"A critical autoethnography of a doctoral students' research journey: Learning to take risks in the academy"

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Abstract

What is missing in present-day physical education teacher education research is the individual female doctoral student perspective and how individuals come to understand academic research culture within the neoliberal university. Through a critical autoethnography, this paper uncovered a transformative learning journey of one doctoral student as she encountered the field of research in higher education. After taking a critically orientated qualitative methods class, the doctoral student recognized that the neoliberal university includes a research agenda entwined in politics, finding that neophyte researchers should be aware of the 'mess' (Cheek, 2017). By questioning how one is disciplined in research and through becoming aware of normalizing techniques, the doctoral student interrogated her research methods and philosophical orientation. Ethnodrama (Denzin, 2010) and autoethnography provided the doctoral student with an opportunity for alternate meaning-making, which can be productive in understanding the journey of becoming in academia.

Keywords: higher education, Foucault, becoming, neoliberal, doctoral student, critical autoethnography

A critical autoethnography of a doctoral student's research journey:

Learning to take risks in the academy

> A girl would feel mortified not to be through schooling by the time she is eighteen… The poor thing has her brain crowded with history, grammar, arithmetic, geography, natural history, chemistry, physiology, French, reading, spelling, committing poetry.... Alas! Must we crowd education upon our daughters, and for the sake of having them 'intellectual,' make them puny, nervous, and their whole earthly existence a struggle between life and death? As for training young ladies through a long intellectual course, as we do young men, it can never be done – they will die in the process. (Todd, 1967, p. 24-25)

Educating the Woman

At the time of writing this paper, I[1] was a female international doctoral student at the University of Alabama in the United States (U.S). Prior to arriving, I resigned from a physical education teaching position in London, England, to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). It was one of my aims to become an educator in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE), for which a Ph.D. is a prerequisite for pursuing a career as a professor or researcher, in institutes of higher education. Individuals undertaking their Ph.D. have been termed 'stewards of the discipline' (Walker et al., 2006). These individuals can generate vast amounts of new knowledge through critically transforming their understandings into writing, teaching, and application. Figuratively, the term steward is suggestive of taking a discipline forward, expanding, representing and remodeling innovative ways of thinking. One of the critical times for any 'steward' is the time they spend in their doctoral program, where they will transform into future faculty members in their respective discipline.

[1] I refers to the first author of the paper.

Typical to the U.S, and attractive for those relocating from England, was the required curricular structure within the Ph.D. system. The U.S differs from Europe through the structure of doctoral programs. Europe has a traditional master-apprentice model juxtaposing the U.S that follows a structured Ph.D. degree requirement comparable to most undergraduate courses. This structure includes coursework elements and class assignments (see Kehm [2006] for more differences between doctoral programs). I envisaged the U.S model as more holistic and structured and after being in the position of a practitioner, I felt it would be a good reintroduction to the academic community. I also envisaged the prospect of taking classes as an opportunity to make friendships as an international student with those from another culture and to prepare me for research, teaching, and service within PETE.

Researchers in PETE have suggested that Doctoral Physical Education Teacher Education (D-PETE) students should be exposed to and trained to perform the core activities in which a faculty engages – research, teaching, and service (MacPhail, 2017). Considering this, I had very little guidance from academic literature throughout my program of those in similar positions to myself. With the exception of Cameron (2012) and Lynch, Richards, and Pennington (2018), there has been very little literature that has documented the lived experiences of female D-PETE students learning to be teacher educators, from a personal narrative perspective. Furthermore, to our knowledge, apart from Sperka (2018) there has not been a body of research from female D-PETE students documenting their research learning journey in the field. Sperka confessed through a personal narrative the struggles faced when she discovered the differing theoretical choices she could adopt in her work. After highlighting the struggles she faced in isolation, she encouraged other doctoral students to be reflexive. With Sperka's words in mind and personal narratives from female D-PETE students lacking from different nationalities, I

started a large research project with the aim of answering: How do experiences in a D-PETE program prepare an individual for the role of a higher education faculty member with a focus on the three university missions of research, teaching, and service? Elements of research are operationalized differently across institution types (Ward, 2016), it worth noting that I began my D-PETE journey at a research-intensive university. This paper specifically focuses on how my D-PETE program prepared me for a future in research and how I was interacting with and negotiating the culture of the academy. I have written elsewhere using self-study research about how my acculturation to the U.S, teaching role, and the juggling of multiple identities throughout this process (Lynch et al., 2018). Through using the work of Michel Foucault (1980, 1990, 1995, 2002), I wanted to rethink my research approach and about how I positioned myself ontologically. A notable study by McCuaig (2007) showed that Foucault's ideas could be employed usefully by PETE scholars in helping them understand their process of becoming, from teacher to researcher in health and physical education. Similarly, Foucault's ideas were drawn upon throughout this paper. We discuss the problem of the current research system at neoliberal universities for future scholars, how individuals are disciplined and how resilience might be shown, along with discussing qualitative debates circling these issues.

