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## **“In Our Very Flesh, (R)evolution”: An Exploration of Secondary Education Teachers, Otherness, and Embodiment**

Ryan Ambuter

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“In Our Very Flesh, (R)evolution”:

An Exploration of Secondary Education Teachers, Otherness, and Embodiment

A Dissertation Presented

by

RYAN AMBUTER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

May 2020

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

College of Education

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## ABSTRACT

### “IN OUR VERY FLESH, (R)EVOLUTION”: AN EXPLORATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION TEACHERS, OTHERNESS, AND EMBODIMENT

MAY 2020

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In education, the proliferation of a mind/body dualism leaves the pedagogy of the body undertheorized, and its impact on education disregarded. While there is not an absence of research on the body within the field of education, what exists is limited in scope. Little has been written about the connections between teachers' bodies, pedagogy, and politics at the level of secondary education.

This research specifically focuses on teachers who are visibly other, critically conscious of their bodies, and find power in their difference. The purpose of this study is to make meaning of the stories, experiences, and potential of teachers who refuse to assimilate their embodied otherness through critical, phenomenological methodologies.

The findings reflect my in-depth interviews with 8 public school educators from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I used a three-interview series protocol to examine the process of developing a critical and political consciousness situated in embodied otherness, accessing a power that is personal, and analyzing the impact of embodied

otherness on classroom pedagogy. Data showed that through implicit and explicit messages about bodies, education plays a significant role in enforcing normativity as well as providing access to alternative narratives, both of which have lasting impacts. Data also provided a vision for an embodied pedagogy that is relational, transparent, and student-centered. Embodied pedagogy frameworks expressed by participants included centering access as an anchor point, an emphasis on student agency, recognizing the importance of modeling authenticity, and shifting from ‘power over’ to ‘power with.’

This study has implications for the knowledge and methods valued in educational settings. It highlights the need for theories of identity development that are situated in educational contexts, as well as for the development of frameworks in formal education which foreground access and embodiment.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Bodies speak. They have a language. They reveal context and contradiction. However, the physical body as a site of meaning-making, teaching, and learning, is often overlooked in education. I became aware of this as I worked for a decade as a high school English teacher, though I didn't talk about it until years later. The thing about bodies is that they're always there and they're always doing something, but the culture of education is disembodied. There is this pervasive silence that makes it hard to discuss the embodied nature of the work in part because there isn't space or language for it. As a teacher, my experiences told me that I wasn't supposed to talk about my body; I was supposed to ignore it and teach. For the most part, there just wasn't room for these conversations. In the rare instance teachers' bodies did come up it generally was in the context of something being inappropriate, like we were revealing some aspect of ourselves that wasn't supposed to be there. It was clear to me that there are un/spoken norms or "professional" expectations in education that teachers not reveal their politics or bodies in the classroom. In other words, there are implicit standards that teachers who are nonnormative cover the parts of themselves that break the rules, while normative expressions and belief systems are privileged and expected. This is how dominant culture maintains itself through hegemony.

As a young teacher, each time I took a step towards being visible and unapologetic about the parts of myself that did not conform to norms, I was somehow reminded that this was not my job, that being myself in the classroom is unprofessional.

This wasn't always through explicit communication, though sometimes it was. Being out as transgender and queer, having visible tattoos, acknowledging my small fatness, making room for classroom conversations about bodies and identities, I was reminded often that my version of being in the classroom was not what good teachers do, and I should take steps to minimize my otherness and cover my politics. Be neutral. However, to me there is no denying that teaching is a political act. Teaching in a body that often does not have the privilege of normativity or perceived neutrality (as well as not finding these qualities desirable), being connected to and finding strength in my embodiment was necessary to sustain myself in my work. Embodied teaching became central to my pedagogy.

In all of my academic and professional work what I was not reminded of is that my body is white. I was not reminded that while being small fat, queer, and trans are all marginalized identities, holding those identities and being othered does not and never will erase the power I hold as a white person working in a country and culture that is rooted in white supremacy. In *To My Fellow White Others*, Chase Strangio, a white, transgender and transgressive person, writes,

And the attacks on my body—individual and systemic—have not taken and could not take away the many ways that I am aligned with power. I exist in public, at Penn Station and elsewhere, without the sense that the world “intended that [I] should perish,” as James Baldwin wrote to his nephew in 1962. That is the power of my whiteness. It cloaks my body in protection and serves to channel my voice and my existence into the realm of the legible. And my legibility has always

allowed me to imagine a future for myself and to believe that I have a right to self-determination in that future. (Strangio, 2019)

White supremacy is a primary system that contributes to the otherness of all bodies and links to capitalism and productivity. What I didn't internalize for a long time was that as white, marginalized people we face real pain and othering based on the ways that we are marked as different, and yet "we [cannot] equate our real pain and trauma with the systemic, deliberate, and foundational exclusion of people of color, particularly black people, from the very notion of humanity conceived in the American conscience" (Strangio, 2019). This critical awareness has been absent from discourses I have participated in about bodies, power, norms, and difference.

I also was not reminded that I am able-bodied. I wasn't taught to think about the ways that my access to education was facilitated by my ability to move from place to place, access space(es), produce work, and meet expectations for productivity and performance with relative ease. There are myriad examples of this. As a student, a few are that I could fit (albeit somewhat uncomfortably) into the chairs and desks in my classrooms, walk from class to my locker to the next class in three minutes, absorb information that I heard verbally, organize linearly, respond immediately when called on, and participate in sports and theater without accommodations. As a teacher, examples include that I could memorize the names of 100 students, stand for 3-4 hours at a time without a break, navigate a classroom with many desks, assess hundreds of pages of writing in a few days, make connections with students and colleagues, manage multiple deadlines and responsibilities, organize and plan both in the short and long term, and

generally complete tasks quickly and efficiently. I did not experience significant trauma created by systems or life circumstances that overwhelmed my ability to cope or meet expectations. So much of my being a “good student” or a “good teacher” was because of my able-bodiedness, and the invisibility of ableism in my own narrative is notable.

It is necessary to address the material, systemic impacts ableism has on people’s lives. In “Moving Toward the Ugly: A Politic Beyond Desirability,” Mia Mingus (2011) states, “Ableism cuts across all of our movements because ableism dictates how bodies should function against a mythical norm—an able-bodied standard of white supremacy, heterosexism, sexism, economic exploitation, moral/religious beliefs, age and ability.” Ableism informs which bodies are coded as un/productive. It is a form of oppression in which systemic, environmental, and cultural circumstances render some more or less able to perform normalized functions, and when people do not meet these constructed standards ableist ideologies provide justification for treating certain individuals or groups as if they are disposable (Mingus, 2011). As a student and teacher, my ability to access and meet various standards of productivity in the classroom was a primary mode through which my worth was reinforced, and it is not until recently that this has become visible to me.

Over the past fifteen years, my experiences in the classroom have built into a strong awareness of the politics of teachers’ bodies and difference. I’ve realized that as a student I don’t remember having a single teacher whose nonnormative body was given attention and space in a way that showed me the ways difference can be powerful. What would it have meant if growing up I had a fat teacher who was clearly not trying to take

up less space? What would it have meant to have a teacher who disrupted gender norms through their body and didn't conform to the Mr./Ms. Binary prevalent in public schools? What would it have meant to have an out LGBTQ teacher whose personal life wasn't minimized, or who offered a counternarrative of how queers can be in relationship with each other? As teachers, what we do and don't do, say and don't say, show and don't show, are all part of the embodied discourse of the classroom. This often goes unacknowledged. However, to act as though the only significant learning in a class is through the course content is reductive. It's false. There is deep and significant learning that comes from the ways our bodies speak us.

I'm interested in the dynamic it creates when teachers make an intentional choice to be radical in their embodiment. When teachers whose bodies aren't supposed to be worth much teach from a body politics of power-in-difference. I am interested in bodies that are marked as other in particular because I believe that visible difference dispels the illusion that bodies are objective, apolitical, or ahistorical. These bodies interrupt. They challenge. They make what is invisible visible.

### **Centering Bodies**

In my own research, staying rooted in the body as a central lens rather than systems and social identities is intentional and essential. In "Body Politics," Brown and Gershon assert that "bodies are sites in which social constructions of differences are mapped onto human beings" (2017, p. 1). Both daily experiences and legacies of colonization, oppression, regulation, inclusion, and exclusion are material. In *Between the*

*World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates reinforces the physical nature of racial oppression when he writes:

But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body. (2015, p. 10)

Systems of oppression and experiences of difference do not exist separately from bodies. There is deep importance in naming this and grounding research in our lived and felt experiences, and particularly in research on bodies as they interact with systems of oppression.

Academically and personally, I have often experienced social identities and systems explored and understood as though they are disembodied. During the Enlightenment period, philosophers such as Kant and Descartes theorized about a “moral body” separate from the physical self. Reason was viewed as an ability of the mind, and highly valued. The body was regarded as something to “control” or distance one’s self from, while the mind was the way to achieve an “ideal self” (Cooks, 2007). This binary continues to be perpetuated within theory, discourse, and education; it is both hard to see and essential to shift. In my research, I have engaged concepts in critical theory, crip theory, and feminist theory, which offer frameworks and understandings are perceived to engage the body in more central and meaningful ways. Critical, crip, and feminist

theories offer perspectives on the regulation of bodies through norms, the meaning and impact of otherness and liminality, and an analysis of embodied resistance that use useful to the conversation about bodies in the field of education. I've specifically turned to materialist theoretical stances to engage the body through the lens of access and lived experience, and to interrupt the disembodied structures and values and power dynamics that dominate public education.

Foucault's work on power grounds my understanding of the ways schools control and reproduce norms, and is useful to give language to some of what is invisible about bodies in education as well as why it is important to engage the body as a central lens. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault asserts that the body is what reveals how power operates. Foucault's analysis of *biopower*, the way we control and self-regulate our bodies, has significantly influenced understandings of embodied subjectivity. According to Foucault,

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimal cost. (1980, p. 155).

Once norms are understood and internalized, once some meanings are good and other meanings are bad, once it is made clear what is desirable and what is not, people will self-regulate both in order to gain power through adherence to norms and to avoid

punishment. Although this is not an all-encompassing understanding of power and control in/through bodies, it is a useful critical analytic through which to explore teachers' bodies as well as to understand the power of schools to enforce dominant norms.

Although many consider feminist theory a fertile field to study the body, Cindy Cruz (2001) understands feminist theory as a collective that values the mind over the body and the rational over the lived experience of the body. She calls theory a “bodiless entity” (p. 659). There is something lost when understandings of systems and constructions of identities are disembodied. If we, as researchers and educators, do not notice and push back against this mind/body divide, we reinforce who has power and where it is accessed. We continue our own oppression and disembodiment, and we reify and amplify the oppression of others. In my research, I have specifically sought out critical, crip, and feminist theorists who center the body in their work and in education. bell hooks (1994) writes that “those of us who are trying to critique biases in the classroom have been compelled to return to the body to speak about ourselves as subjects in history” (p. 139). Within critical and feminist theory, as well as critical disabilities studies which is rooted in critical race theory, there are scholars who are engaging the body in material, political, historical ways that allow us to resee and revalue bodies in and beyond education. There is deep potential in these fields to shift our thinking, our being, and our scripts in education, and to impact power and pedagogy in the classroom. The body is a site we can turn to to “understand how structures of domination work in one's own life” (hooks, 1990, p. 15) and resist these structures. Both salient and



understudied, the body is where I want to ground my inquiries into pedagogy and politics in secondary education.

### **Current Educational Climate**

To begin these inquiries it is important to situate public school teachers within the current educational climate. Over the past several decades, beginning in 2001 with No Child Left Behind, public education has seen a rise in high-stakes standardized testing at every level, allowing schools, students, and teachers to be measured against each other (Nygreen, 2017). While there is little research that directly connects testing and standardized learning to increased achievement, forty-four states have adopted the Common Core standards. This trend towards national standards, rather than state standards, is under the rationale that if all states have the same standards and tests, the system as a whole has increased accountability. What the Common Core rhetoric masks is corporatization and the profit-driven private industry that drives public education. The educational products and services that support these neoliberal reforms have produced a \$500 billion dollar market for goods and services, roughly \$16 billion of which go to assessment through standardized testing (Endacott, Wright, Goering, Collet, Denny, and Davis, 2015, p. 417).

High-stakes reforms are characterized by external and internal regulation. Participating in education at any position or level becomes a quantitatively-measured system that requires performance on the part of students and teachers. Those who do not perform well are punished. In this system, it is possible to connect student results to their teachers, and there is an immense amount of pressure on teachers for their students to

achieve proficiency on state and national tests. The presence of annual testing, even if teachers have freedom within their lesson plans and delivery, has a confining and dehumanizing influence on curriculum and pedagogy. Research shows that teachers who have strong social justice values, expansive visions, and critical pedagogies still end up narrowing the scope of their work when facing high-stakes testing. Creativity is diminished. Students and teachers are disempowered. Even if teachers don't agree with high-stakes testing ideologically, the test becomes what matters in practice. What can't be quantified is given less time and energy (Nygreen, 2017). The increased external accountability creates an "audit culture" where teachers' work is not their own. Anderson and Cohen (2015) reference Foucault's concepts of governmentality to explain ways that parents, students, and teachers are being pushed to think like consumers rather than people. They also use his idea of disciplinary power to describe what is currently happening in schools: discourses get circulated that over time become taken-for-granted norms or truths and people forget or do not see that they are culturally constructed.

High-stakes reforms have "diminished the scope of teachers' professional influence on policy and practice" (Endacott et al, 2015, p. 418). These reforms are creating a "new professionalism" in education based on the commodification and commercialization of teaching; performance culture; narrow, scripted conceptions of "what works;" and more competitive forms of governance. As a result of these changes, the "ethos and identity of teachers are being reengineered" (Anderson and Cohen, 2015, p. 3). The "new professional" identity comes from *above* rather than from *within*, which is decreasing teachers' agency and control as professionals (Anderson and Cohen, 2015).

Teachers' perceptions of agency and professionalism in the era of the Common Core experience marginalization, a disregard for their expertise, and a lack of reward for risk-taking or creativity. While schools emphasize differentiation, Endacott et al's research on teachers, agency, and professionalism showed a sense of hopelessness, an increased "authoritarianism," and an "obey or quit" environment (2015, p. 429). As one teacher stated, "I feel handcuffed now. I have no freedom. I was trained to be a teacher, not a robot. I have no individuality now. I cannot make decisions about teaching based on the needs of my 425 students. Instead, I have to follow a strict schedule telling me how to teach and what to teach and what to use to teach it" (Endacott et al, 2015, pp. 425-426). I have personally experienced the anxiety, frustration, and confinement that come with high-stakes expectations as a teacher, and while I have been lucky to teach at schools that offer curricular freedom, it is clear to me that my teaching is impacted by this system. I know that my curriculum would be under strong surveillance if my students did not perform well on standardized testing.

In the current educational climate, what is there for teachers who don't want to quit and don't want to be robots? Anderson and Cohen offer three resistance strategies to new professionalism: critical vigilance, which they define as introspection and critical thinking; counter-discourses, which they define as attempts to shift the narrative on a larger scale; and counter-conduct and reappropriation, which is working subversively and productively within the current cultural contexts (2015, p. 8). When I think about my own experiences in education both as a student and a teacher, and my initial questions about teachers' bodies, I see critical awareness and engagement of teachers' bodies and body

politics as a tool for curricular and pedagogical resistance to neoliberalism. On the surface, teachers' classroom practices can still appear normative and follow new professional expectations, but doing it in a body that inherently challenges the norms of the space changes the conversation and curriculum of the classroom. Making these connections is part of what drives me to explore the significance and power of visibly different teachers' bodies in education.

Teaching from a place of power-in-difference and anti-assimilationist body politics has the potential for educators to to “develop alternative habits of being” (hooks, 1990, p. 15); in this case, through an intentionally embodied practice that comes from within rather than above. To understand what this could look like, I first want to turn to the normative, asking the following questions: What are the stated and unstated assumptions for teachers' bodies within secondary education? What is acknowledged and expected? While I imagine that most teachers could talk about this at length, finding something clear and explicit about teachers' bodies through scholarly sources has proven to be a challenge. Within the field of education, there is limited research on bodies in general. A significant amount of the existing research focuses on physical and health education, obesity, or connections between bodies and self-esteem. There is insufficient research and writing regarding teachers bodies, and about connections between teachers' bodies and pedagogy. What research there is shows that bodies are impacted and have impact through hidden curriculum (Fisette and Walton, 2015); that normative and harmful discourses about bodies pervade education, particularly in physical education (Garrett and Wrench, 2012; Li, Li, Zhao, and Li, 2017); that there is potential for

embodied pedagogy to empower students when teachers understand and support initiatives to engage the body explicitly (Robertson and Thomson, 2014; Yoo and Loch, 2016); and that some teachers are already thinking about bodies (Perkinson, 2012; Sosa-Provencio, 2016; Woodcock and Hakeem, 2015). These critically aware teachers see the need for many more resources to support embodied pedagogies (Branigan, 2017; Fisette and Walton, 2015; Hughes-Decatur, 2011; Jones and Hughes-Decatur, 2012).

Even outside the field of peer reviewed scholarship, it is difficult to find information about norms for teacher's bodies. What is easy to find is teacher demographics. While students in US public schools are becoming more diverse, those who enter teaching are not. Most teachers are monolingual, white cis women (Gay, 2000; Han, 2013; Silverman, 2010). Although there are few explicit teacher dress codes or policy pieces regarding these teachers' bodies, it seems irrefutable that the normative expectations for cis white women's bodies, and all bodies, in society are mirrored in education. There are myriad studies that show the pressure women face to conform to dominant body images (Bordo, 1993; De Beauvoir, 1953). Be polite, have a quiet body, be rational and respectful, be in a generally good mood, have a thin body, be attractive without being over or under-sexual, take time on your appearance, be clean, always work to get closer to the ideal. Andrea Dworkin writes "In our culture not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered ... From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification, alteration" (1974, p. 113-4). Gender is not the only social construction that shapes the expectations placed on bodies in education. From my experiences teaching, I'd like to add to this list of norms:

be white, be straight, be able-bodied, don't have visible trauma, don't have visible piercings, if you have visible tattoos they should be small, speak Standard English, feel well. I live with constant exposure to dominant culture and aware of many dominant body norms and ideals. However, it is hard to find sources that state all of these norms explicitly. Sometimes all there is to show you are being held to dominant, white, ableist norms is an article from *Psychology Today*, too many anecdotes for it to be a coincidence, or the feeling that the reason you were fired was less about having a bad year and more about being the only teacher with a black body in the school.

Given the implicit expectation that being a teacher means meeting implicit and explicit norms, what happens to the teachers whose bodies are not normative? What happens to the visibly queer teachers, to the black and brown teachers, to the women who wear sleeveless shirts and don't shave their armpits, to the teachers with unsubtle piercings and tattoos, unapologetic fat, obvious physical differences, loud voices, visible feelings and uncompromising politics? What happens to those who have the audacity to deviate from norms and aren't trying to conform?

### **Theorizing Otherness**

Through this research, I want to explore the pedagogical meaning of teachers' bodies that are visibly different or other. I am interested in the politics of otherness; specifically, what it means to be visibly different from the norm in the classroom. Otherness is difficult to define in a static way because it is a relational term that involves bumping up against the boundaries of normal, and those boundaries shift based on location, culture, and context. My understanding of otherness has to do with both having

a body whose materiality is marked as different, and a critical consciousness engendered by experiences of material difference and liminality.

In “Misfits: A Feminist, Materialist Disability Concept,” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains that “The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits” (2011, p. 593). When a square peg meets a square hole, it is a fit. When a square peg meets a round hole, it is a misfit. In her theorizing of misfits, Garland-Thomson is making a shift from the discursive to the material which centers the focus of misfitting on “the encounter between bodies with particular shapes and capabilities and the particular shape and structure of the world” (2011, p. 594). Within this framework, there is an implicit connection to access. Garland-Thomson (2011) explains that when a body is able to be a close enough fit to its environment, it can move through that space without being marked. Those whose identities are other are not afforded this anonymity. For the purposes of this research, I define otherness in large part as a misfit between teachers’ bodies and their educational contexts. Embodied otherness refers to individuals whose materiality and embodied identities cannot, will not, or do not align with dominant body norms for privileged social identities in their environments.

Garland-Thomson’s work on misfits is specifically situated within the context of disability. However, she writes that “Although misfit is associated with disability and arises from disability theory, its critical application extends beyond disability as a cultural category and social identity toward a universalizing of misfitting as a contingent and fundamental fact of human embodiment” (p. 598). She also states that the embodiments

she is writing about are generally not chosen, though there is a degree to which they can be shaped. In my own research, part of what I am interested in is how teachers negotiate and shape their otherness. While the process of being marked can lead to isolation or lack of access, it also engenders a certain political, social justice consciousness.

Garland-Thomson (2011) claims it is harder for misfits to be complacent or ignorant of material realities, and this consciousness can be a source of power and community. This politicized consciousness is also central to my research.

In “La Conciencia de la Mestiza,” Gloria Anzaldúa offers her articulation of a *mestiza* borderland identity which is the chaos that comes from being in, out, and between cultures and their value systems, and the consciousness that comes from such a position. Rejected from both homeland and dominant culture, this violent and painful consciousness has the potential to transcend dualities and requires a “tolerance for ambiguity.” Anzaldúa goes on to write that this consciousness is “characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (1997, p. 101). Here Anzaldúa is expressing the expansive consciousness required to encompass the wholeness of those whose otherness is shaped by cultural and geographical misfitting. This piece also states the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of a *mestiza* identity in negotiation with dominant white culture (Anzaldúa, 1997). Ellen Samuels builds on Anzaldúa’s *mestiza*, asserting that “*mestiza* consciousness emerges not simply as a combination of factors but as a praxis of embodied identities that occupies the border as homeland” (2003, p. 250).



I find this work useful both in naming the violent and painful experiences that engender a liminal consciousness as well as its connections to embodiment and power. Dominant power structures legitimize certain bodies and delegitimize others. Otherness is produced and regulated in a way that leaves the other disempowered and disembodied in dominant culture. At the same time, Anzaldúa (1997) offers a vision of an empowered, embodied consciousness in which “our humanity and worth is no longer in question” (p. 109). In the context of education and teachers’ bodies, having a gay teacher or a fat teacher does something, but it also matters how they are embodied. There are gay teachers who choose to minimize their difference through embracing heteronormative values. There are fat teachers who share their dieting success with their students. This is not what my research is about. I am focused on the legibility of a certain anti-assimilationist stance and critical body politics of power-in-difference.

I enter into this research with several guiding frameworks about bodies and oppression. A primary framework through which I approach this work is intersectionality, which is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her work to name the specific dimensions of the oppression black women face due to the intersection of racism and sexism. Her argument is against a single-issue analysis of identity and oppression; she asserts that the experiences of black women cannot be understood by looking at race and gender separately (Crenshaw, 1994). I understand that all bodies are marked by multiple social identities. It is important to acknowledge these identities as specific social locations, as well as to acknowledge differences between individuals within identity groups. I also understand that people are not privileged or oppressed by one system at a

time. bell hooks (2010) states “I often use the phrase “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics.” Othering is systemic, and in this research it is important to situate the various systems and identities at play that impact a person’s experience of otherness through an intersectional lens. There are deep rooted systems and beliefs in place that impact who is at the front of the classroom, and how they experience their positions as teachers.

I also want to position my research within Donna Haraway’s call to redefine vision and knowledge as situated, messy, partial, and moving. In “‘Gender’ For a Marxist Dictionary,” she asserts “The evidence is building of a need for a theory of difference whose geometries, paradigms, and logics break out of binaries, dialectics, and nature/culture models of any kind” (1991, p. 129). A meaningful analysis of teachers’ bodies cannot be represented cohesively and it is important to recognize the boundary breaking that is an essential part of this research. In “The Persistence of Vision” Haraway writes about marked and unmarked bodies, subjectivities, and objectivity. She writes about uncritical feminist standpoints that do violence by making claims that are all-encompassing and asserts that the power of unmarked categories (white, man) “depends on systematic narrowing and obscuring” (1997, p. 286). She asks: how do we see and what do we see? Haraway “want[s] to argue for a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (1997, p. 287). Haraway is not trying to find the Truth, but rather to understand through

context and contradiction. This frame is important for my exploration of teachers' bodies within a context of otherness.

