The Bodies We Write In:

Reentry Women Narrate Embodied Experiences of Writing in Graduate Education

Jennifer Adele De Cerff

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Abstract

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This inquiry project explores connections between mind and body in academic writing. What scholars, educators and researchers have noted about the inclusion of the body in academic study illuminates the challenges of understanding the relationship between the two. Using a framework shaped by embodiment and feminist criticality illuminates how the body is elided through schooling and educational systems, reaching a peak in higher education. An interdisciplinary review of the literature supports a broad consideration of embodiment and typical writing practices in academic settings. To better understand the body as a source of knowledge, data construction is holistic, using an embodied methodology with women who reenter graduate school later in life. Mindful awareness of the body guides the relating of writing experiences, and methods are designed with an ethic of care for participants, a spirit of co-creation, and shared experience. A narrative approach to data is used to explore where and how embodiment appears in women's stories about academic writing. The research process reflects a time of social separation within a pandemic. By better understanding women's embodied experiences, this project seeks to enrich and enliven the way institutions of graduate study

understand writing as an embodied practice and to honor what the body knows alongside the mind.

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to my daughters, Sara and Ruth,

who are doing the work of becoming strong, passionate, liberated women,

and to your daughters, and their daughters.

I wrote these words with you in my heart.

May you each bear the fruit of freedom, joy, and creativity as you make your way in the world.

I love you more than words can say.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

I wake up and a familiar throb sits in my forehead on the right side. I say 'sits' because it has taken up residence in my best comfortable chair, has wrapped itself in self-pity and satisfaction, and refused to move. It (because I resist giving it too much attention) attends me like that unwelcome neighbor with chronic problems who never calls before visits and is utterly indifferent to overstaying. I have a final paper due Friday, so I eventually submit to coffee and a pain pill, willing to just leave me for a day so I can write. But never one to disappoint, it ensconces itself as a slow hiss in the background, until a clamor of symptoms: neck pain, eye strain and nausea, eventually banish me to my bed or for a walk.

In 2016, I reentered graduate study after a 27-year hiatus, returning to get better qualified as a teacher and adult educator. In 1989, I started a master's degree right out of college only to take a gap year in South Africa. One year of youth work turned into two, and the prospect of living and breathing the reality of a country birthing its first democratic government kept me there for the next two and a half decades. My pastoral work with university students, as I saw it then, was to be in supportive relationships with young people entering college and the workforce.

I married, gave birth to two daughters, and spent time working as a pastoral intern, mentor, workshop facilitator, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher in various non-profit organizations. Five years after arriving in Cape Town, I put the idea of finishing my MA in teaching English into a drawer and moved to the city of Durban where I lived for the next two decades. In 2012, I reinvented my desire to teach by training as a facilitator of adult learning, and ultimately returned to the classroom by getting certified to teach English to recent immigrants from neighboring African countries.

During my time away from the United States, it felt like I had lived a whole other life. When I came back to live in Virginia in 2015 and submitted an application to Teachers College, readmission to graduate school truly came as a surprise to me. I was a student again.

I came to New York and immersed myself in a Masters in the Teaching of English. My mind was energized and stimulated by my coursework, and yet I noticed my body was signaling deep discomforts alongside my mixed emotions about whether I belonged here and could perform well. I was happy to be back in an academic environment, but afraid I lagged far behind and lacked the natural intellectual demeanor of my fellow students fresh out of undergraduate study. I worked hard on my academic writing, but the thought of assessment plagued me, and I imagined I was constantly submitting inferior work. I was anxious about keeping up with my cohort, most of whom were in their twenties and digitally literate. I felt stymied in my thinking and writing. Stress about the conventions and language of academic writing prompted either a frantic writing response or a dreadful agonizing over paragraphs, as I sought a way to put my thoughts into words. Not content to stay in my psyche; these mental struggles worked their way into my marrow, my muscles, and my moods.

During that year, daily headaches and I became reluctant bedfellows, making tacit agreements to spell each other in relays of hyper-focused study and rest as I constantly pushed myself to do the work of writing. We were joined by sciatica, neck and back pain, an increased protest to my dismissal and disregard of my body. It wanted to talk to me, but I willfully ignored it. I became bone-tired yet could not rest. Grumpy and driven, I holed up at my desk, determined to prove myself a good writer and student. Throughout my master's degree, relief from these discomforts came in bouts when I got good grades from a professor or took a trip over winter

break. For a few weeks, my body temporarily forgot how much punishment it had been taking all semester.

I wanted to earn a terminal degree, so I went on to enter a Ph.D. program in English Education. In my second year of coursework, I had a crucial realization: doctoral study was so demanding that, alongside the stresses in my personal life, I knew I would not make it if my body failed. Not only that, but I suspected my body might have crucial information for me, perhaps even about my studies.

So I began to pay attention to my need for sleep, exercise, healthy food and nurturing. When familiar parts of my body complained, I learned to recognize that I needed to pause, listen, and acknowledge the ever-present internal and external stress to achieve in my work. Headaches, for example, were a message that I took too much on myself and needed to reach out for support from faculty and peers. And with the help of mentors, I began to integrate my writing with mindful art practices to create connections between myself, my ideas, and the work of graduate school.

1.1 The Birth of the Project

These experiences culminated in a multi-modal writing project about the trajectory of my doctoral experience. To synthesize my journey, I used a practice combining reading, meditation, video, painting, and music and presented it publicly. Crossing this threshold reconnected me to a sense of passion for my subject and joy that had been sorely forgotten in my academic work. I discovered that the more I listened to my body, the more it helped me learn, work, and engage as a writer. I had to make sense of the way I had disengaged from my own body in the process of becoming more of an academic. Somehow, I had gotten the idea that my mind was so much more important than my body.

This research project is an exploration of how women build knowledge through the bodies we write in. In my first chapter, I use my own experience to describe the impact of struggling with, rejecting, and ignoring my body while striving to become a more educated and academic writer and teacher. By looking at what other scholars have noted about this problem and how they would restore the value of bodies to academic study, the challenges of doing so become evident. As a result, I have come to believe that although there is ongoing conversation to dignify embodied knowledge in our education system, greater attention to and research about embodied knowledge is needed.

To enter this ongoing conversation, my project considered the experience of women who reenter graduate school later in life especially pertinent to the question of embodied knowledge. Because I wondered if other emerging scholars had found ways to connect with their bodies, I invited older women students to share their stories about the bodily experience of academic writing. I designed this inquiry with the idea that women could learn more about the mindbody connection in writing if we paid attention to the bodies we write in. Our work together would add personal knowledge to what we currently understand about this connection. As a result, I co-created a supportive and ongoing conversation with my participants through interviews, focus groups and shared writing. By employing a framework shaped by embodiment theory and feminist criticality, we looked more closely at the stories that emerged about our experiences of writing in graduate school.

Four of the women in my study are teachers, one is an occupational therapist, and another is a church leader. All have been graduate students. As these six women entered graduate school, each woman faced disconcerting challenges as to how she perceived herself as a student and how she was perceived by others. As we studied at the graduate level, various papers or forms of

academic writing were required of us as the dominant way to express learning and knowledge in our disciplines. Throughout her studies, each woman found ways to nurture her growth as a writer, successfully expressing her ideas within academic forms. As each woman in my study described her particular embodied experience of academic writing, she was also able to clearly articulate the engagement of her body in her writing processes.

In the course of our conversations, three women's narratives emerged as complex renderings around experiences of embodied identity, visibility, and marginality within their programs. (Their names in this paper are their chosen pseudonyms.)

Winnie draws on a history of marginalization and an educational culture of critical thought, employing academic writing to persuade fellow students and professors of her perspectives. She uses personal writing to inform her writing of reports and as a humanizing approach to treatment plans.

Jacqueline's keen interest in neurodivergent behavior leads her to research and theorize a larger range of so-called autistic traits as present in all human beings. She relates her academic writing processes as highly curious, focused, and connected to physical movement. She also seeks various aesthetic spaces for inspiration to write.

Jennifer's history as a writer and teacher helps her actively resist and wrestle with forms of academic writing, and she describes her embodied experience as a somatic and visceral one. Her narrative describes a relationship with text and her own voice that looks for authentic expression.

Three more women participated in the study, Natasha, Katja, and Colette. Their narratives provided compelling experiences of academic writing as well, but only Natasha had a complete data set. I decided not include her narrative due to the similarity of her work history

and writing experiences to Winnie. In addition, I felt the writing samples were important material data and I chose to work with the data sets that included academic writing samples. I mention their participation because I value the time and effort each was able to give to the project. Natasha's, Katja's, and Collette's accounts bear further exploration and attention, given the future opportunity to do so. In the writing of the data, I chose three different accounts to represent diverse experiences and disciplines.

Table 1.1 Demographic Information About Study Participants

Name	Age	Graduate Institution in U.S.	Previous Education	Gap Before Reentry	Graduate Level of Study and Field	Research Activities Joined	Writing Sample Shared
Collette	50	Theological College, Upstate NY	B.A. Humanities	10+ years	M.A. Transformational Leadership	Survey 1 Individual Interview 1 Group Gathering	None
Jacqueline	67	Graduate School of Education, Northeast	A.A., Music B.S. Human Development	20+ years	M.A. Psychology	Survey 3 Individual Interviews 3 Group Gatherings	Portion of M.A. Thesis
Jennifer	63	Graduate School of Education, Northeast	B.A., Ed.M. Education	20+ years	Ph.D. English Education	Survey 3 Individual Interviews 2 Group Gatherings	Blog post and article
Katja	65	Graduate School of Education, Northeast	B.A., Art	20+ years	M.A. Arts Education	Survey 3 Individual Interviews 2 Group Gatherings	None
Natasha	40	State University, OK	B.S., Business Management	15+ years	M.A. Education Ph.D. English Education	Survey 3 Individual Interviews	None

						2 Group Gatherings	
Winnie	47	Southern Liberal Arts University, TN	B.S. Occupational therapy	20+ years	M.S. Social Work	Survey 3 Individual Interviews 2 Group Gatherings	Class essay and short writing

The flow of Chapter 1 discusses a persistent and pervasive problem; how awareness of the body is elided throughout schooling through educational systems, reaching a peak in higher education. To demonstrate this loss of connection with the body, I present statistics about the prevalence of women students currently reentering graduate school and what we know about how they fare as they seek a graduate degree. I define older students as a particular type of nontraditional student who are quite distinct from younger students in terms of how they engage with academia. I then explain more fully how I come to this work and pose the questions this study explores. I also begin to outline the theoretical frame I used to make sense of the women's stories and my own. I conclude with a look forward to the remaining chapters of the study and how this research informs academic writing practices.

1.1.1 Academic Writing: A Disembodied Place

Ideas about academic writing come from somewhere, and assumptions about academic writing are, to a large extent, initially informed by schooling experiences. Academic writing, in the broadest sense, can be defined as the writing students do for school as a primary way to demonstrate knowledge. Here I would say that school includes K-12 through to higher education. To show what they know, students engage in learning how to express their ideas, using grammatical conventions and choosing genres that best exemplify cognitive knowledge.

What teachers say about writing, what is required and how writing is graded are all ways students learn what good academic writing "should" be. As Prior (2006) defined it, writing is understood as a sociocultural activity, "situated in concrete interactions that are simultaneously improvised locally and mediated by prefabricated, historically provided tools and practices (p. 55)." In other words, learning to write is experienced and learned with others in a social context governed by a culture of accepted ideas, methods and tools that have been used in the past (Elton, 2010). In this sense, writing is also very much a tacit learning process. It is also a deeply colonizing one, rooted in dominant ideas about correct English language usage (Cushing, 2020), social constructions of error (Anson, 2000), and the positioning of this hegemonic conception of English language and literature as culturally superior (Brass, 2012). Therefore, teacher instruction and interaction with others within the social culture where students learn to write fundamentally shape how to "do" writing (Gee, 2000).

The traditional schooling context privileges the cognitive and rational, so the experience of learning to write reifies the idea of mind and body as separate entities. To this point, anthropologist Joseph Tobin (2004), argued that undue centering of the mind and language in school suppresses a felt sense of the body resulting in a disembodied experience of education. This is progressive: as students become more educated, cognitively biased educational experiences increase, ultimately leading to a negating of the body to work cognitively. This common experience deeply privileges mind over body.

In a telling study, Woodcock's (2010) research noted the impact of this disembodied experience. When the sense of a mindbody split was internalized for example, by older adolescent girls, it reduced their sense of agency and creativity in problem solving and producing literacy artifacts, preventing them from utilizing the intelligence of their body. Woodcock

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introduced writing practices that enabled students to incorporate an awareness of their body. Thus, she argued that "deliberate, conscious and creative writing" that connected body and mind was a remedy that reestablishes this lost connection (2010, p. 59). I discuss this disconnection of the body and mind in further detail in the review of literature to demonstrate how and why the erasure of bodies in typical American education is a progressive and taken-for-granted process.

1.1.2 Disappearing Bodies

Disembodiment, or the mental disconnection from a sense of the body during learning, begins as early as preschool (Tobin, 2004). Tobin pointed out in six dimensions how collective thinking around rationality, control and risk avoidance in both society and education produced disembodied discourses for both students and teachers. For instance, in the way schooling is organized, disembodiment becomes an intentional classroom practice through the need for social order. In everyday practice, this disembodiment looks like a policing, disciplining, and surveilling of bodies (Foucault, 1979) in the school system. As Foucault noted about the penal system, schools are also ideal contexts in which student bodies are governed by these discourses. As a result of this conditioning, he argued that students adopt the values of the system they find themselves in and eventually learn to surveil their own bodies.

Educational practices of watching students and managing their bodies results in students feeling controlled and that their agency is tightly governed. How learners sit in a chair, how they hold their pens, how they form letters, and what they write are all activities regulated by how school is organized. Ultimately, learning to write becomes a social practice that students actively participate in, establishing their own disconnection from their bodies and participating in the production of disembodied knowledge (Woodcock, 2010). As a result, as students commence

their education, they start to lose out on a vital first relationship: that between themselves and their bodies.

As a first step in understanding the problem of disembodiment in education and how it occurs, a look at the ways schooling systemically disconnects students from their physical selves is helpful. For example, when students enter college, they are expected to already possess academic writing skills to support their tertiary education. This expectation puts undue pressure on secondary teachers, teacher education and preparation, and particularly the public school system, to produce students who are well-versed in academic reading and writing skills. This normally includes reading and writing academic texts using prescriptive academic conventions (Hillocks, 2002). As a result, in practice, the closer learners move towards higher education, writing for school becomes increasingly about cognition and language, eventually requiring students to learn the language of the academy (Bartholomae, 2005).

If the process of learning to write reflects a trajectory of increasing focus on the cognitive, then it can be said that disembodiment reaches its peak in graduate education. As feminist educators in composition studies have been quick to note, the disembodied writing privileged by the academy and the ideas that produce it are abundant (Benstock, 1988; Fleckenstein, 1999; Knoblauch, 2012).

Not only that, but social and cultural dynamics in school systems support disembodiment, which students then internalize. For instance, holding onto a culture of standardized achievement and testing facilitates the entrenchment of a cognitive approach to academic writing (Hillocks, 2002). In other words, successful writing in school is measured and determined by what is valued: measurable standards of achievement through state-wide tests and entrance exams for colleges and universities. What these tests do not measure are many, including the implicit and

tacit elements of writing academically. If intuition and bodily perception were quantifiable, perhaps the body would be as valued as cognition in the performance of writing.

The impact on students is pernicious. Along the lines of Vygotsky (1980), Prior (2006) noted how as a sociocultural activity, institutional writing practices, and testing norms build up historically in the individual, eventually becoming natural. These norms are internalized and may not be noticeable, until a pause is taken to notice how "in the head" writing has become.

As a result, mindful, embodied practices such as slowing down and taking notice of the body may feel unnatural and need practice, but they can be learned. Sadly, disembodied writing practices and the harms they cause have not been viewed as detrimental enough to warrant major changes in the way academic writing is currently taught. But as my own academic journey attests, bodies resist being ignored. In this research, I looked to better understand how graduate writers experience mind and body working together, or, perhaps even at cross-purposes.

Interdisciplinary theorists, practitioners and researchers continue to try to understand this connection. For instance, studies of the brain in early education (Van Der Kolk, 2015) and trauma-informed teaching (Wilson et al., 2013) demonstrated how embodied teaching practices support cognitive understandings by grounding them in bodily experiences. Holistic pedagogies inform how writing can be taught, shedding light on how learning practices grounded in the body bring important nuances to writing as a social practice (Batchelor, 2019; Butler, 2017; Dixon & Senior, 2011; Wilson et al., 2013; Woodcock, 2010). As I discovered with my own academic writing, these studies demonstrate not only how important it is to recover the bodies we write in, but to offer students the means to do so.