A Critical Autoethnography

Autoethnography has been described as 'a research method that foregrounds the researcher's personal experience (*auto*) as it is embedded within, and informed by, cultural identities and con/texts (*ethno*) and as it is expressed through writing, performance, or other creative means (*graphy*)' (Manning & Adams, 2015, p. 188). Additionally, autoethnography builds on personal experience and enlightens others through storytelling to help us see commonalities against other human experiences within the same or similar settings (Boylorn &

Orbe, 2014). 'Critical autoethnography differs from conventional autoethnography because of its explicit focus on power' (Cameron, 2012, p. 2) and therefore allows for both a personal critique and a cultural critique within wider societal structures and systems of domination (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Moreover, those who write in this style are engaging, postmodern, reflexive, theoretically engaged, vulnerable, open to critique, methodologically responsible, ethically interrogate, and use themselves as data sources (Richardson, 2000; Holt, 2003; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Manning & Adams, 2015; Holman Jones, 2016; Landi, 2018). Consequently, rigor, trustworthiness, triangulation, objectivity, reliability, and validity are rethought in autoethnographic work and research should be understood as a subjective account where writing is validated as a method of knowing (Richardson, 2000; Holt, 2003; Landi, 2018). Instead, autoethnographers recognize there are multiple sides to the world and attempt to deconstruct research topics to partially understand them from one side, pattern, or color; this has been termed crystallization (Richardson, 2000). Furthermore, critical autoethnography should be judged by the reader as to (a) whether it makes a contribution to the research field, (b) whether it is aesthetically pleasing and not boring, (c) whether the author has been reflexive, (d) whether the reader is affected emotionally or intellectually, or/and (e) whether the paper represents the author's lived experiences (Richardson, 2000). For that reason, the qualitative criteria are flexible and subjective, and when the reader is thinking about judging the work by these standards, then it might have made a significant contribution to the field (Sparkes, 2000).

The Qualitative Methods Course

The critical autoethnography described in this paper was one-year in length and began in the fall of 2016. I entered the second year of my D-PETE program and worked through required doctoral classes. It was my final year taking qualitative methods and sport pedagogy classes

before dissertating. As a college requirement and as per my program of study, I was required to take three qualitative research methods classes. These classes were taught by research methodologists outside of my discipline, in the College of Education. I had been enrolled in Qualitative Research Methods (III) taught by Aaron Kuntz, the Department Head for Educational Studies in the College of Education. Aaron had a deliberate critical research agenda and focus for the class, his objectives, as stated in the class syllabus, were for students to become familiar with contemporary debates within the qualitative writing community; to gain an understanding of conservative methodological practices and the response of critical inquiry; to develop an understanding of individual responsibility; and engage with a philosophical orientation; methodological choices; and analyses of qualitative research. Much of the class involved facilitation of theoretical dialogue and discussion from reading novel texts including Cannella, Salazar Perez, and Pasque (2015), Coleman and Ringrose (2013), Denzin (2010), Jackson and Mazzei (2012b), and Peters and Besley (2007). These texts were different to what I had read previously in my academic work; they challenged my thinking and the ways in which I had formerly done research.

Through my work for this course, I began to question long-held and taken-for-granted assumptions about society. Previously, I had taken textbooks as gospel and assigned class texts as above question. I had regarded my professors in the highest of esteem. Throughout this small seminal class comprised of six students, I recognized distinct ways in which I had become disciplined to *do* research in certain ways from my undergraduate research methods classes through to my graduate classes. I began to question the self-study research project I had begun in the fall of 2015, its methodology, my research agenda, my education up until that point, and how individuals are trained to become future stewards of the profession in higher education. To

engage such uneasiness, critical autoethnography provided me the opportunity to highlight problems and issues within academic culture that other D-PETE students could face when becoming early career academics.