### **Research Questions**

My research questions focus on teachers who find power in their visible difference in the classroom, engaging their body critically with intent. My central question is: What does it mean when teachers embrace their visible otherness and challenge hegemonic discourses on the body from a place of anti-assimilationist politics and power-in-difference? Follow-up questions on this topic include: What is transformative about finding power and worth in a body that is not seen as worth much to dominant culture? How are these teachers' bodies pedagogical? How can we revalue these bodies? What does it mean to choose not to assimilate and to work in a context that mandates conformity and control? My focus is twofold: First, it is about the process teachers went through that brought them to a politicized understanding of embodied difference and informed their politics in the classroom. What experiences and awarenesses engendered each teachers' embodied awareness in their own lives, and how did it shape their desire to bring body politics into the classroom? Second, I am interested in what it means to revalue and center visible otherness in the classroom.

Through my research I will pursue several sub areas that may offer opportunities for depth or extension. I am interested in the personal and political identity development of visibly other teachers who find power in their difference. What experiences and realizations have been central to these teachers finding empowerment in something about themselves that is not supported by dominant culture? How does this relate to teacher

education? Can the process of developing a critical consciousness and a politicized awareness of bodies be facilitated through teacher education? I also have questions about what these bodies do in the classroom. [In what ways] are they pedagogical?

Additionally, I am curious whether visibly other teachers believe their bodies have subversive potential to challenge neoliberal norms and values through their existence.

Does the presence of embodied, anti-assimilationist values and teaching have the potential to shift the dehumanizing nature of neoliberal discourse?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of teachers who are visibly other and the meaning that can be made from centering and analyzing their intentional embodiment in the classroom. Everyone has a body, and there is no escaping the meanings mapped onto it. Teachers in public education spend eight hours per day in classrooms for years with their bodies fully present, and yet somehow bodies as sites of learning and meaning are rarely discussed in education. This is relevant data about the deep and silencing impact of dominant norms in and of itself. Although teachers today have their hands tied in many ways, there is no denying that teaching can be activism and that bodies have power. As a researcher, I wanted to dig into that power and potential.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In education, the proliferation of a mind/body dualism leaves the pedagogy of the body undertheorized, and its impact on education disregarded. Much of the existing research on the body from within the field of education focuses on physical education, obesity, and body image. There is little analysis of teachers' bodies, and less on how teachers' bodies impact their pedagogy. To explore the meaning of teachers' bodies and embodied pedagogy within the context of education, I have applied concepts and theories from critical theory, feminist theory, and critical disability studies, fields which are perceived to engage the body in more central and significant ways.

The purpose of this literature review is twofold: First, to explore existing research on bodies from within the field of education. Second, to apply concepts, conversations, and frameworks from critical and feminist research on and beyond the topic of education to understandings or interpretations of bodies within the field of education.

#### **Bodies and the Field of Education**

To explore research on bodies specifically from within the field of education, I mined databases such as Academic Search Premier and Google Scholar, using the search terms "high school" or "secondary education," "teachers," and "bodies." I chose these databases and search terms because I believed they'd offer the widest window into what is being written that stays within the parameters of my topic: otherness and teacher embodiment in secondary education. What follows is not proportionally representative of the topics one would find researching bodies in education. If I selected sources based on

frequency, articles about obesity, physical education, and body image would dominate and there would be little to no focus on teachers' bodies. I did select several of these articles to offer a representation of this research, but I also did significant digging to find sources that explore the body from a critical lens, and also to find articles that focus specifically on teachers' bodies. I made this choice because I believe it offers a broader window into the thinking and writing about bodies within scholarship on education.

The issue is not that there is a complete absence of the body in education or education research; it is that in most cases when bodies are taken up in these contexts the scope is limited and dominant norms of bodies and power are reinforced. The majority of education-based research on teachers, bodies, and classrooms takes place in higher education. Within the field of secondary education, a significant amount of research on teachers and bodies centers physical education, body image, and/or obesity. This section explores the body's unspoken impact via hidden curriculum, the impact bodies and norms of embodiment have on students, student identity development, teachers' relationships to their and others' bodies, critical pedagogies of the body, the role bodies could have in teacher education, and embodiment-focused needs that some within the field of education have identified as necessary.

### **Bodies as Hidden Curriculum**

“A hidden curriculum refers to the unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, procedures, and norms that exist in the educational setting” (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125). In ““Beautiful You”: Creating Contexts for Students to Become Agents of Social Change,” Fissette and Walton position their research within a neoliberal landscape of education, one

in which curricula are limited in scope and silences students' worlds beyond the standards. The authors then set forth an argument that it is essential for teachers' pedagogy to make hidden curricula explicit and allow students to explore their social and embodied identities. In their own attempt to decode hidden curriculum, Fiset and Walton state that schools reinforce norms that teach students to police bodies, and that in the context of PE, very few teachers address social constructions of embodiment and identity such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and body. This absence of bodies and identities causes students to feel isolated and marginalized. By confronting hidden curriculum and implementing a critical body pedagogy there is potential for educators at all levels to empower students and their relationships to their bodies (Fiset and Walton, 2015).

Data show that many preservice and classroom teachers have deeply internalized ideas about bodies that are mostly unexamined in the context of their work as educators, and that this impacts their relationships to their own and others' bodies (Garrett and Wrench, 2012). Gillanders and Franco-Vázquez studied a postgraduate course in Spain that aims to shift pre-service secondary education teachers' attitudes towards the female body through the course content. The hope was that focusing on gender through a critical theory-approach would impact these students as future-teachers. "Unconscious socialization" was given as part of the rationale for implementing such a course. In the context of education, this term seems similar to what others might call hidden curriculum. Perhaps if pre-service teachers were more conscious of the patriarchal constructions of

gender and its impact on women in Spanish culture, they would be better equipped to not spread these values to their students.

### **Impact on Students**

Students are negatively impacted by the assumptions, silence, and policing of bodies in education. Sosa-Provencio posits that school is a place that capitalizes on inequalities. For students who are not part of dominant culture, school “has endeavored to control their minds, bodies, and spirits” (2016, p. 3). In “(How) Does Obesity Harm Academic Performance? Stratification at the Intersection of Race, Sex, and Body Size in Elementary and High School,” Amelia Branigan explores the impact of body size on student achievement by looking at performance in English and math classes (2017). She hypothesizes that the gendered assumptions connected to each subject (English is feminine/feminizing, math is not) impact the ways teachers relate to students’ bodies in each course. To frame her work she references “Three causal studies [which] acknowledge that obesity is also a socially sanctioned characteristic of the physical body (Saguy 2013), with the potential to alter academic performance via social pathways, such as discrimination and stigma, even in the absence of direct physical health consequences” (Branigan, 2017, p. 27). Research that has shown obesity is not associated with lower test scores but is associated with lower GPAs when it comes to white students. After controlling for a number of factors, research showed that white girls seemed to be penalized for obesity in their English classes, which is what the researcher predicted. These same penalties were not present for white boys, black students of all genders, or any students in math courses. These distinctions are important because prior research



about obesity and GPAs has been averaged across all courses. In her discussion, Branigan asserts that,

Such differential perceptions of obesity by course subject may be a reflection of the discord between the unfeminine gendering of an obese white girl's physical body (Whitehead and Kurz 2008) and the female gendering of an English class itself. Functionally, this may mean that an obese white girl simply does not look like her teacher's mental image of the normative white female student in feminine course subjects, and she is thus perceived as less academically able. Because femininity is not privileged in math, a white girl's body size is less relevant in a math classroom. (2017, p. 41)

Additionally, growing research shows that teachers, particularly physical education teachers, hold negative views of diverse bodies, impacted by the current cultural climate towards fat bodies. Teachers' bodies and their discourses on the body convey messages to students about who is valued and desired in society. If teachers lack critical awareness they can easily send messages to all students, and particularly nonnormative students, that impact their self-esteem and sense of worth (Robertson and Thomson, 2014) in addition to their achievement and educational outcomes. In "Including Overweight and Obese Students in Physical Education: An Urgent Need and Effective Teaching Strategies" Li, Li, Zhao, and Li note that that overweight and obese students face a series of social stigmas, and that it is common for these students to be shut out of physical education as a result of stereotypes and bullying. These students can internalize the assumptions that they are lazy or bad at sports, cope by becoming

increasingly sedentary, and that can cause additional weight gain which is a concern to the researchers. This study echoes others in saying that PE teachers often hold biases against overweight and obese students, and that these teachers often lack the ability to engage students with diverse bodies in physical education (Li, Li, Zhao, and Li, 2017). Li, Li, Zhao, and Li clearly have internalized some of these biases and stereotypes because while they note the harms of stigma, their main concern seems to be weight gain and their language contrasts obese students with “normal-weight” students.

In “Giving Permission to Be Fat? Examining the Impact of Body-Based Belief Systems,” Robertson and Thomson assert that schools have an opportunity to shape students’ body-based belief systems. They analyze what arises when a body image and self-esteem curriculum is implemented in six schools. This study begins by noting that while some teachers have a role in promoting body acceptance, many teachers, particularly PE teachers, hold negative views of diverse bodies. They note that what hasn’t been studied is how teachers’ views play out when they implement body image curriculum. There are numerous risks that come with having a negative body image, and schools have an opportunity to offer education about bodies to all (Robertson and Thomson, 2014).

There are some instances in which a focus on bodies in schools can have a positive impact on students. Fissette and Walton set out to disrupt the silence and marginalization that many students face in PE. “As scholars and teacher educators, we embarked on a research journey with high school girls in a PE setting by creating a critical body pedagogy context to access and authorize their voices about problems and

issues they encountered within school” (2015). This research took place with eight 10-12th grade girls in the Midwest over the course of a year. The first part of the research was discourse-related, and the second part was youth participatory action research, where the students created a curriculum on the body. They found that in their work, students were able to have agency, developing a youth-led program called Beautiful You that they implemented after the research ended. The researchers noted that as the students found their voices on this topic and began to take action steps, the roles switched where the students led and the researchers supported. The findings of this study show that it takes time to shift students’ understandings of bodies and power. Throughout the year, there were instances where students reinforced dominant norms even after being exposed to critique and information that challenged these norms. Critical body pedagogies must be incorporated into every subject, and especially in PE, in order to value students’ lived and embodied experiences (Fisette and Walton, 2015).

A focus on bodies can increase student engagement. Yoo and Loch note that while the body has been devalued in education because it is a “less reliable and tangible” site of knowledge, embodied learning can improve the experience for students. They draw observations from two workshops attended by students of low socioeconomic status designed to increase engagement for youth in Australia, looking at how students used their bodies during the workshops and how teachers/facilitators modeled an embodied practice. In their findings they note that “The body is shown to occupy a central and constantly changing role as people, environments and emotions shift” (Yoo and Loch, 2016). There is a connection between bodies and engagement. Students show moments of

joy through physical movement. They show intimacy and connection through their proximity to each other and the teacher. If teachers pay attention to embodiment and affect they have the opportunity to empower students, particularly those who are vulnerable (Yoo and Loch, 2016).

### **Student Identity Development**

The role education has in students' embodied identity development is minimally reflected in education-based research. In "A Review of the Racial Identity Development of African American Adolescents: The Role of Education" (2009), DeCuir-Gunby explored literature on black racial identity (BRI) in the context of the educational system. This review does not engage aspects of bodies directly, except for a paragraph on skin color and hair texture where DeCuir-Gunby wrote "there is a lack of focus on the effects of skin color and hair on BRI development." DeCuir-Gunby concludes his literature review by asserting "Black racial identity is impacted by the school context, including interactions with teachers, relationships with peers, and academic issues. Unfortunately, these interactions are not always positive. In light of these negative experiences, educators need to create a social context for learning that supports the racial identity development of Black adolescents" (p. 118). Race and racism are upheld through meaning mapped onto bodies and embedded in institutions. This research suggests that there is a need for these institutions to engage critically with the meanings of students' bodies and how it impacts them psychologically and academically.

In a literature review on the role of school in adolescent's identity development, Verhoeven, Poorthuis, and Volman (2019) attempt to integrate findings of theoretically

and methodologically “scattered” research on connections between school contexts and identity. They analyzed 111 studies on “personal and social identity and on school-related identity dimensions.” Verhoeven, Poorthuis, and Volman explicitly name their choice of language, and recognize that they are not reviewing articles that focus on a specific personal or social identity such as race or gender though those articles do exist. In comparing studies, three themes emerged: what schools do unintentionally that impact adolescent identity development, how schools could intentionally impact student identity development, and research that suggests a supportive classroom environment is necessary for intentional experiences meant to foster identity development to be meaningful. In the conclusion to their literature review, they write, “this review demonstrates, more than anything, that even though we know that schools and teachers in formal education may unintentionally impact adolescents’ identity development, there are only a few studies on how adolescents’ identity development can intentionally be supported in *formal education*” (2019). The commonality between these two literature reviews is that educational contexts consistently impact identity development in ways that are not foregrounded, and these impacts have negative outcomes for students with marginalized identities.

### **Teachers’ Relationships to Bodies**

There is work that can be done with teachers to impact their attitudes and beliefs in the context of education. In “Health Literacies: Pedagogies and Understandings of Bodies” Wrench and Garrett focus on PE teachers because of the role they have in students’ wellness. PE teachers impact students’ ways of thinking, their understandings

about themselves and their bodies, in addition to the ways they situate themselves in social and cultural contexts (2014). Jones and Hughes-Decatur posit that if elementary school teachers were more at ease in their own bodies, it would allow them to engage students in an embodied pedagogy that would positively shift students' relationships to their own bodies. They too reference PE as fertile ground for this work, and name that most PE teachers reinforce hegemonic body norms and perpetuate inequities (Fisette and Walton, 2015). In an attempt to address exactly this, Gillanders and Franco-Vázquez worked with groups of teachers to design an arts and gender unit that they could implement in a future classroom. They hoped this process would impact pre-service teachers' own attitudes towards gender and bodies. Topics ranged from gender inequity in comics to sexualization of children (mostly girls) to visual representations of women's bodies in the media. Participants in this course reported that it was a positive experience and they could see themselves replicating something like this in the classroom. Gillanders and Franco-Vázquez noted that participants were able to meet the methodological expectations for teaching through this work. They concluded that in Spain there is enough freedom in the secondary education standards that teachers can do this sort of work, and that it is important to sensitize future teachers to issues of gender, representation, and power in order for the students they teach to be more social justice-oriented themselves (Gillanders and Franco-Vázquez, 2016).

Some teachers are more open to critically examining their beliefs than others. In examining body image curricula across 6 schools, Robertson and Thomson (2014) found that teachers had varied levels of support and buy-in, differing levels of comfort, and the

completeness of implementation was not uniform. “This research confirms earlier research findings that teachers are concerned about their students’ health, weight, and eating, as well as the teachers’ own shape and health. This study also matches earlier findings that teachers need support to understand their own preconceptions and stigma attached to body size and shape” (Robertson and Thomson, 2014, p. 17). Robertson and Thomson found that in schools where beliefs and differences could be openly discussed, there was more success (Robertson and Thomson, 2014). This finding makes me think about the impacts of neoliberalism on education including lack of student and teacher agency and accountability measures that focus on numbers rather than people. There is a case here that being more personal has positive benefits to programmatic implementation.

There are also teachers in the classroom who have deep awareness of their own embodiment as well as the impact of bodies in the context of education and specifically the ways that their teacher bodies can impact and empower students. Woodcock and Hakeem provide a window into the work of Phyllis, an experienced literacy coach working at the elementary level in the Berkshires. Phyllis argued that teachers need a voice in their work, but their agency is becoming increasingly diminished. “Voiced, embodied experience gives way to real change” (Woodcock and Hakeem, 2015, p. 23). She notes for teachers, finding one’s voice can be uncomfortable, but that the alternative is a high stakes kind of silence. “Although voice can feel risky, vulnerability is not the opposite of strength; we need layers of vulnerability in order to be strong” (Woodcock and Hakeem, 2015, p. 26).

How do teachers develop an awareness of their own bodies and a desire for authenticity and vulnerability, particularly if they are part of dominant groups? James Perkinson is a white male scholar, theologian, and teacher. His aim is to explore questions we can ask about what it means to incorporate embodied dispositions of the other (in this context, black urban folks) into white people's embodiments, particularly within the context of teacher (and, in his case, preacher). The topic came to him after reflecting on the embodied dissonance he experienced over several decades as a white person in an urban community of color, wanting to incorporate some of what he saw from his community into his life and work, but also being very aware of the ways white people profit from people of color's bodies and creativity. When sharing his poetry he reflects, "Either I am a white boy who has paid his dues in black theaters of struggle, or a "wannabe," ripping off the culture in yet one more operation of white plunder" (Perkinson, 2012, p. 328). I don't know if this binary is so simple, or if you ever get a pass as a white person for "paying your dues," but what is clear to me is that he has some level of critical reflection about his body. What has made it so that a privileged white male has this level of awareness and questioning? I would hypothesize that his awareness has been enhanced by the visibility of his own body in these contexts. He isn't marginalized as a white person in society, but his experience of otherness has given him an embodied awareness.

In his own classroom, Perkinson invites black artists, performers and scholars, and makes explicit that he invites them in as their authentic selves. He notes that it is a deeply meaningful and powerful experience for students of color and white students to be



in the presence of visible otherness in their classroom contexts. In closing, Perkinson asks: “What can a white professor do who has not lived through a deep experience of immersion in another context and is confronted with a largely (or all) white classroom?” (2012, p. 333). He asserts that what a white professor can do is be explicit about showing examples of white difference and embodiment in their classrooms (2012).

In “Seeking a “Mexicana/Mestiza” Critical Feminist Ethic of Care: Diana's “Revolución” of Body and Being,” Sosa-Provencio focuses specifically on one Mestiza teacher, Diana, in order to go into depth about this framework and how she embodies it. One way that Diana enacts resistance in her classroom is by making the scar from her smallpox vaccine visible to her students. While white students do not understand its significance, “as Diana allows her upper arm vaccination scar to be visible to her students, she gives them the means to defy the shame and distortion heaped on a collective Mexicana/o Body marked Foreign Other in the United States” (Sosa-Provencio, 2016, p. 9). Diana offers her students an intentional legibility through her embodiment. She also does this through sharing images of her childhood, naming her identities, contexts, and struggles. Diana’s body, her words, and her sharing with her students, are healing. She is able to act in subversive ways through her physical and unapologetic presence to empower her students. Sosa-Provencio concludes by asserting “As Diana (re)claims her Mexicana body and being within its complexity and survivability, La Revolucionista seals young Mexicanas/os beneath a banner of shared Mexicana/o identity, nurtures a cultural connectedness they lack elsewhere, and equips them to transcend their perceived status as victims” (2016, p. 12). The implication here is

that from a position of teacher-as-other, an unapologetic ownership of self is a transgressive and revolutionary act that can positively embolden students who share that same othered context, and has the potential to transform their relationship to power (Sosa-Provencio, 2016).

### **Pedagogies on/of the Body**

There is research in the field of education that positions the body as pedagogical and advocates for pedagogies of the body. Woodcock and Hakeem emphasize the relational aspect of learning, which is necessarily embodied. "The Power of Our Words and Flesh" frames the role of a literacy coach as one of "relationships and growth" (Woodcock and Hakeem, 2015, p. 14). Woodcock and Hakeem name some of the challenges educators face in our current educational culture (standardized tests, accountability, etc) and how that impedes relational work in the classroom. Knowledge is built relationally, so "As teachers and teacher educators, we must honor the body language, daily experiences, emotions, and perceptions of all of our students and colleagues" (Woodcock and Hakeem, 2015, p. 14). In their theoretical groundwork, the authors reference Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (1990), and Malaguzzi (1993) to emphasize the relational and affective aspects of teaching and learning. Teacher's bodies are constantly visible, constantly "on stage." The educational system and culture however, make it difficult to engage in embodiment. The authors describe a disembodied quality to research and theory on the body itself, and that it is important to engage in our corporeality rather than studying the body objectively. There has been growing research on the role bodies play in student learning, however researchers must look at the body

and its role in the context of teachers. “In short, we learn more effectively when we learn in an emotional, embodied manner” (Woodcock and Hakeem, 2015, p. 17).

In his own acknowledgement of bodies in education, Perkinson asserts “pedagogy is always embodied and performative, requiring close attention to the controlling protocols of that seventy percent of communication which happens outside of conscious intention or explicit invocation” (2012, p. 326). He goes on to reference the contradictions of embodiment as other. The ways bodies speak silently, the ways they are forced into silence, the ways bodies are contentious or navigate truths and dominant expectations, the inherent resistance in this embodiment. He claims that this results in “a kind of body literacy among the oppressed” (Perkinson, 2012, p. 326). Along these lines, Sosa-Provencio references the educators of color, particularly black and Spanish-speaking, who have “fortified” students of color using a “critical feminist ethic of care” framework in their classrooms (Sosa-Provencio, 2016, p. 1). This work has a clear premise that some teachers who are other have profound impacts on students who share those identities. These educators “drew on the capacity, intellectual gifts, wisdom, and rich histories of students and their families, utilizing curriculum and pedagogy simultaneously as a healing balm and the battle armor necessary to resist the pain of invisibility, distortion, silencing, and physical brutality threatening to erode a collective body and being” (Sosa-Provencio, 2016, p. 2).

In setting up the frameworks for a critical feminist ethic of care, Sosa-Provencio notes that white feminist care in education is often sterile, apersonal, and apolitical in ways that do not help students of color. The author references a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic

of care as something that is enacted through physical presence as well as pedagogy. “A Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care challenges and reconstructs dominant notions of social justice revolution as it cloaks itself within an ambiguity and mutability in order to protect those who fight this still-contested battle on behalf of and with their Mexicana/o students and their families” (Sosa-Provencio, 2016, p. 5). This quote highlights the constant negotiation of cultures, identities, and power required to embody this particular politic and pedagogical stance, and the critical awareness necessary to do this work.

Because of its impact on social and educational experiences, Fisette and Walton argue that “critical body knowledge,” needs to be integrated into all content areas, particularly PE. They state that while some in education have made a case for using critical pedagogy, they have not found any that specifically advocate for a focus on the body. They reference Jones and Hughes-Decatur’s research on elementary education that claims “Sometimes, the spaces produced are racist, sexist, misogynist, exclusionary, and oppressive, but when individuals work on their own bodies as a site for self-transformation, they can move, speak, and interact differently and produce new social spaces—perhaps spaces of inclusion, value, acceptance, and power” (Fisette and Walton, 2015).

### **Bodies and Teacher Education**

In my research process I found several articles that were outside the scope of my research terms because they have no direct connection to secondary education. All of these articles address teacher education and pedagogies of the body. Though the teacher

education programs were not in service of secondary education, I found the work salient and important to include.

In “Embodied Literacies: Learning to First Acknowledge and Then Read the Body in Education,” Jones and Hughes-Decatur ask: What do bodies have to do with education and teaching? Hughes-Decatur would say “everything” (2011, p. 73). Drawing on her experiences in K-12 as well as preservice teacher education, Hughes-Decatur offers a series of vignettes that illustrate how she came to this understanding. She highlights the ways that teachers read students’ bodies, “often revealing the implicit and explicit raced/classed/sexed/queered/(dis)abled/xenophobic (mis)perceptions that we are not spending any/enough time discussing in our classrooms” (Hughes-Decatur, 2011, p. 74). Hughes-Decatur reflects on how even with all of these stories and knowledge, she struggles to articulate why bodies matter in education. She uses this study to craft an answer.

People consciously and unconsciously (re)shape their bodies so that they can be *enough*. In US culture there is an implicit understanding that our bodies need to show the “work” we are doing on ourselves. Going to the gym, grooming, thinking about how to sit, stand, walk, talk, how much space to take up...all of this sends the message that bodies are something to control and fix. “Fat bodies that need to be thinned; queer bodies that need to be straightened; dark bodies that need to be lightened and light bodies that need to be darkened. Some bodies are not American-looking enough, and other bodies aren’t “American-speaking” enough.” Hughes-Decatur, 2011, p. 74). These cultural messages lead to a sense of what she calls *body-not-enoughness*, and this is part of what

educators are up against. Hughes-Decatur then moves into popular culture, giving examples of celebrities who were crucified for their embodiments, and also the moments when some of them decided to push back and just live in their bodies rather than continue to battle them. Why would we expect youth to be able to understand and decode all of this when adults sometimes barely recognize it? In education, youth bodies are policed and disciplined, sometimes in contradictory ways, in order to conform to dominant norms.

You can't do that here!...No hugging!...Grow up!...Ask to use the bathroom!...You're acting like a child!...NO talking!...Walk the line in the hall...No loud voices...Raise your hand!...No touching!...Detention!...Follow directions!...Grow Up!...Walk slowly...You can't say that here...You're too young to understand that concept...Don't run!...Raise your hand!...Be quiet!...You can't think that here...Act your Age!...You're not old enough to talk/think like that...*Grow Up!* (Hughes-Decatur, 2011, p. 83).