The above exploration of the mindbody connection leads me to briefly introduce how a conceptual framework of embodiment theory informed by critical feminisms is most helpful in

addressing the problem in educational systems of disembodiment. This framework bolsters an interdisciplinary understanding of bodies as integral to learning and more pertinent to my study, the writing experience. To confront the problem outlined above, I look to embodiment and critical feminisms to shed light on the ways that, despite progress, demonstrating knowledge still often fails to reflect embodied ways of knowing and working in the academy. In the next section, as a preview to what the reader can expect in Chapter 2, I continue with a short review of the literature that informs my inquiry project.

1.2 A Conceptual Framework of Embodiment and Feminist Criticality

To highlight and to address the problem of disconnection from the body in educational settings, and in academic pursuits such as obtaining a graduate degree, a conceptual framework of embodiment and critical feminisms enhance one another.

Throughout my project, I have been inspired by the way embodiment theory dispels ideas of dispassionate, cognitive knowing. Instead, embodiment draws attention to knowledge construction as multifaceted and rooted in the tangible, bodily, human experience. A study about bodily experiences, however, could not be undertaken without a consideration of how gender and other identities such as race, ethnicity, and age serve to shape perceptions of embodied experience for the women in my study. Critical feminisms provide a sharper lens with which to identify issues of marginality, exclusion and discrimination, and the empowered actions of resistance, agency, and ongoing constructions of self by Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer. Accordingly, it is possible to see the passion of response and how unique perceptions inform how each woman positions herself in graduate school.

1.2.1 Embodiment, Perception, and the Body

Embodiment, the idea that everything human beings do is informed by and enacted through a material, sensate, and thinking body is grounded in a phenomenological theory of perception. In *Phenomenology and Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) expanded on Husserl's (1929) ideas of knowledge and perception, describing the sensations and intuitions of the body as the primary way humans know themselves and the world around them.

In a time of scientific or so-called objective knowledge building, thinkers like Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi (1966) theorized implicit or tacit knowledge as equally as valid as cognition. Unlike Cartesian ideas of cognition and sensation as separable entities, phenomenological approaches hew closer to human experience, in which thinking and experiencing inform each other. Polanyi (1958) further problematized the elevation of objective, detached observational knowledge by arguing that knowledge was, at its very center, personal to the person knowing something. Thus, as a basis for knowledge and meaning-making, embodiment encompasses the entirety of experience in and through the body. Knowing then, comes from consciousness and consists of our awareness of our own mental states, our bodies, our environment, and our physical and social interactions (Gibbs, 2011).

However, the idea of scientific knowledge has shaped the way many disciplines have esteemed cognitive knowledge. Classic cognitive science, for instance, has long neglected embodiment and elevated the mind above the experience and knowledge of bodies. Thinkers like Plato, for instance, viewed the body as a distraction from intellectual life, and this tradition produced a hierarchical relationship of mind over body that was later reflected in the philosophical works of Descartes and Kant (Gibbs, 2005). As a result of their influence, when it came to explaining and theorizing cognition, for example, logic superseded intuition as a more

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valid way to know. Enlightenment thinking has long persisted in the sciences and humanities proposing that objective knowledge, or knowledge separated from emotions, sensations or personal bias is not only possible but ideal. Placing cognitive knowledge in a privileged position has produced ideas of a hierarchy of knowledge that has, in turn, shaped education. As Hillocks (2002) has noted, standardized testing is one way education has valued cognitive knowledge over embodied, tacit knowledge.

Today, owing in part to studies in psychology and neuroscience, the perceived separation between mind and body is just that: perceived. Discussions of embodiment and situatedness in cognitive science have become more common (Clark, 1999). Recent empirical studies illuminate vital connections between the human aspects of brain (Taylor, 2017), mind (Payne, Levine, & Crane-Godreau, 2015), and body (Van Der Kolk, 2015), strengthening understandings of cognition as embodied. As Lakoff, Johnson, and Sowa argued, "The mind is inherently embodied, reason is shaped by the body, and since most thought is unconscious, the mind cannot simply be known by self-reflection" (1999, p. 5). This relatively recent move in cognitive science has caused a shift towards the body and has become more prominent through the research tradition of embodied cognition.

1.2.2 Embodied Cognition

Although many disciplines take up the idea of embodied cognition using various models, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) are known for first theorizing that structures of meaning are not only embodied in cognition and language, but in metaphor. Lakoff (1987) went further, developing a body-based framework for cognition. Ultimately the conception that "the core of our conceptual systems is directly grounded in perception, body movement, and experience of a physical and social character" became the basis for the more all-embracing term of embodied cognition (1987,

p. xiv). Today, wider acceptance of the body's presence and interaction with cognition reveals the shared commitments that now guide theories of embodied cognition. These include but are not limited to ideas that cognition is situated, that the environment informs human cognition, and that bodies provides important input to cognitive processes via sensorimotor information.

Though embodied cognition is criticized for a lack of a unifying theory or one defining model, as a research tradition, it remains a diverse and growing body of knowledge, subject to developing over time (Laudan, 1977). What the research tradition of embodied cognition has done is shift the ranking of cognitive knowledge from the center to explore how the mind and body engage in perception and meaning-making (Lakoff et al., 1999).

1.2.3 Sharpening the Framework: Feminist Criticality

Critical theory in educational research draws on the social sciences to shed light on structures of power and oppression (Fay, 1987). Criticality has been essential in educational studies investigating how systems function to keep structures and practices that privilege certain kinds of knowledge in place (Freire, 1970).

Supported by critical theory, feminist criticality in its broadest sense, takes up the problem of social gender inequity in research, focusing attention on "an analysis of women's subjugation for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (Gordon, 1979, p. 107). Thus, in the quote that begins this section, Ward and Bensimon (2002) note explicitly that it is men's, not women's, experiences that have shaped the social and cultural aspects of the academy. Most relevant to my study, I take up feminist criticality to problematize academic settings and the practices that accompany knowledge production as both gendered and disembodied.

Research methodologist Patti Lather explains that in the work of critical feminism, critical theory aligns with feminism to correct "both invisibility and distortion of female

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experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (1991, p. 71). Academic

writing, especially at the graduate level, is steeped in gendered traditions of working in the

cognitive that require both men and women to comply with socially prescribed academic forms.

However, the world is not the same for women and non-binary persons as it is for men.

Considering that men have initially shaped the academy, measuring women's experience against

men's (as the norm) is problematic because of issues of power and is not to be normalized

(Yoder & Kahn, 1992).

As research has shifted away from comparisons of women against typically white,

heterosexual, and middle-class men, comparisons between women have shifted away from

normalizing any one woman's experiences. Haraway (1988) argued that knowledge is situated in

particular bodies, providing only a partial perspective. Following her argument, it is faulty to

assume that there is one type of woman against which other women's experience could be

measured. Thus, a major goal of women's studies, for instance, has been to inspire women-

centered scholarship that focuses on the lives, experiences, and contributions of women who are

diverse in relation to age, race, ability, ethnicity, and class (Shapiro, 1998/2005). Therefore, by

privileging the experiences and stories of women, my research leans into women's ways of

knowing and working (Belenky et al., 1986).

Moreover, I draw on feminism and criticality as theoretical approaches to explore how

gender intersects with women's other identities, such as race, ethnicity, and age, and intensifies

their experiences within oppressive structures (Crenshaw, 1991). As Bloom (1998) cautioned, an

overemphasis on gender has excluded how women are not just one thing, but embody many

identities, echoing a crucial critique of feminists of color,

> Using gender as the primary analytic category of feminist research may diminish
> the ways that race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on are

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equally constitutive of some women's understandings of themselves as subjects and of their experiences of marginalization, unequal treatment, domination, or oppression. (p. 140)

Bloom acknowledged, as do I, that not all experiences of discrimination for women are experienced primarily through gender, and while sexism is an important frame of analysis, it is not the only most useful category for all women. Bloom concluded, "sexism, as one form of oppression, and gender, as one analytic category for feminist research, must be problematized, contextualized, and localized to include the variety of ways that women understand who they are, given their histories and current changing situations" (1998, p. 140). For example, Belenky et al.'s (1986) foundational study focused on women's perspectives and experience of knowing, and by doing so, elevated knowledge of women by women. But because of the single emphasis on gender, much more was left to explore regarding other identities that speak to how women's knowledge is carried, constructed, and conveyed.

Embodiment theory and feminist criticality speak to one another in that they each take up the body of lived experience as crucial to knowledge building. Both hold to and celebrate the situated nature of knowledge and the diversity of human experience. Theories of embodiment emphasize how personal knowledge, or perception inform action, and feminist criticality affirms the particular social and historical bodies in which individual women's perceptions and knowledge are manifest.

Feminist criticality aids an understanding of embodiment by pointing to where women's unique experiences are shaped by social, cultural, racial, and institutional positioning of their bodies and how women negotiate these positions. As a result, attending to the bodies of women decenters comparisons of mind with body, and embraces both as informing one another. In the same way, neither embodiment theory nor critical feminisms alone could adequately address the questions of my inquiry. Working with a framework that engages the body to address structures

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of power, systemic racism and hierarchies of knowledge further identifies where the social, cultural, and institutional normalizing of men's experience, a preoccupation with the cognitive, and positivism, appear and how they marginalize the knowledge of women.

Therefore, in an ongoing construction of self, Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer's narratives of their academic experiences were illuminated to a great degree by a framework of embodiment informed by feminist criticality, because it demonstrated how, within their bodies of knowledge, they made meaning of lived experience. By approaching my study with this conceptual frame, the relating of individual stories challenge and change taken-for-granted ideas about how knowledge is constructed and represented. Though I have only briefly outlined the interplay between the two in this chapter of my study, I will go on to describe how I use this framework in greater depth in a review of the literature in Chapter 2.

1.3 Coming to This Work

Lesser (2020) speaks of the disproportion of stories told by men in human history, and the narratives they reinforce. She joins the call for women's stories to come to the center, and warns that the future depends upon it, lest this unbalanced era continue:

> Humanity has come to the end of a long, unbalanced era, one that started thousands of years ago, one that has been both creative and destructive, but one that has run its course and is running away with our future. (p. 14)

To bring a balance of stories to human history, my study joins many others in explicitly putting forward Jacqueline's, Winnie's, and Jennifer's storied accounts of graduate school.

During my doctoral program, my questions about imbalance in my own embodied writing experiences generated several inquiries about writing and embodied pedagogy. Through one study, I explored a teacher's experience of embodied art and storytelling. In another, I invited teachers in a short pilot study to develop a vocabulary around embodied teaching to

deepen my understanding of embodied pedagogy. I researched literature about critical Black Feminist Theory (BFT) and material feminist pedagogies. In addition, I began to integrate body awareness into academic writing through journaling my experience and I created art projects alongside my academic papers. These explorations led to and culminated in this dissertation inquiry.

Beginning with my own experiences, I seek to answer personal questions about my bodily experience of writing and graduate work. Through listening to the stories of other women, and writing about their academic journeys, I intentionally privilege the perceptions and experiences of women as a way of disrupting the silence around embodied academic experiences. Ultimately, I hope my inquiry will inform how higher education can more fully support the success of older adult women as they pursue graduate degrees. The purpose of my study aims to better understand how narratives about writing bring forward the embodied experiences of mature women who negotiate a return to graduate school later in life. I hope through their stories, and my own, to make the embodied knowledge women bring into the academy more visible.

For this research project, I purposefully selected and invited six survey respondents who identified as women and had a significant gap in their education of at least ten years prior to re-entering graduate school to discuss their experiences. During the writing up of the data I focused on three women whose narratives were examples of diverse experience and emerged as complex renderings around the themes of identity, visibility, and marginality within their programs. My project poses the following research question: *When women re-enter the academy after a significant gap in their post-secondary education, what do the embodied experiences of these*

women tell us about their visibility within the institution and their agency to work against being marginalized?

Alongside this overarching question I developed these sub-questions:

1. How do these women's perceptions of themselves inform how they negotiate this transition?

2. How do these women's embodied experiences inform how they position themselves in the academy?

3. What do we learn through these women's stories about how they participate in academic writing?

1.4 Significance of the Project

It is well documented that the typical student seeking higher education has shifted dramatically over the last four decades (Benshoff, 1993). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in the 1980s, the number of women surpassed the number of men enrolling in higher education at all levels for the first time in the United States. In 2019, the enrollment of women at all levels outnumbers men by two to one. In the 1990s, available data about non-traditional, reentry students were mainly limited to quantitative survey studies of undergraduate women (Padula, 1994), and some qualitative researchers began to pay attention to the experiences of this demographic and their specific needs at the graduate level (Padula & Miller, 1999).

At that time, half (50%) of graduate students were over 30 years old (Benshoff, 1993; Aslanian, 1980). This accounts for the fact that at that time, before entering graduate study, people went into the workforce and then returned to study after gaining work experience. Research recommendations from these studies urged universities to adjust to a demographic

trend that was projected to continue: financially independent, working, part-time students who have family responsibilities would become more the norm than the exception. More and more of these students would also be women. In 2009, over half of graduate students were 25 to 34 years old (Lin & Wang, 2015; NCES, 2019). According to The Council of Graduate Schools, the average age of graduate students in the U.S. is 33 years old, and the majority of students are under 40 years old. According to Data USA, at my institution, two-thirds of my fellow graduate students are between the ages of 25 to 34 years old (2020). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2019, women were earning the majority of degrees at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels across the U.S., representing 60% of the student population. But "older adult students" still make up almost quarter of students, since 14% are between 40 and 50 years old, while 8% are older than 50.

1.4.1 The "Older Adult" Learner

The descriptor "older adult" refers to students who fall between the ages of 50 and 80 years old. As part of this group of reentry students, women have been changing the face of universities (Padula & Miller, 1999; Myles, 2017) and were more vocal about the barriers facing them (Colvin, 2013). Not surprisingly, the studies that have centered on women have tended to focus on the barriers women faced in gaining entrance to graduate school and staying enrolled (Colvin, 2013; Lin, 2016).

Within the last decade, the typical doctoral student, for instance, was no longer typically white, single, or male. Offerman (2011) argued that doctoral students were by nature nontraditional in that they were increasingly female, over 30 years old, were married, had children or parents who depend on them and had a career outside their program. These students enter graduate study for numerous reasons and study part-time alongside the responsibilities of

children, job, and family. For women, these coexisting responsibilities weighed much heavier on women than on men (Fisher-Thompson & Kuhn, 1981; Lin, 2016; Padula & Miller, 1999), and that these situational barriers disrupted and often competed with their degrees. Colvin (2013) noted that because women often give up a salary to reenter postsecondary school, financial strain was a main barrier to attending full-time and in person. On the other hand, the main reason for women not completing their degree usually related to family variables (Lin, 2016).

Besides these demographic shifts from what used to be considered the traditional doctoral student, older women students tend to fund their own studies and come from many diverse ethnic communities, bringing with them a wealth of life and career experiences. As a result, they require different mentoring and support. Offerman noted that, "the typical faculty member must act as facilitator, coach, and colleague" rather than a supervisor for the older student (2011, p. 27). This characterization of older students and their lack of homogeneity suggests that a more individualized approach should be taken in promoting their success.

1.4.2 Gender and Age

For some women who are doctoral students, a study by Gardner (2008) found that they experienced gender discrepancies during the time they were socialized into the academy. Additionally, the women and men in her study talked about these experiences of gender bias spontaneously without being asked in interviews. The women they interviewed expressed that not only were these discrepancies obvious, but they were also accepted as normal among students and often referred to the "male-dominated environment surrounding them" (2008, p. 131). Most significantly, Gardner noted that exposure to overt gender bias in the academy had subsequent repercussions. Inequitable treatment during their studies caused women to wonder how these inequities might affect their job prospects after graduation.

Even though there are more women seeking advanced degrees, I suggest that colleges and universities have been slow to adapt their highly gendered environment to a changing student demographic, and therefore have failed to shift to meet the needs of both women in the academy and a growing population of older adults. A study such as mine seeks to reconsider how women's ways of working implicitly confront gender bias in how knowledge is valued in the academy. Focusing on embodied experiences supports re-looking at the vital role bodies play in educational practices of the academy such as writing. The exploration of the lived, storied experiences of women is a crucial part of restoring more equitable understandings of how women might flourish as scholars.

New research work must be done to incentivize pedagogical and curricular changes in educational systems whose practices continue to deny the value of embodied knowledge. Cognitive approaches that elevate thinking work reify teaching practices that use criteria such as standardized English and standardized testing as dominant ways of representing learning. These practices further disembody and alienate writers from being present and experiencing joy in their learning. This experience leads to a sense of mistrust in the body, causing teachers and students to depersonalize who they are as they enter the classroom.