The Journal: A Transformative Learning Experience

Through this methodological approach, I journaled every day to document my experiences related to how my D-PETE program was preparing me for a position that included research. My journal included reflexive notes about my experiences, class materials including class readings and notes on how I was making sense of readings, and class dialogues with faculty members and class colleagues, which I would write up and reflect upon after the occurrence. I analyzed the journal by writing analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016), which provided an audit trail on how I was making sense of the data. Second, through the reading of Foucault, I categorized the data into themes that explained my research experiences. Using theory in critical autoethnography is essential as it supports the explanation of individual experience within the culture; consequently, theories and stories can change us and how we think (Holman Jones, 2016). As a result, excerpts from my journal supplement text in this paper to evidence my journey and the themes found (problematization, discipline, resistance, the act of becoming).

Throughout the journal, I repeatedly articulated a transformative change with the knowledge learned in Aaron's class. O'Sullivan (2003, p. 326) articulates transformative learning:

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans

> and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, races, and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

Through this transformative learning journey, I felt more conscious of the social realities around me and the power structures embedded and entwined within society. I felt a sense of understanding but also a sense of curiosity. When teaching physical education courses in my department, I weaved aspects of sociocultural issues, diversity, and difference into my lessons and became more focused on inequality and inequity in education. I noticed how my ontological positioning became different from my class colleagues, who frequently shared positions that supported a constructivist view towards reality.

> The world of a doctoral student is an ever-changing journey of adaptability, acceptance, and resilience. You change to suit your social world, the classes you are in; you accept the difference of those people and culture in those classes. All the while you are attempting to stay true to yourself, whoever you are and do your best in every situation and just keep learning. (August 22, 2016)

Holistically, my journal evidenced a journey of discovery and realization that a dialectic research stance had become too restrictive in allowing me to uncover my identity within my research. Initially, I continued a tradition of following an interpretive research agenda focused on assessment, curriculum models in PETE, and acculturation theories. With additional knowledge, I wanted to dialogically open-up and share my subjectivities rather than pinpoint formative and accustomed traditions related to research. In doing so, my interests changed to transformative

pedagogical practices and sociocultural issues in PETE for a social justice agenda with a socio-critical perspective.

The Problem: Understanding the Neoliberal University Traditions

> It's somewhat of a thankless task being a graduate student, no one pats you on the back and says well-done you can do this. It becomes isolating. You must just get through it because everyone else who has a Ph.D. has, so you must go through the same, in the same way, enduring the same practices. (September 1, 2016)

Problematization is a term for analyzing a normative system of knowledge and how those elements relate to one another to form that system (Foucault, 2002). Researchers can make a topic out of something integral to them, which becomes recognized as newly relevant and meaningful through relations of power with truth. Truth emerges as the procedures that regulate, circulate, and distribute statements (Foucault, 1980). Problematization can offer new discourses or politics of truth by making a problem out of something by extracting it from a normalized role or concept to make it visible and open to critique. In this case, the specific topic extracted from the literature by us, as authors, is the preparation of female D-PETE students/research stewards in the neoliberal university. Traditionalists approach this task by encouraging stewards to comply with conventional research approaches and agendas. However, critical scholars suggest harnessing individual uniqueness and encourage stewards to challenge the status quo where researchers speak their truths, are committed to political goals, transform, and restore society, making possible personal and collective freedom (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). This critical research approach has been termed by Denzin and Giardina (2006) as 'activist qualitative inquiry,' which seeks to intervene within the traditional conventions of the neoliberal university.

Enright, Alfrey, and Rynne (2017) define the notion of the neoliberal university as a market-driven system, which employs modes of authority based on corporate models. Furthermore, the university is an institution of science and aims to shape human beings through training research professionals to produce knowledge in autonomous ways. Spry (2001, p. 707) notes reproductive training as 'danger here in this world, the academy, and the researching body in the academy.' Danger is defined here as an uneven distribution of power and knowledge which can be positive or negative for an individual and is perpetuated by systems within neoliberal universities.