This both teaches young people how to read bodies and creates hierarchies.

Hughes-Decatur posits that the body has been both under and over-researched, and that the ways that the body has been generalized social and psychological fields contribute to its absence in education. In education, the mind/body dualism remains strong. We are brains. In all of the discourse on accountability, it is more about numbers and metrics than actual people. She also notes that teachers basically aren't supposed to have bodies. We are supposed to be "docile" and "asexual" (Hughes-Decatur, 2011, p. 86) and our bodies are not supposed to have anything to do with student learning.

Hughes-Decatur concludes by asking: “how do we uncover/dig up this phenomenon of bodies in education that has been buried over for so long? How do we unlearn these disciplined body practices that continue to permeate the structures of popular and educational culture so that we can learn to read bodies differently in education? And how do we even begin having conversations in classrooms around the body?” (2011, p. 86).

In “Speaking of Bodies in Justice-Oriented, Feminist Teacher Education,” Jones and Hughes-Decatur aim to explore what a “critical pedagogy of the body” could look like in teacher education. To contextualize the topics, the authors note the ways that bodies are policed in American culture, in educational contexts, and particularly the way female bodies are regulated in elementary education. They taught a course on a critical pedagogy of the body in an Early Childhood Education program. Their goal was to help preservice teachers have a critical view of bodies in education because in the big picture this influences the relationships students have with their bodies to be more liberatory.

Jones and Hughes-Decatur provide vivid anecdotes to show that elementary school-aged children are obsessed with bodies, which shows the necessity for this research. They also note that while the body is the subject of significant research, there is little research in the field of education, and more specifically teacher education, that explores critical body pedagogies. They want to disrupt the singular image of elementary education teachers, noting the range of identities and experiences that educators bring to the classroom that go beyond being middle class white women. Within their course, they aim to use feminist frameworks and open up discussion through their assignments that helps challenge hegemonic notions of body. One unit that does this has students focus on

their context and positionality, placing value on their lived experiences and shifting the focus from other to self. Students also engaged in a critical analysis of the “normal” body, and connecting their critiques and understandings of bodies to their work in the classroom with students. Through their praxis they notice their preservice students’ sense of power shifting, and determine that this work opens up space for preservice teachers to think critically and creatively about their own lives as well as in their roles as educators.

In their findings, they conclude that “A critical body pedagogy that introduces a subtle, but explicit, integration of issues of the body throughout a justice-oriented teacher education course opens up spaces for students and instructors alike to explore, critique, and reconstruct normative discourses and practices around the body” (Jones and Hughes-Decatur, 2012, p. 59). They note that the diversity education in teacher education programs tends to have an absence of the body, and this creates the possibility of students being critically aware of social identities and experiences while also negating or silencing their and others’ bodies. They close by arguing that if we want to change the nature of education, we need to start with our own bodies and the bodies of those in teacher education (Jones and Hughes-Decatur, 2012).

Dixon and Senior worked with hundreds of preservice teachers over a three year span, leading an art-based course on curriculum and assessment. Their pedagogy is embodied, which they define as relational. In “Appearing Pedagogy: From Embodied Learning and Teaching to Embodied Pedagogy,” they expand on what they mean by embodied pedagogy, linking it to voice, affect, and control of the body. When they reference embodied teachers who control their bodies, I get the sense that they mean



these teachers hold themselves with intentionality rather than that they conform to dominant standards and silence their bodies. They also note that bodies are discursive and that we speak through our bodies even when we aren't saying anything. In the context of education, the body is as important as the mind. In their review of the literature on bodies they quote Erica McWilliam, who asserts that "The ways we feel about each other, our relationships – physical, emotional, spiritual intellectual – are pedagogical material used in the processes of teaching and of learning (Dixon and Senior, 2011, p. 477). They also state that the majority of the research on bodies is lacking, and focuses on body language in abstract ways in addition to being heady and language-based. As a result of this, they are drawn to doing their work through images rather than words, doing a micro-analysis on the space that bodies take up and the space between/around bodies. In analyzing a series of images of teachers and students, they assert that embodiment is fluid, that in the context of education "the form of the relationship *is* bodily" (Dixon and Senior, 2011, p. 483). Their hope is that we can engage in "an embodied pedagogy that crystallizes the relational 'teacher' and 'student' and refuses the distorted normalising gaze of teacher reflection and student observation" (Dixon and Senior, 2011, p. 483).

### **Needs and Next Steps for Education**

Scholarship and practice within the field of education need to do some work on bodies. Wrench and Garrett argue that bodies should be at the center of Australia's health literacies curriculum, and that it is essential that these practices engage from a critical pedagogical stance that challenges hegemonic understandings of bodies (2014).

Robertson and Thomson show that many current programs to address body image

reinforce dominant body norms, and state a need for more critical approaches. There is a question of whether teachers have the training and support to implement effective programming, and the researchers acknowledge that some teachers, specifically PE and home economics, “are under pressure to match the ideal body” (Robertson and Thomson, 2014, p. 7). Robertson and Thomson name a need for critical body literacy in teacher training. “A critical body literacy program would encourage students to name the hidden codes in society that attribute positive (privileged) values to certain bodies and stigmatize the less-preferred but naturally occurring diversity of bodies” (Robertson and Thomson, 2014, p. 19). Robertson and Thomson’s hope is that this literacy would push students (and teachers) to focus on health rather than size. When reading this I thought there was a lot of important work happening, and that perhaps the researchers also needed to unpack their emphasis on the goal of students wanting to seek a “healthy body” and how that connects to ableism.

Branigan (2017) emphasizes education and sensitivity training for teachers about bodies and stigma, which connects to a growing understanding of obesity as a social issue rather than solely a medical one. Her study shows a need for education research that is better versed in theories of the body, which may impact both how research is interpreted and how questions are asked. She also posits that this sort of research is relevant to issues of educational achievement as well as social justice/equity. ““Beautiful You”: Creating Contexts for Students to Become Agents of Social Change” is rooted in critical pedagogy that begins by asking the question: “Who, within education, has the power to authorize what is considered important knowledge to be taught by teachers and learned by

students?” (Fisette and Walton, 2015). I see this as an example of the ways that critical and feminist theory can support research on embodiment in the field of education.

Through this research it is clear that the body is ever-present in education and has “everything” to do with education. Students and educators alike are shaped by understandings of their own bodies, normative messages about embodiment, and curricula that address the body in marginalizing and liberatory ways. Many within education operate through normative understandings of bodies and limited acceptance of difference, and as a result impose those norms onto others. Those who have a critically reflective practice about embodiment seem to come to this consciousness through their own experiences with difference or otherness. These experiences of otherness and reflection position empower some to bring visibility to bodies within educational contexts and offer opportunities to build relationships that are personal and deeply meaningful. There is a lot of work to be done to bring critical pedagogies of the body into the practice of education.

### **Critical and Feminist Approaches to Embodiment**

There is a conversation about bodies that can be had between research in critical and feminist fields and research in the field of education. Whether acknowledged or ignored, disrupting norms or assimilating, consciously engaged or unconsciously speaking, the body is present in education and it *does something*. Inequalities are reproduced through assumptions and projections of bodies. Bodies speak and learn through and in relation; they have a hand in engagement, achievement, and pedagogy. In an educational context where adherence to norms is prioritized over a truer expression,

where numbers are more important than people, there is a distancing or alienation that everyone in this system grapples with, passively or actively.

Teachers, and particularly those who are visibly other, are alienated from their own work. As educators, we are pushed to reinforce pedagogical myths of a mind/body dualism, and a valuing of rational and cerebral over felt and embodied. Students in this system are constantly surveilled and controlled. They are normed, they internalize these norms and scripts, and they enforce conformity on themselves and others. Preservice teachers are not provided much training that engages in bodies, let alone a cursory critique of their own embodiment. Many enter the classroom without a critical analysis of the role bodies play in education or the impact social and cultural norms and power structures have on their work. Curricula is disembodied, and when the body is taken up in educational discourse or development, it is generally done in a cerebral and removed way that distances the content from an affective and lived embodiment.

What critical theory and education research seem to have in common is an understanding that there are dominant dispositions towards and expectations of bodies, that not everyone fits these expectations, and that education, particularly in PE, need to do better at supporting and making room for engaging bodies. That said, the field of education needs help centering bodies and understanding the role of embodiment in education. Branigan (2017) asks, how can education better engage theories of the body? How can educators interpret data differently and ask better questions? Critical and feminist theorists have been concerned with embodiment as an important site of understanding and knowledge, and as a resource for analyzing normativity and power in

personal and professional spheres. The physical body shapes both theory and pedagogy in educational contexts though it is difficult to categorize critical and feminist approaches to embodiment because the theory, literature, and curricula as a whole are disembodied. Critical and feminist theories in and of themselves as well as applied conceptually to the classroom, offer the field of education lenses through which bodies can be revalued. They offer the potential to shift conversations about bodies in education and offer ways to reconceptualize the value of difference in an educational context that, for the most part, centers normativity and control.

In this section, I explore how the body has been engaged, messily and incoherently, implicitly and explicitly, in/through critical and feminist theory. I draw from seminal texts that engage the body or embodied pedagogy as well as more current texts within the field of critical and feminist theory and research that center embodiment or explore bodies within the context of education. The literature in critical and feminist theory/research that directly addresses embodiment in education is diverse, spanning many fields including those that are discursive, affective, materialist, postmodern, critical, and queer. This literature is useful to understand and make meaning of the body and otherness generally, and specifically within the context of education. I organize the literature that follows around several broad themes: the production and societal use of bodily (in)visibility in theory and pedagogy, the production and power of otherness and liminality, and critical and feminist perspectives on embodiment as resistance. This frame opens up space for raising questions and understanding the potential of the pedagogical body in educational contexts.

### **Normativity, (Dis)embodiment, and Invisibility**

There is an “institutional erasure” of bodies in the classroom. bell hooks (1994) claims that making bodies invisible creates the illusion that education is objective. This erasure creates a system where people buy into a false mind/body dualism. She states that “we are invited to teach information as though it does not emerge from bodies” (p. 139) and highlights the ways the silencing of bodies in the classroom maintains hegemony. Teaching from a place of embodiment requires bringing class, race, gender, sexuality, and identity into the classroom, which challenges the way power functions institutionally in education. However, norms and the regulation of bodies in educational spheres perpetuate the illusion that bodies are neutral. Most educational contexts do not acknowledge the ways that bodies are not viewed and treated equally or confront this illusion of invisible bodies and invisible differences (hooks, 1994). Educators and researchers must explore classroom embodiment through the lenses of power and normativity. As Foucault writes:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. (1994, p. 181)

Schools are places where norms are reinforced and reproduced (Foucault, 1994), and the mechanisms that shape and control these norms are often not seen or acknowledged.

Those who have visibly nonnormative bodies face bias and punishment for existing (Butler, 1997). Cindy Cruz (2001) writes that simply the presence of queer bodies can destabilize a space and is seen as a threat, and uses examples of queer youth of color in schools to illustrate how their bodies are seen as inherently “disorderly.” Queer youth of color are targeted because their bodies are too present to maintain the illusion that education is solely a function of the mind (hooks, 1994) and their bodies are highly regulated.

Cindy Cruz asserts that “Nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body” (2001, p. 659). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault wonders why there is so much interest in managing deviants. Why aren’t we just putting them away? Why is there so much emphasis on reform? Foucault posits that emphasis on managing the body is about maximizing wealth. In addition, he shows that in managing/treating the deviants society is actually creating/establishing the norm by comparison (1977). Through this analysis he originates the field of biopolitics, the comparisons of the individual to a larger social demographic. Each of us locates ourselves, and because of that we can set goals for improvement or have a desire to be above the average. This desire to be better causes people to start governing and regulating themselves. Biopolitics can be understood as the point in time when actions become self-regulated, and what is distinctive about biopolitics is normalization.

Normalizing the concept of professionalism plays a significant role in shaping experiences of (dis)embodiment and (lack of) agency in the classroom. In “Redesigning the Identities of Teachers and Leaders,” Anderson and Cohen (2015) posit neoliberal school reforms and practices are creating a “new professionalism” in education based on the commodification and commercialization of teaching; performance culture; narrow, scripted conceptions of “what works;” and more competitive forms of governance. As a result of these changes, the “ethos and identity of teachers are being reengineered” (p. 3). The “new professional” identity comes from above rather than from within, which is decreasing teachers’ agency and control as professionals. The increased external accountability is creating an “audit culture” where teachers’ work is not their own. The authors reference Foucault’s concept of governmentality to explain ways that parents, students, and teachers are being pushed to think like consumers rather than citizens. They also reference Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power to describe what is currently happening in schools: over time discourses become taken-for-granted norms and people do not realize these discourses are culturally constructed (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). Together, this paints a picture of teachers who are disembodied and lack agency in the classroom. Anderson and Cohen’s work makes an argument that authentic aspects of teacher/leaders’ identities and embodiment are at best ignored, and at worst purposefully silenced or shut out of the classroom.

Even those who carry the awareness that bodies matter can struggle to center them in the curriculum. This lack of focus on bodies, in part, is due to educational “scripts,” meaning rote ways of engaging within the context of education. Educators and



students alike fill roles and engage predictably, without much deviation or regard for individuality. These scripts maintain norms, regulate bodies, and leave difference unacknowledged and unexamined. “What Her Body Taught” (2005) is a study about bodies, disabilities, and teaching between three English professors in higher education. Each of these professors has a body that is visibly different in the classroom: Brenda Breuggermann is deaf, Georgina Kleege is blind, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has a congenital condition that affected the formation of her arms and hands. Through this conversation they explore the meanings of their bodies in the classroom and in the world (Breuggermann, Kleege, and Garland-Thomson).

In the classroom, one theme that comes up repeatedly throughout their conversation is the normalizing nature of public education. This normalizing can manifest in a silencing or erasure of disability through a lack of acknowledgement where students “(over)normalize” their teachers. They attribute part of this to the structure and performance of teaching. Garland-Thomson states “I have a position; they have a position; we have a relationship based on those positions” (2005, p. 21). There is a sort of script to a classroom that minimizes difference. In regard to the concept of scripted classrooms, the professors posit that they do not want their disabilities to go away, nor do they want to be seen solely as disabled. Rather, “We want to redefine, to reimagine, disability...We want it to go away in a way that *we* want it to go away” (2005, p. 15). This awareness, however, does not necessarily change the scripts that exist in the classroom. One reason for this is stigma “And in what ways we manage our stigma--work to unspoil our spoiled identities...” (2005, p. 20). Breuggermann, Kleege, and

Garland-Thomson are aware of the ways that their appearance will be monitored, and recognize that they use clothing and certain aesthetic choices to normalize and mediate their bodies in the classroom. Dressing the part of a teacher or professor is a script, and while it does not make their deafness, blindness, or physical deformities invisible, it can serve to regulate the discourse of the classroom in ways that leaves their embodiment unacknowledged. Similarly, in a research article examining the understandings of teachers with learning disabilities, Ferri, Connor, Solis, Valle, and Volpitta found that as participants fought the learning disabilities narratives imposed on them, they were “caught within the very oppressive ideologies we seek to disrupt” (2005, p. 75), positioning themselves as “exceptional” for their success and reinforcing binaries between ability and disability.

Disability and difference are always present, even when not visible to all or part of the explicit conversation. Negotiating disability and bodies is “complicated, and often contradictory” (Breuggermann, Kleege, and Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 32). No matter how seemingly unacknowledged, teachers *are* their bodies. Scott Smith names the silence he experienced in the university classroom as a teacher with Dwarfism. He came into the classroom expecting his body to be noticed, expecting to be asked questions. In his essay “On the Desk” he reflects that in the entirety of his teaching career he has not be asked about his body, and that this silence is profound and instructive. Smith notes that he expected his students to react to his body in some way on his first day as a professor, but no students did and no students have since. He writes that “this silence speaks loudly not only about disability but also about the emphasis on the *mind* in academic life” (2003, p.

27). He theorizes as to why this silence or erasure exists. One possible explanation is that in his role as a teacher his mind is what students acknowledge. This too is a script between teacher and students. As Smith explores his experience of education as cerebral and disembodied, he concludes:

Perhaps our bodies, for all their silence, do have something to say. Perhaps what we carry into the classroom physically--our way of carrying ourselves but also the ways in which our bodies have carried us or let us down--is just as important as the books or syllabi we carry in our hands and the theories and ideas we carry in our heads. Perhaps the body, as it has been for many of us in the study of our lives, is the most important text of the course. (Smith, 2003, pp. 32-33)

The connection between Smith and the conversation between Brueggemann, Garland-Thomson, and Kleege is the concept of (over)normalizing and the use of scripts to regulate bodies and minimize difference. Even with Smith's profound awareness and realizations that the body may be "the most important text of the course," he is not necessarily committed to speaking about his body in the classroom in the future.

### **Otherness and Liminality**

Otherness is difficult to define because it is a relational term that implies being outside the boundaries of normal, and those boundaries shift based on location, culture, and context. I define otherness as a misfit between teachers' bodies and their educational contexts in order to center the materiality of the body, though otherness is not an exclusively material construct. There is a certain critical consciousness that comes from not belonging to dominant culture that is also central to my definition of otherness.

Embodied otherness refers to individuals who cannot, will not, or do not align with the norms of their environments, both in materiality and consciousness. Those whose bodies and identities are other are marked and marginalized. Dominant societal understandings regard othered bodies as worth less than those whose bodies and identities are normative.

Garland-Thomson's definition of a misfit focuses on the material aspects of the interaction between bodies and the environment. She writes, "the experience of misfitting, if it is theoretically mediated, structures the narrative aspect of identity and is structured by the material world. Misfitting has explanatory power to produce a coherent narrative of how inferiority is assigned and literal marginalization takes place" (2011, p. 601). Misfitting also creates a dissonance between one's "felt and attributed" (2011, p. 601), which Garland-Thomson connects to Du Bois' double consciousness.

A feminist materialist analysis of bodies, difference, and power reveals the the oppression and structural barriers faced by many whose bodies and identities are othered. Through this framework we can ask questions about access. What do bodies that are othered need physically, psychologically, socially and economically, and what constraints are preventing them from accessing it? In *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts*, Nirmala Erevelles reveals tensions in and argues against current theoretical perspectives within the fields of feminist and disability studies that are ahistorical and/or apolitical, making a case for the ways that these approaches obscure disability or render the disabled body invisible. Rethorizing through a materialist analysis, Erevelles "focus[es] on the actual social and economic conditions that impact (disabled) people's lives, and that are currently mediated by the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation" (2011,

p. 26). I find Erevelles' materialist framework particularly useful in order to have a conversation about access in the field of education.

In Erevelles' chapter, "Of Ghosts and Ghetto Politics," she examines the ways educational policy simultaneously renders (other) bodies visible and invisible. Erevelles begins by setting up a neoliberal context for education that emphasizes the quantitative--standards, objectives, benchmarks, numbers--rather than people and bodies. This virtual erasure of the body in educational policy does not protect marginalized bodies from violent practices within educational contexts, but it does silence and/or shift the discourse in ways that perpetuate their oppression. Sex education curriculum is an example where disabled and LGBTQI students are not written into the curriculum or even given access to it, and "professionals draw on the rhetoric of protection to deny these students choice and control in their sexual lives" (Erevelles, 2011, p. 80). The theories/theorists that address these issues are largely ideological, and Erevelles (2011) argues that they do not give "shape" to the disabled body when they are dislocated from history or society.

Within critical and feminist research and writing on student embodiment and education, the "disabled" body has not been included in a meaningful way and this speaks to the ways disabled students are written out of American education. In "Educating Unruly Bodies," Erevelles critiques the limited/limiting discourses and theories about disabled people in the field of disability studies, and asserts that "I am going to foreground the radical possibilities that could be made available to critical theory and pedagogy when examined from the standpoint of materialist disability

studies” (2000, p. 26). Erevelles explores the way education has segregated and severely limited disabled people’s futures, as well as how that critical and poststructuralist theorists have theorized disability in the context of education. She interprets education as a context in which schools see bodies as “unruly,” “disruptive,” or “distractions” and as a result strictly control and regulate “unruly bodies” (2000, p. 33).

There are unexamined structures in and beyond education that lead to the marginalization of the other. Ashley Taylor is a professor at Colgate University in the field of Education Studies. She draws on feminist disability studies to show that the concept of “able-mindedness” is produced through race and gender norms; embodiment is connected to conceptions of able-mindedness. Taylor argues that until the raced and gendered construction of able-mindedness is addressed, people with disabilities, people of color, and nonnormatively-gendered people will continue to be pathologized and marginalized in and beyond academia. Taylor makes connections between appearance, value, and ability, specifically citing eugenics and “ugly laws.” She also draws on examples from popular culture to show that “attributions of mental disability are more often and more easily deployed against those whose bodies are already perceived as nonnormal or undesirable” (2015, p. 186). She references George Zimmerman’s trial, where the testimony of a witness was not seen as credible and was attacked on social media because of her blackness and fatness. “The discourse of pathology functions to disqualify such apparently undesirable bodies from occupying spaces of social contact or social influence” (2015, p. 188).

Gloria Anzaldúa argues that it is essential to reclaim narratives and histories that have been ignored or seen as invalid because they do not adhere to EuroAnglo ways of knowing. The consciousness of the borderlands involves inherent contradiction and ambiguity, and necessitates flexibility. Anzaldúa argues that “the future depends on breaking down paradigms, it depends on straddling two or more cultures” (1997, p. 236). This borderland consciousness comes from a lived, felt experience. Using Anzaldúa’s *mestiza*, Cruz makes the claim that the “goal is not for the production of a new binary or the displacement of one meta-narrative for another” (2001, p. 660). The goal is for a hybridity that “allows reading of liminal (or third) spaces” (2001, p. 661). Anyone with a liminal identity has the experience of living with what Du Bois calls a double consciousness. They have the majority consciousness and know how to operate within that and perform in the dominant narrative, but it doesn’t mean they assimilate. Those with liminal identities also have their own thinking, insights, observations, and sensibilities (2008). This frame for liminality is useful in understanding the consciousness and critical reflection present but often invisible in the work of teachers’ whose bodies are visibly other.

### **Bodies in/as Resistance**

Even with this double consciousness, if one’s sense of self is fashioned through hundreds of years of colonial oppression, then what does it mean to conceptualize a different sense of self that can stand against? Can people develop a new vision? (Memmi, 2013). How do we enact and embody resistance? In “The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity,” bell hooks (2014) posits that “That process emerges as one comes to

understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined” (p. 15). Through a critical and reflective state of embodied difference, liminal bodies can be a site of resistance. hooks’ explanation of the process of resistance can be applied to teachers’ experiences before they enter the classroom. One does not enter a classroom without values and understandings about the world. Those who have learned to identify the structures of domination that impact their lives and have access to alternative realities can resist from a place of power-in-difference.

Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” reinforces the power of non-rational knowledge that comes from within. Lorde wrote this piece specifically to explain the societal separation from the idea of the ‘erotic’ as power and how that detachment has an impact on women’s lives. In my own research, I find this exploration of the erotic as power as a useful place to situate the concept of power-in-difference. Lorde defines the erotic as feeling: fully, truly and deeply. Her argument is that women have been conditioned to deny or turn from their erotic power because it does not fit into patriarchal notions of power. However, the erotic can bring power, joy, and connection; it empowers and energizes lives in a deep way.

This erotic power is an essential component of embodiment. Owning one’s identity and authenticity, especially from a place of difference, requires a deep knowledge of what “feels right” (1997, p. 280). Through Lorde, embodiment moves beyond the superficial, to feeling acutely and listening to “the *yes* within ourselves”



(1997, p. 281). Lorde critiques systems where success is commodified rather than defined by meeting the needs of humans, because these systems do not allow for fulfillment and power through the erotic. Having a body politic that challenges dominant power structures is partially done through “how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing” (1997, p. 278). The climate and culture of education is disembodied. From my experience, professional understandings of what the work of teaching entails in secondary education does not involve “full feeling” or finding joy through our internal sense of power. In education, the dominant form of power is top-down, it is power over, not power from within. Lorde’s explanation of the erotic as power articulates one form of power that I believe educators can harness that has the potential to subvert the normative in the classroom.