Moreover, teachers focus on managing classroom behavior for example, requiring students to sit still and learn (Stygall, 1994). Students in turn, learn that bringing their whole selves into the learning experience is unacceptable and even punishable (hooks, 1994). Both teachers and students become disembodied in this process. In contrast, bell hooks (1994) argued for "the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the body/mind split and allow us to be whole in the classroom" (p. 193). This practice is evidenced by educator studies where embodied teaching experiences have the effect of creating a sense of trust in the body (Macintyre, Latta, &

Buck, 2008; Shapiro, 1998). Without further research and greater understanding of bodies in academic pursuits, teachers and students remain in danger of becoming further removed from their own bodies through a problematic cycle of disembodiment in the primary goals of hegemonic education.

My project is poised within a unique time to explore an under-researched demographic of adult women's lived experience of negotiating a reentry to graduate school. As the embodied experiences of these women suggest, their histories and identities shape perceptions of themselves as scholars. How they position themselves and are positioned by others is informed by unique embodied experiences. Through studies such as this one, I advocate for greater support of older adult women scholars in completing their studies, and that institutional structures must promote a fuller, more joyful experience of graduate students as writers. My study hopes to offer a reconsideration of what might restore the mindbody connection in learning, and to cultivate this through embodied practices in everyday classrooms and the institutions they represent.

1.5 Mapping the Way Forward

The second chapter of this project is an invitation through the literature to consider bodies as central to human beings' knowledge alongside the mind. With a phenomenological approach to perception, I ground knowledge in the body. I also offer a working definition of embodiment and the use of the term mindbody to describe the mind and body in conversation. By arguing that the literature exposes a progressive disappearance of the body during the course of education through dominant, cognitive-based practices of learning such as standardized testing and academic conventions, I problematize dominantly cognitive approaches as more often than not, a gendered and disembodied way of learning. I do this by noting that cognition is privileged and consistently practiced to the exclusion of embodied approaches in schooling despite research

findings to the contrary. To address this loss of the body, I explore how embodied cognition as a research tradition supports practices that help restore bodies to teaching and learning. I then describe my approach to the data I constructed with women participants, a conceptual framework grounded in embodiment and feminist criticality. Moving on to the literature about embodiment and writing, I illustrate the struggle for embodied writing practices to take equal footing with normalized cognitive approaches in academic settings. I offer interdisciplinary examples of research studies that support a mindbody approach to teaching and learning and their findings. I conclude my review of the literature by calling attention to how including personal experience supports cognition, learning, and ultimately, the construction of agentic identities for students.

Chapter 3 follows as I describe how I built a study about embodiment using a narrative approach. I begin with points of departure: I outline inclusion criteria and how I recruited participants for my study, and discuss the context and positionality of the study, particular to carrying out research during a time of social separation during the COVID-19 pandemic. I continue with introductions to Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer and my positionality as researcher. To better understand bodies as a source of knowledge, I discuss an embodied methodology framed by critical feminisms, a narrative approach, and a constructivist stance as crucial supports for addressing my research questions. I also describe the positioning of the study.

Next, I set out an embodied design, reimagining long-standing research methods such as conducting interviews and focus groups, keeping a researcher journal, and inviting participants' responses to written data, describing how research activities were implemented. These reimagined methods are grounded in an ethic of care for participants and a spirit of co-creation, collaboration and sharing one another's storied experiences. As further context for this work, I

discuss reciprocity in the study and my positionality as a researcher. Lastly, I put forward a layered analysis of data that details how I worked with data.

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I reintroduce Jacqueline, Winnie, and Jennifer separately, and give a more fleshed out account of their narratives. In each of these chapters, I take time to explore each woman's narrative of transitioning towards graduate study and her perceptions of identity, visibility, and agency in the process. A conceptual framework of embodiment and critical feminisms provides a way to better understand each woman's perceptions of her graduate experience and how it informed how she positioned herself in the academy. Using a narrative approach to explore their stories enabled me to consider their individual meaning-making due to some similar and other, more unique experiences to them as mature women undertaking graduate study.

Chapter 7 delves into a discussion of what I learned through these stories about Jacqueline's, Winnie's, and Jennifer's embodied knowledge, their perceptions of visibility within the institution they attended, and their agency to work against being marginalized. In this last chapter, I discuss the larger themes and implications of this work, the limitations of the study, and the questions that arise for further areas of inquiry.

Chapter 2: Reviewing the Literature

The emphasis of my review of literature is to bring together theory, practice, and research in order to think about practices of embodiment in English education. As stated in the previous chapter, the purpose of my study aims to better understand how narratives about writing bring forward the embodied experiences of older women who negotiate a return to graduate school later in life. To consider the body as an integral part of the writing experience, I include literature from composition studies, as well as various other disciplines, to develop a conceptual framework that speaks to the subject of embodiment. In addition, to support the exploration of embodied experiences, I call on concepts of embodiment theory and feminist criticality as approaches to knowledge building in developing this review.

Before exploring the literature surrounding academic writing as an embodied experience, it is important to make note of the challenges of collecting and organizing such a review. To explore embodiment, my reading and inquiry goes well outside the bounds of the discipline of English education, where the teaching of writing has a practice-based understanding of the teaching of English as both a content subject area and a language. That is, although I position myself within the teaching of literature and the teaching of language, I expanded my review to include other disciplines that inform a consideration of the body.

Because of the considerable influence and research of philosophy, psychology, and sociology on English education, I include literature from these disciplines to inform the mindbody connection. For instance, even cognitive psychology has moved away from strictly cognitive models to consider how the bodily experience also shapes how people see the world. Today, the concept of embodied cognition is used to theorize a more holistic understanding of

how body and mind work together for human beings to understand their experiences. This shift in psychology, has in turn, informed both composition studies and English education.

The Cartesian construct of a mindbody split posits that mind and body can be conceptualized and experienced as separate and discrete entities. Today, owing to studies in psychology and neuroscience in particular, we understand that the separation between mind and body is just that, perceived. Not only does personal experience bear this out, but recent empirical studies illuminate vital connections between the human aspects of brain (Taylor, 2017), mind (Payne et al., 2015), and body (Van Der Kolk, 2015), strengthening understandings of embodied cognition. As Lakoff et al. argued, "The mind is inherently embodied, reason is shaped by the body, and since most thought is unconscious, the mind cannot simply be known by self-reflection" (1999, p. 5). In the twenty years since they wrote about it, it is more widely acknowledged by disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and sociology that human experience is embodied, that what we think about, what we feel, and what we do is experienced *in* and facilitated *by* the body.

Research about learning, and therefore writing, is embedded in the discovery of pedagogical approaches for students. My review focuses on the way writing has largely drawn from perspectives that privilege the cognitive, that is, on the thinking work involved in reading and writing. Less attention has been paid to student's embodied experiences, or to the way teachers, for example, might be trained to approach writing pedagogy in ways that embrace the body. Therefore, the concept of the body as knower is a fairly new consideration in the teaching of writing and, in practice, has yet to carry the same value as cognitive approaches. Going forward, I explain more about how I went about building my survey of the literature for my project.

2.1 Building a Review of Literature About Embodiment

Although I began my search in Composition Studies to review what had been studied and theorized about the embodied experience of writing, I soon broadened my search to see what had been studied elsewhere. I looked further afield and drew from holistic educational approaches to consider if and how embodiment theory, influenced the practice, and research as it was applied in the classroom. Therefore, the literature reflects a tapestry of interdisciplinary sources that speak to my project. This review is by no means complete but offers a journey of how I thought about this work, and then offers selected sources to show some of what is known about the embodied experience of older adult women as they participate in academia.

Each discipline had it its own way of describing the mindbody connection and working with it. Terms like *holistic* and *expansive education* gradually are overarching descriptors for using the body, attending to the body, and resourcing the body in teaching and learning. In particular, the fields of adult learning, holistic education, and arts-based education overtly embraced tuning in to, accessing, and expressing experiential and intuitive ways of knowing through the human body. Keyword searches using "embodiment" and "composition" soon had me looking for new terms like "embodied writing pedagogy," "embodied literacy," and "somatic writing."

These investigations brought me into the field of rhetoric and composition, with its long tradition of linguistic and cognitive approaches. I searched databases for articles, books, and studies that used the word *embody* or *embodied*. In this rigorously cognitive discipline of argumentation and theory, composing for academic purposes required both reading and writing in the unique literature(s) and language(s) of the academy. I also discovered that embodiment in writing was explored and richly theorized within composition and rhetoric (Butler, 2017;

Fleckenstein, 1999; Knoblauch, 2012; Perl, 1980; Stenberg, 2002). These feminist composition theorists conceptually reasserted the knowledge of the body in the experience of writing, emphasizing the essential mindbody connection. Knoblauch (2012), for instance, called for more attention to specific bodies and yet noted how, in making knowledge visible, practices so easily return to cognitively performing knowledge in linguistic and discursive ways.

I initiated a small pilot study with teachers to investigate what words educators use to connect with the body when they teach writing and began to develop a list of terms teachers use when they described their embodied teaching and learning pedagogy. Their words included: *holistic, paying attention, mindful, noticing student bodies, attunement, practice, pausing, somatic, sensory,* and *movement*. This growing vocabulary list then helped me describe non-verbal processes of knowing and to be more aware of them. However, *embodiment* is a very general word to mean something done in or through bodies, and therefore I continued to define the term more carefully. I had to tease out a stronger understanding of what academics and teachers meant when they talked about embodied writing.

As I was beginning to suspect, there was no systematic or agreed upon approach to the practice of embodied writing as such, something Haas and Witte (2001) noted. I discovered various practices that make space for the body, and that teachers idiosyncratically adopt them based on what fits into their pedagogy. In addition, the more recent research literature around embodied writing has prioritized the high school classroom and first year undergraduate academic writing (Chandler, 2007; Nguyen & Larson, 2015; Mayfield, 2020; Woodard et al., 2020).

Researchers and teachers in the field of literacy and learning have been actively seeking more integrated ways to teach and for students to write (Clugen, 2014; Kazan, 2001, 2005; Lea

& Street, 1998; Philipps & Larson, 2013; Weisberg & Newcombe, 2017; Woodcock, 2010).

Although educational systems keep cognitive approaches in place, now there is more recognition

that current writing strategies need to expand beyond thinking work and embrace the body.

One surprising gap that emerged in my survey of the literature was how understudied the

student experience was relative to teacher practice. To better understand the perspective of

women returning to graduate school later in life, my study explores how women describe and

interpret their embodied experience of graduate academia. In this chapter, my review of the

literature explores the framework that I use for my study and the literature that supports my

research question: *When women re-enter the academy after a significant gap in their post-*

secondary education, what do the embodied experiences of these women tell us about their

visibility within the institution and their agency to work against being marginalized?

My sub-questions are:

1. How do these women's perceptions of themselves inform how they negotiate this
   transition?

2. How do these women's embodied experiences inform how they position themselves in
   the academy?

3. What do we learn through these women's stories about how they participate in academic
   writing?

2.1.1 Structuring the Conversation

Going forward, this review of the literature begins with constructing a conceptual frame

of embodiment informed by critical feminisms as foundational to my inquiry. With a

phenomenological approach to embodiment and perception as a starting point, I establish the

importance of the body in epistemology, and I explore its roots. I discuss how for individuals,

perception and paying attention function to create interpretations, or understandings of human experience. I clarify the term embodiment from the perspective of lived experience. In doing so, the concepts of perception and the lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) are a helpful way to distinguish the more superficial idea of life experience from embodied knowledge, the knowledge that comes from being in a particular body, experiencing and making meaning of the world.

To inform an understanding of embodiment, I draw on critical feminisms to sharpen the critique around the masculinized space of academia and the experience of women's bodies (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; Lorde, 1978; hooks, 1994). By this I mean that paying attention to bodies instinctively brings up the ways in which physical distinctions such as gender, race, ability, or age shape the nature of people's experiences. Because the concern of my study is women's experiences, I demonstrate how the criticality of feminist thought serves to inform the concept of embodiment, unpacking the gendered nature of the academic experience, and revealing a bias of cognition and a suppression of embodied knowledge (Grosz, 1993). Thus, by focusing on the body, discrepancies of lived experience become more visible.

As an example of how feminist criticality informs embodiment, Black Feminist Thought (BFT), as a critical social theory, has always regarded the combined experience of race and gender as integral to understanding the lived experience of women of color in the U.S. (Collins, 2000). Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality, for instance, helps frame how women of color, their ways of writing, and constructing knowledge remain marginal in the Academy. Critical feminist thought therefore enables a discussion of how race and gender can operate simultaneously in society against women of color, and thus an activity such as academic writing can be seen as both a liberatory and oppressive practice.

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In the lineage of Lorde (1978), Darder (2009), and hooks (1994), the erotic, or women's life-force energy, fosters passion and desire in making meaning of experience through narrative, multiple modes of expression and personal writing. Opportunities for personal writing, for example, may help make important connections between embodied experiences and current learning. It is easy to imagine what a powerful practice this would be for older women who reenter graduate study with a lifetime of experience.

Alongside this tradition of feminist criticality, post-structural feminists such as Annas (1975) pointed to the body through the relationship between language and gender, acknowledging that women's multiple identities impact the way they experience participating in academia. Haraway (1988) regarded experience as situated and therefore criticality meant seeing inequity in the academy as mainly a function of gender and class, emphasizing the need for multiple perspectives. Although these are crucial aspects of understanding women's individual and corporate experiences of knowledge construction, white feminists did not and still do not typically emphasize the bodily aspect of race. In my review, I draw from both traditions to show more fully how academic literacies such as writing did not normally include women's ways of working. In sum, critical feminisms do not assume that all embodied experience is the same, and assert that women's ways of knowing face an ongoing struggle to come to the fore in academic settings.

Next in the review, I discuss how various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience have more recently turned toward the body. This turn stems from the emergence of embodied cognition, shifting the way scientific disciplines have begun to understand cognition by including the body. Thus, the research tradition of embodied cognition has become a more useful way to understand and explain the mindbody connection. This concept has begun to

supplant exclusively cognitive assumptions about the primacy of mind over body in these disciplines. The shift has been called a "corporeal turn" in Sociology (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011). Literature about the processes and practices surrounding academic writing become especially relevant in seeking to understand the complex demands placed on graduate students. So too, when students experience support from educators, their response to embodied pedagogies serve to illuminate what is helpful to their writing as they seek a higher level of education.

Following the above section of the review, I then contextualize my study with a discussion of the literature surrounding older adult learners. I examine what has been written about women who return to graduate school later in life, and what has been discovered about their needs related to participating in higher education. In this portion, I highlight how colleges and universities tend to support the needs of majority students and how the social culture around age is reinforced in academic institutions. Last, I review research studies about writing that explore practices that support embodied learning. With this structure in mind, I move to discussing the conceptual frame for my study, an explanation of the phenomenological conception of knowledge as rooted in the body and a discussion of how critical feminisms inform an inquiry about embodied experiences.

2.2 Constructing a Conceptual Framework

To describe how I constructed a framework of embodiment informed by critical feminisms for my inquiry project, I begin with a discussion of embodiment theory. To define how I use the term and to situate knowledge in the context of the body, I discuss the personal nature of embodied knowledge and how I have come to see the mind and body working together. Then, to address the political nature of bodies, I discuss how critical feminisms provide crucial understandings about how women's bodies and thus women's knowledge is positioned in

educational settings. In addition, critical feminisms allow me to problematize the masculine bent

of the academy and explore women's embodied knowledge as integral to writing, teaching, and

learning.

2.2.1 Embodiment Theory

The concept of embodiment resists rigid and resolved definition, perhaps because it is

experiential in nature. A broad definition (Gibbs, 2011) helps to show how the concept of

embodiment encompasses many factors:

> Embodiment refers to the ways in which persons' bodies and bodily interactions
> with the world shape their minds, actions, and personal, cultural identities.
> Embodied accounts of mind and language embrace the idea that human symbols
> are grounded in recurring patterns of bodily experience, and therefore reject
> traditional dualistic, disembodied views of human cognition and linguistic
> meaning. The study of embodiment demands recognition that thought and language
> arise from the continuous dynamic interactions among brains, bodies, and the
> world. (n.p.)

The word *embodiment* holds the idea of mind and body being inseparable and in continuous

relationship. Embodiment describes a holistic engagement of the body, intellect, and

environment, by which individuals come to know the human experience in particular ways.