'Danger' has been portrayed in numerous ways, namely universities auditing and surveilling faculty on the number of publications rather than quality, public intellectualism, and community engagement (Denzin & Giardina, 2017). All faculty, despite their research inquiry, are held to high publishing requirements in order to achieve tenure or promotion at research-intensive institutions. Giardina and Newman (2015) have highlighted how qualitative research as a methodology demonstrates how the politics of institutions tend to oversee the impact and conduct of research. Furthermore, when politics situates methodologies, the act of research is impinged upon somewhat negatively by institutional review board (IRB) requirements, journal impact factors, tenure necessities, and funding councils. Cheek (2017) specifically calls this political agenda a 'mess' stating that neophyte researchers must overcome a lot in the neoliberal university especially if they want to do something other than normalized research. The neoliberal university has structures in place that support normalized inquiry, whereas, there are very few structures in place to support critically oriented researchers offering a new politics of truth surrounding the production of current political and historical regimes of truth.

Often, faculty researchers imply universal consensus so that students comply with class guidelines, methodologies, programs of study, and so on. Repeatedly the 'right of way' for stewards is encountered, I frequently heard and noted in my journal quotes from professors 'this is all preparation, learn how to play the game', 'it's publish or perish out there,' and 'I had to do it this way, follow the rules and you'll get your degree then tenured.' These 'gatekeepers' or knowledgeable researchers in the field can be seen as extremely powerful and dangerous. Lawson (2009) has argued that gatekeepers knock innovation out of new researchers; they develop power and authority, which become institutionalized and sustained. Even more of a pressing issue for training doctoral students are foundational beliefs and fundamental experiences about how to *do* rigorous research. Often graduate students have been said to point to other scholars' assertions and employ similar research approaches without interrogation but rarely point to their own inquiry practices (Kuntz, 2015). Additionally, Giardina and Newman (2015) note that doctoral students often talk about the methods they are doing rather than disturb or disrupt traditional practice and grapple with questions of ontology and epistemology. It is this type of Ph.D. that produces normalized and docile future scholars rather than individuals who seek to challenge the status quo through unique research agendas.

Fernández-Balboa (2017) articulated the need for researchers to critically examine their beliefs, values, knowledge, and self-consciousness. I found thinking with and through Foucault's theories during my critical autoethnography helpful as I performed and then unfolded my research practices. Throughout the second year in my D-PETE program, I felt the wave of the institutions' 'mess.' I gained a heightened consciousness, and my experiences in class allowed for an opportunity of meaning-making:

> I feel deep in thought. I feel like I have been indoctrinated in every way and, specifically, my research methods classes have all been training in lies. Also, that my approach to research has been wrong and overtly traditional. Why haven't I ever critically questioned this or questioned what I had been taught? My qualitative class is making me look at the world differently. How am I making sense of the situations that are thrown at me in life? Do I believe in poststructural or postmodern thought? I now feel the little I know about them both has shifted the perceived atmosphere around me and how I think in this space. Why am I just learning about this? What is my place here? What is a place? How I do define certain terms? How do others define certain terms? How do we mesh as people? I do not have the answers but that is okay, it's okay not to resolve worldly issues in research. What is okay is the fact we are making sense of things in our own way and allowing meaning and being honest, telling truth. (September 6, 2016)

Discipline: Questioning Techniques of Research

Techniques that are used to train and normalize individuals have been termed disciplines (Foucault, 1990). In this case, stewards are trained to perform research methods in standardized ways, and individuals are seen as objects, normalized to conform and not to question those in power such as faculty or class materials. Normalization has been an issue for many philosophers, not just Foucault, including Gilles Deleuze. Snir (2017) overviews Deleuze's philosophy, stating one must think differently, in unorthodox, and non-common-sensical ways. Deleuze believed education was taught for common sense as students repeat logic until it becomes common rather than developing the critical reflexes of questioning. When students can question their education, they become active thinkers and can have transformative learning experiences, promoting difference, and thus, diversity of thought. Through class readings that questioned status quo

techniques of research, I began to question my common-sense thinking (assumptions, experiences, and beliefs) and my D-PETE program (the research method classes, paradigms, and PETE influence) that previously I had not questioned. My prior research classes had taught me common qualitative techniques, including basic ethnographic procedures such as interviews and focus groups. Often when I had a question about these techniques, I was referred by professors to textbooks for answers and encouraged to use universal criteria to judge my qualitative work.