Critical and feminist theory can offer frameworks that help us ‘read’ bodies in education. Susan Bordo’s work in specific offers ways to have political discourse about the female body. In “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity,” Susan Bordo argues that the body is both a “text of culture” and a “practical, direct locus of social control” (1997, p. 90-91). She asserts that it is important to make sure our bodies resist rather than conform to gender norms in our daily lives. In this piece, Bordo focuses on hysteria, anorexia, and agoraphobia. She writes about how these bodies can be interpreted as hyper-conforming to the feminine ideals and norms, but that they can also be interpreted as bodies of resistance when they reach a point of “excess.” At this point, “the conventionally feminine deconstructs into its opposite...and opens onto those values our culture has coded as male” (1997, p. 101). Bordo takes what many may interpret as

hyper-normative bodies and reinterprets them through the lens of resistance. This political lens, applied to discussions of the body, is an important one to bring into education. How can we engage with teachers' bodies as Bordo has with the female body?

Bordo's emphasis on the body as a text of culture and social control relates to the theme of power and how it moves and is used. She inscribes the body with a different possibility for meaning. The body becomes a text of resistance rather than submission, and the anorexic body gives women power to possess masculine power. While Bordo's text is binary and complicated, she offers the possibility to read differently and rethink positions that essentialize conditions as oppressive and conforming into those that are potentially transgressive, or transgressive and oppressive at the same time. Interpreting embodied otherness through a politicized framework illuminates the potential to transform the classroom into a site of resistance. On the surface, the teacher's classroom practices look assimilationist and follow new professional expectations, but teaching in a body that inherently challenges the norms of the space changes the conversation. This embodiment comes from within rather than above.

Resistance can also come from (re)centering othered or liminal bodies in education. Cassius Adair questions what would happen if the concept of 'access' were central to trans and critical disability studies and similarly we can ask what would happen if the concept of 'access' were central to our conversations in education. In an anecdote about a course project where their students mapped accessibility of single-stall bathrooms, Adair posits that without losing sight of transgender concerns, "A thematic focus on "access" as a critical lens offers a way to explore new forms of resistant

pedagogies” (2015, p. 467). In doing this, Adair moves into a broader conversation that centers structural and historical contexts. Connor and Gabel argue that the educational resources and outcomes for special education students are severely lacking, and that the turn towards testing and neoliberalism in education keeps special education students separate from general education. They are critical of the “hegemony of normalcy in education” (2013, p. 102) that, among other things, frames disability or difference as deficit. They highlight the growing field of Disability Studies in Education as a site of potentiality to shift this dynamic. “By focusing on the overall system rather than on the child as the site of responsibility, teachers and scholars in the field of DS engage in combating structural ableism that is embedded in the everyday arrangements of schooling” (2013, p. 107).

It seems obvious that people’s bodies need access to classrooms. These researchers remind readers in the field of education that we need to look at more than just the people in education when we provide access. We need to look to the systems and structures that impact people in educational spaces. Rachel Cargle is an academic and writer who explores connections between race and womanhood. She tweeted, “Unless the racism is addressed and eradicated in the places you are looking to make ‘diverse’ you are simply bringing people of color into violent and unsafe spaces” (2019). We need to look at the cultural and systemic barriers to access for those who are visibly different, and understand the daily impacts those systems have on the people in education.

After discussing the ways people stare at and relate to their bodies in the world significantly differently than the classroom, Breuggemann, Kleege, and

Garland-Thomson argue that the models for teaching and learning in college classrooms are pedagogically similar and limited. With a model of “mutuality” and “interdependence,” “disability and disabled people in a college classroom changes and challenges the rhetoric of higher learning considerably” (2005, p. 27). What this calls for is a revaluing of bodies. In their research on “curricular cripestemologies,” Mitchell and Snyder position crip/queer folks as “active subjects,” (2014, p. 302). They assert that bodies that are different are agentic and essential to the curriculum rather than something that needs to be fixed or confined in order to exist in an educational context. In their critique of disability studies education, they assert that ‘passing’ or ‘inclusion’ as goals serve to silence, devalue, and control difference. They reference the framework of inclusion from the 1980s and 1990s, and then push against it using Jack Halberstam’s argument towards failure, positioning “failure of rehabilitative regimens as a worthy goal” (2014, p. 298). Mitchell, Snyder, and Ware argue that “crip/queer subjectivities create an alternative value system” (2014, p. 297), one in which experiences are fertile curricular ground and embodiment is taken seriously. This decenters able-bodiedness and able-mindedness as the foundation of educational pedagogy and curriculum, and “leaves no body behind” (2014, p. 308).

Critical and feminist theories offer ways to make meaning of bodies through an analysis of power and norms, invisibility and visibility, disembodiment and empowerment. Through these theoretical lenses, readers can make meaning of the body discursively and materially. Otherness is produced through the regulation of bodies and those who are different are often marginalized or ignored. At the same time, this

difference or liminality can be a site of embodied resistance and can offer new ways of conceptualizing bodies, use-value, and worth, both in and beyond the context of education.

### **Discussion**

Methodologically, critical theories can support researchers in an embodied and material analysis of bodies in education. Woodcock and Hakeem note that the educational system and culture make it difficult to engage in embodiment. There is a disembodied quality to research and theorizing on the body itself, and the body is often studied objectively rather than engaging in a more material, corporeal analysis. From within feminist theory, Cindy Cruz (2001) echoes this sentiment, naming that there is an absence of the body in feminist theory. Sosa-Provencio (2016) reinforces this in her analysis of feminist practices in education and the apersonal nature of white feminist care.

Critical disabilities studies helps to reinforce that the body is material and never outside of history. A question that can be asked and answered through a material analysis is: “Why do some bodies matter more than others?” (Erevelles, 2011, p. 6). To engage this inquiry, Nirmala Erevelles foregrounds a class analysis of disabled bodies, using concepts of transnational capitalism and historical materialism to intervene in other feminist analyses of disabled bodies. Erevelles argues that engaging these theories to provide explanations for the ways disabled bodies are produced and consumed can

expose underlying structural conditions that limit their potential. Moving from local to global throughout her text, Erevelles explores existing theoretical analyses of events, conditions, and policies. She reveals tensions in and argues against current theoretical perspectives within the fields of feminist and disability studies that are ahistorical and/or apolitical, making a case for the ways that these approaches obscure disability or render the disabled body invisible. Rethorizing through a materialist analysis where she “focus[es] on the actual social and economic conditions that impact (disabled) people’s lives, and that are currently mediated by the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation” (2011, p. 26), Erevelles makes interventions which instill the disabled body with transformative possibility.

Erevelles engages in the tensions and absences produced when these and other theories are employed in ways that are not relational or dialectical, and do not foreground a political and historical material analysis. Erevelles is clear that the consequences of these theoretical gaps are significant: erasure of disabled bodies, narrow definitions of humanness that rely on individual and naturalist ideologies, and positions that make it difficult to confront ableism locally and globally. The consequences Erevelles names are all playing out in the field of education. Centering disability or difference in an analysis of education in an embodied way is necessary, in addition to understanding how this is mediated through race, class, and gender. Through a material lens or a combination of material and discursive analysis, the field of education can take up research on the body, and perhaps find transgressive potential in embodied difference.

Critical and feminist theory can also help education researchers and practitioners challenge universalizing or assimilationist methods of providing access to education for all bodies and abilities. I have come to understand unraveling binaries as a core concept in critical theory. This understanding can shed light on ways that binaries are often taken for granted in the context of education, even in progressive contexts. For example, Perkinson reflects, “Either I am a white boy who has paid his dues in black theaters of struggle, or a “wannabe,” ripping off the culture in yet one more operation of white plunder” (Perkinson, 2012, p. 328). Even though Perkinson has a critical and embodied analysis, he falls into this either/or thinking when exploring his body in the context of his work. Similarly, in their research on body-based belief systems, Robertson and Thomson (2014) set up a binary between health and size. They are advocating for a “critical body literacy program” (p. 19) but in doing so, they are falling back on an either/or mentality where their hope is that this literacy would push students (and teachers) to focus on health rather than size. While reading this, I thought about assimilation and deconstruction and how both can happen at the same time. Robertson and Thomson’s work shows meaningful contributions to education. At the same time, the researchers need to unpack their emphasis on the goal of students wanting to seek a “healthy body,” what binaries they reinforce, and how to break their analysis open.

What do we do with bodies that are different? While there are some individuals engaging in this line of inquiry, the field of education as a whole has yet to engage in the complex and contradictory negotiations that come with difference, otherness, or liminality. Uncritical stances on education want to contain and normalize difference.

Slightly more critical stances on education want to shift attitudes and beliefs about normal, have a more diverse practice, and then be more explicit about including diverse bodies in their assimilationist project. Critical and feminist theory can help us revalue or reimagine what it means to exist in a place of difference, with an “unruly body.” What can be made of the constant negotiation stemming from otherness or visible difference that seems to manifest in conscious and unconscious ways? Freirean scholar Antonia Darder asserts that “the most powerful interventions we can make come from a situatedness in who we are” (2017). Teachers like Diana, Garland-Thomson, Brueggemann, Kleege, and hooks engage in a liberatory and activist project every time they step into the classroom as themselves.

Critical and feminist theory, including critical queer theory, critical race theory, and critical disabilities studies, have the potential to shift conversations about worth, value, and economies of the body in the context of education. Why revalue the body? Because education has been and continues to be cerebral. Rational knowledge is most valued. And even knowing this and advocating for something different, much of the theorizing around bodies involves thinking deeply and analytically about embodiment and identity through an analytical and somewhat disembodied process. When bodies can't help but be visible, as in the case of some liminal or othered embodiments, there is an opportunity to break down the mind/body dualism that is pervasive in education. There is a much more significant likelihood that these bodies will be seen as inappropriate or disruptive, but if we can revalue difference there is a chance for embodied otherness to be the resistance and change that education deeply needs.



What would it mean if there were a way to value and center feeling and non-rational forms of power in education? How would that change access to education? [How] would that shift the ways people move in/through education, who has a voice, who is privileged, who is silenced? Bodies play a role in accessing our humanity; every single person brings their body every time they enter a classroom, everywhere they go, and this matters. When it comes to shifting education to something more valuable and humanizing, what can be done on the floor right now with what we have, where we are? We can look to bodies for an answer.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Purpose and Overview

Educators at all levels teach in a neoliberal context that values mind over body, rational over emotional, independent over interdependent, thinking over feeling, and data over actual people. Schools have become a site that both teach and enforce these norms, and policing bodies is a significant piece of this. Little has been written about the connections between teachers bodies, pedagogy, and politics at the level of secondary education. This is a fertile and salient area for research. My research specifically focuses on teachers who are visibly nonnormative, critically conscious of their bodies, and find power in their difference. While information is lacking and hard to find, my experiences as a teacher tell me that there is immense power in this particular embodiment in the classroom right now; these bodies are pedagogical. The purpose of this study is to dig into the stories, experiences, and potential of teachers who refuse to assimilate their embodied otherness through critical, phenomenological methodologies. I am interested in how these teachers developed their theoretical and political stances in the classroom, and what it means for teachers who are visibly other to teach with/from a body politic of power-in-difference. Exploration and analysis of sociopolitical and historical contexts are embedded in this work. This chapter will show the methods used throughout my research process.

## **Rationale for Research Methods**

Qualitative research methodologies were not too long ago considered less worthy, less reliable, and less credible than quantitative methods. Over the last forty years, it has become more widely recognized that there are limits to quantitative methodologies when focusing on meaning, understanding, and lived experiences. Qualitative research methodologies including phenomenology and grounded theory have been used to ask different sorts of questions than those explored through quantitative methods, and to achieve different results (Laverty, 2003). “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). I chose to ground my research in the qualitative because my data are stories, perceptions, understandings that grew over time, and explorations into experiences that are present but often undervalued and unarticulated. In this critical, phenomenological study, “the lived experience of a small number of people is investigated” (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, p. 96).

Qualitative research has varied philosophical perspectives. Interpretive perspectives seek to describe or understand with the awareness that there are multiple realities and that meaning is constructed subjectively and in/through context. My research was interpretive because of its focus on subjectively exploring varied perspectives, contexts, and experiences of participants throughout their lives and teaching careers. Critical qualitative research goes beyond individual understandings of the world. With roots in feminist, queer, and critical race theory, critical research confronts inequality,

challenges injustices, and seeks to transform systems. It is always concerned with power and the ways power is historically and sociopolitically constructed (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). While my central focus was to phenomenologically make meaning of a particular embodied experience, it was clear to me that this research was also critical and situated within the dominant neoliberal context of education. I drew from feminist, critical, crip and queer theoretical frameworks. Through data collection and analysis I sought to both understand the impact of norms on teachers within the institution of education and explore disruption of and deviance from those norms through lenses of power, agency, and resistance.

Using critical, phenomenological, qualitative methods was essential to my inquiry because of the emphasis on voice, stories, power, visibility, and invisibility. This research was the process of transforming participants' embodied knowledge into stories that get seen and heard and acknowledged for the deep impact they have in education. Through my research, I hoped to reinforce "the importance of language and stories of a person's life as ways towards knowing and understanding" (Seidman, 2013, p. 4).

### **Researcher Profile**

There are ways in which I am close to my research and fit my own participant criteria. Before beginning my Ph.D I taught high school English for 10 years. I often thought about my body in the classroom as someone who is visibly fat, visibly queer, and visibly gender nonnormative. When I got my first teaching job and was moving to rural New Hampshire, one of the first things I did was stop cutting my hair. The second thing I did was go to the women's department of Old Navy and buy pants and dress shirts. This

is all to say that even though no administrator or colleague at my new school said anything about my embodiment, I had internalized norms for teacher appearance and norms for gender expression, and took steps to conform. In the classroom, I minimized the aspects of myself that were nonnormative. I spent a lot of my early years as a teacher uncomfortable and afraid. Over the years, my teacher identity and politics evolved, and I started to believe deeply that my own authenticity in the classroom was essential to my work as a teacher and activist. I did not spend a lot of time talking about my identities with my students, but I made them visible through my hair, through my clothes, through my body language, through body modifications, through the ways I used my voice and took up space. I made it a point to be honest, even when it was hard and uncomfortable, and I paid attention to how this seemed to impact my classroom and students in varied school contexts. I came to believe that my realness and my belief in the power of my own presence in the classroom was one of the most important things I was teaching. And I could do that with my body without even directly talking about it with students. In that sense, I have been living my topic and have many thoughts and opinions on what being visibly other as a teacher means and can do. I also have spent time reflecting on how my privileged identities (of which I have many, but I think race, class, and education are dominant) have mediated my ability to be out and visible in my work.

My background in social justice education impacts and informs my lens as a researcher. I see things intersectionally, through multiple and contextual perspectives. I understand people and systems as messy and ambiguous, and tend to be critical of binaries, dichotomies, and notions of objectivity. I value non-rational forms of power,

storytelling and narrative as theory, and feeling as significant to the discussion. I work within systems and institutions, and also see them as sites of oppression that need dismantling.

My own stance on this work is not neutral; I carry with me a number of biases, values, and assumptions about my topic and education in general. Most significantly, I believe that having examples of visible difference and diversity are transformative for students and to the field of education. When we refuse to assimilate our bodies, when we take up space with power-in-difference, we are resisting a system that mandates conformity and hopefully making room for other bodies to do the same. Nonnormative embodiments open up possibilities. When youth have unapologetic and diverse models of who they can be, of ways that difference is strength, it empowers them in their own lives and identities even as it is challenging to hold the tensions of living as an outsider.

### **Research Questions**

My research focused on teachers who find power in their visible difference in the classroom, engaging their body critically with intent. My focus was twofold: First, it was about the process teachers went through that brought them to a politicized understanding of embodied difference and informed their politics in the classroom. Second, I was interested in what it means to revalue visible otherness in the classroom. My research questions were: What experiences and awarenesses engendered each teachers' classroom values and actions? What does it mean to choose not to assimilate and to work in a context that mandates conformity and control? What is transformative about this

embodiment? How are these teachers' bodies pedagogical? What does it mean to revalue bodies in education?

### **Selecting Participants**

Eight participants were recruited from public, secondary schools in Massachusetts. The choice to limit to public schools in Massachusetts was made intentionally. While there is diversity of values within the state of Massachusetts that vary based on region and demographics, all of the participants teach in schools that are regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Education which allows for their experiences to share certain commonalities, namely similar regulations in terms of accountability and testing in addition to similar values for student expression which may impact teachers' experiences. At the start of this research, I reasoned that there was enough room within the boundary of Massachusetts to find participants from a range of public secondary education experiences who also all shared a common broader context, and that this offered the potential to yield rich data that can be put in conversation.

As a Commonwealth, Massachusetts has made moves that both support difference and limit teacher autonomy. Massachusetts has been a leader in supporting students' diverse identities and rights in the classroom. For example, "An Act Relative to Gender Identity (Chapter 199 of the Acts of 2011), which became effective on July 1, 2012, amended several Massachusetts statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of specified categories, to include discrimination on the basis of gender identity" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). There is no data on whether this support of diversity impacts the climate for teachers who are visibly

different, but I would personally hypothesize that this shift in policy by the state has a positive impact on teachers whose visible difference relates to gender. It is a message that on some level the state recognizes that learning is facilitated by people being able to be who they are in schools. At the same time, “Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to institute learning standards that outline what all students are expected to know and be able to do in each subject area and grade level” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Teaching). On a national level, the push for data-driven assessment is one that has been linked to teachers’ lack of agency in the classroom (Anderson and Cohen, 2015) and Massachusetts has been on the forefront of this movement.

I sought participants who fit the following criteria:

- At least one year of full-time secondary education experience in a Massachusetts public school
- Self-identified visible difference/otherness
- Finds power in difference
- Thinks about their body in the context of teaching
- Anti-assimilationist politics

It was difficult to identify criteria for selecting participants. I chose the above requirements because I hoped those who would self-select into this research would be teachers who own their bodies and nonnormativity, who are not trying to conform or hide their difference while teaching, and who already understand the classroom as a political site. I did not name an intersectional analysis of privileged and oppressed identities as



participant criteria, though this is part of my own lens as a researcher. It was important to me not to require teachers to have more than one year of experience. While new teachers often experience additional challenges as they adapt to teaching, I thought that leaving the experience requirement open would allow for participants in many stages of their careers who were diverse in age.

Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. “The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016). This is a nonrandom sampling technique in which the researcher decides what is important about the participant pool and finds individuals who reflect the desired qualities, knowledge, or experiences. It does not require a set number of participants. Unlike random sampling, the goal of purposeful sampling is to select participants who share certain characteristics because their participation will be better able to support the goals of the research (Creswell, 2007; Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016).

I used several strategies to recruit participants. As a veteran teacher who has experience teaching in three secondary schools in Western Massachusetts as well as membership in several educators networks focused on social justice, I had the ability to recruit participants through my own connections. I directly contacted colleagues, former colleagues, and principals who I knew, sending an electronic version of my recruitment letter (Appendix A) to people who could spread the work or may be interested themselves. I contacted anyone who expressed interest in the study directly to review the criteria for participation as well as the purpose of the research, the time commitment,

recording and consent information, and to fill out a questionnaire determining whether they meet the study criteria (Appendix B). If they met the research criteria, I then set a time for the first interview if they were interested. At the first interview participants were asked to sign a letter of consent. It was important to me that all interviews were face to face (another reason to limit the research participants to Massachusetts) to facilitate connection and rapport throughout the interview process.

Another strategy I used to find participants was to post information about my research project on social media groups meant for secondary educators in Western Massachusetts. When someone expressed interest, I would email them a copy of my recruitment letter (Appendix A) and set up a time to connect over the phone to review the criteria for participation as well as the purpose of the research, the time commitment, recording and consent information, and to fill out a questionnaire determining whether they meet the study criteria (Appendix B). If they met the research criteria, I set a time for the first interview if they were interested. At the face to face interview, participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (Appendix C).

Eight participants ranging in age from 23-50 were interviewed for this research project. Below are their names or pseudonyms along with the words they used to describe their visible otherness and teaching positions.

- Aurelis: black, Dominican, queer, young, power writing teacher at a self-directed program
- Beth: white, fat, bisexual, English teacher

- Clara: white, fat, queer, femme, consciously negotiated gender identity, acknowledged trauma history, math teacher in an alternative behavioral program connected to a large school district
- erin: white, tattooed, queer, feminist, does not shave her armpits, veteran English teacher
- Jasmine: black, dark-skinned, queer, Christian, cisgender woman, has had a 20+ year teaching career, biology teacher
- Kyle: white, Jewish, wears a tzitzit, queer, transman, short, expressive, social studies teacher
- Megan: white, queer aesthetic, looks Jewish, larger than most people she is in community with (though not necessarily fat), does not use scented products or shave or wear a bra, neurodiverse, math teacher
- Trena: black, may not fit the assumptions about what some black folks think blackness means, queer, femme, theater and academic support teacher

One of the challenges of recruiting participants was the time commitment of the three interviews in combination with the demands of the teaching profession. I found that participants who I did not know peripherally through personal networks were less willing to commit to three 90-minute interviews. A handful of people initially responded to my call for participants, but ultimately did not have the ability to go through with the research because of the time commitment. I also found myself challenged by limiting the research geographically. There are a number of recent former teachers living in New

England who do not have experience teaching in Massachusetts public schools and therefore they did not meet the research criteria.

### **Ethical Considerations**

UMass Amherst and other institutions have established guidelines for the ethical conduct of research in order to ensure that research is just and protect participants from harm through an institutional review board (IRB). This research followed University IRB procedures. Prior to the first interview, participants and I reviewed the letter of informed consent (Appendix C) and informed consent was given.

It is important that participants have a full understanding of the ways their interviews will be used in research. As a researcher, I was careful to explain the difference between confidentiality and anonymity, and emphasize the participants' choices in this research study. Confidentiality refers to "information that is private or secret that should not be passed onto others" (Mukungu, 2017, p. 2). This includes content shared with the researcher that is requested to be 'off the record'. I made it clear that if a participant asked for something to remain out of my research I would do that, but that in general the purpose of this research was to explore and share the information gathered. With a focus on life histories and visible otherness there is no guarantee that all information that could be used to identify a participant would be removed as doing so could change the meaning of the data.

Anonymity is a method of assigning pseudonyms to participants which theoretically protects participants and helps to separate the participant from the information they shared as a way to do less harm and maintain confidentiality. However,

some feminist researchers have challenged and complicated this process of blanket pseudonymity. Participants share intimate information about their lived experiences, and this builds an understanding of a phenomenon which greatly contributes to the research in a field. While being able to offer confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms is essential, it is equally important that participants have the option to be named and recognized for their contributions to the work if they so choose as participants deserve to have ownership of their lives and stories. Additionally, there have been instances in some studies where participants are public figures within their communities and it would be virtually impossible to separate their names from their life histories. It is important that the conditions surrounding confidentiality and anonymity are discussed thoroughly with participants so they can make a decision about their participation in a way that maintains their agency and power (Mukungu, 2017). In addition to the discussion about issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity, participants were informed that this research may be used in articles and presentations beyond the dissertation.

### **Data Collection**

A critical, phenomenological approach was taken for data collection, guided by Irving Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (2013) which suggests that "stories are a way to knowledge" (p. 1). Seidman states that "at the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (2013, p. 9). This concept of worth is particularly salient to my project because it centers bodies that are coded by dominant culture as not being worth much due to their difference.

Phenomenologically-based interviewing methods seek to understand the meaning participants make of their subjective experiences. Although some scholars assert research should have more than one data source, Seidman argues that sometimes in-depth interviewing as a single research method is most appropriate for a research study. This single method approach can avoid methods that have conflicting frameworks for understanding others' experiences (Seidman, 2013). I believe that this is the case in my particular project. Theorizing the body is messy. Theorizing otherness is messy. Power, norms, and otherness are all about boundaries that shift based on culture and context. There are inherent tensions and contradictions in centering and exploring the essence of being a high school teacher with a body that is visibly other and a stance of power-in-difference. Methodologically, it benefits the research to maintain a consistent frame for what it means to understand and make meaning of the lived experiences of the participants.

Seidman identifies four themes of interviewing that make the research process phenomenological. "These four phenomenological themes provide the rationale and the logic for the structure, technique, and approach to analyzing, interpreting material" reflected in Seidman's interview methodology (2013, p. 19). One theme is the understanding that experiences are transitory. While there is an emphasis on the essence of an experience, there is also the understanding that this essence shifts with time. Subjectivity is also a central theme to phenomenological interviewing, particularly the reminder that participants are sharing experiences from their own point of view and as researchers we cannot be in their heads. In phenomenological interviewing, "lived

experience” is centered. This means the emphasis is on the action of participants’ lives, and the retrospective meaning they make of this through language. This theme highlights the importance of rhetoric in the interview process, the care and accuracy required in the transcription process, and the emphasis on details in getting as close to the action of the experience as possible. Finally, there is a “reflection on meaning” that is put into context. We need to situate what participants share in the broader context of their lives, cultures, and world.