Philosopher Edmund Husserl (1997), understood to be the founder of phenomenology, theorized

about knowledge as an embodied experience providing a foundation for conceiving of

knowledge as perception. That is, knowing something was bound up with being a body in

relationship to other bodies. He argued that perception, or how something is seen, included

intentionality and the idea of apprehending something through the senses. He also argued that

embodied experiences could be better understood not by attempts at objectivity, but by

suspending judgement about them. Thus, knowing about something had much to do with how it

was perceived through the body, and for each person, this knowledge might look different.

2.2.1.1 Embodiment and Perception.

Following Husserl, philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) theorized that the basis for all knowledge was through the perceptions of the body, and philosopher and mathematician Michael Polanyi (1966) took this up with special attention to the body's senses and intuitions. The body was likened to an instrument, a way to perceive the world by a combination of non-verbal, tacit intuitions as well as verbally spoken, enacted or written understandings. What Merleau-Ponty (1962) called implicit knowledge, scientist and philosopher Polanyi termed tacit knowledge, and both understood the body to be the principal site of knowing. Effectively quashing the mindbody split, thinkers in phenomenology regarded the body as our "primary instrument" (Polanyi, 1966; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is with our bodies, they said, that we know ourselves in the world and come to know things about the world. We probe and feel and sense with our body, and as Polanyi describes, "rarely know ourselves as other" (1966, p. 15). Knowing, through perception, happened *in* the physical, sensing, intuitive, integrated, perceiving body, and as result, was rooted in the experience of being and doing.

Other theorists also expounded on the idea of embodiment, spawning concepts that united cognition with the bodily experience. For example, John Dewey (1958) referred to it as "body-mind," using this term to "designate what simply takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication and participation" (p. 285). Like William Poteat's (1985) Polanyian concept of mindbody, these words carried with them the sense of being a mind and body simultaneously, without separation.

It is from this profoundly personal place that each of us makes sense of the world. These concepts convincingly push against positivist traditions of objective knowledge or Cartesian ideas of a mind as distinct from the body, in which scholars typically attempt to depersonalize or

distance the knower from the object or person they studied. However elusive a definition of embodied knowledge may be, personal experience tells us that knowledge is more than cognition. It is a concrete experience felt in the body, one that comes from a mindbody relationship.

2.2.1.2 Embodiment and Personal Knowledge.

The lived body that Merleau-Ponty (1962) described is necessarily situated. He argued that each person's context produced unique and legitimate vantage points, or ways of seeing. That is, each particular body is positioned to know in particular ways. Lakoff et al. (1999) proposed three levels of embodiment that together shape the embodied mind:

1. *Neural embodiment* describes structures that denote concepts and cognitive functions at the neurophysiological level. This aspect has to do with the brain and how it operates biologically.

2. The *cognitive unconscious* consists of the rapid, evolutionarily given mental operations that structure and make possible conscious experience, including the understanding and use of language.

3. The *phenomenological level,* which is conscious and accessible to consciousness and consists of our awareness of our own mental states, our bodies, our environment, and our physical and social interactions (Gibbs, 2011).

Although aspects of the first two levels are considered, for the purposes of this review, I emphasize the lived body and the individual's experiences by focusing attention on the third level of embodiment Lakoff et al. (1999) describe: the phenomenological, or lived, experience.

I also define the term *embodied* as referring to *understandings and knowledge that are understood through the experience of being a mind situated in a body. From the external*

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perspective, these bodily interactions with the world shape individual's minds, actions, and personal, cultural identities. Internally, individuals also have verbal and non-verbal expressions of intuitions, sensations, emotions, movements that respond to, or contain, or enact these understandings and knowledge. Within this definition, I adopt Poteat's (1985) understanding and use of the term mindbody to describe cognition and bodily awareness, reciprocal within one another and in an ongoing relationship. There is no intent to set the two up as binaries, but as speaking to one another with unique perceptions. Neither one can do without the other.

In the context of writing studies, I also use the term mindbody to refer to the physical experience of being in a body, and the communal working out of many types of knowledge that support the writing process. In a concert of interrelated perceptions, embodiment assumes an integrated way to know about something, that brings both spoken and unspoken knowledge together (Freiler, 2008). Thus, with the word mindbody, I conceive of embodiment as able to reflect both mind and body as integral to one another. Turning towards the next section of this review, I discuss the importance of critical feminist thought in understanding the embodied experiences of women in academic settings.

2.2.2 Critical Feminist Thought

Over the last 50 years, Black and Latina feminist educators have argued for the politics and importance of bodies in education (Darder, 2009; hooks, 1994; Lorde, 1978). By placing the body at the center of educational experience, its absence in dominant educational practices it revealed how teachers and students must deny, ignore, and set aside relationship with their bodies in order to teach and learn. An undue emphasis on cognition, in effect, sidelined intuition, passion, physical sensation, and emotions as central to the learning process. Leaning into Critical Race Theory, Lorde asserted the notion of passion, or the erotic, as a way of redressing this

imbalance. Taking up the body in teaching and learning through eros both resisted and disrupted the masculine, cognitive bent of the academy (1978). While the term erotic conjures up sexuality, this theorizing of the body in education did not sexualize bodies as something to be used, but rather as a source of energy, pleasure, and joy to fuel learning for its own sake (Lorde, 1978; Ohito, 2018). As a result, taking up the erotic simultaneously recognized the body as a daunting presence and a pathway to knowledge for both teacher and learners.

2.2.2.1 Feminist Movements and Critical Race Theory.

Foundational to Black Feminist Thought, the humanizing framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) also upholds that bodies should be recognized, celebrated, resourced, and embraced. Critical Race Theory is a way of seeing how the social construct of race has pervaded history and culture as a backdrop for the social experience of human beings. It is within this milieu that Sylvia Wynter, a critic of the Western aesthetic that idealized the European male, pointed to the hierarchies created through biological concepts like gender and race. These constructs made it not only possible to "other" human beings based on their bodies and thus their gender and race. When this happened, humans had the lived experience of "wrongness of being" (2001, p. 163). Following the thinking of philosophers Franz Fanon and W. E. B. Dubois, she argued that to counter the Western normalizing of the desirability of maleness and whiteness, a whole new way of understanding what it meant to be human in the world was needed (Wynter, 2001).

Arguments such as Wynter's gave rise to Afro-centric feminist standpoints that shared common beliefs. Previously, alluding to the new understanding of humanity that Wynter described, Hill-Collins (1989) noted the advantage women of color had in seeing race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, forming the basis of a woman's standpoint with

its corresponding feminist consciousness and epistemology. She argued that women of color could see aspects of oppression that perhaps white women did not have access to because of privilege. Therefore, to rearticulate an alternative epistemology, it was vital to have access to both Afrocentric and white feminist standpoints to understand how gender, for example, can be complicated by race (1989, p. 746).

These claims drew on foundations of Black and Latina feminist thought that centered the unique experiences of women of color, embracing common tenets around the fact of race and the struggle for liberation (Combahee River Collective, 1977). For example, the tenet of social justice praxis affirms that women of color engage in academic scholarship for the purpose of challenging hierarchies of institutional power and transforming leadership structures. In addition, "research about Black women must linked to efforts to changing conditions that subordinate them and their communities" (Richie, 2012, p. 131). Taking an activist stance, research, new knowledge, and policy changes are all for the benefit of those who it most directly impacts.

In legal studies, Kimberlé Crenshaw theorized the term intersectionality as a framework to understand the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality (1991). Intersectionality is both a tenet and a framework that has been taken up to explain how multiple identities intersect upon one another to intensify the experience of oppression and exaggerate privilege, especially through the construct of race. She demonstrated through legal cases of employee discrimination how the intersection of identities impacted Black women, creating a different lived experience for them than for white women.

As a result, the premise that oppression was intersectional brought critique to an undue emphasis on only gender and class by white feminists because it did not adequately explain how race complicated discrimination. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality pointed to simultaneous

intersections of multiple identities (racial, sexual, gender, age, class, and culture) that impacted how people interpreted experience and behavior, and this idea for example, applied to how adults experienced educational environments (Sheared, 1999). By looking through this frame, the functions of privilege and oppression become more visible. As Hill-Collins described, women of color have access to both epistemologies and thus a unique way of knowing (1989). Thus, the influence of Critical Race Theory perspectives and practices upon Black Feminist Thought cannot be understated because of how they function amplify the visibility and invisibility of women's bodies, and more particularly, directly expose and address oppression experienced by women of color.

In comparison to and alongside this tradition, white feminist scholars have used criticality to expose how the traditions around research and writing privilege cognitive, masculine values such as objectivity and rationality, thus determining what is valued as knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Knoblauch, 2012; Lawrence, 2012; Stenberg, 2002). They have also noticed how bodies are forgotten and ignored in education. As a result, schooling has been seen as a disconnected experience between body and mind, an erasure of the body in knowing (Banks, 2003) or a representation of knowing (Bordo, 1993) that increases the more highly educated students become (Knoblauch, 2012).

As a result, learning to write in academic settings overtly takes on typically masculine ways of knowing, thus normalizing these ways of thinking and working. In contrast, typically feminine ways of knowing and working celebrate and embrace the body by centering the lived, situated body and its subjectivity. The idea of *eros* for example, in teaching has also been taken up without referencing Black Feminist Thought in dance education and writing. Celeste Snowber

argued that an embodied perspective elevates the intentional practice of presence through eros in

The Eros of Teaching (2005). She explains,

> I am speaking here of a kind of engagement that encompasses bodily, heart and intellectual knowing. A kind of engagement where we become truly present. In this presence, we become known as we know. I like to refer to this presence as a 'physicality of presence.' This expands on the notion of attentiveness of mind to include the full attentiveness of the body as well. (p. 218)

In other words, practicing the presence of the body performs an extremely relevant role: that of

weaving intellect, body, and emotion in learning. Thus, in an activity such as writing, expands

from the acquisition of skills and moves towards a more mindful and body-aware pedagogy. But

holistic ways of teaching are often bound by the social practices of educational settings that

privilege gender.

2.2.2.2 The Gender Effect: Mind, Body, and Academic Writing.

I found in my pilot study with teachers that when embodied practices such as

mindfulness, emotion, intuition, or somatic approaches like "body work" are used during

academic writing instruction, the question of rigor arises almost immediately. Merely talking

about bodies in academic contexts can feel taboo – it is not only personal, but subjective. By

describing bodies as taboo, I rely on a well-established connection between genre and gender in

writing. Approaches to writing that are considered rigorous, such as analysis, critique and

argumentation are also typically associated with masculine scholarship. In addition to rigor, the

subjective nature of bodily knowledge grates against the belief of so-called objectivity in

academic writing (Darder, 2009; Lawrence, 2012).

In contrast, personal, experiential, and subjective genres of writing are perceived as non-

academic and therefore feminized (Annas, 1985; Benstock, 1988; Darder, 2009; Hindman,

2002). Hindman (2002) confronted this explicit bias toward masculine ways of knowing and

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expressing knowledge in the academy, arguing that discursive practices directly created a pecking order in writing. For instance, a distinction between "professional" and "creative" writing is a judgement that hampers the inclusion and valuing of many types of writing in the academy. Hindman's helpful reorientation to the body brings the conversation back to who is doing the writing and how it is performed, not whether the genre is perceived as masculine or feminine.

To explain, the body's ability to contain knowledge and represent it discursively, cannot be separated from the "real" body that lives and moves in the world (Stenberg, 2002). Abstraction, or staying "in the head," tends to disembody knowledge from the knower. In other words, it is mistaken to say any one genre can fully represent knowledge. Here I note the difference it makes to place the emphasis on the authority of the author-body rather than the writing genre. Hindman's (2002) very useful notion of "embodied rhetoric" for example, counters ways in which academic writing genres tend to decide what discourses are legitimized and which are not. This idea is one way critical feminists seek to recover the individual, autographical body and its right to represent knowledge and how knowledge is rendered (Benstock, 1988; Haraway, 1988; Knoblauch, 2012; Stenberg, 2002).

I suspect the term *embodied pedagogies* puts together two words teachers hardly ever use – unless they are teachers of teachers. Embodied pedagogy centers the body and is well theorized by a range of thinkers (Csordas, 1999; Darder, 2009; Haraway, 1988; Knoblauch, 2012; Stenberg, 2002). But an absence of direct instruction on this topic during teacher preparation, for example, reveals how the concept of embodied pedagogies resists clear-cut definitions and reproducible practices for teachers (Snowber, 2011). This is not to say embodiment cannot be

described or modeled., but that teaching in embodied ways is a very purposeful, nuanced, and personal teacher practice (McDonough et al., 2016).

Returning to the idea of perception, adult educator, and feminist Lawrence (2012) highlights the idea of trust to approach embodied teaching and learning. She maintained that masculinized western culture privileges cognitive ways of knowing and argued for reclaiming the body as a source of knowledge. She contended that shutting down the mindbody connection creates a lack of trust in our perceptions. As a result, limiting, ignoring, and suppressing this conversation between body and mind can mean losing trust in the lived body during the learning process. Looking at it this way, a restoration of the relationship between mind and body and a trust of the body is not only a positive and disruptive act (Stenberg, 2002), but a humanizing one as well.

By way of example, a critical argument of hooks (1994) was that teaching practices tended to distrust the teacher-body. Her feminist pedagogical practices relied on a mixture of anticolonial, critical, and feminist theories to resist the erasure of bodies in education and come as whole people into the classroom. Though it may be scary for teachers to notice their bodies and those of their students, doing so brought a groundedness to teaching that focusing on a cognitive approach could not. hooks' echo of Freire's (1970) "education as the practice of freedom" (1994, p. 15) reflected a liberatory approach to education and became a call to change the way teachers not only thought about their teaching but how they showed up in the classroom.

Therefore, when academic writing is theorized as gendered, it illustrates, on the one hand, how much richer the practice of academic writing might be if it equally included the body. If this were the case, it becomes clear that reducing a hierarchy of writing genres, legitimizing autobiographical writing, and a restoration of trust in the body's perceptions are only a few of the

benefits of more deeply embodied approaches to writing. On the other hand, because of the way embodied writing practices make learning more complex, it is also easier to understand how they struggle to become widely accepted in academic settings. But as I illustrate, the body must come into the conversation. I have come to think that leaning into *eros*, the life and energy that critical feminist thought emphasizes, interrupts a hegemonic ranking of knowledge, and begins to redress inherent masculine bias in the teaching of writing.

Considering my project and research questions, a conceptual frame of embodiment informed by critical feminist thought strives to value embodied and cognitive knowledge for their merits in academic practices such as writing. Continuing to ignore bodies prioritizes one way of working to the loss and detriment of another. By bringing critical feminist thought to bear on the concept of embodiment, I highlight this imbalance. Furthermore, it would be difficult to explore the embodied experience of women without also drawing on critical feminisms. By privileging the perceptions of women in my study, their experiences offer ways forward, embracing the full range of human experience. In sum, a conceptual frame of embodiment informed by feminist criticality calls educators and students back to the body and decisively supports my study of women's reentry to academia.

As I argue in the introduction, viewing human experience as embodied makes sense experientially and has a strong theoretical foundation, but Enlightenment thinking has long persisted in the arts and sciences, proposing that objective knowledge, or knowledge separated from emotions, sensations or personal bias is not only possible but ideal. But over time, there have been shifts towards a new view of how body and mind function together. That is why in the next section I provide a discussion of how for some, these ideas have changed, and the concept of embodied cognition has found a place in disciplines such as cognitive psychology,

philosophy, and linguistics. This change in thinking has in turn, been reflected in teaching and learning.

2.3 Embodied Cognition: A New View

Gibbs (2011) offers a rich description of how different disciplines go about exploring the place of the body in relation to cognition:

> Scholars' opinions about the proper locus of embodiment in cognition and language tend to privilege their own methodological preferences. For instance, neuroscientists tend to privilege the brain and some peripheral aspects of the nervous system in their studies of thought, language, and emotion; anthropologists focus on cultural-specific behaviors and generally explore how culture both is written onto bodies and gives cultural meanings to bodily experiences and behaviors; cognitive linguists, and some literary theorists, concentrate on the embodied nature of linguistic structure and behavior, as well as on the embodied nature of speaking/listening and writing/reading; and psychologists tend to study the role of different bodily actions on various cognitive activities.

In contrast, much scholarly thinking has been shaped by traditional, westernized Cartesian enlightenment thinking that saw mind and matter as separate entities. Consequently, classic cognitive science previously grounded cognition in the ideals of rationality, objectivity, and computation. According to Thelen et al. (2001), some conceived of thinking as a manipulation of symbols or representations. Others posed a computational theory of mind (Mulloch & Pitts, 1943) in which human cognition worked like an information processor. In other words, because of Enlightenment thinking, it was normalized to believe that the mind functioned as a detached entity from the material body. This longstanding focus on the cognitive has informed much of educational practice in the way knowledge has been viewed in the past and still is today.