I learned to produce problems to disrupt common sense thinking by asking questions that I was curious about and did not have the answer to. Outside of Aaron's class, I sought literature outside of my field of study that were not recommended readings by faculty, so I could question everyday research methods I had taken for granted. Within my discipline, I broadened my research to unfamiliar scholars outside of England and the United States that employed a socio-critical lens. Fullagar (2017) has invited scholars to engage at different points from different perspectives when questioning onto-/epistemological positions around humanness and non-material forces (known as post-human inquiry) and figure out how to ‘open up’ closed spaces. I made critiquing and destabilizing the technocratic ideals of qualitative research methodology (Fullagar, 2017) my goal; I wanted to talk about what I was learning, encourage others to question how they had been disciplined in research and unravel how and what I was becoming in the neoliberal university. I no longer saw my research as separate to my embodied-self; I felt part of the research process (Pierre, 2015) and that person-free, objective research was not possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With this knowledge, I questioned techniques of research I had used previously and began to investigate alternative forms of meaning-making.

In the first year of my D-PETE program, I had completed and published a self-study research project (see Lynch et al. [2018]). During this time, I had sought the perspectives of my

students in the PETE classes I taught with the desire to improve my teaching practice, and the methodological technique recommended for use was focus groups (Lynch et al., 2018). A colleague unbeknown to the students interviewed the students on my teaching. However, after reading alternate texts (when the paper was in press, 2017), I began to question my techniques and found that Hamilton and Pinnegar (2017) argued that focus groups should be avoided in self-study because of the focus of self-in-relation-to-other. In this case, the self-study was an attempt to investigate how the individual (myself) acted relationally with others (the students). My students were privy to the traditional focus group format, where they were expected to uncover their personal experiences to an unknown and abstract researcher. A philosophical question arose regarding the nature of selfhood and what individual turned up as themselves that day for the focus group. Which story of relational acts was told as an experience from past realities? Consequently, I realized, similarly to Kuntz (2015) that focus groups are a type of normative inquiry that in specific situations invite individuals to do things in a certain way and therefore produce disembodied metaphorical relations where the researcher is a facilitator and absent in body and material contexts.

By thinking deeply and questioning norms of focus groups in general, I felt uneasy using them as a methodological tool in the second year of my research. Instead, my research evolved to focus on the culture of the institution through journaling, which influenced my research interests and teaching purpose. Not only did it lead to this critical autoethnography but through the use of journal reflection, I shifted my thinking around relational questions about the material-discursive forces that are complicated in what bodies can ‘do’ and how matter ‘acts’ (Fullagar, 2017). This type of inquiry proved more powerful and informative than re-representing a fragment of reality,

and I was able to see a more holistic picture that I was entangled in - the 'mess' (Cheek, 2017) and how I was interacting with and negotiating the culture of the academy.

Throughout this stage in my research journey (year 2 of the Ph.D.) and considering research is not done in a vacuum, I became concerned and re-considered the IRB agreement to my self-study. Self-doubt and questioning are likely occurrences of normalization as IRBs are inevitably disciplining mechanisms that neoliberal universities employ so that individuals comply. While invented to protect the rights of participants, IRB processes have the potential to impede critical studies and methodologies through a lack of understanding about what critical inquiry will entail and the data it generates (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004). After much deliberation and speaking with an array of educational researchers, I considered my initial research questions were still being answered but with a deeper critical understanding of relations of power in the interlocking structures of the institution. I wondered why the ethics of such research was deeply confined to processes such as prescribed methods, timelines and designated research questions rather than overarching research themes and timelines that were flexible.

Dixon and Quirke (2017) have highlighted that textbooks promote procedural rather than nuanced approaches to ethics and that content in ethics chapters are out of step with new scholarly research. With this knowledge, traditional textbooks can be dangerous as they promote universal consensus. In an attempt to overcome the process of IRB approval I decided that going forward I must think deeply about the space I am in, rather than be worked over by it (Cheek, 2007). As Tarc (2006) suggested, individuals should engage in an experience of ethics and relearning of how one approaches knowledge. I did this through critical autoethnography to understand what other normalized ways I had been disciplined in and to what affect. I also engaged in ethical self-consciousness; I was mindful of my character, actions, and the

consequences of these for others; this has been termed as relational ethics (Tracey, 2010). To ensure I was not partaking in academic misconduct I also checked my autoethnographic approach with the IRB. I emailed them to see if autoethnographies using journaling are required for IRB review. They stated that autoethnography 'would not be considered human subjects research and an IRB application would not be required' (University IRB, personal communication, January 12, 2018). While I was relieved I could continue with my research, I felt as if IRB did not consider my research as important enough to be questioned but that it was imperative to share my experiences as part of my ethical care.