### **In-Depth Interview Protocol**

This research study used Irving Seidman’s (2013) three interview series protocol to explore the meaning of teachers’ embodied experiences. Seidman’s three interview series is intentionally structured with each interview both serving its own purpose and connecting to broader phenomenological goals of making meaning of lived experience in context. In this protocol, each of the three interviews is 90 minutes long. The time frame can be changed, but what is important is that this is predetermined by the researcher and interviewee and that the three interviews have the same length to unify the process. Seidman (2013) states that the timeframe between each interview can be between three days and three weeks which offers enough time for reflection without losing continuity or relevance.

“In the first interview, the interviewer’s task is to put the participant’s experience in context by asking [them] to tell as much as possible about [themselves] in light of the topic up to the present time” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). In my research on teachers’ visible otherness, political stances, and embodied pedagogy in the classroom I used the first

interview to learn as much as I could about participants' identity development and shifts in their critical awareness up until the time they entered the classroom as teachers. I asked participants how they became aware of their bodies, in what ways, and what experiences were central to their physical selves. I asked participants what otherness meant to them and how they understood themselves as visibly other. I asked them to share the language they use to talk about their bodies and otherness. I also asked participants when and how they became aware of others' awareness of their visible difference, and what experiences they have had that have reflected their own nonnormativity to them. This first interview explored participants' body politics, specifically engaging with how their politics evolved, and what experiences were central to that evolution. The interview closed by focusing on the ways participants experienced their bodies, otherness, and politics in the context of education up until the time they became teachers.

The goal of the second interview is to focus on participants' lived experiences in the classroom as teachers at the present time. Seidman makes it clear that the focus is on the "details of their experiences" (2013, p. 21) rather than their opinions about the experiences. I asked participants to tell me as much as possible about their day to day experiences in the classroom as teachers. I wanted to know what it was like for participants to be in their bodies in the classroom, and in what ways they were aware of their physical bodies as they teach. I also asked participants to share experiences that reflected others' awareness of their bodies in the classroom. This interview, in part, centered teachers' politics during their daily experiences at work. Participants were asked if there is anything they intentionally do or do not do to show their politics. In essence I



wanted to know how they experience their bodies and how they revealed their embodied politics and pedagogy in their professional lives.

The third and final interview is a reflection on meaning. What this means is that participants are asked how they understand their experiences in context. This “addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Seidman (2013) makes it clear that the structure of the first two interviews is essential to the success of this third interview. The questions I asked to start this interview were: Given what you have said about your visible otherness and body politics in your life, and given what you have said about your body and politics in the classroom now, how do you understand this topic in your practice? What sense does it make to you? While all of the interviews had some element of meaning-making, this interview focused specifically on analyzing and interpreting their experiences rather than just the details of those experiences. I asked questions about the perceived impact of my participants’ bodies and politics on themselves, their classrooms, their students, and their colleagues. During my pilot study on the same topic, a theme that came up was power, so in this round of third interviews I also asked participants if there was any meaning they could make of their experiences through the lens of power, and how this theme of power related to their bodies and politics in their lives as teachers.

The three interview-structure was guided by a list of prepared questions (Appendix D). These questions did not have to all be addressed or necessarily addressed in the order that they were listed, but they offered some structure for the interview and provided a basis for participants’ answers to be compared. I did add in questions

depending on the context of the participants' answers, and I also added questions to early interviews based on themes that came up in the later interviews. This three interview structure is repeatable, recordable, and focused. Each interview has a purpose within itself, and serves the larger purpose of making meaning of the phenomenon of visibly other teachers' embodiment and body politics (Seidman, 2013). Participants chose their own interview settings to assure their comfort due to the personal nature of the interviews. The only criteria placed on them was that the setting was conducive to the interview being recorded, so very loud or busy environments were eliminated.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is a way of working with data in which theory is developed through an exploration of the data. The research and information gathered is the source of the theory. It is also possible to have a grounded theory process that begins with existing theories on a topic and then expands on them throughout the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). In grounded theory the researcher has few preset ideas about what the participants are experiencing. Theorizing the topic to understand its meaning happens throughout the research process (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). Data collection and data analysis occur concurrently through interviewing, theorizing, coding, and writing memos.

Grounded theory offers flexibility throughout the research process. "We can add new pieces to the research puzzle or conjure entire new puzzles-while we gather data-and that can even occur late in the analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). This fits the phenomenological and qualitative nature of the research because it offers "systematic, yet

flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). Additionally, grounded theory fits the feminist and critical nature of this research. Some researchers who explore social justice issues have oriented themselves towards a grounded theory because its analytical frame can “locate subjective and collective experience in larger social structures and increase understanding how these structures work” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 326). Strauss and Corbin (1994) add that grounded theory understands that knowledge is located. Grounded theory allows us to ask questions about power and context to help understand the influences on our research. It was important to me that my data analysis were guided by an approach that made room for participants’ subjective experiences and for a broader analysis of power and systems that impact teachers’ experiences in public, secondary education.

In grounded theory, it is important to choose research methods that allow you to gather rich data. Intensive interviewing was the sole data source for this research. “Intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). There are many benefits to intensive interviewing, including the researcher’s ability to control the pace of the conversation in order to explore an experience more deeply, shift the pace and content based on what is coming up in the interview, restate what was heard in order to check for accuracy, or to humanize the participant’s role in the research through acknowledging their feelings, experiences, and contributions to the work. In-depth interviewing also allows the participant to control aspects of the research through the ways that they share their stories and experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Some

critique interviews as data sources because they are subjective and rely on “retrospective narratives” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 78). However, interviews are a common source of data in qualitative research, and can be of great use. Seidman’s protocol along with Charmaz’s grounded theory methods allowed for rich data, reflection on meaning, complex analysis, and deep insight that values and accounts for the subjectivities of both participants and the interviewer (Charmaz, 2014).

It is important to recognize the contextual nature of interviewing, and the dynamics produced by the research/participant relationship. Interviewing is not a neutral process and research questions are not neutral even if a researcher thinks they are. There are dynamics of power at play based on the position of the researcher/interviewer and the participant, as well as dynamics of power shaped by the identities of the researcher and participants. Race, class, age, gender, and other social identities are all present and all impact the interview (Charmaz, 2006). I found these contextual negotiations and dynamics particularly salient given my focus on bodies, otherness, and political stances in the classroom. The connection to power through embodiment and discourse both in classrooms and in interviews seems clear and is central to the work.

“Intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well. Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28). Each interview was recorded and transcribed. To construct grounded theory, the interview transcriptions were initially coded openly at the sentence and paragraph levels. Open coding is important because it keeps the researcher open to possibilities and “grounded in the data”

in the data as they construct their codes (Charmaz, 2014, pp 116-117). The data were conceptualized through names and labels, and categories were developed using a more focused analysis of the initial codes. This process of coding and then grouping data relationally sets “the foundation and beginning structure for theory building” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 121). Axial coding was used to solidify four central categories, further develop the relationship between categories and their subcategories, and to look at *how* and *why* these dynamics were present in the data. “Combining process with structure helps analysts get at some of the complexity that is so much a part of life” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 127). Selective coding and an analysis of the relationships between categories, allowed me to analyze a story that came out of the research. This story formed the basis for constructing grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Writing a results section for each category and revising the results continued the process of discovery and refinement in theorizing (Charmaz, 2014). Memo writing was significant in this process because it allowed me to capture ideas and assumptions throughout the stages of interviewing and coding, and reflect on them continuously. “By writing memos on your focused codes, you build and clarify your category by examining all the data it covers and by identifying variations within it and between other categories” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 190).

### **Validity and Reliability**

Determining validity and reliability in qualitative research requires a shift from the traditional measures and understandings of this process in quantitative research. This is in part because in quantitative research, having researchers impact the research process is something that reduces its reliability. Additionally, there is an emphasis on whether

instruments and measurements are accurate and whether they do what they were intended to do. Qualitative research can operate under a different paradigm, where the role of the researcher is part of the process and data, and where the emphasis is on meaning and exploration rather than a more objective sort of accuracy (Golafshani, 2003). This is not to say that accountability does not matter in qualitative research, but rather that the nature of qualitative research changes what accountability means. In redefining this criteria, Golafshani claims that “to ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial” (p. 601).

Some criteria that can be used to assess and increase trustworthiness in qualitative data include using well-established methods for data collection and analysis, random sampling when possible to decrease the chances that a purposive sample creates a misleading picture of the data, triangulation, using rhetorical strategies to reinforce the value of participant honesty and openness, and rephrasing questions in multiple ways to uncover contradictions (Shenton, 2004). In the case of my research on secondary education teachers’ visible otherness and body politics in the classroom, I have used many of these strategies for data collection and analysis. I used research methodologies with systemic protocols that have been developed and refined over the last 50 years. Phenomenology is an established qualitative research method with roots in the 20th century. “In the 1970s, phenomenological psychologists established a praxis, which is a methodological realisation of the phenomenological philosophical attitude” (Groenwald, 2004, p. 44). Irving Seidman’s in-depth, three interview protocol has been used and referenced in many qualitative research studies. Grounded theory originated in the 1960

and has gained significant traction since then as a method of data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

Triangulation and member checking in qualitative research that can be used to increase trustworthiness, making the research more credible. Given the nature of some qualitative research, it can be necessary to expand what triangulation traditionally means to do this. In a quantitative context, triangulation is achieved through using multiple data sources. In a qualitative research that does not have multiple data sources, triangulation can mean having participants participate in the data interpretation or having other researchers or peers interpret or analyze a percentage of the data as a form of reliability check (Golafshani, 2003). One method I used to make sure that I was capturing and interpreting participants with as much accuracy as possible was through checking with the participants themselves. Both during and at the end of interviews, I reviewed what I heard and asked participants if what they meant to say was accurately reflected by my summary. This restating of ideas also offered participants a chance to refine or elaborate on the context of their interviews throughout the process. In addition, to incorporate member checking into my research I provided participants access to the transcribed interviews and the results section of my write-up so they could check for accuracy and elaborate on any of the content. I also had peer researchers analyze and interpret thirty percent of my data as a way to assure the likelihood that my analysis and understandings were relevant and credible given the data.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This research study is focused on the experiences of teachers who are visibly other and the meaning that can be made from centering and analyzing their intentional embodiment in the classroom. My research questions focus on teachers who find power in their visible difference in the classroom, engaging their body critically with intent. Part of this is through exploring the process teachers went through that brought them to a politicized understanding of embodied difference and informed their politics in the classroom. What experiences and awarenesses engendered each teachers' classroom values and actions? I also asked: what does it mean when teachers embrace their visible otherness and challenge hegemonic discourses on the body from a place of nonnormative, embodied empowerment?

The results section of my research is organized by the following themes: defining visible otherness, learning and unlearning bodies, embodied pedagogy, and negotiating visible otherness in the classroom. The first theme, articulating visible otherness, draws on data that shows the properties and dimensions of visible otherness as understood by participants. Visible otherness is not a static concept, it shifts based on location and context. This section explores the ways that concepts of wholeness, authenticity, and integrity connect to visible otherness, what power-in-difference is, the awareness that participants carry about their bodies, and the impact visible otherness has on their body politics. The second theme is learning and unlearning bodies. This section focuses on the ways ideas about bodies and otherness are learned, with a focus on the roles education



and access play in that process. For most participants, education was the location where they learned to conform their bodies to social norms, and it also was the location where they gained access to people, texts, and resources that shifted their awareness of bodies and difference into something critical, personal, and empowering. The contrast between dominant narratives and counter narratives shows the dual role that formal and informal education plays in controlling and liberating. The third theme is embodied pedagogy. This section explores participants' visible otherness and body politics within the context of their work with students in the classroom. The focus is on the awareness and stances that teachers brought into their pedagogy including providing access, bringing realness, modeling difference, and shifting power. Teaching as someone who is visibly other, anti-assimilationist, and has intentional body politics is not always comfortable. The fourth section is focused on teacher's visible otherness in the context of negotiating their bodies within the system of education. Participants grappled with professional norms, considerations of boundaries, interactions with colleagues, and a daily sense of hyperawareness at work.

### **Articulating Visible Otherness: Awareness, Power-in-Difference, and Body Politics**

In my recruitment letter for this research, I was clear that I was looking for participants who have a body that is visibly other and teach from a place of power-in-difference and from an anti-assimilationist political stance. Rather than defining what that meant solely on my terms, I solicited participants who related to my research and felt the parameters applied to them. Part of what I was interested in was understanding what the terms of my research meant to the participants, specifically how

they understood visible otherness and what it meant to move through the world in their bodies. For participants, making meaning of their embodiment is an ongoing process of critical self-awareness, alignment with one's integrity, harnessing an internal sense of worth, and a refusal to conform or assimilate. In this context, the self is intentional and necessarily political.

For participants, the process of claiming visible otherness began from the understanding that bodies have meaning and impact, and that separating themselves from their embodied otherness was both impossible and harmful. In a conversation about her relationship to her body, Clara reflected, "I think especially around the ways that I'm embodied, there are ways, like it feels immutable to me, I haven't been able to ever make myself skinny even though it felt sometimes like that was the only way I'd obtain love or be acceptable or just stop receiving abuse, like I've never been able to turn it off." In a conversation about surveillance and knowing that society is watching and judging, I asked Jasmine if showing up as visibly other is important to her. She responded, "It's impossible not to. It's how I show up, I mean it's just how I show up. There's no hiding my education, there's no hiding the vocabulary, there's no hiding." Both Jasmine and Clara understood their otherness as something core and central to their being, and understood their difference as something that they couldn't change even if it would make their lives easier.

Participants indicated an awareness that socially bodies have a deep impact on how they live. For example, Trenda stated that:

“People who experience otherness, I believe often are still seeking community and connection wanting to see people that look like them, that exist like them, that struggle in similar ways. That's why caucus groups can be so useful. That's why identity-based groups can be so useful and beneficial. Is because there's strength in community, there's strength in connection, and there's strength in remembering that you're not alone.”

She went on to state that it is society that determines what is othered. “Society makes ways of being queered” that could separate people from connection. All participants made comments that people do not exist outside of a social context, and in that social context bodies are not neutral. Kyle stated how much systems of power in our society are mapped onto our bodies. In and out of the classroom, as people and as educators, we are operating within these systems. “To think that our bodies will be somehow outside of that, it's just absurd.”

A significant aspect of claiming one's identity as visibly other is a politics of acknowledgement. Participants found a language for their embodied difference that named their bodies and named their experiences of difference. Aurelis said “I wake up and I think about race, you know?...My hair is a big afro, an unapologetic big afro. Every single day is othered.” For Trenda, the ways she does blackness that may not fit the assumptions about what some black folks think blackness means, contributes to her visible otherness.

“For me, it's melanin, having a lot of it and what that does in terms of how people see you, what assumptions they make about you, how they treat you sometimes or

not...I think blackness is also about a bodily knowledge and reality of what has happened and continues to happen to bodies that look like yours. I think blackness is the history, I think there's so much power in it. I think often about the historical trauma that gets passed down through lineage but also like the brilliance, the survival, the stories that we may or may not be aware of.”

Jasmine’s understanding of her visible otherness comes from a triple positioning of “being black, being dark skinned, and being female” in addition to being “intellectually nonnormative.” When she was younger and in a community of color, she was thin and had a body that garnered her social approval “until I opened my mouth” at which point her vocabulary and way of communicating ideas marked her as different. Megan recalls feeling othered as a kid based on her neurodiversity, but also states that she was very thin and that was reflected to her as desirable, so it wasn’t until adulthood that she understood her physical body as nonnormative. She stated that she has cultivated a very “niche community” of people like her, and “sometimes I land in someone else's social circle, let's say a friend invited me to a friend of a friend's party or I'm visiting your sister. Suddenly, I get this feeling and it's like, “Oh, this doesn't really cut it here.” Or, “I'm going to be regarded very specifically here.”” Her visible otherness is a cumulative effect of a queer aesthetic, looking Jewish, being larger than most people she is in community with (though not necessarily fat), not using scented products or shaving or wearing a bra as well as having challenges with executive functioning that often brings the awareness that she is on the “other side of other.”

Kyle's initial understanding of his visible otherness came from being a transgender man, but has shifted to being a short man who gestures a lot and also being a person who wears a tzitzit which are strings that some religious Jews wear. When he is not in a community that has much Jewish awareness he said, "It's weird, it marks me. Somebody might read me as just being weird, or something that they don't understand." erin also understands her body as marked. She stated "I do not shave my armpits and I am very tattooed" and that many of those tattoos are on her arms and are visible. The way erin realized her body was marked was in part through comments from others. For example, in recalling a conversation with her stepmother, erin said, "I remember her saying to me "what will you ever do if you ever want to wear a sleeveless dress to a party?!" And I just was totally flummoxed by this, I thought, well A, "if I wear a dress" (at the time I never wore dresses) " thought...I'll just put the fucking dress on. That's what I'll do. I'll put it over my head or however you get in a dress and zip that shit up and wear the dress." It was so weird that this occurred to her like a barrier." That comment was just a small moment, but it helped erin realize that in being visibly tattooed she was becoming different from tradition and it sparked a new awareness in her about her own embodiment.

For Clara and Beth, size is a significant form of embodied visible otherness as well as being tattooed (Beth) and having an acknowledged trauma history as well as a consciously negotiated gender identity that is different from most cis-women (Clara). Clara defines being fat as "Having fat on my body. Like taking up much more physical space than the people around me are comfortable with and sometimes even I am

comfortable with.” Beth also identifies as fat, and part of her understanding of fatness has been shaped by material access. “That is not just clothes, but also facilities, like whether I think twice about sitting in a chair with arms or whether I see a space that someone's left for me to squeeze through and whether I second guess it or not. The way in which I interact with the physical environment has a lot to do with it.” For all participants, part of claiming their visible otherness involved naming the dimensions of their bodies and what meanings were mapped onto their bodies in varied social contexts.

Claiming visible otherness also meant participants were whole, authentic, and/or living in integrity with themselves and that that felt powerful. When I started this research, I was looking for participants who not only were marked as visibly other, but also had a sense of what I called ‘power-in-difference.’ I wasn’t sure exactly what that meant except that I was interested in participants whose bodies, whose otherness, were a source of worth and not something they were trying to make more normative or conceal. Through conversations participants made comments that reflected an internal manifestation of power.

To start, participants named power-in-difference as power that is personal. Megan stated “in that sense when I think about it-- well I think that a really authentic, and raw, and intentional relationship to yourself. I don't know, just like your self is a source of power and gives you more strength, and resiliency, and the ability to see clearly in the world.” Megan reflected that it is very hard to fully embrace difference all the time, and having a sense of power-in-difference doesn’t mean that you feel awesome in the face of a world that wasn’t built for you, but there is something about power-in-difference that

means these participants are actively not cultivating shame. This doesn't result in the exact same feeling for all participants. Clara articulated her power in difference as "An intrinsic sense of strength and resilience and integrity, more structural integrity, energetic integrity. Not being in pieces. Like having this whole awareness of yourself as an energetic edifice." Clara's power is not power over anyone else, but something big and significant and internal.

For erin, there was a clear and immediate relationship between finding the language that felt like herself and feeling power-in-difference, and that language was the term 'macho femme.' "Those are the two things that sort of came to me, and I was like WHOA this is ME. I was like boom, boom [stomps feet down], you know, I felt like I had arrived." erin took her identity into her own hands, creating new language to identify her embodiment. For Beth, this form of power came from marking her own body. "A big tattoo on a fat arm is demanding to be looked at and that felt very much like a fuck you that I enjoyed about it because it demands to be seen." Beth's power goes beyond not trying to hide--it is a power that comes from using visible difference to resist norms.

For Kyle, resisting norms as a transgender person started when he cut his hair. He stated, "I felt like I existed more than ever because I felt like I was being my own self instead of what everybody else had projected on to me. That was what my body had been. It was like a collection of things that other people had projected onto me for so long. By shaving my hair I was reclaiming my body for myself." he recalls a similar feeling when he made his tzitzit visible in school. "For a while, I wore them tucked in. I wore my tzitzit tucked in. Then once I started wearing them out, I do think there was a way that I

was like, "You know what? However people perceive me, this is what I need to do. This is who I am and what I need to do in order to live my life the way I want to live my life." I think there was kind of a reclaiming of my body in that way." Jasmine also understood her visible otherness as an act of reclaiming. "I think there's the idea that my presence, my survival my thriving my occupation of space are all acts of taking power back from structures that say I'm not supposed to be there."

Participants had to consciously decide that their bodies visible otherness had worth. For Trenda, part of this came through her work as an educator, and realizing that she wasn't being treated fairly.

"I further recognized my own value and recognized what someone not recognizing my value looks and feels like in a very specific way. Since then I don't really do so well in spaces where I'm recognizing that people are not recognizing my value. Part of what's transitioning for me right now, and this is relatively new if I'm being really honest, is that I don't watch what I say in the same way that I used to. I used to be silent about a lot of shit because I didn't want to make other people feel uncomfortable because I didn't want to risk losing my job or risk losing a friend or risk making someone angry. I'm just not there anymore."

Trenda's power-in-difference means that she isn't willing to settle for less than she believes she's worth. When Trenda owns her otherness in this way, "I think beautiful things happen. I think that it again is part of that re-expanding. It becomes less other. It



becomes less about-- I don't know. I think that when I have been able to more fully claim the ways in which I've been othered, one, I get what I need.”

Clara also has a deep understanding of the power that comes from being visibly other. “You know there’s a way you have to be more vulnerable, I think. And be strong and vulnerable at the same time.” Clara reflected that being simultaneously strong and vulnerable requires clarity of purpose. While there are many people who are visibly other, what is consistent about these participants is not just that their embodiments are different in some way, but that they are deeply conscious of their bodies and have claimed an internal sense of power.

Several participants reflected the ways that claiming one’s otherness offers degrees of freedom. To Aurelis, this meant really listening to and negotiating with her body rather than just trying to control it. She stated that “It means that I am, I am allowing myself to breathe. I am allowing myself to exist.” She went on to explain that “my body is it’s own, you know, imma say spirit, it’s its own spirit and if that’s you know, if that’s how it feels today then I need to respect it.” To Jasmine and Clara, part of claiming freedom was by rejecting norms and letting go of the need to conform. As Clara put it, “one of the things that helped me transform my relationship to my body was being like “well if I’m not gonna win, then fuck this!”” Jasmine had a similar comment where she explained that turning 18 allowed her to feel less fearful of being surveilled by her parents and in general. “I got to put myself out there and just accept the consequences which was freeing to be like like fuck it.” Kyle also had a mantra that helped him own his own body. “There was definitely in high school, there was this quote that I latched on to.

I forget who said it. I'm sure I could look it up. There was a quote I latched on to that said, "Enjoy your body. After all, others have." That was my way of reclaiming my body from this early sexualization by other people, that early sexualization and objectification that I really didn't want anymore." Freedom came from participants prioritizing their bodies and their desires, and engaging with their bodies on their own terms.

Along with understandings of visible otherness, I was interested in how participants articulated their body politics. For all participants, the root of their body politics was simply the understanding that bodies are political. Beth stated that "I think that the body is inherently political, just like the personal is political because existing in a fat body, in a public sphere without trying to change it or apologizing for it is challenging what is normal and accepted." For her, it was about not conforming to others' expectations and "demanding to be seen." Jasmine also stated that "I think my very, like my presence in certain spaces, my embodiment is a political act." Kyle drew from his own experiences in high school to explain the ways he engaged with his body politically. He shared that:

I think I definitely saw my body as political when I was in high school.

Sometimes I did that literally like I had this jacket, this quarter red jacket that I would wear that was covered in political buttons. I would wear, really, physically wear all of my political feelings on my body. Definitely, for a while, actually, I was in this really outwardly sex-positive space with my body, really trying to embrace my body as sexual in terms of doing naked pictures and doing some porn, all of this kind of way of trying to claim my body as even specifically

feminist porn, and this way of trying to claim my body as a source of empowerment.

For some participants, their body politics were about showing up fully. Aurelis explained that “If I was to in any way try to hide or you know swallow certain politics to make other people feel comfortable in my workforce, I would not be true to myself. I would not be true to myself, I would not be true to my students, I would not be true to what I believe in and what I teach.” For Megan, her politics were to stay in alignment with herself. To be the same person in the classroom as she was outside the classroom. In the interviews she referred to herself as a “radical leftist” and stated that even when she is in a room where everyone is progressive, she tends to be further left, and perhaps the furthest left. As we discussed her politics, I asked “Would you say that there's a lot you do differently as a teacher than you living in the world?”

Megan: No

Ryan: Is that your politic? To exist?

Megan: Yes. Absolutely. That's a good way to put it.