Interestingly, pre-Enlightenment thinking did not ascribe to this dualism, and a progressively new view of the mind as embodied is returning cognition to the physical, sensing, emotional, social, and positioned body. Cognitive science is moving from a traditional,

Enlightenment view of reason to a new view in which thought is no longer understood as abstract but is instead connected to the body. The above description of the move towards the body in the sciences by Raymond Gibbs, whose work focused on embodied experience and cognition as it relates to meaning-making, provides a start to the diverse ways the concept of embodied cognition has been applied in various fields. It is hard to overstate the significance this shift. As a result, in this section of the review, I consider the importance of embodied cognition in reorienting thinking towards the bodily experience.

2.3.1 Understanding Embodied Cognition

Embodied cognition is a "diversified research tradition," argue Miłkowski and Nowakowski (2021, p. 68), that has gained prominence and greater acceptance as it continues to grow. Inspired in part by phenomenology, and drawn from work in psychology, neuroscience, ethology, philosophy, linguistics, robotics, artificial intelligence, and sport, embodied cognition has had many contributors and created multiple models to understand the body's relationship to cognition (Shapiro & Spaulding, 2019). As theorists work out this departure from a dominantly cognitive view of knowing, embodied cognition has been criticized for its lack of uniformity, been subjected to ongoing philosophical scrutiny and criticism, as well as becoming more well received.

What united researchers of embodied cognition was a commitment to an expanding understanding of lived experience, and that a new framework for cognition be proposed. Following Laudan's (1977) conception of embodied cognition as a research tradition, Miłkowski and Nowakowski (2021) argue that what was not needed is yet another definition of embodied cognition, but the apprehending of a few common agreements about cognition as embodied that

embraced diverse perspectives. Here, they addressed a main criticism of embodied cognition, that it was not a unified theory, but rather had many definitions and applications.

Theories about embodied cognition are drawn from many disciplines. Thus, embodied cognition should be understood as "composed of multiple, and sometimes quite extensive, component research sub-traditions (Miłkowski & Nowakowski, 2021, p. S71)." But Goldinger et al. (2016) said the main problem with embodied cognition was that it did not offer a unifying theory of cognition and therefore failed. Rather than a theory, Miłkowski and Nowakowski (2021) counter that it is a *research tradition*, first, because it has "a number of specific theories which exemplify and partially constitute it" (Laudan, 1977, p. 78). These research sub-traditions are diverse, taking many different foci and can be pictured as overlapping with one another to various degrees. As these traditions, that are often called approaches, seek to describe the mind *in* the body and reflect the disciplines from which they are drawn. For example, ecological psychology takes and ecologically embodied approach, the discipline of linguistics describes itself as embodied linguistics. These domains overlap with sensorimotor, affective, radically embodied and mirror-neurons research. In cognitive science, Miłkowski and Nowakowski (2021) have represented these visually as well as defended embodied cognition as a research tradition that offers rich and diverse understandings of cognition as embodied.

The strength of embodied cognition as a research tradition is its breadth and flexibility as a concept to describe many experiences and to frame knowledge as embodied. So, in the next part of my discussion about embodied cognition, I narrow my own focus to show why it informs a study such as my own.

2.3.2 Shifting Towards Embodied Cognition

Notably influential in theorizing about embodied cognition were linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson, who moved toward a new view of cognition through the idea of metaphor. Because cognitive linguistic models at the time lacked the ability to address certain linguistic problems of meaning, Lakoff said he began looking for a different framework that could do so. This search eventually led to one such sub-tradition psychology has used for empirical studies called embodied cognitive linguistics, by Lakoff and his colleagues (Miłkowski & Nowakowski, 2021).

 Prior to the term *embodied cognition*, Lakoff (1987) posed a body-based understanding of thinking, saying that "the structures used to put together our conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience and make sense in terms of it; moreover, the core of our conceptual systems is directly grounded in perception, body movement, and experience of a physical and social character" (p. xiv). In this new view of thinking, Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) point of departure was that embodiment invariably disrupts traditional western assumptions about cognition. They asserted that there were traditional ideas about reason such as mindbody dualism, computational thinking, and total autonomy of the individual that would have to be let go if cognition were to embrace the body.

This position led to some of the conceptual and methodological commitments that shape embodied cognition today. Previously, for example, cognitive theorists privileged mind over body without qualm. Wider acceptance of the body's presence and interaction with cognition however, revealed shared commitments that guide theories of embodied cognition today. Weisberg and Newcombe (2017) noted that embodied cognition takes on "different flavors"

depending on the discipline and purposes to which it was applied (e.g., Clark, 1999, 2001; Shapiro, 2011; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991; Wilson, 2002).

Despite varied models and approaches to specific functions, proponents do agree on some underlying assumptions about its nature. These include, but are not limited to, the concept that cognition is situated, the idea that environment informs human cognition, and the premise that the body provides important input to cognitive processes via sensorimotor information. These standpoints form the basis of viewing the body as an equal part of cognition to the mind. Consequently, traditional viewpoints, such as the curiously long-lived premise that human cognition was much like a computer, now become incompatible with this new view of cognition (Kiverstein, 2012; Marshall, 2014). These accepted assumptions support a further reason why embodied cognition can be considered a research tradition instead of a theory or framework as Laudan (1977) proposed.

The broad conception of embodied cognition as a research tradition stands in contrast to theoretical attempts to reduce embodied cognition to several essential tenets argue Miłkowski and Nowakowski (2021). Beyond embracing basic standpoints, understandings about cognition as embodied resist being drawn into one theory or a fixed group of theoretical explanations, such as Wilson's (2002) six psychological claims. Although valid claims such as situatedness, or that the environment is part of the cognitive system are defensible, they are too diverse and richly embedded in different disciplines and at times, often contradict one another.

Currently, embodied cognition, viewed as a research tradition, benefits more from its many contributors and their applications than from efforts to unify it. To put it simply, it remains a diverse and growing body of knowledge, subject to developing over time (Laudan, 1977). My point here is that in this shift towards the body, there is no one 'embodied cognition framework'

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through which we might view how the mindbody works together. What continues to emerge are the many interdisciplinary ways of understanding this connection and its implications for the construction of knowledge and meaning-making.

As the research tradition of embodied cognition keeps expanding to describe the body's role in cognition, more applications emerge. This conceptual shift around cognition informs my study because it offers a picture of how understandings of embodiment have entered cognitive dominant spaces, particularly in the sciences. This move is an essential part of reconsidering the way teaching and learning happens for women in the academy. In many disciplines, including composition English education, this has meant a greater recognition of the premise that perception is for action (Gibson, 1979; Wilson, 2002), something I address in the data discussion. For now, I look at examples of how embodied cognition has changed learning approaches in several disciplines.

2.3.3 Applying Embodied Cognition in Education

The idea that thinking is embodied offers many immediate iterations and applications in education. For STEM teachers, it has meant emphasizing the body's sensorimotor role in forming abstract ideas because it enhances learning. In other words, experiencing a concept concretely supports the ability to think about it abstractly and to, for example, create analogies to describe it (Weisberg & Newcombe, 2017). Here the connection between what is experienced and the language rendered to describe it becomes more visible. Similarly in math, an expanding view of the body in learning has led to specific modalities in learning experiences. For instance, to understand and explain abstract math concepts, building physical models have become a way to show understanding (Hall & Nimerovsky, 2012). The shift to thinking of cognition as

embodied matters because now a variety of modes of demonstrating knowledge are more widely accepted than in the past.

In cognitive neuroscience, embodied cognition has been used to explain and explore how human beings interpret the actions of others and how they respond (Grafton, 2009). It has been argued that it is its own distinct domain and as such, it is a system of knowledge like episodic memory, capable of encoding and retrieving information. Because it involves direct interaction between what people do and see, it is thought to be part of how actions are organized in the individual. Embodied cognition is important in this instance because it relates to how individuals use knowledge of their own bodies to understand the body movements of others.

As I have outlined above, the various conceptualizations of embodied cognition offer many ways to approach teaching and learning. Most importantly, this diverse array offers interdisciplinary ways to shift away from the dominantly cognitive and towards bodies in the way knowledge construction is conceived. The diverse nature of embodied cognition as a research tradition stretches across disciplines, and as a paradigm shift, has done much to illuminate the interrelationship of mind and body. Embodied cognition counters what cognition theories alone could not explain about the role of physical bodies in knowledge construction. It is, however, not the only way to conceive of embodied knowledge or how individuals learn.

Theories of embodiment continue to evolve, and some theorists move away from locating cognition in the body and its sensorimotor functions to think of framing understandings of embodiment as an ontological turn rather than a corporeal one (Migliore, 2017). This view for instance, grounds itself in perspective taking rather than perception and draws on anthropological and animistic traditions. In a more distinct move, western conceptions of bodies and cognition are rejected. Knowledge, for instance, is located inside and throughout the body, not just in one

organ, the brain. Physical experiencing and knowing are so intertwined that knowledge becomes part of and shapes the body itself.

In this way, knowledge is acquired and acted upon by the parts of the body that knows (McCallum, 1996). This conception of embodiment contrasts with an individual generic mind in a generic body and embraces different and specific bodily knowledges. This way of theorizing embodiment does not take the body as given, nor does it focus on the idea that the mind is embodied, but rather how it is embodied. As Migliore (2017) concluded,

> The meaning of 'Embodiment' in new Anthropology sheds light on the shortcomings of the cognitivist approach. Considering the recent change of sensitivity toward the non-human and the animal, the notion of Embodiment as an individual mind incarnated in an individual body must be abandoned. Embodiment should rather be seen as a temporary clothing, as a somatic exteriorization, interconnected with the viewpoints of others, of an interior system of habits, of affections and affects. (p. 130)

Bodies, in this view, are more like composites rather than unified beings. Knowledge is bound up with perspective taking, and relies on differences, not unified experience to understand relationships with other bodies. In ways that are too complex to give full discussion to at this point, I venture into an alternate view of how cognition and bodies work together only to signal that ideas of embodiment evolve and continue to evolve.

As such, the above discussion functions to paint a picture of how ever expanding and significant the discussion of embodiment has become. Embodiment, or considering how bodies and cognition engage, makes crucial moves away from western conceptions of intelligences, positivistic notions of certainty. Instead, embodiment ventures towards ever-expansive considerations about many types of knowledge whether social, cultural, spiritual, intellectual, or historical and how they are experienced and performed. In the move towards more holistic conceptions of cognition and bodies for instance, critical thought and pedagogy as conceived by

Freire (1970) has contributed much to education by focusing on praxis, or the experience of learning. Knowledge, in his view, was something students carried into the classroom through lived experience. By connecting to what adult students already knew, teachers connected to embodied knowledge. The practice of critical consciousness as a pedagogy for example, encouraged students to looked at the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which they found themselves. Below, I extend the discussion of cognition and bodies briefly with some thoughts about how embodiment is integral to how students might construct various identities and a sense of self.

2.3.3.1 Embodying Identity.

Critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), the idea of asking questions around socio-political structures of power, was connected to cultural identity by Kincheloe (1999) especially regarding whiteness as a cultural identity. In this way of teaching, criticality concerned how individuals engaged questions about ethnicity or culturally constructed ideas of self and the groups to which they belong. Holland et al. (1998) also placed the idea of identity partly within culture through the concept of relational identity. That is, it posited that people understand their personal identity in relation to the sociocultural environment in which they live.

This cultural knowledge about oneself could be understood based on age, gender, role in the community, or symbolically for example, in relation to food, or parts of the home. For each person, an understanding of relational identity guided actions and interactions with others. That is, people had a sense of self, or identity and knew how to act because it was informed by understanding who they were in relationship to others. Relational identity, for Holland et al. (1998) shaped the important idea of positioning, or how people position themselves, or are

positioned by others. To address the experience of privilege, for instance, Holland et al. (1998) cited Lykes (1985) to point out that,

> Individuals have different senses of self because, senses of self being grounded in experiences of power, individuals have differential access to the positions of power that afford the experience. People develop different relational identities because they are afforded different positions in the world. (p. 136)

Bodies are an essential aspect of how people position and are positioned in the world, or for example, in educational settings. How teachers handle their positional and personal power in relation to students is a social signal to learners about their own social, cultural – even cultural position in the classroom. From these positions individuals construct understandings of self, or relational identities. These understandings to my mind, can be considered embodied identities in that they are embodied experiences of positioning self and being positioned in social and political relationships of power and privilege.

As I go on to discuss a well-established trend of older adults reentering higher education, embodied knowledge and identities become more relevant because of the rich histories and identities they bring into learning spaces. Along with the above discussion about how individuals understand themselves in educational settings, the following research statistics also help to understand why more investigation is warranted about the experience of these learners in graduate institutions.

2.4 Trending: Older Adults Entering Higher Education

As I outlined in Chapter 1 and hinted earlier in this review, mature adults have been an increasing demographic in higher education that requires attention. As early as the 1980s, evidence suggested a new demographic of students were rapidly entering higher education. It was surprising to find that the reentry of older men and women to undergraduate study and graduate school has long been perceived as an emerging trend (Schmidt, 1983). In Schmidt's

important study, it was estimated that by 2030, the population over 65 would double from the 2005 census data, and that even more older adults would seek ongoing learning opportunities in formal settings like colleges and universities (Myles, 2017).

As might be expected, older adults experience academic settings differently than young adults. Lakin (2009) observed that older adults crossed generational and community boundaries to engage in higher education later in life. They believed they had a lot to give and wanted to "make a difference and do something meaningful" (p. 39). Older students, particularly baby boomers, sought graduate degrees to enhance their careers, to transition to a different career, or fulfill a lifelong ambition (Myles, 2011; Offerman, 2011). As they navigate a new life-stage, mature adult learners were also engaged in forging new identities by "retooling and reinventing themselves" and used networking to create social connection (Lakin, 2009, p. 42).

But perceptions of age may thwart social engagement. Part of the significance of investigating embodied experience relates to the physical experience of and how others perceive bodies at academic institutions. For instance, age acts as a visible, physical marker that socially distinguishes young adults from older adults, and shapes a sense of how students feel they fit in. Taylor and House (2010) noted that even though there was a need to reach out to older students because "it would be expected that they have differing needs," further research about mature student's needs for support did not necessarily follow this awareness (p. 48). In what government reports call "widening participation," universities try to engage a range of different learners from underrepresented groups to reflect diversity. Older adults, although they represent an ongoing trend, particularly those over 50, fall into this category representing 8% of students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2020).

I found that because many reentry students began their return to higher education with undergraduate study. Research studies about the graduate student experience were less common than those about the undergraduate experience, and even more scarce were research studies about older adult graduate students that reentered higher education later in life. Few studies explored the experience of how mature adult women students in the academy experienced practices like academic writing, nor was there a common vocabulary used to describe it. Self-reflexive studies by teachers about their own practice peppered my searches about embodied writing, embodied teaching, and reentry students, revealing that research in teacher professional development had paid attention to embodied pedagogies (Carolan & Kyppö, 2015; McDonough et al., 2016; Ohito, 2017). This research showed that teachers needed to be self-aware about their own bodies before inviting students to do the same.

However, little was said about how the mindbody worked together from a student perspective. Stolz also notes a lack of research that links education to embodiment, "Even though the has been a paradigmatic shift toward questions of the body and embodiment, there is a notable gap in the literature on this topic as it relates to education and educational research" (2021, p. 1). So, a shift towards thinking about embodiment more has not meant an increase in educational studies on the topic, suggesting there exists a gap for a new body of inquiry.

Unfortunately, the studies about the experience of undergraduates kept finding how unprepared higher education was to meet the needs of older students (Myles, 2017). Due to the adoption of neoliberal business models that constantly reassessed programming and curtailed spending, women's studies programs and those that accommodate older adults suffered (Colvin, 2013). Lakin, Mullane, and Porter's (2007) study concluded, for instance, that higher education often kept the same old barriers in place from the past and resisted change. They stated, "ageist

attitudes might impede more progressive policies and practice […] support services don't seem to be suited for older students" (2007, p. 19). Their study suggested that a failure to meet the needs of older students was in effect, erecting barriers that prevented their success. Nevertheless, the range of age groups attending institutions of higher education kept transforming. As Myles (2017) suggested, older adult students faced discrimination as a significant but underrepresented group. But it was proposed this experience could be countered by changed attitudes and more intergenerational approaches in the way institutions support diverse populations.