When looking back to previous research I had done, I considered how confined and predestined I was to use traditional interpretive methodologies and humanist theories as in Lynch et al. (2018). The initial structure of my research meant I could not intervene in unethical proceedings such as questioning a teacher on their prejudice in the classroom or when seeing bullying occur in front of me not mediate, furthermore that I must always stay distant from the research/researched. I began to question authoritative truths and how power and knowledge are intimately linked and historically produced. These elements have been defined as constitutive of poststructuralist thought (Rossman, Rallis, & Kuntz, 2010).

With helpful commentary by Smith and McGannon (2017) I began to consider my overall research line as a replication of historical truths regarding how research should be done. Their opinion supported my findings towards the field and provided me with literature support for my methods within this paper. Smith & McGannon outline that qualitative research in sport needs to change to keep up to date with qualitative methods because current research could be seen as outdated, flawed, stagnant, and limited. Researchers should also evolve like methodologies and adopt newer, updated methods that are worthier of use. Further to their point

regarding outdated methods, Smith & McGannon outline issues with common methods used in qualitative research, such as member checking, researcher triangulation, and universal criteria to confirm qualitative work. They argued that these methods are old-fashioned and only portray an individual's reality through a single experience rather than developing options for difference. Equally important remains the background of research professionals, and the impact of their assumed knowledge influencing results. Consequently, reliability and trustworthiness are not rational in qualitative research, despite numerous researchers' arguments that their research has been conducted employing conventional methods. Smith and McGannon (2017) suggest meaningful, co-participatory research, understanding the worthiness of a topic rather than conforming to outdated disciplines used several decades ago. This is a similar concept to Denzin & Giardina's activist qualitative inquiry; the individual must be able to truth-tell and see the importance of their topic for a personal and collective good.

> Innovation is being knocked out of me by the structures I am entwined in. I do not want to present traditional academic style posters, papers or essays, full of words and a set list of requirements. I want to be different, I want my work to represent and create an experience for viewers. If I do adhere to traditions, the repetition and discourse go on; it is confining. We must harness people's desires and allow them to be unique if they so choose. Otherwise, if one just conforms, then they will be a product of the institution… another thing pumped out the factory line perpetuating norms… produced for the world of academia; publishing parrots with no care of a collective good, rather more interested in numbers and efficiency of publications. It resembles our original purpose for schooling, preparation for factory work. I would be unhappy because I want to do different things and that is not what I was trained to do. We are not laboratory rats; we

> should not have to be trained in such ways. We should be informed and educated about the way of the rats, but we should not be punished and penalized for not conforming. Although sometimes I consider that it is easier to conform, though far less enjoyable, maybe I should just *play the game.* I mean, what do I know? I am just a female grad student in what seems to be a male-dominated patriarchal education system. The whole system is quite off-putting, to be honest. (October 17, 2016)

As a woman in higher education, I was learning that the structures support conditions that are unsatisfying, marginalizing, and sexist (hooks, 2015). I came to an understanding that unless I resisted the disciplined techniques and privileged knowledge of the academic institution, then I would maintain the status quo of my thinking (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012b). Thus, I wanted the neoliberal structures to support opportunities for research possibility and move away from traditional ways of knowing. However, resistance meant not conforming.

Risk: Resistance through Writing

> One cannot pigeonhole or slot into a framework; the self is continually evolving. To fit into a framework would be to make me a docile subject. I feel it is my duty to speak up and discuss discourse and how one becomes a product of conformity. Is my institution disciplining me or are my faculty? Am I resistant? Is being resistant looked upon negatively because the structure around me is engaging me with my education rather doing its intention, making me a subject to be controlled, preparing me for my future role, which defines and classifies me? Is this model within the institution failing me? We can change, we can evolve, we can learn, we can disrupt and not prescribe. I have choice. I can select what to do. I can evolve. I can self-disclose. I can tell the truth. (November 14, 2016)

Foucault (1995) has argued that processes of normalization produce subjects that are conforming and subjects that are different, by constituting what and who is seen as 'normal' or 'deviant.' Furthermore, subjects can never fully achieve normalcy because as self-regulated individuals we can choose what we want to adopt and conform to or resist within the scope of socially accepted cultural discourses. At times, there are subtle rejections of not conforming, for example, changing a lesson plan while in practice, something I regularly did when teaching. Rejecting the norm denotes resistance. Resistance occurs when there is domination by power or unequal distributions of power. In our society, Giroux (2014, p. 52) notes that 'resistance is no longer an option, it is a necessity' because of the oppressive inequitable structures of society. In my case, the neoliberal institution and disciplining qualitative research techniques were necessary to resist because I could not see social good coming from the repetition of traditional research methods.