Trenda articulated her politics, in part, by saying, “Do you. Be you. Be the fullest version of yourself.” She went on to connect this politic to education and to theater specifically, stating that actors who are different will get the message that they can only play certain parts and it is important that we make the stories we want to see in the world if they are not out there. “It's like being in charge of your own story because other people are going to try to tell your story and they're not going to do it justice.”

To most participants, body politics were rooted in an analysis of social justice and connected to the classroom. For example, Aurelis situated her politics in the context of privilege and oppression. “What I’m saying is...we cannot afford to be neutral. In anything.” This understanding informed both the ways she moved through the world and the moves she made as educators. erin stated that “I think that sometimes that there are a lot of people who think that teaching should be a not political act, they think that it should be an objective exercise in instructing kids in how to fill in the blank, you know whatever the fuck you’re actually teaching them, and boy have I never ascribed to that.” To erin, the classroom is deeply political.

Participants very clearly illustrated the work they put into noticing: noticing themselves, noticing their feelings, noticing how they carried their bodies, noticing when they were existing in a way that maintained their integrity. What it means to be visibly other and to find power-in-difference is to make the body visible and intentional, and to harness an internal sense of strength, alignment, and connection. Understanding one’s body as visibly other did not mean that participants were done growing and changing; they continued to redefine themselves in various contexts and anticipated this to be ongoing. And it doesn’t mean that participants were or are impervious to being a person in society who is influenced by norms and culture. However, in my research claiming one’s body as visibly other meant that participants developed the awareness and intentionality to inhabit their bodies for themselves as well as a political stance regarding their bodies and bodies in general. They moved through the world on their own terms.

## **Learning and Unlearning Bodies:**

### **From Internalizing Normal to Embodied Difference**

This section highlights the ways participants both learned that difference is something to change or hide, and re/learned that their bodies and difference can be a source of empowerment. Participants named early education experiences as the dominant location where norms were revealed and imposed that showed them their bodies were different. Judgments and expectations were made clear to participants and these judgments or expectations came with a power imbalance. In any context of imposed norms, participants were not imbued with agency but rather being subjected to and participating in an ongoing process of being shaped to fit societal values and expectations. Education also provided the dominant access point where participants experienced shifts in their identities, in their worldviews, in their self-concepts, and in their politics. Mostly in higher education, participants began to be intentional about their bodies, identities, and expression. Social media and community organizations also played a role in shifting participants' understandings of their bodies. Through both formal and social education, transformation was shaped by access to people, places, and ideas as well as critical moments of strength or clarity about their bodies in relationship to their integrity and/or power. Participants held more nuanced and complicated awarenesses of their bodies in context, and made decisions about how to shift the shape of the space they took up.

I began the life history interview by asking participants how they first learned that there was something different about their embodiment. Half of the participants started by

sharing context about their lives and their earliest memories of their bodies before they were aware of their difference. Several shared information about their home context that impacted their understandings of self. For example, Jasmine began by saying “my mother would never call herself a feminist, but her deep belief that we could do whatever we wanted, to be whatever we wanted in the face of the intersection of racism and sexism and sometimes classism and colorism, for me is a deeply political deeply feminist act.” This belief system shaped Jasmine’s understanding of her body and of what she could do. Beth also began by sharing family values. “Despite my mom having her, she didn't have a lot of body issues, but she had very much a lot about sexual shame for her kids, not for them, but despite all that, we were raised very much that we were doing our own thing. We were kind of a 'fuck the haters' family, even though they would never have sworn like that.” Beth shared that that family attitude, along with white privilege, helped her to maintain a sense of worth in herself even when she faced external negativity about herself. In part of Trena’s interview she spoke specifically about her queer identity, and began by saying that her mom is a lesbian. “Prior to entering school, I saw nothing weird or strange about the fact that my mom and Kimmy were together, and that they loved each other, and that they kissed each other. We're talking early '90s here. My first weddings were lesbian ones.” Growing up in a queer context wasn’t confusing to Trena until classmates and friends made comments about relationships that showed her that her family was different.

Participants also shared early memories that reflected themes of confidence, strength, and power. Clara had the earliest specific memory of her body. She stated “I

think I was 2, and I went up to my mom and my aunt and I was like: “I am big” and I wasn’t physically big but I was trying to communicate to them that my body wasn’t defining for me in that way at that time.” In her first interview, erin stated that “as a really young kid I was a gymnast, like as a little girl...and that experience of being both strong and little, sort of started my notion of my physical identity in a body, and I think it informed this sense that I have continued to have of myself as being “badass” and that that is somehow connected to the physical self.” Kyle had a similar feeling. In his case, he knew that he was different and remembers thinking “I was really proud of my difference. I was really like, “Whatever, I don't need to fit in with these societal expectations.” Like, “Why? That's a stupid rule.”” Participants’ early memories of their bodies reflected a sense of acceptance and/or empowerment.

Schools were the dominant location where participants both learned that they were different and received the messaging that being normal is worth a lot more than being different. One pattern in the data is that participants received negative messages about their bodies and difference through policing, feedback and comparisons. In the context of these interviews, policing had to do with participants’ bodies being monitored and controlled. As Clara put it, “everyone else was thinking about my physical self and I couldn’t shake that at any point, you know?” Jasmine also offered a definition of policing through the language of “a surveillance state,” which is “an awareness of others being an awareness of your body, um, and you know what are you wearing, where are you going, who you going to be with, how are you presenting yourself?” For Aurelis, her first memory of her body being policed was in the context of getting dressed to attend

Catholic school. She shared that “ Catholic schools you know, it’s very controlling and very punitive when it comes to your body and how you present your body, especially me as a female-assigned person. It was like you know, like the skirt needs to be below your knee, you needed to always have leggings on...” She remembers one very hot September day telling her mother that she didn’t want to wear an undershirt because she knew she’d be uncomfortable. “she’s like you need to just wear it and I’m like I don’t get it.”

Participants also experienced comments from others as a form of policing in schools. As Clara experienced significant bullying in early education that caused her to feel shame or a desire to hide her body. She stated that on her own she felt fine about her body, but “Other people make me aware of my body and the way that it is different.” Trena shared a similar turning point in relationship to her understanding of blackness. She stated “I think that part of what's true for me is that I grew up in-- my mother's white, and I'm quite black for having been born by a white woman. It wasn't something that I had a lot of awareness of at first. It was really when I got to school, that other people's interpretation of our relationship came into play, where folks were telling me that she couldn't be my real mother because we look so different. I remember just knowing that they were wrong but also still asking about it.” For Beth, the policing she received was by her peers in middle school. She remembers “having a girl in seventh grade criticize me for not shaving my legs, like one of the cool girls and I had never really thought much about it at all because I was definitely like a late bloomer in that. Then really getting the conscious sense that I should change what I look like.”



It was in elementary schools when Kyle's confidence in his style and gender difference was shaken. He began by sharing that "I used to wear sweatsuits all the time, like that was my thing, just all different sweatsuits." He went on to share that he began to notice everyone else was wearing jeans. He stated "I started to feel, "Oh, if my body isn't presented in this certain way, I'm not going to fit in, I'm not going to have friends. Nobody is going to want to hang out with me." Kyle began to internalize the ways that his body impacted whether or not he was liked, and whether or not he had friends. "I was very aware of the difference between being not popular and popular, and how I presented my body was a huge part of that. Starting to get different clothes and starting to grow my hair long in order to fit in." Erin also shared that while she had people who loved her and very dear friends, the combination of social pressure and the media impacted her and in mid-high school "I started really kind of unfortunately buying into that self-loathing."

This awareness of other people noticing and making comments impacted the ways participants comported themselves. While participants were ostracized for their difference, they also had the experience of receiving positive feedback for ways that they fit in and having this shape their understanding of what they were supposed to do with their bodies. For Aurelis, this was in 4th or 5th grade and had to do with wearing the tightest jeans possible because she received the message that that's what made her attractive. "The way that I would relate, the way that I would be aware of my body or how I would find things that I felt look good on me was really based on the attention that I would get from the boys." Megan had a similar experience because she was thin growing up. She reflected that "At the time of thinness, it was really like people were

obsessed. It was a great asset for fitting in in terms of body normal activity. I understood myself as someone who had a body that could have been made to be fit. I could have fit in if my brain was on board.” The excessive positive feedback she received regarding her size sent a strong message about what society valued and how her body was a form of social currency.

A significant theme throughout all interviews was the ways silence shapes the discourse on bodies and reinforces dominant narratives. As a child, Clara lived in an extremely rural community where the norms were her only access point how to be in the world, and she had limited access to other narratives or realities. She likened this to “being in a fall-out bunker after a nuclear war, and like not knowing what’s outside of the bunker, right? Where you’re like “well I could go out and it could be fertile farmland and people living peacefully, or it could be a nuclear wasteland and I could die immediately.” And like, there’s no idea.” There is no conversation because there is no representation or information that offers alternative ways of being. Clara told a story about coming back to work in her hometown one summer during college. One of her jobs was to drive around with her supervisor and pick up students every morning. Clara said that:

“At one point I mentioned my girlfriend, and she like, almost stopped the van and she was like “you’re gay?!” And I was like “yeah.” And she was like “I have always wanted to be gay.” [pause] Right? But I feel like that exemplifies it so well because it did not occur to her that she could be, that she actually could be.”

Clara was naming the way that lack of access hides all but the norm, erasing possibility from people's lives. In her experience, this isolation allowed for people to be manipulated and feel like there is only one possible reality.

Participants noted that both in their experiences as students and as educators they were not exposed to many realities outside the norm. Beth's experience of body size as a child impacted the way she saw herself. She recalls an aunt saying that they shared a body type and being offended because the aunt was large. This reaction was due to growing up in a society that taught her in implicit and explicit ways that fat is bad and fat people should not like their bodies. She reflected, "I feel if I had been exposed to more confident, fat people in the classroom who were not afraid to discuss body politics as the conversation arose, if I've been having those conversations earlier, I think it would have had a more significant impact on me. I think I would have felt a lot better about myself when I was younger." She connected this to her work as an educator, stating that "there is already a framework in place for teachers to be expected to live lives of example, but we have a pretty narrow definition of what that example is." According to Beth, being unapologetically fat is not what is meant by leading by example. She shared her perception that we are supposed to reflect for students is normative and when we offer a life of example that is counter to the norm, it is often seen as inappropriate.

Most participants observed that a significant contributor to teachers' bodies' silence in the classroom is the fear of being associated with anything sexual, and the ways bodies and embodied differences are sexualized and relegated to the private sphere. When explaining the tensions she experiences about her own body at work, Erin stated, "I

do not want to be seen as a sexual being while I'm being a professional. Ever. To me those things are so profoundly separated that covering my body, I think, helps with that line." When reflecting about leading by example, sex/sexuality, and the theoretical frame of the charmed circle, Megan shared "As a society, the circle has expanded to include monogamous gay couples who have children. Not everywhere of course but generally speaking, you would never get fired from a teaching environment in this part of Massachusetts, at least for that. That's definitely within the charmed circle of this area. Being openly polyamorous, maybe not quite, or certainly if a student found out that you went to the local BDSM dungeon, that's not in the charm. That's not in the circle." Participants also expressed an awareness of the ways that their black and brown bodies, queer bodies, and fat bodies are sexualized in their lives even when they aren't doing anything sexual. According to participants, this combination leads to a culture of silence where teachers whose bodies are different feel pressure to minimize or hide who they are because of the risks of being seen as inappropriate in the classroom.

As a community of educators, there is also just a lot of silence that comes from 'the way things are done.' As Jasmine reflects on her teaching career she noted "so much goes unsaid, about bodies and context and economy and fear and love and power in school." Both in casual conversation with colleagues and in professional development, these conversations are not happening. Beth has taught at her current school for 12 years. In a conversation about the relationships she has formed with colleagues and the work they do together I asked:

Ryan: Do they ever talk about bodies with you?

Beth: No.

Ryan: Twelve years, nothing? ...Even in the context of students, is there discourse on bodies at all?

Beth: I don't think so. However, I do bring it up on occasion.

Some participants linked this to a neoliberal educational climate. Clara stated that “there’s clearly a lot of emphasis to, um, raise kids’ scores, and at the high school level in MA if they don’t pass their MCAS they can’t graduate.” She went on to explain that if we pare away identity and see our work as educators as teaching a subject rather than teaching people, and our markers of achievement are quantitative and driven by capitalism, there is no room for conversations about the people who are in the system.

Participants observed that this silence means we aren’t hearing that difference is meaningful, or positive, or important. Beth stated, “If I had known it was okay to be fat, as opposed to the worst possible thing, then I would have, hopefully, overcome some of my fatphobia and self-hatred a lot earlier in my life, as opposed to just continuously being at war with it.” Without the message that authenticity mattered, participants shared the ways they learned to compartmentalize, disassociate, and detach themselves from their bodies, and they learned that the system was not going to support the conversations they wanted to have. The impacts of that linger. As Aurelis stated, “there's a lot of healing I have to do. I’m in constant healing all the time.” In one way or another, every participant pointed to experiences in school as the dominant social context where they received clear messages about worth in relationship to normal bodies and different bodies, and where harm was caused to their relationships with their bodies by internalizing these messages.

Changes in context, whether a new environment, different people, or exposure to ideas, also instigated participants' processes developing an empowered relationship to their embodiment. The transition to college marked significant shifts and identity and ideology for most participants. Simply being in a different place helped participants let go of the expectations they had grown up with and develop a stronger sense of their own power. As Jasmine reflected, "I'm leaving home and becoming something else and that's very clear." This process of leaving home and building her own sense of agency was significant. "Just the act of choosing a school that is not my parents' experiences was a political act. My parents both went to HBCUs as did my siblings and my aunts and uncles and my godparents." Jasmine, on the other hand, ended up going to Williams College in Western Massachusetts where she felt she could make the experience her own. Williams was "a place that at least supported what I felt like were my emerging and exploratory politics."

Aurelis and Trenda attribute some of their changes in consciousness to the ideas that they were exposed to in college. Aurelis remembers her early experiences at Hampshire including conversations about consent and gender norms and what it means for a female-assigned person to be unapologetic about their body hair. Her coursework and her professors also impacted her as they exposed her to "afrofeminism or you know womanist politics or you know reading Patricia Hill Collins or reading Angelis Davis reading Audre Lorde. Um, bell hooks especially has been someone who shaped a lot of my thinking as well, um...a lot of these black women, right, who paved the way." These readings and ideas shaped her experience on theoretical, creative, and spiritual levels, and

started her on a path towards being unapologetic about certain things in her own life. Similarly, Trendera stated that in college she took a class on African Folklore. “To read these stories and to be, mostly black folks took the class, so to also be in a learning space for the first time where the professor's black, I think that was my first black teacher ever. You know what I mean? It was an incredible thing for me.”

College is also a time where participants met people who impacted their lives and worldviews. As Jasmine puts it, “I got to hang out with queer people, my first biracial person, my first Jewish person.” In doing this, her world expanded. She didn’t have her parents looking out for her or being afraid for her body in the world, and that made room for her to center her own embodied experiences. Participants also found role models in college. As Aurelis notes, “I had people in my life, in my young life, who were a little older than me who had been through you know certain things that I was already going through...and I think that that was one of the main things that also continued to empower me to continue to have these conversations with my body.” Trendera’s relationships “gave me language to recognize and to name the patterns that I have been experiencing alone. Both that, the fascination with black hair and blackness and the softness of my skin. It was like, “Ohhh.” In some ways it was like, “Oh, I'm not special.” There's a reason why I feel like recoiling when strangers come up behind me and put their hands in my hair. It felt really good.” Participants’ early experiences in schools imposed norms on their lives that were challenged or subverted over time through personal connections in college.

Overall, it seems like college was a time for most participants to confront and shift narratives they had about themselves and about their bodies. Clara states that “one

of the most transformative understandings for me around my relationship to my body has been that the initial narrative I receive about it is not the only narrative there is.” The exposure and options that college helped her access reoriented the way she related to herself. Participants told stories about college being a place where they began to understand that their bodies have their own agency. College also was a time where participants acknowledged that they needed to confront some of their own internalized discomfort about their bodies. For example, erin shared that “I think, too, that college was when I started sort of really confronting the narrative in my head about how much I was uncomfortable with the way I looked and the way it felt inside of the way I looked.” While participants didn’t necessarily have answers, they were engaging in critical reflection and consciousness raising that shaped their sense of power-in-difference.

Kyle was the only participant who named high school as the time in his life when he began to access alternative understandings of bodies, both in and out of school. In school this happened through literature. “I read Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle* for a project in high school. I did a whole book report on it. I think that was a huge thing too, presenting in front of my class about *Rubyfruit Jungle*. It was really important to me in terms of embracing that I am a whole person with a whole body.” When I questioned him about how he got this access to information at a time when it didn’t seem like other participants had access, he stated that he grew up in DC and at a young age was attending Dyke Marches and participating in youth theater and activism. “I started hanging out in Dupont Circle when I was 14 or 15 and I definitely saw posters up at the gay bookstore that I would go to there. Maybe that’s--I’d heard that Dupont Circle was a thing. When I



rode the escalator up into the bright sunshine of the salvation of Dupont Circle, it was this huge moment for me. Then I just started finding out things because I was there.” Kyle had social access to resources that expressed the ways otherness can be empowering that bolstered his understanding of self.

College was also a formative time for Kyle, but differently than the other participants. For him, college was the place where he really began to explore whiteness. He notes that this is funny because his high school was much more racially diverse than his college, but still college was the first place where “I had a huge realization about what my white privilege meant. I took a class, a JanTerm class. We're just focused on white privilege and really unpacking all of that for a week and then from there, I did a whole video project where I was naked. It was all about understanding what my skin meant in terms of my white privilege.” Kyle continued to explore gender in college but by that point found himself to be a queer resource on campus rather than someone who was using the college experience to access information about his difference. Instead, he used college as a platform for his emerging critical consciousness around his body’s privilege which added an important layer to his understanding of his own embodied otherness.

Beth and Megan’s access to alternative narratives of embodiment mostly happened through social education online. Both of them went through significant body and value changes as adults. In their mid-late 20s, they each experienced significant shifts in theory body sizes and expressions, and that was the time when they understood their bodies as other. Both name social media and online communities as a significant site of information education where they shifted their politics and relationship to their visible

difference. For Megan, her awareness began by finding the *Bitch Magazine Anthology* in a coffee shop, and then reading everything it linked to online. She stated that she “dumped into the world of online-- Especially the very specific 2005 to 2012-ish maybe. There was just like feministing and like a certain period of Jezebel.” She remembers reading an article on the politics of shaving and then thinking “I don't have to shave. I'm never going to shave again” and she more or less hasn't since then. Online communities were central to shaping her radical leftist politics.

While Megan eagerly embraced online communities, Beth was more hesitant at first. She remembers college as a time when she was fighting her body and had a lot of internalized sizism. She remembers going on diets and getting positive feedback as she got smaller. However, in her late 20s something started to shift that corresponded with getting her first tattoo, publishing her first novel, and becoming immersed in certain online communities that offered access to a different sort of education on bodies. “As I started to discover online resources I remember first avoiding them because I was worried that if I went down that path, I might accept my body as it was instead of trying to change it. I did not want to interact with that as a possibility. As like I don't want to like myself as I am which is really funny to think about.” However, at some point she started looking into social media. She read “a lot of body-positive Tumblrs. Eff yes, VBO about visible belly outlines and fat Instagram models.” She notes that while she can't point to a specific moment, there was a point she came to in the last five years where she was able to externalize other's opinions of fatness and advocate for herself around the ways her body is different. “Like saying, “I can't fit through that,” Or, “I need a different

chair,” Or, “I’m not going to be able to do that.” Saying those things and saying them without blame or shame.”

Social settings that center learning, like schools and online communities, were deeply formative for participants. All of the participants acknowledged shame or an intentional distancing from their difference that they experienced by learning and internalizing norms in educational contexts. Participants were able to redefine their relationships to their bodies on their own terms, and most of this also happened in the context of higher education or informal education through social media. What participants have in common when it came to valuing their bodies and their difference is that shifts in their consciousness were rooted in access to literature, courses, and communities that offered empowering narratives of embodied otherness.

### **Embodied Pedagogy: Teaching, Politics, and Intentions**

Participants' awareness of bodies in general and their own bodies in specific are central to the work they do as educators. Their embodied knowledge shapes both what they do and *how* they do what they do. In the classroom, these experiences engendered a teacher politic that involved intentionally providing access to information, knowledge, and concepts that had the potential to open up the world for students; centering student agency in the classroom; naming dynamics at play; building relationally with students; and modeling authenticity. These values and actions were critical to participants because they recognized the transformative potential of providing access and understood their classrooms as sites of activism and opportunity.

Participants were driven by a pedagogy of access. Part of prioritizing access was having a curriculum that included growing understandings of the world. For Jasmine, along with making sure she designs work on multiple levels that everyone can do, this also means “Making sure that I disrupt some understandings they have of the world and support them in that disruption. Right?” As a high school biology teacher, she was able to address this content under the guise of it being germane to the curriculum. “I can say let’s talk about the presumptions about how you’re using this body, and how this body is written in space, and how this body interacts with culture and global economies and place.” Erin acknowledged that while she teaches English all day, that isn’t the full point. “I’m mostly teaching how to interact with people who you find frustrating, I’m teaching how to articulate yourself when you don’t totally know what you mean, I’m teaching how to read something that you hate or that’s complicated or is hard and make sense of it...I’m teaching how do you find the bias in what you’re reading, I’m teaching how do you say “boy this was written in the 1500s and how in the world do they know how I feel?”” Some of Clara’s curricular decisions are driven by the understanding that everyone is constructing reality around themselves. “I want to give my students the tools to help construct a reality that is more just and more loving of them. And like allows them to connect with their power more authentically and functionally.”

Participants also understood that a pedagogy of access required an awareness of difference, and the ways that systems and values would impact students’ senses of worth and ability to navigate the world. Beth reflected that “so many of our issues of social justice and education itself are about access. Accessing knowledge, accessing mobility in

society, and I think visible otherness is part of helping everyone get that access.” Trena was concerned with how she could support students as whole people, with the awareness that school structures aren’t always designed in ways that are best for young people. As a teacher, she asked “How can I help you understand that some of our job is about navigating systems that we don't believe in and that don't actually serve us? There are ways to insert what it is that you need.” Similarly Clara stated, “because of my experience growing up fat it was really important for me and it remains important for me that students feel comfortable being who they are in classroom spaces.”

The presence of participants' bodies had a significant role in their work as teachers. Participants were purposeful about how they sat, how they carried themselves, how they referenced their bodies, how they exposed aspects of their otherness, all with the awareness that occupying space is not a neutral act. Being fat, being queer, being tattooed, being brown, being real, matter in the classroom. As Erin puts it, “It’s about the shape of the space I take up.” For her, a big part of this is acknowledging that moving through the world, and not being afraid to embody that messiness as a teacher. Aurleis was clear that “I don’t really reference my body because my body is already there for them to see.” Trena understands that the way she moves in the classroom helps both her and students understand what is happening. As she put it, “I don't always feel most confident with the words that come out of my mouth and my body helps me find them. My body is my classroom management tool.”

Participants named the ways their bodies are marked and how that is part of their teaching. Kyle stated “The fact that I'm able to--That I wear my tzitzit, it starts a

conversation sometimes, sometimes in my classroom where I think kids feel a little bit safer being different. Because I'm visibly different, it allows for more visible difference in my classroom.” Megan’s body also generates conversation and awareness.

“It's like students will see this bunch of rainbow triangles and they're like, “What does the tattoo mean”? I'm like, these are the colors from the original queer pride flag that was made before it was mass-manufactured and certain colors were dropped. If I tell them that, that's literally tattooed onto my body like, “Oh you’re the gay teacher.” Students would want to talk to me and they would be excited to talk about these things. So all of that is like, look at my body doing all of this work for me, that would have been harder to do upfront in conversation.”

Outing their difference, either by simply existing unapologetically or by placing signifiers in the classroom that reveal their politics, are all about creating access for students. erin stated, “Those who are looking can see the signs. Now I do this on purpose for a lot of reasons but in part because I want to make sure that the queer kids know they have an ally in at least one class.”