Turning towards older adult women engaged in graduate studies, it was challenging to find recent research that spoke to their experiences. Padula (1994) noted that the focus of research about reentry student was focused on undergraduates and identified a "critical need" for studies about women's experiences (1999, p. 328). Padula and Miller's later study (1999) focused on doctoral students as case studies and highlighted the value of qualitative research to address further questions around reentry women's persistence, sacrifices, survival skills, preparation for and fears around graduate study. Implications from their study highlighted the need for women to tell their stories to continue to bring their needs to light. In addition, institutions and faculty needed to shape their understandings accordingly to support the diverse experiences of mature women graduate students. Bauman et al. (2004) took Padula and Miller's recommendations in a pilot study to address academic counselling but did not address the more qualitative aspects of what women found helpful or supportive for their survival as graduate students.

With a lack of studies about supports for women in graduate school in later life stages, much empirical and theoretical work remains to be done. Having considered the need for more studies about the experience of older adults in graduate school, it is worth considering how older

adults, particularly women, engage with academic writing during their studies. To explore this experience further, I move on to another section of the review and consider how a concept such as embodied cognition has informed composition studies. More specifically, my discussion moves to how embodied writing practices have been thought about and applied in academic writing practices.

2.5 Writing and Embodiment

As I explore embodiment and writing studies, I define how I use the term academic writing and some of the assumptions surrounding it. I also look at a few disciplines to show how writing has been seen as an embodied practice. By comparing cognitive approaches with embodied writing pedagogies, I note why and how cognitive approaches remain privileged despite evidence that knowledge is constructed through bodies.

2.5.1 Defining Academic Writing

At this point, it is important to discuss the notion of academic writing, how I use the term, and why it can be viewed as problematic. In my introduction, I described how learning can become disembodied and bodies can be sidelined by the controlling practices of schooling. By the same reasoning, I also suggest that writing can be removed from the bodily experience through an over emphasis on cognition.

As a start, I acknowledge that the term *academic writing* encompasses a tremendous range of approaches to writing. As a general term, academic writing can simply refer to the writing language of the academy (Bartholomae, 1986). In other words, the language and conventions in which so-called academic ideas are communicated within university settings. However, what is considered expected and acceptable writing looks different in each academic discipline. As an emerging scholar, I initially found the best way to understand what the

expectations were in each discipline was by reading articles in different academic journals. There I could see and emulate what was acceptable in my field of English education, and I could also note how it differed from other disciplines.

Another part of learning these conventions was understanding that apprenticing academic writing expectations happens within the culture of each discipline. For example, I learned the *how* of academic writing with my professors, fellow students, and by reading countless examples of academic writing. In addition, I would receive feedback on my written papers through which I learned the conventions expected of me. As a result, I used model texts to structure my writing, cite concepts and research, construct transitions, work with theory and research to learn the language(s) of the academy.

In addition, during my program of study I was encouraged to write short assignments that asked me to connect with my personal experience, history, or my emotions. These writing pieces helped me make sense of what I learned in class and these chunks often found their way into my longer, more academic papers. They were my most meaningful and memorable pieces of work in graduate study. With this environment as a given, I will define academic writing for the purposes of this review as*, writing that conveys scholarly knowledge, concepts, and research by utilizing the genres, conventions, and language of academic disciplines within academic institutions for the purpose of knowledge building and publication.*

2.5.2 Traditional Writing Practices

Interest in embodiment, or the mindbody relationship in writing processes, is a topic in pedagogy that remains peripheral to much of mainstream academic writing practices. I have noticed in my search of the literature in English education that interest in the body's role in writing practices has surged and waned as a noticeable pattern, gaining attention, and

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subsequently fading. The body's presence in the teaching of writing has been highlighted, debated, theorized, and then sporadically researched and taken into practice.

Unlike mainly cognitive writing processes such as drafting, revision, and editing, that have been adopted by writing teachers and researchers, embodied pedagogies have resulted in few mainstream embodied writing practices. Focused largely on the cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Moffett, 1992) or on writing as a heuristic activity (Atwell, 1998; Emig, 1971), early researchers of writing produced influential studies with elementary (Graves, 1975) high school (Emig, 1971) and college students (Murray, 1982; Shaughnessy, 1979; Sommers, 1980). These studies still support classroom practices today.

Writing pedagogy determines how students experience composing. When practiced as linear, these cognitive approaches to teaching writing unfortunately perpetuate the perception of a separation between mind and body. Described as oppressive and prescriptive (Crowley, 1998; Kynard, 2008), rigidly adhering to these methods tended to encourage writers to be preoccupied with conventions. When practiced as recursive (Graves, 1975; Murray, 1982; Sommers 1980), writers engage in these cognitive processes multiple times, and not always in the same order, to arrive at a piece of writing.

Traditional writing practices in schooling and beyond tended to focus on the thinking work of writing and has produced notions of writing ability based on hierarchical levels of cognition based on language use (Moffett, 1992). These ideas about levels of thinking have become connected to writing proficiency through and other measures of learning. Rubrics, for example, are one way explicit measures of proficiency can be used as concretized writing standards through a culture of testing in schools. As a result, what was seen as proficiency in writing gradually began to prescribe how writing was taught and cause teachers and students to

focus on conventions. Instead of writing as a heuristic activity, for instance, students learned to write in ways they needed to know for tests (Hillocks, 1986, 2002).

2.5.3 Writing with Bodies

In contrast to practices that were used to support testing in schools, other writing teacher-researchers take more body-centered approaches. Rhetoric and Composition studies have explored and richly theorized embodiment in writing (Butler, 2017; Fleckenstein, 1999; Knoblauch, 2012; Perl, 1980; Stenberg, 2002). In addition, teacher-researchers have taken theory to practice in an effort to write with bodies in mind.

2.5.3.1 Felt Sense

Sondra Perl's (1979, 1980, 2004) research work in college composition made a strong departure from the cognitive by using the concept of felt sense, a term coined by philosopher Eugene Gendlin, to tap into the body during writing. Perl (2005) described the mindbody relationship as inextricable:

> Felt sense helps us clarify the dynamic relationship between language and thought. In fact, with felt sense, we can see that thought and language are inextricably linked in the body. Felt sense exists prior to our language-ing it; it exists alongside the words to come; and it exists as a physical referent after words come. By directing attention to our felt sense, we establish a living connection between what we sense and what we know or between what we sense implicitly and what we state explicitly. (p. 9)

Gendlin described felt sense as an "alignment between thoughts and our bodies" (1978, p. 4), and Perl's words capture this relationship. This connection between implicit and explicit created time and space for pausing to listen to the writer's body. Perl's (1979) research with five so-called unskilled college writers confirmed the idea of writers having internalized, intentional, and recursive writing processes. These processes were also recounted by Emig (1971), Shaughnessy

(1979), and later Sommers (1980), making significant contributions to how writing processes were understood.

However, Perl's research findings directed her to theorize about tacit, embodied understandings that led to language during the writing process (1980). She later employed this idea in her teaching practice with adult writers (2004), resulting in transformational dialogues and narratives with holocaust survivors about their experiences. Perl's "guidelines for composing" articulated how teachers might practice embodied writing in a classroom (2004, p. 15). She used taped, sequential writing prompts to help writers write in sustained ways, pausing to notice tacit knowledge by embracing felt sense during their own writing.

By foregrounding bodies as the place to start, this work signaled to academia that writing must include sensate bodies. However, even scrupulously researched findings such as Perl's have failed to make embodied writing practices widely accepted in academic settings. Cognitive approaches prevail, and feminist educators in the field of college composition and rhetoric have been quick to note the disembodying and disempowering effects of institutionalized academic language (Fleckenstein, 1999; Knoblauch, 2012).

2.5.3.2 Interrupting the Disembodying Effect of Academic Writing.

Criticality problematizes how academic conventions can disembody writing from the writer, and do not serve the linguistic and cultural, and gender diversity of learners. For instance, First Year Writing courses have been described as a potentially disembodying and discriminatory practice within college institutions (Crowley, 1998). While their merit is in teaching students academic rhetoric, they value culturally biased writing and thinking, causing students to perform language as a form of academic survival (Lu, 1987). Not only that, but students like Lu found that there are consequences if language is not performed in specific ways, such as exclusion and

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fear of participation. For instance, Prior (2006) took a critical perspective on writing as social practice helping to notice the power dynamics that writing in community introduces. These dynamics range from the interpersonal to the institutional and can have the dual effects of both liberating and silencing student experiences.

Paying attention to the body through lived experience is therefore a compelling practice in the writing classroom, but it requires criticality on the part of teachers. For example, educators' expectations of student writing can be shaped by their own literacy experiences. Criticality helps decode places where literacy expectations are hidden in their own curriculum. Teachers can ask themselves if they create a context that allows students to reinvent themselves as writers or create environments where students must conform to oppressive ways of using language to prove they are learning (Bartholomae, 2005; Kynard, 2008).

To disrupt this tendency, culturally responsive approaches to pedagogy recognize, cultivate, and resource the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" to support academic learning (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). This definition of knowledge described the many literacies and funds of knowledge that enter the classroom in adult learners. I draw attention to the use of the words "bodies of knowledge" to note the plurality of knowledge within individuals, rather than the idea that a persona is a single body of knowledge. Like Freire's (1970) banking model of education and work with adult learners, Moll et al. (1992) resisted ideas of what students lacked and focused on what knowledge they bring to the learning experience. including cultural knowledge and know-how. How a student's body and bodily experience is regarded for instance, is a crucial consideration for teachers (hooks, 1994). As Lu and Horner's

(1998) work also suggested, embodied writing instruction must develop both critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) for students and changed literacy practices for teachers.

Educators who take a critical approach to learning see how bodies were being sidelined in teaching and learning. In the context of first year and advanced writing at two-year colleges, Banks' (2003) essay identified through personal reflections how he and his students were socially constructed through the contexts in which they wrote. Through embodied personal writing, he explored intersections of identity such as gender and sexuality, demonstrating how the text is inseparable from the person who writes it. Banks calls embodied writing, "a gesture away from impersonal, disengaged, disembodied rhetoric's that permeate certain masculinist logics" (2003, p. 35). Writing about the truths of their experiences, writers make visible the bodies, text and knowledge writing produces and represents. It is these gestures, he argues, that interrupt detached writing that requires disengagement from the body.

Embodied writing that draws on experience also helps writers work out how to represent themselves in the world. In another example, this same positive disruption was evidenced in Woodcock's (2010) dissertation. In her study, high school girls used the keeping of journals as a way of performing identity and being in the world. Journal writing prompted the girls to explore, imagine and rehearse authentic expressions of themselves. As they investigated gender and sexual identity, writing enabled these young women to step into these identities in real life. I make a connection here to say that this type of writing is a practical outworking of Hindman's (2002) embodied rhetoric.

Drawing on embodied cognition, embodied rhetoric is the idea of "rhetoric characterized and authorized in part by specific sorts of 'personal' author- and context-saturated gestures to everyday life that replace or supplement our conventional discursive gestures to an always

already constituted authority" (Hindman, 2002, p. 94). Simply put, Hindman argued for a

rhetoric of personal bodily experience to loosen ever present authoritative academic constraints.

In this way, she proposed that embodied rhetoric made way for discursive practices that

exploited feminist theory and praxis and thus greater agency to writers. The goal of recognizing

the body in rhetoric was "to effect change in our own and in our student's lives" (2002, p. 95).

Using this concept, others in the field of composition have worked to address the female

body, enacting the call for a politics of location in their teacher practice (Rich, 1987, 2001).

Notably, Knoblauch (2012) argued that embodied language, embodied knowledge, and

embodied rhetoric directly helped writers to tackle the thorny question of the missing body in

academic writing by stating,

> By locating a text in the body (understanding the importance of embodied
> knowledge) and by locating the body in the text, writers utilizing an embodied
> rhetoric work against what might be seen as the potential hegemony of (some)
> academic discourse. (p. 59)

Here, Knoblauch calls attention to the relationship between body and text to disrupt ways of

writing that that have been reified and are no longer useful. In a final example, I offer another

study that exemplifies a positive disruption in how writing *with* the body can interrupt

disembodied practices of academic writing.

As a way of bringing feminist theory to practice in science writing, Essén and Värlander

(2012) investigated what would happen if students were allowed to bring their sensory

experiences into their discursive practices. The embodied materiality of clothes and furniture in

the classroom were studied to understand students encounters with the material and discursive in

academic settings (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Taylor, 2013). These studies found that acquiring

writing and academic literacies are bound up in material surroundings and whole-body

engagement. In addition, studies that have explored teacher education found that because

embodied writing is more reflective, it creates deeper and more complex teaching and learning experiences for teachers and students (La Jevic & Springaay, 2008; Perry & Medina, 2011; Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015).

Embodied pedagogies such as the ones mentioned above have the potential to interrupt academic practices that privilege rational, cognitive approaches and content knowledge, by making room for tacit knowledge. Including the body in teaching and learning opens up ways to create and express embodied knowledge alongside the thinking work done in graduate school. As a result, students can show as well as tell what they know, drawing on their experiences and cultural knowledge.

2.6 Summing Up the Literature Review

In this review of the literature, I have considered how knowledge is perceived and constructed from a phenomenological perspective, examining the legitimacy of the body alongside the mind in constructing knowledge. For teachers, the literature that speaks to embodied knowledge implies an essential to have an awareness of their own bodies and of student bodies in pedagogical practices (hooks, 1994). It calls for a respect and recognition of what each person brings into the classroom through their unique histories, experiences, emotions, sensations, and intuitions. For students, it means that they sense a regard for the way each unique body understands things and that they feel welcome to bring that knowledge to the learning experience (Freire, 1970; Knoblauch, 2012).

However, educational practices systemically disembody writing processes by emphasizing mainly cognitive processes and products. This tendency arises from multiple factors surrounding the bodies of teachers and students in the classroom. Widespread practices such as a culture of testing encourage teachers to focus learning on what will be cognitively assessed

(Hillocks, 2002). Compounding this, fear and distrust of bodies as understood by the reviewed literature make it harder for teachers to work *with* the body (hooks, 1994). In contrast, a focus on the cognitive often leads to practices that seek to manage and control bodies in the classroom (Darder, 2009; Tobin, 2004). But the human body is more than a resource that works to serve the mind, or society. It has been suggested as a site of learning (Perry & Medina, 2011). Thus, the body is the primary instrument, but it is much more than a tool; It experiences, it materially mediates, and it holds what is learned.

Embodied, holistic approaches on the other hand, seek an interplay of both body and mind informing each other in the processes and products of learning. This frame of reference points to the necessity of recovering the body in the way we teach and learn. In the teaching of writing, it means developing helpful ways to grasp the role of the body and to consciously practice writing as an embodied experience in the classroom. The concept of embodiment helps to describe how knowledge is gained and expressed through bodies in various ways; emotionally, through experiences, sensations, and perceptions. Writing and the teaching of writing, then can be considered activities that draw on, intuit and rely on what the body knows (Polanyi, 1966; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Reflective, personal writing are examples of practicing bodily presence in writing and can be a support to cognition (Banks, 2003; Ohito, 2018; Snowber, 2005).

Feminist criticality draws on many traditions to understand how embodied identities such as gender, race, age ethnicity and many others lift bodies to higher visibility. When women pay attention to their bodies, it inevitably brings up questions of equity and privilege. Gender as a focus is one way to see these disparities. Black Feminist Theory in particular employs tenets which guide praxis and inquiry. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Richie, 2012) for example provokes understandings of how race complicates other identities and intensifies experiences of

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marginalization, visibility, and inclusion. Moreover, Black Feminist Theory focuses on the strengths of individuals and communities noting how women draw on embodied knowledge to cope, survive, and even flourish under oppression. By doing so, it is possible to embrace varied perspectives and to reframe hegemonic narratives of deficiency, lack, and victimhood (Adichie, 2009). In narrative research, for example, individual stories bring forward different narratives when not just taken at face value but examined with an eye towards the dispositions and tenets Black Feminist Thought takes up.

Embodied cognition as a research tradition paves interdisciplinary ways towards understanding how mindbody works, and endeavors to counter positivistic thinking. Before this term existed, Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) work began to return the idea of cognition towards the body by proposing three levels of embodied experience. The idea that cognition as inherently embodied was taken up and applied in many areas of linguistics and psychology. In this view, interdisciplinary agreements about embodied cognition assert that cognition is situated, that environment informs human cognition, and that bodies provide important input to cognitive processes via sensorimotor information. Embodied cognition, however, is but one move toward theories of embodiment. For example, leaning into animistic traditions is another move away from mindbody dualism and western bias towards the cognitive. Definitions and understandings of embodiment continue to evolve and gain recognition. Today, with a greater consideration of the body as knower, the way researchers think about embodiment has rendered more holistic and diverse conceptions of knowledge as rooted and grounded in the bodily experience.