Saldaña (2017) draws upon Foucault to issue a coda on qualitative research, stating that everything we know about qualitative research we could have picked up in high school. Unusually, he articulates that modern qualitative researchers can show deviance by challenging the status quo and presenting an alternative perspective on life. Seeing a published coda as a recognized academic piece spoke to me as I began constructing this paper. I felt it connected with the task at hand and I embraced writing an unusually formatted article to allow the reader to come to their own meaning-making. As an example, I attempted to keep my journal quotes as uncut as possible to allow readers to interpret the reality I faced at that time. Throughout, I felt as if I was being deviant through writing this paper and I was cautious to avoid intellectual irritation for readers. As recommended by Saldaña (2017), those that are deviant and resist norms must walk their own path. In interpreting this statement, I felt deviance was following your act of

becoming as a researcher, teacher, and individual and engaging in relational ethics (Tracey, 2010) without provoking hostility towards others.

Through my class readings I was inspired to walk my own path and show resistance; I wrote an ethnodrama (see Denzin, 2010) as part of a class assignment. Aaron frequently requested students to engage with the writing process to the written product. He set a class essay assignment, where I was required to consider my philosophy towards writing and research. I found this assignment to be most thought-provoking and reflected on this assignment more deeply than any other in my academic career. In some respects, by not writing a traditional essay as assigned I felt as if I was going against my community in which I was a member, but, in other conclusions, I felt it was a way to view myself differently in the world and truth tell (Fernández-Balboa, 2017). It took great courage to submit an assignment that was against the ordinary, especially considering my assistantship was based on a strong academic standing within my courses, but through the experience, I resisted the academic pressures and embraced the messiness of the writing toolbox (Krane, 2016) to tell a story to produce complex and non-linear texts to represent life experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It was in this case that this performative project (Denzin, 2016) allowed text to represent voice and experience (Kuntz, 2015) exactly how my philosophical orientations were changing. By using this small level of resistance towards traditional academic work, I was able to witness my reality construction and uncovered new meaning (Fernández-Balboa, 2017; Spry, 2001). This was done in an attempt to problematize and question my interpretations and worldly view, and was acknowledged and praised by Aaron as an act of courage and challenge towards the status quo.

Similarly to Foucault (1991), I began to find writing transformative, and realized ideas can change over time. Writing is a useful way to examine forms of power and dominance that

work to control and shape individuals and social relations. Concurring, Markula and Pringle (2006) stated writing is how we become ethical humans, and by enjoying one's mind in the moment, one's writing should lead to a modification of the author's relational ways of being and acting in the world. This critical work allows an embodiment of social processes rather than static representations of reality, and therefore we change our ways of knowing in the world to alter the power relations as we know them (Kuntz, 2015).

Writing and truth-telling in research provoke risk; fear comes with risk-taking, and in going against the grain individuals can be seen as outcasts. Typically, those that attempt to truth-tell question the status quo and are considered critical, postmodern, or post-human scholars, and are marginalized intellectuals in neoliberal universities (Giardina, 2017). However, 'when our moral sense for social justice can no longer tolerate the passive technocratic ideals of faculty work, productive change in methodology might as well occur' (Kuntz, 2015, p. 37). Neophyte PETE faculty members Williams, Christensen, and Occhino (2017) described risk-taking behavior when entering new neoliberal universities. They stated their behavior involved iterative, trial and error workings and reworkings aimed at establishing and maintaining new equilibria between themselves and their surroundings through ongoing 'mini' experiments. Throughout, the researchers encourage the need to be resistant in the neoliberal university. Risks have been emphasized by Barker (2017), a mid-career PETE faculty member, who expressed the need to take risks, take care of the self, and resist oppression commitment in the neoliberal university by being personally truthful about the self-formation process.