Participants were also explicit about their pedagogy centering student agency. Aurelis stated, “The first day of class I’m like “listen...you have agency. Do you know what agency is?” She went on to explain that for her it is not about liberating her students, it is about her students realizing that they can liberate themselves. Participants believed students should have real choice in the classroom. Jasmine explained her classroom set up, saying, “And here’s another set of options, you can sit in the quiet corner. The quiet corner is a space where they can exercise their power, they don’t have

to work, they can have their headphones in, they can have their head down they can sit and sulk, I'm not bugging them or talking to them, that's what the quiet corner is for. It's not punishment." The quiet corner is for students being able to get what they need on any given day. For Clara, it is important to create the physical and emotional space for students to be able to engage agentially with their own bodies, "like feel out their own fluidity in terms of gender or they ways their bodies expressed, or the ways they're choosing to express their body via physical artifacts"

Participants used the discourse of the classroom to support student agency and student discovery. Beth referenced the example of students talking about prom dress choices, and explained "I try and give philosophical statements like, "Well, if you like it, then does it matter what other people think or would be the worst thing in the world if this shows something?" Part of this discourse is about participants naming what is present in the classroom and having a pedagogy of transparency with students. Another way that Beth does this is through her work leading student hiking overnights to the white mountains. "With that smaller group, I'll use the language like, "I'm a fat person. I also haven't been as active as I usually like to be, and it's really hard for me to struggle with something physical in front of a group." That's probably where I'm most transparent about my body and my challenges, is in that certain environment." This naming offers students the chance to explore their own experiences without thinking they are the only one who experiences discomfort.

Clara and Jasmine also used discussion and transparency to support students in reflecting and growing their own perspectives. Clara mentioned that she would listen to

student comments about bodies and use nonjudgmental questioning and conversation to explore where they are coming from. For her, this was about “giving kids an opportunity to kind of feel out the assumptions that they’re making.” Jasmine illustrated this through the example of getting to know you activities at the start of an academic year. “We’re talking about like your name and your favorite fruit and I’m like ”and mine’s not watermelon”...and it took a while for the kids to, even the black kids to process that and be like “oh, oh! She named the fact that she’s black out loud! And made it a joke!”” Jasmine went on to state that she thinks “the idea of naming where you’ve been and bringing that knowledge, that experience into [the classroom] here because it’s valued” can be revolutionary for students. Participants consistently used discourse to break the culture of silence around bodies and paid attention to how that shifted student access and engagement in their classrooms.

Another important belief connected to participants’ pedagogy was that teaching is relational, and that relationships are built in part by them bringing their own realness to the classroom. For example, in reflecting on the nature of student-teacher relationships Clara shared, “I think that for students, the ways that teachers are pressured to depersonalize are often...is more often an obstacle than an asset.” Aurelis was very clear that to her the classroom is personal. “I don’t hide from my students, whether or not I know they’re homophobic. I don’t hide from them that I’m queer.” Aurelis also talked about the impact of her realness and visibility as a black, Dominican, queer teacher. “They relate to me differently and it’s kinda like refuge in a way. So I think of my body as that too often times when I’m teaching.” Participants built strong relationships with



students, and the ways students reacted showed them that it mattered. For example, Jasmine shared the frequent experience of being in the hall and having students come up to her and say “miss! I look for you, I looked for you in your old classroom I thought you weren’t here!”

I asked participants whether they thought teachers can ignore bodies and build strong relationships with students. Kyle’s response was that he has a tendency to ignore his body, and he thinks that that might be the problem when he is having a hard time connecting with students. Trena answered the question by stating, “I just think that visible otherness for me has been a community builder. I think that students have seen elements of themselves in me, which I think creates an opening for deeper connection to be built. I think that that has been one of the beautiful things about visible otherness for me.” She connected this back to an example she has of students noticing that she wears her hair naturally, and that she sometimes witnesses her black students shift to wearing their hair naturally part way through a year. “Having black students who are always straight hair, always straight hair, always straight hair come in and rock their natural hair. It just brings me so much joy.”

In their early life histories, many participants spoke about the role models that impacted them by expanding their worlds. As teachers, participants hoped to be those same role models for their students. In terms of embodiment in specific, participants tried to model not being ashamed of their difference. They tried to model being unapologetic. They tried to model moving through the world on their own terms. erin stated that “I think it is the most important thing that I’m doing in the classroom is being an authentic

grown-up while a whole bunch of kids watch.” Aurelis simply stated that “It matters because, I mean it was so important for me to have black teachers in school when I was growing up.” She also explained that she does a lot of code switching when she speaks with students. “And that in itself is political, that in itself is resistance because what I’m doing there is that I am letting them know not only with my body but even with my language with the way that I speak that we are one in the same.” Trena reflected on the way she models for students in her theater class. “I felt like by my taking up space, not that people need permission to, but sometimes people need examples. It’s like permission and I see this person who’s physically taking up a lot of space, who is sitting with her legs open and she’s down watching. It’s just that openness, I guess. My hope is that other people felt like they could take risks with their bodies.”

There is purpose in the ways that participants model themselves in the classroom. For Jasmine, that purpose is to break down compartmentalizations. She stated “I bring in the wholeness of my identities there to, to kind of as an act of fuckery.” Clara models unapologeticness in the classroom. To her, this looks like “not shying away from the ways that you fall outside of the norms. You know, it means like referencing those parts of yourself casually as they come up.” One of Kyle’s purposes as a model is to offer an alternative way of being a man in the classroom. “Two thirds of our students are male. Many of them have a very narrow idea of what it means to be a man. The way I express myself, and the way that I talk, and the way that I move in the world really does help them to expand to that view.” In addition, Kyle notes that through his presence in the classroom, “In a very basic sense, my students get exposed to somebody who’s Jewish,

when most of them don't know anybody who's Jewish, and somebody who's visibly Jewish...That's an important piece of it. They get exposed to different culture a little bit because of that.”

As an intersectional feminist, erin thinks about “being a model for students who maybe don’t have any queer people in their family or don’t have any, um, intersectional thinkers in their family.” For her, being really comfortable as a model and looking for chances to talk about those aspects of identity and politics in authentic ways are really important to her. Megan, at times, has taught in environments where she was the only obviously queer teacher. She embraces that role modeling, and stated that “I want to be in the classroom as a series of adults who support each other in helping students be comfortable with the greater diversity of [queerness]. That’s the project I want.” Beth reflected broadly on being a visibly other teacher and modeling that otherness for students from a place of worth and confidence.

“If we can have people celebrating their otherness or just being comfortable in their otherness, which in its own way is a form of celebration, then it helps students in their own journeys toward becoming the people they want to be. It's about building empathy, it's about compassion and it's about making transparent or making clear, making visible the invisible barriers that we have in our classrooms.”

Discussions of power came up organically in every interview. Participants were clear that their pedagogy of being real, of centering student agency, of providing access, connected to shifting the norms of power in their classrooms. Their experiences of the

way power works in schools means that the dominant form of power present in the classroom is “power over.” Jasmine named “schools don’t acknowledge that young people have power and they’re looking to use it and they don’t acknowledge, they don’t help adults particularly adult males frankly but adults deal with their own power over students.” Kyle connected this power over directly to teachers’ bodies. He stated “I do think that all too often. I mean, I sometimes do this, teachers use our bodies as a way to have power over students. It never works out very well.” He went on to reflect that in his own experience, “when that happens, it’s me overcompensating for not feeling empowered enough within myself.” Megan understands power over as something that power over is “a totally different power than creativity which is fully yours and just yours to explore and be with if you want it.” For participants, the aim was both to find power within themselves and share power with students. This is not easy, because, as Trena named, she has been brought up with power having a negative connotation and it wasn’t until college that “I learned anything about the concept of power with. Everything before that was power over. I think part of my experience of womanness, of queerness, of blackness, of all the things, is connected so much to the concept of cultivating the power within classrooms.”

Participants acknowledged the ways that what they bring into the classroom can impact the power dynamic, and that they had a desire to have classroom spaces with authentic senses of power. For Clara this has to do with bodies and making visible the “strengths and weaknesses and challenges attached to their particular body, their particular lived experience...like, that is something that helps equalize that power

dynamic with students.” For Aurelis, this was about “cultivating a space in which my students can be themselves.” The real power comes from students owning the space and their experience. erin explained how she tries to do this by “taking these few steps back and making room for the energy to move without me having to fuck with it or be in charge of it. It’s THEIRS. And just always working to empower them in a space when young people so rarely have authority or control or any idea of what to do.”

Participants employed an embodied pedagogy in the classroom because of their deep beliefs that teachers’ bodies matter. At the very basic level, it is important for students to be exposed to diversity. Megan put this simply, stating, if we put a human who has a characteristic around humans that share that characteristic and when they've been deprived enough access to those people in those roles, that's good.” Beth also shared to her it seems obvious that teachers' bodies matter. “I think it's pretty clear that students see us for who we are and also what we look like and how we present ourselves. To deny that that happens is-- it does our students and us a disservice. Then it's not about whether they see us this way, it's what do we do with that and what impact does that have?”

Clara’s experience tells her that being in her body in the classroom has positive impacts. One part is that she believes that a teacher in the classroom authentically is a huge driver of student learning. Her experience also tells her that being visibly other and having intentional body politics “made my classroom a safer, more inclusive, more fertile space for often the most disenfranchised students.”

Participants did not struggle to justify that teachers’ bodies matter in the classroom. In the interviews, participants mostly focused on what it means to understand

that bodies matter, and how that shapes their actions as educators. To Trendera, “It means that I have a responsibility. I think to be aware and to be intentional about how I do both things; how I do teaching, how I do me visibly.”

Howard Zinn famously said “You can’t be neutral on a moving train.”

Participants recognized this in their own teaching. Aurelis expressed that, “ I think that if I, if I were to come into class everyday and try to assimilate, and like not talk about the fact that I’m queer not talk about the fact that you know like I’m proud to be black or any of those things...um...I really don’t know what I would be doing as a teacher. I really don’t know what would be my purpose.” Participants acknowledged the classroom as a political space, and their project was to teach with a pedagogy that offered access and justice. As erin stated, “for me, teaching is activism.” Participants demonstrated ownership of their practices and integrity to their values. In the context of secondary education in the United States today, this is inherently radical and transgressive.

### **Negotiating Visible Otherness in the Classroom**

Negotiating is a daily, sometimes an hourly or minute to minute, engagement with the tensions between the dominant narratives about bodies in education and one’s visible difference as a teacher. Megan, whose pedagogy is to be the same person in the classroom as she is in her life, was fired from her most recent teaching position. I asked her whether she thought it was possible to be a visibly other and political teacher, and maintain a job without making body concessions. Her answer, without hesitation, was “No.” Participants found that the combination of their embodied difference and anti-assimilationist stance meant that they were in constant negotiation: internally,

physically, and socially. This meant that they constantly had to make choices about *how* they did what they did, with an awareness of dominant culture and the external expectations placed on them by various constituents as well as their internal wants, needs, and objectives.

On the day to day, participants were highly conscious of themselves and of the impacts of their choices as teachers. When asked what it's like for her to be in her body in the classroom, Jasmine responded, "It's contentious." In this case, I believe that she meant that her body is complicated and controversial, and that it was difficult to move through the day without some sort of opposition. In speaking about the awareness she carries with her on a daily basis, Aurelis shared that, "I'm conscious of the numerous battles that I might face, and then I need to make a decision. Do I want to like, like which battle do I choose that day?" This demonstrates the constant negotiating that participants faced. They had to weigh their own comfort and integrity against the expectations of their administrations, communities, and students. They might be aware that wearing a sleeveless shirt would be most comfortable because they teach in an un-airconditioned classroom but it means that their tattoos will show and that may mean that they are seen as unprofessional by parents and their boss. At the same time, it may make them more relatable to students. All of these considerations impact the seemingly small choice of what shirt to wear to work.

The concept of professionalism was at the core of many participants' daily negotiations, and their statements about professionalism showed a great deal of systemic awareness in connection to what it means to be professional. Jasmine shared that she

often had the experience of receiving negative teacher evaluations “that were really about this thing called professionalism which is deeply unnamed but normed for white people, normed for cute bodies, normed for quiet bodies, normed for smart, funny, palatable bodies.” Professionalism reinforces dominant power structures and dominant cultural beliefs. There is an unspoken hierarchy to professionalism, and Megan understands this hierarchy and its relationship to capitalism as something “specifically designed to make it difficult for people that are trying to be screened out or just that weren't situationally born in the right environments.” According to Clara, “it effectively erases otherness in teachers in a multitude of ways.” Trena explained that “it's based in classism and what standards have been set for the kinds of theater that's valued is very much connected. It's Eurocentric, it always has been. That's part of why I don't want to do it.” The impact of teaching in a context of professional norms is that “people with nonnormative bodies are fucking beat up by the system, by institutions, by structures.” It is clear from this comment, made by Jasmine, that expectations of professionalism take an emotional toll on her as an educator.

The negotiation of professionalism came in for participants because of the ways it was at odds with their bodies and their politics. Clara stated, “prioritizing embodiment in the classroom, and prioritizing, like, helping students or like being in communication with students about their embodiment as a site of learning, requires you to challenge ideas of professionalism.” Participants understood that what they wore and how their bodies moved might work to their advantage and reflect their values in the classroom, but also would be a source of ostracization. In speaking about this dynamic, Megan mused,



“I feel like for me when I am regarded in some circumstances as not being a professional body but it's not any one thing. It feels like a cumulative of things that tipped me over an edge. I'm positive there are outfits that a very thin person could wear that would be considered more professional on them than me when I wear them.”

One negotiation participants experienced in the classroom had to do with having breasts, and connections between professionalism, sexualness, and taboo. For example, two participants, Aurelis and Megan, preferred not to wear bras. When thinking about what it would mean to come into school that way, Aurelis said, “Ah, how comfortable would that be if I could just do that, but I know that it's not, you know, it's not the time and space because of the you know all the things that come with that, right?” Aurelis wore bras to work daily, compromising her comfort. Megan was not willing to make this compromise. She did not wear bras to work because it felt like too much to her to be uncomfortable for the sake of an institution. While no one said this to her specifically, she understood her choice not to wear a bra, even when she wore shirts that were loose and fully covered her breasts, as one of the dominant but unnamed reasons that she was fired.

“I'm not doing the work of policing my own breasts. People do that to themselves all the time. It's like, How much is too much showing? How tight is too tight? How much movement is too much movement? How much nipple is too much nipple? I know people with much larger breasts who basically have just an instant calculus they've developed with what they can and cannot wear and they have learned over time and they know it very deeply.”

In the interview, Megan was very clear that she knows what it means to sexualize her breasts and does not do that at school, but that she has to negotiate knowing colleagues and administrators will see her breasts in a shirt as inherently sexual and inappropriate. She explained this dynamic through the example of Gayle Rubin's 'Charmed Circle,' which she writes about in *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* (1984). The concept of the Charmed Circle is that what is privileged or accepted by society is inside the circle and seen as good or normal or natural. Things that are on the outer charmed circle are seen as less desirable or acceptable, and then there are things that are simply taboo, like a teacher with breasts who is not wearing a bra that stops them from moving naturally. As an educator, she is constantly aware of how her body falls inside and outside the charmed circle, and the negotiations she has to make to navigate that environment or be forced out.

Participants also had an internal process about when and how to send signals in the classroom as a way to negotiate their non-normativity. While participants understand their embodiment as powerful and radical, that did not mean that they were easily accepted by all students. Clara reflected that, "there are ways that when you deliberately or not deliberately are visibly outside of, like, normative embodiment in a classroom, that there is a pressure to communicate cultural fluency to offset that." Because fat is often viewed negatively in society, she was aware that fat can be an impediment to creating mutually respectful relationships with students. She negotiates this by finding ways to make herself accessible to students by showing cultural fluency that is recognizable to normative teenager perspectives.

Participants named the culture of silence or invisibility around bodies in professional development, and the negotiations that came with deciding when to speak up. Aurelis related the experience of being in daily professional development and deciding when to address comments from colleagues that did not reflect social justice values. She knew that she was already othered based on her age and identities, and added, “I also didn’t want to be that person that, that person of color who is always teaching the white person.” She often waited to see if one of her other colleagues would speak up, but it was rare that anyone would. She then would have to negotiate how she wanted to feel uncomfortable--for being silent in the face of injustice or for being increasingly othered for speaking up.

Beth has been teaching in the same school for 12 years, and states that she cannot remember a single instance that bodies were brought up in a professional context. However, her tenure at her school has made her more comfortable negotiating informal conversations with colleagues. Her main example involves lunch table conversation and diet culture where someone talks about eating a certain food as “bad.” Beth stated, “That is one thing I try to respond to every time and usually I say, "It's just food, it's not morality." I actually use that phrase. Sometimes, I say, “I'm just going to stay fat and eat this cookie.”” Participants shared that it was not uncommon for them to have colleagues who had harmful ideas around fat or gender or difference and that they struggled with how to address these comments and when. Clara noted that when she tried to respond to the harm in these comments, her colleagues were not always receptive, but “By the time I left I just got really comfortable being like “that’s not appropriate. You can’t say that to a

kid.” Or like “you can’t say that to me.” Participants experienced slightly more ease speaking up over time at one school. Kyle related this through the idea that colleagues and students would say “That’s just a part of Mr. Josephs,” as they got used to the ways he confronted racist and homophobic language, but speaking up was never without consideration of how the comment would be received or the energy it would take.

Being visibly other in secondary education meant participants taught in a constant state of hyperawareness. For Clara this was regardless of whether her difference was named. “even if that wasn’t feedback I was receiving, that was feedback I was mindful of potentially receiving, right?” This caused her to constantly adjust and readjust her boundaries. Trenda reflected that “Often it’s the wondering. Like, is this thing about me being different from all of you? The thing that’s getting in the way of you showing me respect? I remember thinking a lot about the difference between people liking me and respecting me.” For Megan the hyperawareness came from moving around a tight classroom space. She shared,

“I’m always dropping things and running into people just by accident. It’s magnified by the classroom setting especially since I’ve been in these rooms that are really tiny and you can’t move around without sticking your butt in somebody’s face. I think it’s just like having-- In certain environments just really aware of like, “Okay, I dropped this thing and I have to pick it up and does that mean I’m going to accidentally make someone uncomfortable and should I care?” All of that’s in the back of my mind, but also I’m teaching algebra.

For Kyle, part of his hyperawareness comes from the worry that students could accuse

him of being inappropriate at any moment because he is queer and because he is a man. He is also worried about students knowing about his transgender identity, based on early experiences of harassment and lack of support and rendered his work unsustainable. He is less worried about the transgender piece now, but the sense of riskiness in his work never goes away. He stated, "It's exhausting. It's totally exhausting...I would say, every day that I'm in the classroom, there's a way that my body does feel unsafe. I keep putting myself in that situation over and over again."

On the whole, participants in this study are tired from the hyperawareness. Jasmine gave the example of being the only black teacher in her last school and the number of times she was asked about her bus route rather than her teaching. She moves through her days knowing that at all times "I am on the margins." Participants are putting a lot of work and energy into their bodies in the context of teaching. There are important positive impacts of this which participants named, but they come at a cost. As Trenda stated, "I think I personally have a pattern of seeing people both wanting the presence of blackness, but not wanting to actually deal with what that means" and that negotiating this left her feeling exhausted. Beth shared "I wish teachers were-- I wish other people, teachers, and students were more aware of the ways in which otherness affects their colleagues even if they don't feel like it affects themselves. It's invisible labor. If you're not doing it, you don't know that it's happening."

Some participants mitigated this by finding a space that they could occupy authentically. erin stated that "I have always, I don't...I don't really know how to be anything but me, and there are people in the world who do know how to not be who they

really are. I am not one of those people so I had to find myself a little niche in the world where I could be overtly feminist and outspoken and tattooed and still do my job really well.” This demonstrated the negotiating that can happen before even setting foot in the classroom as a teacher. Not every participant has the luxury of choosing a job that honors their embodiment and identities, but participants made choices about how they dressed for interviews, what they put in cover letters, and how they let their bodies speak throughout hiring processes. Teaching at a preferred school did not prevent negotiating, but for some participants it did make it so they could mostly show up as themselves.

### **Summary**

Developing a critical consciousness and maintaining it across time and place is not an easy process; the data show that it is one that needs to be actively worked for and nurtured. Participants in this study were not exclusively passive recipients of norms and dominant culture; rather they consistently challenged, questioned, negotiated, and retheorized their own selves in order to be aligned with an internal sense of integrity and coherence in and out of the classroom. They also had moments where they weren't aligned with their integrity or couldn't be fully aligned with their integrity. Participants' visible differences brought their bodies into the discourse of the classroom because their bodies were not always quiet, not always easy, and took up figurative and literal space. Their awareness and politicized consciousness brought the challenge of negotiating bodies and identities into the disembodied context of education. Teaching in a body that is visibly other from an anti-assimilationist stance and power-in-difference is work on top of work. Discomfort is inevitable. However, participants were clear that in negotiating

levels of freedom for themselves, for their classrooms, and for their students, they were teaching in a way that could feel powerful, meaningful, and transgressive.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

This research explored the significance of teachers whose bodies are visibly other in service of the broader project of addressing issues of access and equity in educational contexts. There is a large body of research on equity, diversity, inclusion and culture in education. Without erasing the valuable work that researchers and theorists have done to address equity and social justice in education, I want to offer an additional way of addressing this project by putting the body front and center. As Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote, racism isn't just theoretical, it is violence that lands on black and brown bodies. The body is the vehicle through which oppression plays out; it is where theory meets reality. Building on the important work others have done, I want to intentionally engage the body as its own lens and the conversations and interventions that this lens opens up.

#### **A Call for New Scripts**

This research on embodiment within the field of education reflected that we need to develop scripts to intentionally engage bodies and their pedagogical meaning. It means something that the topic of bodies is not a regular conversation for educators, even as our bodies are what we carry with us into the classroom every day. Ableism, racism, and oppression form the basis for a system of education that allows us to ignore or silence bodies, and minimize the body as a valid and valuable point of knowledge that informs our work.

There are researchers from within the field of education who recognize the importance of bodies and they are asking for help. As stated in my literature review, in



“Embodied literacies: Learning to First Acknowledge and then Read the Body in Education” Hilary Hughes-Decatur concludes by asking: “how do we uncover/dig up this phenomenon of bodies in education that has been buried over for so long? How do we unlearn these disciplined body practices that continue to permeate the structures of popular and educational culture so that we can learn to read bodies differently in education? And how do we even begin having conversations in classrooms around the body?” (2011, p. 86). Hughes-Decatur’s questions get at the core challenge of this research, which is that we do not have the language, practice, or resources to intentionally engage bodies in the context of teacher pedagogy. This was reflected by participants, who all shared stories about the silence they experienced as students and as educators, and how they wished there were more opportunities and resources for intentionally engaging the body. We need to ask more questions, we need to have more conversations, we need to interrogate the systems that keep us from engaging bodies, and we need to interrupt the mind/body dualism that pervades educational contexts. Explicitly naming the body as its own lens in education opens up conversations about personal power and embodied pedagogy, which allows for interventions that offer educational access to bodies that are othered.

### **Power-in-Difference**

What other scholars have done well is articulate an internal sense of power and wholeness that comes from within, as well as the power and potential of liminal identities and consciousnesses. While this a central component of the experience of otherness and resistance, there is still a lack of research focusing on the crucial intersection of bodies,

otherness, and anti-assimilationist politics, which engenders what I'm calling power-in-difference. This lens foregrounds the embodied negotiations that shape our relationships to our own power. Being able to name power-in-difference for what it is means we can communicate about it and begin to understand its dimensions and impact.

For many participants power-in-difference meant accepting the wholeness of their bodies. It meant not shying away from their otherness or messiness. It meant engaging their bodies with awareness, intent, and self-knowledge. It meant that something about their bodies was an internal source of power. It also meant that participants developed a politic of not hiding who they are, and of making space for bodies to be authentic and free. Participants reflected that when they taught from a place of power-in-difference it felt meaningful; it was the work they wanted to be doing. In addition to or perhaps because they were able to recognize this power-in-difference, participants also recognized the moments when they were disconnected from their bodies, and the negative physical impacts they experienced as a result. This recognition confirmed the importance of taking up intentional space as visibly other. Consciousness raising and developing a body politic rooted in empowerment is not a linear process, and it is possible to both have an understanding of alternative values and the power of resistance, and still have a complicated relationship with one's body.

In addition to feeling themselves, participants learned to understand what it meant to embrace the wholeness of their identities, to not assimilate, and to accept the full unruliness of their bodies. This is not to oversimplify and say that participants moved through the world in powerful wholeness at all times, but that they were aware of what it

felt like and had a knowledge of themselves that was consciously negotiated. Through this, they were able to access and name a power that was personal and embodied. Situated in an otherness that is both a material reality and a critical consciousness, power-in-difference is an intentional and internal sense of strength, resilience, and resistance which is necessarily embodied.