It can be said, then, that personal knowledge is a rigorous process of self-interrogation, experience, and bodily knowing (Polanyi, 1958/2012). As older adult students engage in education to transition to a new life stage, a change of career or to realize previously unfulfilled

dreams, they also forge new identities. They may even seek new social circles because higher education brings different communities together (Lakin, 2009). It is in this locale that meaning-making and identity construction often take place (Banks, 2003; Holland et al., 1998; Woodcock, 2010). Thus, supporting students' access to their bodily personal knowledge promotes access to their tacit, embodied, and historical intelligences.

Embodied approaches to writing bring the importance of personal embodied cultural identities and histories to the fore (Holland et al., 1998). Moreover, cross-disciplinary studies offer examples of how inviting students to share their personal knowledge in writing deepens the learning experience for students (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Perry & Medina, 2011; Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015). Because of their wealth of knowledge (Freire 1970; Moll et al., 1992), adult students have much experience to draw from in this regard and appear to benefit from grounding their academic work in personal reflection and their embodied knowledge.

The experiences of older women in graduate school are somewhat under-researched and beg further inquiry. Administrators and educators alike benefit from understanding the needs of their older adult student population, especially as the trend of adults returning to study continues to grow. Taking note of the emphasis on the experiences of undergraduate reentry students, more recent studies will address this scarcity. My study, conducted during the year of 2021-2022, opens new conversation about the inclusion of older adults in graduate school and embodied approaches to writing, learning, and participating in the academy. Moreover, the narratives of the women involved in my inquiry add greater insight and about negotiations of identity and positionality in academic institutions.

Chapter 3: Building a Narrative Study About Embodiment

My research inquiry set out to understand the embodied experiences of six women who negotiated a reentry to graduate study later in life. Their lived experiences centered around complex constructions of identity, how they were perceived within the institution as mature women, and their responses to work with and against being in positions of marginality in their programs.

An embodied approach to traditional methods and methodology was integral in addressing my main research question and sub questions of, *when women reenter the academy after a significant gap in their post-secondary education, what do the embodied experiences of these women tell us about their visibility within the institution and their agency to work against being marginalized?* My sub-questions are:

1. *How do these women's perceptions of themselves inform how they negotiate this transition?*

2. *How do these women's embodied experiences inform how they position themselves in the academy?*

3. *What do we learn through these women's stories about how they participate in academic writing?*

In this chapter, I begin with the participants. I discuss how they were selected, and briefly introduce Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer, the three women on whom the project centers, and my positionality as researcher. I then detail how an embodied, narrative and constructivist methodology was a crucial support for addressing my research questions. In my research design section, I give further detail as to how I implemented my data construction methods, drawing on

my methodology. I summarize data construction and explain each data method and how it was implemented and the rationale for its inclusion in the study.

I go on to discuss the unique contextual factors that shaped the study. Conducting a study about embodiment during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought changes to the original design of the project I had imagined. As a result of an embodied research design, I reimagined traditional methods to create conscious awareness of the lived body through storied accounts. I also discuss the undertaking of engaging participants around data and the concept of conducting research with reciprocity. I then discuss my own positionality as a researcher. Finally, I describe how I used a layered approach to data analysis to understand the meaning participants ascribed to their experiences. I then preview what the reader can expect in future chapters.

3.1 Points of Departure: Participants, Recruitment, Introductions, and Context

Considerations of embodiment change the way researchers and participant's bodies are implicated in inquiry. Bodies are remarkable in that they are sensitive, personal, and unique, as well as having other qualities. They are ubiquitous, resilient, and flexible enough to adapt to the environment. Ellingson asked this simple yet crucial question while doing her own research: "what would happen if I actually paid attention to my body?" (2017, p. 148). I noticed how just the mention of my body brings it to my awareness, and although this question seemed basic, I came back to it again and again in planning for my project.

3.1.1 Participant Criteria and Selection

Taking into consideration the sensitive nature of embodied research, and the feminist and constructivist framework of my project, I used snowballing as a purposeful sampling method to find potential participants (Boeije, 2009; Noy, 2008), first by word of mouth, asking my network of fellow students and colleagues to recommend possible candidates for the study based on

gender and age-based inclusion criteria. Noy (2008) noted that as a critical research methodology, participants whose shared social experience included the same activity (writing, in this case), social knowledge may bring about fruitful interactions around the graduate experience.

I sent a description of the study to prospective participants via email and invited them to take a survey to find out if they qualified for the project I had in mind. If they were a candidate, I asked them to participate through a letter of invitation describing the study, the activities it involved, the amount of time it would require, and any potential risks and benefits. I included a letter of informed consent, which detailed this information further, and requested their signature should they agree to participate. I allowed time for the women to read the consent form, or if she had not read it, we reviewed it together, and I answered any questions that arose about the study (See Appendices A, B, & C: description of study, Survey, Letter of Invitation).

3.1.2 Participant Introductions

All six participants identified as women over 30 years old who had reentered graduate school after more than 10 years. Through the survey, the women also self-identified with the characteristics of so-called nontraditional students by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). In addition to these selection criteria, the women showed a willingness to discuss their experience of writing in the academy and to share their writing work during the study.

Of the six women who participated, I had the challenging task of deciding whether it was possible to represent them all in the data discussion or if the project would benefit from writing in depth about two or three women. This question returned me to my research questions and the women's perceptions of themselves. I wondered what, if any, influence their perceptions had on

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negotiating a reentry to graduate school. I also looked at how embodied experiences shaped any stances or positions they took up during their studies. Finally, I considered their relationship to and use of writing during their graduate programs.

I wrote chapter drafts for each of the six participants to make further sense of the interview data. I went back to the interviews to see how the quotes I had recorded were couched in the conversation. I asked myself, what came before the statement, what came after, and in what context? Within the framework of embodiment and critical feminisms, I considered which chapters brought out the overarching themes, and wrote in further detail about what I saw. Ultimately, I focused the data discussion on three individuals: Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer for whom I had full data sets. A deciding factor for me was that I had a writing sample from all three, and as table 3.1 indicates, I did not receive writing samples from the others. As a result, I excluded Natasha, Katja, and Colette's data from the in-depth data discussion for my project. Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer's narratives rendered diverse perspectives of embodiment, and their accounts spoke to larger themes emerging from the data analysis, illuminating key aspects of how perceptions guided action, a sense of visibility/invisibility, and how they exercised agency during their graduate school journeys., I offer short excerpts below as an initial introduction to these three participants.

3.1.2.1 Winnie

When she finished her undergraduate degree, Winnie (participant-chosen pseudonym) originally qualified as an occupational therapist in South Africa. Winnie immigrated to the United States in the late 1990s and practiced as an occupational therapist for 20 years in schools, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers in the United States. In her 40s, Winnie applied to graduate school for a Master of Social Work (MSW) to change her career. She had discovered that she

had an interest in grief studies and described how she "wanted to pursue something I was passionate about, and I was trying to honor that within myself." Even though she had not pictured herself going back to school, to change her career and work with individuals and groups in grief counseling, she decided that a social work degree was her best route.

Winnie identified as a woman of color throughout our conversations, both in her home country of South Africa and in the United States. In the U.S. however, how she perceives herself is further complicated by living in a new culture and how colleagues and fellow students see her racial identity. Winnie's experience of being admitted to and attending her program is deeply informed by her identities as a woman of color and the experience of social marginalization from colleagues and fellow students. In a complex experience of racial ambiguity by which she was both socially included and excluded, she uses academic writing to use "the power of opportunity to not only make my point, but I think educate the reader." Her narrative imparts a heartfelt relationship with writing and a picture of using her own voice to speak back to being on the margins and the powerful social dynamics around her. She negotiates feeling peripheral in graduate school through an embodied criticality, recognizing that her racial ambiguity puts her on the margins. Through her writing, she finds a way to speak back from the margins into the silences of unspoken discrimination amongst her classmates.

3.1.2.2 Jacqueline

After 25 years as a preschool director, Jacqueline (participant-chosen pseudonym) decided to return to higher education. She went back to college, changing disciplines from the humanities to obtain her bachelor's degree in the science of human development. During this time, she honed her academic writing and research abilities to prepare herself to join the academy. Jacqueline had confidence in her writing ability and worked hard to become a strong

academic writer. "I have always known I was a good writer – people have always told me that," she said. She began by first attending a local community college and then the state university.

> I took my little diploma, my little A.A. diploma and my transcripts to an outreach meeting that they had at the state college. I went to City College (pseudonym), and it had an amazing quality and high level of classes. In addition to those required classes, I took anthropology and psychology and a logic class and then I transferred as a junior into Orange State University (pseudonym).

While she worked as a research assistant after graduation, Jacqueline applied to graduate programs in psychology and education, eventually moving across the U.S. to attend her master's program in developmental psychology. Her reentry to graduate school was characterized by curiosity and focus. When describing her academic writing, she sketched out a continuum between "cutting down distractions" and an ability to remain hyper-focused when a theoretical concept grabbed her attention. "I'm kind of a dive in and come up six hours later kind of a person," she said, describing how she researches and writes.

Although her writing and research work was highly unique and individual, developing as a scholar and writer, for her, was connected to other academics with whom she can collaborate. She also sought out physical spaces and aesthetic environments in which she wrote her papers, looking for inspiration and motivation. Recognizing that her age and experiences placed her on the fringes in relation to her fellow students, Jacqueline developed communities of support as a way of negotiating graduate study and her change of career. Through her writing and research abilities, she distinguishes herself from her classmates and finds a way forward as a scholar.

3.1.2.3 Jennifer

It had been nearly 40 years since Jennifer (participant-chosen pseudonym) had been in an academic setting. Already a successful writer and experienced teacher when she started her Ed.M. in English Education, her reentry journey to graduate school was not a straightforward

one. Our conversations revealed tangents of academic and career exploration and writing as a self-taught craft. Initially, she began a publishing career thinking, "I didn't have that sort of typical [background], like people who go into a career as writers have had, a K-12 experience, where you work on the literary magazine." She chose a publishing career because she was a reader and said she "came out of publishing as a writer." She wrote fiction for a living for 20 years and then taught English for 20 more.

At 63, she reflected on the educational and career experiences that now inform her pedagogy and writing practices. As a writer, Jennifer described her journey as one of finding her voice,

> [Then] I started working with teachers and writers and became an educator, and through teaching reading and writing, I think I honed my own writing path. During the entire two decades that I've been a teacher, I've been writing for myself and the process of that has helped me find my voice.

Jennifer's account of reentry to graduate school as an older adult was a search for professional legitimacy and writing voice. The academic environment challenged her ideas of good writing through long standing conventions and expectations of writing. Also, a sense of belonging in her program was decentered by feeling much older than her classmates. Jennifer negotiated these experiences of marginality by taking up a position of resistance in her writing and adopted a rationale for being in graduate school. Her stories also shed light on the physicality of her graduate experiences, supporting a better understanding of the bodies we write in.

Each of these snapshots offer a short introduction to the women in the study, which I will expand upon over the next three chapters. As a participant and researcher in this study, what follows are a few paragraphs here about my own positionality in the study before a discussion of my conceptual frame that informs the research design.

3.1.2.4 My Positionality as a Researcher

This study was a very personal project for me. My graduate experience as a 50-year-old woman who reentered my master's degree has driven this inquiry from the start, often unconsciously bringing me to look into the faces of the women in my study with startling recognition. In my own quest for belonging, I have perhaps sought out my peers in this study only to find that recognition was only partial. Each of us have had our own turning points of pain, surrender and renewal, journeys in our education and work that we have yet to complete. As much as I related to each of the women, our experience was as particular to us as our bodies were, sharply defining how we perceived ourselves and were perceived in the world.

The questions that initially surfaced in my research, however, extend beyond the personal. They have provoked a problematization of what it is like for older adult women to participate in graduate education, where the average age is 33 (Council of Graduate Schools, 2020). A place as I mentioned in my introduction, that is largely constructed with the needs of 25–34-year-olds in mind. My curiosity grew when I realized that this assumption is normalized and easily accepted by myself and fellow students. Older students do not often find ways to connect with each other on campus, we are simply expected to fit in. Not only does age function to create the experience of marginality, but other body-identities and lived experiences factor in, making it challenging to find support and community.

As a white woman, I recognize that in a college of teachers, my embodied presence was consistent with nationwide norms, and that in that context, as in others, I benefitted from racial privilege. At my college, Data USA's website reported in 2020 that the most common race/ethnicity and sex grouping is white female. The NCES reported that of master's degree graduates in the field of education across the U.S., women outnumber men 3 to 1 in 2017-18. In

all degrees, 63% of female students earning a master's degree in 2017-18 were white. Women from other race groups only made up 36% of M.A. students.

At my more liberal institution, I was immersed in an educational context that brought up issues of equity as well as literacy. I became more acutely aware that while I might feel marginal in terms of age, women of color, many of whom were first-generation graduate students, felt very minoritized and marginalized in their racialized bodies in the academy and their own daily lives. Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) pointed to lack of social support for students of color in graduate programs, showing that the inequitable social experience of Black graduate students compared to their white counterparts impacted their accessibility and therefore retention in their programs of study. For them, marginality was a more intense intersectional experience that required a greater response of resistance to cope with the demands of graduate school. These inequities remain, and women of color continue to fight for equal standing and access in academia. I had to continually bring this awareness to my consideration of how I showed up as a researcher.

As I became more conscious of what it meant to embody my graduate journey, I kept wondering, what it would mean to experience a more inclusive, holistic, embodied experience of participating in the academy? Like the women in my study, I sought a graduate degree to enact a career change. However proud I have felt of my academic achievements along the way, graduate school also enhanced my concerns about my gender and age. I wondered whether once I graduated, I would be able to make a move to a career as an adult educator as I imagined. In relation to the women in my study, we all felt some similar concerns about this aspect of our next career. Although I was in a position to ask questions about their experience, I was experiencing graduate school simultaneously.

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So, as I began my research, I also recognized that the women may neither see their graduate experiences as I did nor interpret these experiences as I do. My intention was to see what, if any, connections they were making to the body in their graduate work and how they might articulate these connections. Having described the selection of participants for my study, briefly introduced Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer and discussed my positionality in this work, I go on to outline how I thought about my project. As a start, I provide a figure (3.1) as a summary of my data construction before moving to discuss my methodology and methods.

Figure 3.1 Summary of Data Construction

Summary of Data Construction

An Embodied Methodology	• Conceptual Framework: Embodiment Theory informed by Critical Feminisms • Narrative Approach • Constructivist Stance
Methods	• Initial Survey • Body-Anchored Individual Interviews • Group Gatherings • Reflexive Journal • Material Artifacts • Engaging Participants Around Data
Research Questions	• Main Research Question • Sub-questions

3.2 Embodying Methodology

As I developed the methodology and design of my research study, I thought a great deal about the idea that bodies are part of research, whether openly acknowledged or not. Critical

feminist researchers have noted that bodies are often absent from research (Coffey, 1999; Ellingson, 2006, 2017; Stenberg, 2002). By taking an embodied approach, my research embraced a methodology that intentionally resisted disembodied ideas of collecting data, or of taking up a theoretically objective distance between me and the participants (Ellingson, 2017; Lather, 1986; Stenberg, 2002). That is, I approached data construction with the idea of accounting for the way inquiry happens *within a body* as well as *between bodies*.

The implications of an embodied stance in research practices are many, but as a start, awareness of bodies required reflexivity towards the women in the project, and an attunement to my own researcher body. Taking up an embodied methodology informed by feminist criticality was a way to explicitly acknowledge the presence of the body and its interactions; that my bodily presence changes participants' interactions in the research process just as theirs changed mine (Charmaz, 2011; Ellingson, 2017). Both anxiety and excitement surfaced for me as I began to set up interviews to meet with the women. I hoped to create a sense of collaboration and wondered how Zoom would work as a way to construct data around my research questions. On September 17th, I wrote in my reflexive journal:

> I am anxious, expectant, panicky in my belly, mind full, and yet an intuitive sense that I am ready for this, I just need to step into the water. My mindful meditation to ground myself beforehand was to accept myself as I enter the room and to accept myself and each of the women as they come, however they come and to believe that we would find a way forward.

This perspective was to save me time and again in creating solutions to my data construction dilemmas. *I* could not make community happen, nor storytelling for that matter. *We* had to find our way as a group, and I had to trust the process.