Similarly to Barker (2017), resistance in the neoliberal university meant that I must be honest in my work, realizing the different ways I had been disciplined and questioning the cultural discourses circulating in my research. Writing is a way that any doctoral student can

harness personal truths and enter a newly resistive way of being in the space of the neoliberal university. It is through the act of writing that one's thought process can become a transformative act. Through the act of writing one can think and question thinking simultaneously as the text can represent voice and experience (Kuntz, 2015). However, I recognize that using text is conventional and does not move away from traditional representations of meaning-making. Other forms, such as cartography, animation, art-based research, and poetry have the potential to represent voice and experience in non-linear ways and disrupt text conventions.

The Future: Reflections on the Act of Becoming

> Because I am constantly evolving and reading new material and coming to new realizations each day this journal is like a notebook of incessant notes where I am reflecting on what I read, see and hear. That is, a unified voice where I am more able to understand how I have come to know and am making sense of the world. This journey to a Ph.D. is one of self-discovery. I am constantly learning about myself. I like this, and I slowly realize that I quite like who I am as a person and how I attempt to live and teach as humanely as possible. Also, it is okay to do things slightly differently, e.g., approach my research with poststructural thought, and advocate for social justice as a privileged educator. Who I am today I will not be tomorrow. (February 3, 2017)

Similarly to McCuaig's (2007) self-reflection on becoming an educator and researcher in PETE, the journey and reflectivity that comes with questioning status-quo traditions and taken-for-granted-assumptions about research methodologies is not for all social science researchers. Like Sperka (2018), I faced several barriers trying to understanding my research choices and when I found the array of research methodologies options available to me, it was overwhelming. However, I was able to come to sense, not necessarily make sense, which meant I put myself at

risk (Barad, 2012); writing became a transformational and empowering process. Taking risks and truth-telling through writing can assist future doctoral students in coming to sense and support individuals in their journeys when moving away from research discourses in education; such as humanist views that state individuals do not change, and that data have to make sense, be traditional, reductionist, and logical (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012a). Writing non-traditionally is a performative experience and is part of the practice of becoming, which is set in relation to others (Kuntz, 2015). The process of becoming an academic never stops or is achieved; it is continuous. As a result, an individual is always in the process of becoming (Enright et al., 2017) a steward, a researcher, a scholar, a teacher, a subject in the neoliberal structures of university.

When we see the Ph.D. journey as a continued process, it is an adventure requiring divergence of thought and diversity of thinkers (Sousanis, 2015). Becoming a higher education faculty member or steward of the discipline is not a process of transforming from one thing into another, instead ‘a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination . . . A line of becoming has only a middle’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293). Said another way, the line of becoming could be understood similarly to a crystal. Crystals are made from several items and have many different reflections, refractions, and distinct ways of locking things in even though they are made up in a logical order of atoms (Richardson, 2000). To me, the crystal, resembles the species, we cannot find the start of the crystal or the end, but we can cut it open to see the middle. All our crystals are interconnected in some way in the chaos of the world. Thus, to work out our connections, we can engage in critical autoethnographic work in order to learn from others and understand the institutionalized cultures within the academy, which can be seen as activist qualitative inquiry. Ultimately, every steward's path will be different considering each person has unique self-identities intersecting at once.

Continuing my journey of becoming a steward, I transitioned into my third year as a D-PETE student. I wanted to invest more time and develop my research portfolio while dissertating; I was offered and accepted a qualitative research assistantship within the College of Education at my university. My new role focused on advising faculty and graduate students on qualitative research and I saw this as an opportunity for scholars to recognize the individual ways of seeing that are unique to them in their research journey; when they do that, they may realize the closer they look, the more there is to discover (Sousanis, 2015). Along with igniting qualitative research passions with others through knowledge sharing, I wanted to discover more about research discourses and learning the eventualities of the past, present, and future was essential for more becoming to occur (Fernández-Balboa, 2017). To support future D-PETE scholars, faculty members should support stewards in ascertaining their particular areas of interest, allowing them to begin their journey in contributing to the discipline (MacPhail, 2017). Importantly, supporting students includes encouraging stewards to take risks in the neoliberal university, where disciplining practices seek to govern thought. Instead, D-PETE students should be provided with opportunities to question their common-sensical ways of thinking to produce new thought to our field of study.

> My D-PETE journey has allowed my relationship with the world to be different. How I act in the world is different and with others. There is a lot I do not know, will not know and cannot know. I will evolve and transform daily by always learning and on a journey to the unknown. (June 6, 2017)

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