Research in both critical/feminist fields and education present the position of teacher as increasingly inagentic, and this is something that all participants experienced. Teachers are supposed to be minds educating minds about the content of our courses. We act like the body is not involved in the act of knowing, which restricts and alienates us from our own teaching and learning (Darder, 2017). Paulo Freire, seminal author and activist in the fields of both critical theory and education, stated “It is my entire body that socially knows. I cannot, in the name of exactness and rigor, negate my body, my emotions and my feelings” (1993, p. 105). Having a personal or embodied voice is often discouraged and seen as unprofessional. The questions that critical theories and embodied pedagogies engender can work to reposition and revalue the body in education. Through this research, I sought to articulate what it meant for participants with visibly different bodies to have an internal sense of worth, and then exist in the classroom from a political stance of power-in-difference. What do these bodies *do* in the classroom? [In what ways] are they pedagogical? What does it mean to revalue bodies in the classroom?

For participants to revalue bodies in the classroom, they first had to revalue their own bodies in the world. Both research and findings showed that social and educational body norms teach disconnection from one’s own embodiment. However, in order to

access an authentic sense of power in the classroom, participants needed to feel themselves in their bodies. This was through a politics of acknowledgement. Acknowledging what they thought about, acknowledging how they take up space, acknowledging their otherness and what it meant for them to navigate the social world as someone whose body is visibly different from the norm. It is the power and potential that came from owning and revaluing their bodies that grounded participants' pedagogies as teachers.

### **Embodied Pedagogy**

I came into this research assuming that when teachers embrace their visible otherness and challenge hegemonic discourses on the body from a place of power-in-difference the result is transgressive and liberatory. Centering one's body in the context of education is certainly a political project, and while the impacts are not simple or singular, exploring participant's presence in the classroom reveals frameworks for an embodied pedagogy. These frameworks included centering access as an anchor point, an emphasis on student agency, recognizing the importance of modeling authenticity, and shifting from power over to power with. Participants' pedagogies were transparent, relational, and student-centered.

I believe that one of the most radical things that teachers' embodied awareness manifested was an active acknowledgement of power in the classroom and a desire for students to have real power and agency. One of the roots of this agency came from transparency and an acknowledgement of embodied difference. Participants are explicitly or implicitly calling attention to their misfit in an educational context. In embracing the

value of this work, I believe participants opened up their classrooms as sites of solidarity. Participants clearly experienced their bodies as pedagogical. Their bodies took up space, and that process of taking up space invited others to do the same. They modelled taking risks and being messy. As some of the only visibly different educators in their particular schools, their bodies and their power were access points to alternative narratives for students who may not have relationships with other unapologetically queer or black or jewish or fat people. Participants understood their work in the classroom as activism.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's piece on misfits reflects this social justice lens when she states misfitting "can also foster intense awareness of social injustice and the formation of a community of misfits that can collaborate to achieve a more liberatory politics and praxis" (2011, p. 597). One of the most profound gifts these teachers offer students is the exposure to embodied power-in-difference which perhaps cracks open dominant narratives students have received about normality and their own worth. This research did not explicitly explore the impact of participants' visible otherness on students, but participant's shared anecdotal information about their relationships with students which suggested their work in the classroom was transformative. Participants were the teachers they would have wanted as young people growing up with visible differences. Future research could more directly explore the link between teachers' embodied otherness and student outcomes.

Feminist, materialist frameworks center access. Nirmala Erevelles' work, in particular, invites us to ask what bodies that are othered need physically, psychologically, socially and economically, and what constraints are preventing them from accessing it?

My research offers insight into what types of access participants prioritize for students in their classrooms, as well as what they need to sustain their work as educators.

Participants prioritized student access largely in the form of alternative narratives, resources, and realities. They viewed expanding students' worldviews and senses of what is possible as germane to their curriculum in any subject. To do this work, teachers need spaces they can fit in, literally and figuratively. They need chairs that are comfortable and enough room between student desks/tables to navigate space and support individual students. They need to be able to build relationships with students without being sexualized because of their otherness. They need their value recognized. They need the invisible systems and structures that view differences as less than to be acknowledged. They need schools to want their wholeness not just their presence. Positioning the body as a central lens reveals the deep importance of educators who are visibly other and anti-assimilationist and use an embodied pedagogy from a stance of power-in-difference.

This research also reveals the extensive physical and emotional energy required to maintain a career in education from this particular embodiment. In education, as in every other aspect of moving through the world, there is a load that people carry unevenly. When teachers navigate the world with privilege--for example, with whiteness, with a primary dialect of written edited American English, with a cis het identity, with an able body--their energy can go to the visible, contracted work of teaching. Those who have bodies and identities that are not privileged by dominant culture are doing a whole lot of uncompensated labor. They are doing this through the constant negotiations and hyper

awareness of taking up space as someone whose body is other. This matters and is necessary to acknowledge.

### **Education's Impact on Body Consciousness**

Part of the work of this research is finding ways to understand and articulate the personal and political identity development of visibly other teachers who find power in their difference. What has the process been for these teachers to find empowerment in something about themselves that is not supported by dominant culture? While participants did not have a uniform or singular experience, there were dominant themes and experiences which I will identify.

Participants' earliest memories are of accepting examples of embodied difference around them without question. Participants did not think about themselves in relation to or separate from norms. Half of the participants came from families that held what they described as feminist or open attitudes about how to live, and this set the stage for an initial feeling of self-assurance. Early experiences in education changed that. Participants received messages about how to comport themselves from peers, teachers, and family members. They started to notice more about what was embraced and what was rejected. Participants also learned to police themselves and felt themselves being policed by others. All participants reflected that these awarenesses and actions didn't always feel good, though sometimes they did. These experiences and examples all connect to Foucault's concept of disciplinary power as well as ideas of hidden curriculum. Over time, discourses are internalized as norms. They become accepted as the status quo, reinforced by those who are policing themselves and each other in a system which thrives

on conformity and control. People give up their personal power and identity to serve this system.

Over time, participants experienced access to resources that transformed their relationships with their bodies and their visible differences. The initial point when changes in consciousness began varied from participant to participant, with some remembering seeds of anti-assimilationist, embodied awareness in middle school and others not developing an embodied critical consciousness until adulthood. Most participants accessed narratives and information that shifted their realities on college campuses where participants were exposed to courses, people, activism and ideas that intentionally pushed back against norms. Participants developed political stances that helped them negotiate engaging with their bodies on their own terms. They learned about consent. They met people with different values and identities, and it sometimes had the effect of shifting the ways they valued themselves. One commonality among participants, whether in college or later in life, is that once their consciousness changed they sought community with others who shared their embodied difference.

When access to alternative narratives about bodies and difference did not occur on a college campus, this access took place through social community. Some participants' shifts in consciousness can be explained in concrete moments and others' awakenings were more gradual. Some participants may not be able to pinpoint exactly when their consciousness shifted, but they can identify resources that impacted the process. bell hooks describes the process of resistance as one that comes from developing tools to analyze the way that systems of power work, developing a critical consciousness, and



creating new and largely self-defined ways of being in the world. This critical consciousness, named by hooks, Anzaldúa, Cruz, and Lorde, is key to shifting narratives around difference, bodies, and identity and was reflected consistently in my research. These critical, feminist theorists offer tools to interrogate our own developing critical consciousnesses. Cindy Cruz wrote that in this process “The goal is not for the production of a new binary or the displacement of one meta-narrative for another” (2001, p. 660). Picking up on this idea, Ellen Samuels wrote that the goal is “a praxis of embodied identities that occupies the border as homeland” (2003, p. 250). This is worth restating. Developing a critical consciousness rooted in otherness and liminality is a complex and sometimes contradictory process that is constantly in tension with dominant narratives and forms of power.

Participants’ identity development and awareness as visibly other was messy. It is tempting to present a coherent narrative where participants first internalized norms, then had moments of awakening as well as access to resources that offered them alternative narratives, embraced those narratives, found communities that reflected their identities, and went into the classroom as unapologetically anti-assimilationist adults. This account is accurate to central experiences and shifts in participants’ consciousnesses, and also not the whole story.

Participants’ growth and shifts were not without tension, complication, and contradiction. This reinforces the point Donna Haraway makes about knowledge being complex and contradictory. Haraway’s framework does not support trying to find a singular answer to the phenomenon of being visibly other and anti-assimilationist. Her

work is a call for an intersectional, embodied analysis that allows for openings. In “The Persistence of Vision,” Haraway (1997) writes, “Feminist embodiment resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the the webs of differential positioning...the goal is better accounts of the world” (p. 294). Embodiment is in a constant relationship with context, and the contexts of teaching and being in the world will never be static. Positioning and repositioning knowledge is a critical aspect of this work and that is the process participants are still engaged in as educators. Their narratives will not tell a single story, but through these situated and moving knowledges, we can offer a more precise account of the messy work of embodied awareness.

### **Limitations**

This study investigated the identity development and pedagogical meaning of teachers’ visibly othered embodiments in secondary education classrooms. Using critical, phenomenological research models and grounded theory methodologies, I interviewed 8 educators with teaching experience in Massachusetts public education classrooms, an active awareness of their visible difference, and a politic of power-in-difference. As a teacher-activist and social justice educator, my experiences and training have led me to interrogate the ways power exists in a space, what counts as knowledge and who holds it, as well as an awareness of systems and contexts that center the normative. It has taught me to be critical of singular answers or truths, and to listen to voices that are marginalized or missing. In the case of this particular research study, while I was able to gain insight and some answers to my research questions, I believe that the overall number of participants was lacking. There are myriad ways to be visibly different and I was not

looking for quotas of particular embodiments. That said, no cisgender men participated in the study along with no participants whose primary source of visibly difference connected to ability.

There were a handful of people who responded to my call for participants who ultimately did not respond to my follow-up. A pattern emerged in which the participants who committed to the research were conveniently located to Western Massachusetts (even though I was willing to drive to any location), and somehow tangentially connected to me through an educational site, a social justice network, or a community organization. While I don't know exactly why this is, I personally believe that the quantity and length of the interviews were a deterrent to teachers who did not in some way already have a connection to me or my work beyond the topic. I do not propose minimizing the length or number of interviews, but perhaps if I were able to offer more compensation this could have shifted who was willing to participate. I know that teaching is exhausting and teachers' time is valuable. The research was useful as is, but would certainly have benefitted from additional voices. I'd recommend a future version of this study that is larger in scope.

An additional limitation of this study is that it was conducted solely in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I made this choice deliberately at the start of the research, and justified it because the culture and climate for teachers may vary by state. In the end, I found the choice to focus on a particular state more limiting than useful. In a pilot study on the same topic I did not limit by geography and that offered access to additional participants and perspectives. While states and regions are in some ways

distinct in regard to their cultural climates, in all of them education is an institution rooted in white supremacy and hegemonic norms. I believe that I could have accounted for these regional differences in my research and questions, and would recommend a national search for future research. I also limited the study to focus solely on public, secondary educators. I had some people respond with interest who taught at elementary levels or in private schools. Again, I believe the interview process could have accounted for this, and research showed that some educators are taking these questions up at the elementary levels. I am interested in future studies on this topic that are representative of P-12 education in a United States context.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

My research indicates that though race, class, gender, and other identity groups play out through meanings mapped onto bodies, the discourse around social identity is often disembodied. This was a contrast to my interviews where participants strongly connected identity and place and where education had a deep and lasting impact on participants' identity development. It is important to acknowledge specific locations in society that are engendering shifts in participants' senses of worth and body politics are happening, not just that they are happening. What is clear from this data is that education plays a fundamental role in both oppressing and liberating bodies, and while it is not the only location relevant to bodies and identity development the majority of participants' interviews reflected educational institutions as central to their identity development. This matters.

Educational institutions have immense and significant impacts on our relationships with our bodies and senses of worth. However, there is limited research that situates educational institutions as a central context for identity development theories. Much of the research that does exist focuses on adolescence because of its recognized importance on identity development. In my research I drew from two of these studies though it is important to note that in my research, education impacted participants' relationships to their bodies both before and beyond adolescence. What is absent from the existing research are frameworks for engaging with identity development intentionally in educational contexts. The prevalence of participants comments about the role formal education played in their embodied awareness indicates that this is an important area of future inquiry and development.

How does this relate to teacher education? Jones and Hughes-Decatur (2012) claim, “The body is the meaning-maker and the producer of meanings—the material form of the body politic. If we hope to encourage transformation in schools, we need to start with our own bodies and tend to the body of the teacher education student sitting in front of us” (p. 59). The connection between formal educational contexts and embodied identity development is clearly reflected through participants’ experiences though only marginally reflected in literature. Where it is reflected, the focus is on unintentional impacts schools have on identity development. What would it take for preservice teachers to enter the field with a belief that bodies matter and an imperative to act on this belief? This research suggests the field of education needs to figure out how to engage bodies. There is work to be done creating embodied frameworks that intentionally engage with

critical identity development, particularly for students whose bodies and identities are marginalized. Future researchers in the field of education would benefit from asking questions about effective embodied frameworks in formal education for both teachers and students, and developing model curricula.

Through the research, I have also become curious about whether teachers' whose bodies are visibly different have the ability to challenge disembodied norms and values through their existence (if it doesn't get them fired). My research showed an educational climate and culture where teachers work is not their own. Does the presence of powerful, anti-assimilationist values and an embodied praxis have the potential to shift the dehumanizing nature of public education? While I believe that my study does not allow me to answer this conclusively, participant's embodied pedagogy reflected the importance of humanizing education through the ways they showed up, their emphasis on relationships, and their focus on student agency and access.

As was reflected in their embodied pedagogy, participants had a commitment to showing up fully. Participants also understood the value of relationships in their work. Woodcock and Hakeem are researchers in the field of education who argue that knowledge is built relationally. Participant statements in this study both reflected this sentiment, and had specific ideas of what sorts of knowledge they wanted to build. Participants had a clear investment in building knowledge that opened up students' worldviews. While research shows that in practice accountability measures take up the most space in the classroom, my research indicates that participants' efforts to both take up space and shape the space in their classrooms can be transformative. Can teaching

from a stance of power-in-difference, of internal strength and resistance, shift the center of a particular classroom? I plan to explore the liberatory potential rooted in teachers harnessing their embodied power through future research.

To explore this further, I am drawn to critically queer theoretical frameworks that confront and disrupt binaries. One example of this is Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* asks whether there are circumstances in which failing to meet current standards and benchmarks is more positive, more meaningful, more successful than 'success.' In this way, he offers the potential to redefine what matters within the context of education (2011). There is something deeply attractive about the idea of desiring failure as a teacher, especially when 'success' is defined by the MCAS or other formulaic and oppressive standards. Failure, then, would be teaching that is personal, political, creative, visible, fluid, contextualized, embodied. No longer expected to be disciplined and silent, the way our bodies speak could be a necessary site of knowledge and understanding. Halberstam encourages his readers to revalue their own desires, become 'less' disciplined in their own pedagogy, and to get lost many times over. His argument is that rethinking or revaluing in these ways opens up possibilities (Halberstam, 2011). Centering and revaluing the body in education is a failure in a neoliberalist educational climate, and failing in this way is rich with possibility. I hope to pursue this line of inquiry directly in future research.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers' bodies matter. I knew that when I began this research and I know it now. What I didn't know when I started this project was how to talk about teachers'

bodies and difference in the context of the classroom. Much of this project is about the work of naming and the work of figuring out how to have a conversation we haven't had before. Accessing language means material realities of teachers' bodies are made visible, labor is acknowledged, pathways to power-in-difference are illuminated, and hidden curricula are revealed. There is deep and significant learning rooted in the body, and the majority of that learning is situated in educational contexts. It matters that this is acknowledged. This research is not just about teachers whose bodies are different, it is about all of us who are engaged in the process of teaching and learning because all of our bodies have an impact on the work we do every day. Being a teacher is not about making the body invisible, it's about making the body intentional. If we want to transform education, we need to look to bodies for answers.



## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date

Dear Participant,

My name is Ryan Ambuter, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Teacher Education and School Improvement program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I also have an M.Ed in Social Justice Education and 9 years of experience teaching high school English. My research focused on teacher identity, visible otherness, and body politics in the classroom. As an educator who has a nonnormative gender and size, I have always been very aware of my body in the classroom. As a teacher who deeply values social justice, I have also always understood the classroom as political and teaching as a form of activism. I am curious how teachers whose bodies are visibly other understand and make meaning of their embodiment within the context of the classroom and specifically within their pedagogy. I am curious about what it means to others to teach from a place of power-in-difference and from an anti-assimilationist political stance. If you may be someone who relates to my research, I would love to speak with you and I hope you will consider participating in this study.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in three, 60-90 minute audio-recorded interviews. In the first interview, I will be asking you about your life history in the context of the topic of visible otherness and body politics. Specifically I want to know how you understand your body in the world, and how this has changed over time. In the second interview, I will be asking you about your day-to-day lived experiences in the classroom and understand what informs your classroom practices. In your final interview, I will be asking you to reflect on our conversations to make meaning of your body and politics in the context of education. I will be asking you to share your thoughts on the topics that came up throughout the interview.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete and email the attached brief demographic questionnaire, which will serve as a guide in the selection of participants for the sample in this study. If I do not hear from you in the next few weeks, please expect me to contact you again about your interest in this research. If you have any questions or comments regarding this study please feel free to contact me. My phone number is 603-568-7167. I can also be contacted via email at [rambuter@umass.edu](mailto:rambuter@umass.edu)  
Thank you for your time with this important research!

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE MEDIA POSTING FOR RESEARCH RECRUITMENT

Are you a Massachusetts public school secondary education teacher?

Do you identify as visibly different?

Do you think about the role your body plays in your pedagogy and practice?

I am conducting doctoral research on how teachers whose bodies are visibly other understand and make meaning of their embodiment within the context of the classroom and specifically within their pedagogy. I am curious about what it means to teach from a place of power-in-difference and from an anti-assimilationist political stance.

This research consists of three in-person interviews in the location of your choice. \$50 in compensation (gift card or custom pottery) will be provided at the end of the three interviews. If you are someone who relates to my research, I would love to hear from you and I hope you will consider participating in this study!

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the attached brief demographic questionnaire, which will serve as a guide in the selection of participants for the sample in this study. If I do not hear from you in the next few weeks, please expect me to contact you again about your interest in this research. If you have any questions or comments regarding this study please feel free to contact me via email at [rambuter@umass.edu](mailto:rambuter@umass.edu).

Thank you for your time with this important research!

## APPENDIX C

### SAMPLE ORAL SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH RECRUITMENT

Hello,

My name is Ryan Ambuter, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Teacher Education and School Improvement program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am conducting research on how teachers whose bodies are visibly other understand and make meaning of their embodiment within the context of the classroom and specifically within their pedagogy. I am curious about what it means to teach from a place of power-in-difference and from an anti-assimilationist political stance. Would you be interested in hearing more?

My research focused on teacher identity, visible otherness, and body politics in the classroom. As an educator who has a nonnormative gender and size, I have always been very aware of bodies in the classroom. As a teacher who deeply values social justice, I have also always understood the classroom as political and teaching as a form of activism. If you may be someone who relates to my research, hope you will consider participating in this study.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in three, 90 minute audio-taped interviews. In the first interview, I will be asking you about your life history in the context of the topic of visible otherness and body politics. Specifically I want to know how you understand your body in the world, and how this has changed over time. In the second interview, I will be asking you about your day-to-day lived experiences in the classroom and understand what informs your classroom practices. In your final interview, I will be asking you to reflect on our conversations to make meaning of your body and politics in the context of education. I will be asking you to share your thoughts on the topics that came up throughout the interview. Participants will be compensated with either custom pottery or a \$50 Amazon gift card, which you will receive after all three interviews have been completed.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please share your email with me and I will send you a brief demographic questionnaire, which will serve as a guide in the selection of participants for the sample in this study. If I do not hear from you in the next few weeks, please expect me to contact you again about your interest in this research. If you have any questions or comments regarding this study please feel free to contact me. My phone number is 603-568-7167. I can also be contacted via email at [rambuter@umass.edu](mailto:rambuter@umass.edu) Thank you for your time with this important research!

## APPENDIX D

### PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you again for your interest in my research study. To provide a little background, it would be helpful if you complete the brief questionnaire below and email it back to [rambuter@umass.edu](mailto:rambuter@umass.edu).

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Current school:

Current position:

Years of teaching experience:

Please answer the following questions in 1-2 sentences:

In what ways do you consider yourself visibly other?

How is your visible otherness a source of power in your life?

How often do you think about your body in the context of teaching?

How would you describe your politics and pedagogy in the classroom?

## APPENDIX E

### INFORMED CONSENT

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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**Researcher(s):** Ryan Ambuter, student researcher; Dr. Kysa Nygreen, faculty sponsor  
**Study Title:** *"In Our Very Flesh, (R)evoluton": An Exploration of Secondary Education Teachers, Otherness, and Embodiment*

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#### 1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. I encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

#### 2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

Subjects must be at least 18 years old to participate. Subjects must be current or recent K-12 teachers in public school settings. Subjects must self-identify as visibly others, which can be based on race, gender, sexuality, size, disability, or other unique characteristics. Subjects must also have a stance of power-in-difference.

#### 3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and pedagogical significance of teachers' bodies in K-12 classrooms. I am interested in what it means to be visibly other as a teacher, and what that does. This is a phenomenological study, and the goal is to develop insight into the experiences that visibly other teachers have had in the classroom, and the meaning that those teachers make of their experiences.

#### 4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research will take place at a time and location of your choosing. The place needs to be quiet enough to audio record, but otherwise the researcher will come to you. Each session is up to 90 minutes long and there are three sessions in total. The first two sessions can be done at the same time if the participant prefers. The participant will not be contacted in the future to expand on their interviews.

#### 5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to have three, 90 minute conversations. The first conversation focuses on life history before you began teaching. It focuses on your awareness of your own embodiment and how your body politics developed over time. The second

conversation focuses on the concrete, present details of your lived experiences in the classroom. The third conversation focuses on the meaning you make of the first two conversations. You may skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

#### **6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, I hope that your participation in the study may stimulate your own thinking about your teacher identity or provide a space to discuss experiences that are not often part of the discourse of teaching and learning.

#### **7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study.

#### **8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?**

You may choose for your name and non-essential identifying information to be changed to maintain confidentiality. Because of the small number of participants and personal nature of the study, there is a possibility that full confidentiality cannot be maintained. You also have the right to be identified by name in this study and recognized for your contributions if you so choose.

- I would like my name to be used in this research.
- I would like my name and non-essential identifying information to be changed in this research.

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records: The researcher will keep all study records, including any codes to your data, in a locked file cabinet in their home. Research records will be labeled with a code. A master key that links names and codes will be maintained in a separate and secure location. The master key and audiotapes will be deleted 3 years after data analysis is complete. All electronic transcriptions and files containing identifiable information will be password protected. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. Only the researcher will have access to the passwords. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher may publish their findings. Information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations unless you prefer to be identified by name.

#### **10. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Ryan Ambuter, at 603 568 7167. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) at (413) 545-3428 or [humansubjects@ora.umass.edu](mailto:humansubjects@ora.umass.edu).

#### **11. CAN I STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in the study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate.

**12.WHAT IF I AM INJURED?**

The University of Massachusetts does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research, but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

**13. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

When signing this form I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person  
Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

## APPENDIX F

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### 3-Interview Series

##### 1) Life History

- Put experience in context in light of topic → body politics and nonnormative embodiment
  - How did you become aware of your physical body? In what ways?
    - What experiences have been central to your understanding of your physical self?
    - Please share personal definitions of any identity or descriptive terms that most connect to your embodiment.
  - In what ways do you consider your embodiment nonnormative?
    - When/how have you been aware of others' awareness of your own nonnormative body.
  - What are your body politics? How did you develop those politics and how did they evolve?
    - What are your feelings and attitudes towards your embodiment? How did you develop these attitudes?
  - How would you describe your teacher pedagogy as it pertains to professionalism and identity?

##### 2) Concrete, present details of lived experience in the classroom

- Could you tell me as much as possible about the details of your experience as a teacher on a daily basis?
- What is it like for you to be in your body in the classroom?
  - What are you aware of about your physical body in the classroom?
  - In what ways do you think people perceive you as nonnormative in the classroom?
- How do you express your body politics as a teacher?
  - Is there anything you do or don't do, intentionally, to show your politics? What do you think is the impact?



### 3) Reflection on Meaning

- What does it mean to you to have the body politics and physical embodiment you have as a teacher?
- Given what you have said about your non-normativity and body politics in your life, and given what you have said about your body and politics in the classroom now, how do you understand this topic in your practice?
  - What sense does it make to you?
  - What is the impact of your body politics? On you, students, colleagues
- Interpret/Analyze present experience and context
  - What is the impact of your body politics and physical non-normativity? To you, to students, to colleagues, to the school.
  - How does this impact your relationship with students?
- What is your experience of power in the classroom? (students, admin, faculty).
  - Do you think this relates to your body? If so, how?

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