In addition, I highlight the embodied materiality of stories, conversations, and written papers as integrated with the bodies that created them. Ellingson (2017) pointed to how essential

it is to acknowledge how bodies speak, touch, and otherwise interact with each other in creating understanding. Although we met on Zoom, our conversations happened as co-constructed and relational times of understanding our experiences more fully. Our dialogues were not data points or isolated instances but embodied and materially couched in everyday life for all the women in the study, including myself. Moreover, the stories they told were embodied moments *amidst* family life, current academic writing, teaching, and the context of ongoing COVID-19 uncertainty. As Ellingson noted, "participant-created data endeavors to embrace embodiment in participants' daily lives more fully than researchers typically do when researchers inscribe data" (2017, p. 139).

3.2.1 Framed by Critical Feminisms

The body is what makes us feel most human in our learning and teaching (Darder, 2009). As Darder (2009) says, "teachers and students must labor in the flesh: teaching and learning must be anchored in a material understanding of our human existence, as a starting place for classroom praxis and our struggle to reinvent the world" (p. 219). She named what I had noticed in the classroom: that body awareness or paying attention to our experience of being and knowing through emotion, sensation, intuition, and experiences, was strangely absent throughout the teaching of writing in school. If it wasn't absent, teachers and students were taught to manage it, quiet it, make it sit still and obey instruction.

For me and many other educators, Darder connected the vitality, sensuality, and experience of the body to the developing mind, and simultaneously called out the tendency of schooling practices to alienate us from experiencing our bodies in teaching and learning. She dared articulate that awareness of the body was a deeply feminine kind of knowing. Far from negating the cognitive "rigor" of academia, she said we should take risks to know what the body

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knows—it made us more whole humans and more alive thinkers. Darder made me remember my forgotten body as both a teacher, a learner and now researcher.

As I argued in the review of literature, embodiment is directly informed by critical feminist thought. I could not imagine undertaking this study without drawing on a range of feminist conceptions of the body's role in understanding and interpreting experience. Knowing through the body is not strictly the purvey of women, but by bringing a feminist criticality to my study of embodied experience, the missing aspect of attention to bodies came sharply into focus. As I engaged with the narratives of Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer, part of my conceptual frame had to reflect an understanding of the gendered, raced, and historical body in academic settings in relation to how women perceive and interpret their experiences of learning.

3.2.2 A Narrative Approach

I was purposeful in pursuing this work through narrative inquiry because for human beings, storytelling is an embodied, meaning-making activity. Seidman pointed out that, "[r]ecounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that human beings have made sense of their experience" (2006, p. 8). Whether stories are oral or written down, and however they are passed from generation to generation as history, they become part of individual, family, or institutional narratives. These narratives embody and are embodied in the values human beings hold and the cultures that surround them. Thus, storytelling functions in various ways for communities and individuals to explain and understand the world.

In the most general sense, narrative studies can do one of two things. A narrative study can look at the way researchers use data analysis strategies or, it can look at the kinds of stories that are told (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my inquiry, I focused on what kinds of stories are told

to better understand the embodied experiences of ongoing identity construction, visibility, and marginality of the women in my study. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) described the varied nature and relational quality of data as "field texts" and stressed the importance of situating storied experience three-dimensionally in "the temporal, the personal or social and place" (p. 48). As a result, an awareness of when and where and with whom experiences occurred became important in the creation and negotiation of these field texts with Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer. We returned again and again to the stories of our lives before graduate school, turning points in our journeys, stories of returning to academic environments to better reflect this three-dimensionality.

Exploring narratives together had the added benefit of conveying a sense of *qualia* about Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer's' reentry to graduate school later in life. Qualia refers to the subjective quality of conscious experience or what it was like for the person experiencing it (Repovš, 2004). By focusing on what it was like for the women, the collecting, analyzing, and writing up data refrained from generalizing experience or attempting to explain why or how something happened. Instead, I invited the women in my study to co-construct an understanding of embodied experience through the subjective mode of storytelling (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In addition, storytelling performs a range of functions, and Riessman (2008) noted that one function of stories is to convey a message or a point. For example, storytelling can serve the purposes of telling individual stories, group stories about identity, or they can be told to mobilize social action or engender political activism. Again, narrative research privileges story over analysis as a meaning-making activity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Colvin, 2008). By looking at the identities and positions Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer take up to make sense of experience, these women's descriptions also offer insight as to the purposes of their stories.

Therefore, a narrative inquiry set the tone for women to make connections between bodily experiences and life events. By retelling our experiences to one another in the present, we not only recount what happened, but enter a process of meaning-making through what we tell and how we tell it. That is why, I saw narrative research as the best approach for exploring Winnie's, Jacqueline's, and Jennifer's embodied experiences of reentry to their graduate programs.

There was also retelling on my part as I analyzed these conversations and wrote about possible interpretations in the discussion of data. Kim (2016) relies on Polkinghorne (1988) to discuss this aspect of finding narrative meaning, which "is a way of understanding human experience through stories, that in turn, help us understand the human phenomena and human existence" (p. 190). This search for narrative meaning, however, can be problematic for researchers. Kim (2016) cautions that this is not a straightforward process.

Polkinghorne (1988), for instance, pointed out some characteristic problems in the study of meaning. First, that meaning is not tangible or static and not easily grasped. Second, that we are reliant on the storyteller's recollection or introspection and do not have access to the realm of meaning of others. Third, information can be gathered through their narratives and stories. These narratives are always connected to a context and cannot be interpreted in isolation. Fourth, because narrative analysis is interpretive, as a method it may not have the precision of quantitative tools. Last, the realm of meaning comes about in various modes of presentation such as perception, remembrance, and imagination. Complex connections between images and ideas make this investigation a difficult one.

In this endeavor, then is a "toing and froing" from whole to parts and parts to whole as Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative mode of analysis describes. The process of conveying an

interpretation of the data in a coherent narrative also involves what Kim (2016) characterizes as "creating stories (storying and restorying) by integrating events and happenings into a temporarily organized whole with a thematic thread, called the plot" (p. 197). Therefore, in my collaboration with Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer, their chapters reflect a restorying of the events and happenings that they told in a retelling of my own. In my rendering of their meaning-making, I make new meaning, to which they responded through comments and corrections. I called this research activity *Engaging Participants Around Data*. I narrativized their individual chapters to reflect their experience faithfully within the bounds of my questions and the purpose of the project. Continuing the conversation through each woman's response to reading her chapter was a way to further co-construct understandings of experience. This leads me to a second aspect of my data construction methods, that of taking up a constructivist stance.

3.2.3 A Constructivist Stance

Sociologist Kathy Charmaz (2011) affirmed the unfixed nature of socially constructed data in her work with grounded theory and viewed data as problematic. She noted how, for example, constructionist researchers intentionally resisted positivistic attempts to work with data by not generalizing personal experiences, comparing experiences to an external reality, or taking up an objective, detached stance. Instead, they recognized that researchers and participants mutually shape the construction of data and over time, continue to shape it (Charmaz, 2011). I took up these same ideas about data as mutually constructed in my study by recognizing that what comes up continues to be built and is always partial, always contingent, always contextual (Charmaz, 2006).

So, to approach the data from a constructivist research stance for instance, was to be conscious that meaning made in one moment of conversation continued to evolve and required a

responsive stance by me as a researcher. Responsiveness is an embodied act as a researcher was a deliberate part of designing the data methods, a stance I took in the process of talking to Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer. Charmaz states, "reflexivity and assuming relativity aids us in recognizing multiple realities, positions, and standpoints—and how they shift during the research process for both the researcher and the research participants" (2011, p. 169). Therefore, I aimed to be flexible towards what participants wanted to talk about during the inquiry process, and how their ideas and insights might change upon reflection.

For example, there were times in the research where the women wanted to change, elaborate on, or adjust their stories, and I found multiple interviews very helpful in revisiting and re-hearing narratives. The women did repeat the same stories, but often in the retelling, elaborated on details or offered greater context. I found that embracing a constructivist approach to narrative inquiry was a critical stance to take in the design of my project. As I describe the research design in the next portion of this chapter, I outline a reimagination of typical methods to reflect the presence and participation of bodies in research. Therefore, I first discuss the contextual factors that shaped my project and an overview of my research process.

3.2.4 Positioning the Study

During the advent of COVID-19, the institutional IRB did not approve research that included face to face meetings with participants. To gain approval to conduct my research, I proposed that the research be done online. This was different from my initial research plan. Originally, I envisioned a physically present, interactive study with women. During the pandemic, a sense of "being with" one another during the research suddenly and dramatically shifted to a different picture when imagined online.

It first seemed that the limitations related to the construction of data through remote, online technology were myriad, and possibly insurmountable. For example, I had planned observations as a method, but I did not know how I would be able to notice participants' bodies when all I saw was a head in a small square on a screen. The idea of embodied research seemed contradicted by the very nature of the instrument we had to use, and this change required a reconceiving of my research methods. One limitation I had to accept was that important aspects of observable embodied responses by participants may be lost or changed in an online setting. Because of a mainly visual, verbal and more structured medium, technology shifted the way participants and I engaged. It was the first challenge of responsiveness to the study. As a result, I rethought how my embodied methods could invite the women to online meetings that purposefully included the body.

The shift to conducting research online was less of a barrier than I thought, and because of it, participants took a more active role in noticing their own bodies. This change was a far more effective way of gathering first-hand experience because I invited them to report on their own bodies rather than to engage in traditional observations or rely on my own interpretations of behavior. By noticing our own bodies, the distance between ourselves and what we wanted to find out about was immediately reduced. Self-observation removed any attempt by me to try and understand embodied experience from the outside and was aligned with socially constructed research tenets (Charmaz, 2011). One participant called the mindful grounding exercise "a gift" to her in our first interview. Jennifer remarked,

> For you to just do that for us, for me, it felt like a gift. In an interview where you are working on your doctoral project …it just felt great and so helpful [to pause]. But we have that feeling like we're not supposed to take care of ourselves as… especially as older women.

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It was in small moments like these when I realized that for the participants, attention to the body could also be experienced as care. It was one small way of interrupting the dominantly cognitive aspects of academic research that was typical of research interviews. Mindful slowing down affirmed the integral to the project was a sense of tending to ourselves as women, or "caring for the body-self" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 55). Interestingly, being online did not present barriers to this mindful practice.

A Zoom room as a "site" of research did not have the embodied qualities of in-person research, but this was not insurmountable. We did not have the ability to see the whole posture and mannerisms of one another but meeting together online did provide a sense of intimacy though privacy and the comfort of being in our own familiar environments. Looking back now, meeting in person during the pandemic might have presented its own limitations. For instance, facial expressions would likely be hidden by masks, or participants' may have had anxiety about the risks of travel or meeting in person, resulting in poor attendance, and impacting their ability to engage.

Other compelling benefits to using online technology to conduct research emerged. First, although I had seen meeting online as limiting, it nevertheless led to respondents that were well suited for the project. I was able to recruit participants from various locations without concern about whether we were geographically close. During the study, travel, or the many commitments we all had did not unduly impinge on the research process. Another benefit was that none of us had to face the anxiety or risks and challenges of public transportation during COVID-19, nor did we spend extra money or time traveling. Despite the stressors of this uncertain time, these factors may have made it more feasible for the women to participate in my study. With a

description of the context of the study and my methodological convictions in mind, I outline my embodied data construction activities in the next section.

3.3 Embodying Methods

Ellingson observed that, "understanding that embodiment in research practices and products necessarily will vary across the qualitative continuum empowers researchers to make strategic decisions about engaging with their body selves and relevant actants and discourses" (2017, p. 44).

As I began to develop my methods for my project, I discovered that qualitative research provided freedom in the kind of data I constructed, and, as Ellingson observed, to be strategic about my data methods. My reflexive journal was instructive for developing my project proposal. On October 7, 2020, I wrote,

> I'm reading Ellingson again, realizing how much of my inspiration for studying embodiment came from reading her book, Embodiment in Qualitative Research. I think it's where I made so many connections for my personal life with teaching and learning. Being at the proposal stage, I am reading it with new eyes and have been able to take away a few research methods, look back on the references and realize how much she actually did as an author "not to "hide" where all her readings were found -- even the page numbers were there! It's made it a lot easier for me to trace ideas and see her basic foundations in phenomenology and ethnography. I'm also seeing how she departs from conventional qualitative research through a couple of areas I may want to use for my study to best talk about the differing experiences of women on the writing journey:
> - Multimodal expressions of data from participants--what do they create in response to their embodied writing experience?
> - The idea of embodied interviewing and Stelter's process for that [interview method] as a model for my interviews.
> - Do I want to move towards an analysis that comes from multiple perspectives, (Haraway) in order to disrupt reading of data that wants to make certain conclusions based on a positivist way of seeing? I also think it will be helpful when thinking about how I want to do a study with diverse participants and use portraiture (Maybe cite Gentry)? Think about case study?

When I read this excerpt, the excitement I felt about moving into this phase of the project came over me once again, as it would many times during the project. Reading my thoughts again, I

saw the initial inspiration fleshed out in the methods of my project and felt the curiosity and

pleasure of thinking it out through writing. I felt grateful for my academic mentors and the

readings that have shaped the research. As I go forward, I use table 3.2 to summarize the

research activities I used for my project and then describe each method below.

Table 3.2 Research Activities Conducted

Research Activity	Frequency	How Conducted
Purposeful Recruitment of Participants (Mar-June 2021)	Contacted 25 educators for referrals. Distributed 15 surveys, received 13 replies.	Snowball method. Created a chart of all responses and follow up contacts. Sent Google Form survey to grad student referrals.
Purposive Selection of Participants (Mar-July 2021)	One initial survey of 13 questions.	Identified 7 potential participants based on selection criteria. Respondents identify as a woman, over 30 years, with a gap of at least 10 years before reentry to grad school and would like to discuss academic writing experiences. Sent letter of invitation and informed consent form. Six women participated.
Body Anchored Interviews (July 2021-Mar 2022)	3 individual 45-minute interviews over a period of 6-8 months	Multiple, semi-structured interviews with mindfulness activities. Conducted with each participant via Zoom video call.
Group Gatherings (July 2021-Mar 2022)	3 group 45-minute gatherings over a period of 6-8 months	Participants engaged in a semi-structured discussion, mindfulness activity, shared stories about graduate writing, wrote about instances, shared writing processes.
Material Artifacts (July 2021-Mar 2022)	Throughout interviews, gatherings and engagement around data.	Invited Participants to share any examples of academic writing, personal responses to interviews and comments about data chapters.
Reflexive Researcher Journal (Written throughout design and implementation)	Pre- and post-interview entries. Periodically wrote personal reflections about solving challenges in research.	Mindful preparation before interviews and gatherings. Kept running Google doc of dated entries. Reflected on previous entries for prep. Artwork created to represent process and reflection on practice. Adjustments made to the project through reflexivity.
Engaging Participants Around Data (Sept 2021-June 2022)	During individual interviews 2 and 3 as needed	Ongoing throughout interviews, email, text. Clarified events, instances, and details in transcripts. Explored further stories. Engaged in reciprocal and reflexive conversations via Google doc copy of their chapter.

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews were the main source of data for my inquiry. Ellingson expressed that in qualitative interviews, space for pertinent issues to come to the fore can be made in "an interactive conversation created between participant and interviewer that provides plenty of room for participants to engage in sense-making about issues that are important to them" (2017, p. 111). I used a semi-structured approach to interviews by preparing a series of questions in advance and making them open enough so the women in the study could take the conversation towards topics that were of concern to them (see Appendices D & E, Semi-structured Interview Questions.)

I planned for both individual and group interviews to explore different settings for participants to share their writing experiences. I scheduled one to one body-anchored interviews with each of the women to build detailed, personal narratives about their experiences, and I planned group gatherings for all the women to meet one another, share stories and discuss their experiences of reentering graduate school later in life.

3.3.1.1 Body-Anchored Interviews

I invited the women to three individual, body-anchored interviews over 8 months (Seidman, 2006; Stelter, 2010). These interviews were 60 minutes long and occurred over Zoom. Body-anchored interviews start with the body in mind. Therefore, our first step was to engage in a mindful, grounding exercise, to center ourselves in body sensations and emotions. To explain, I invited participants to pause together at the start of an interview for about five minutes, taking note of how they sat in their chair, what tensions they noted in their body and to focus on being connected to the floor or earth or notice the room around them. From a place of full presence in our bodies, we began talking about our experiences of graduate school.

3.3.1.2 Group Gatherings

I saw the women's graduate experiences as embedded in their various social contexts. I hoped that by talking about these experiences in a group the six participants and myself might find common ground and support in sharing our stories. Wilkinson (1998) suggested that focus groups, from a social constructionist framework, have potential to yield high quality data through the co-construction of realities, the "dynamic negotiation of meaning in context" (p. 112). Six participants, Jacqueline, Winnie, Jennifer, Katja, Natasha, and Collette (pseudonyms) were invited to join three focus group gatherings of 60 minutes each over 8 months during this project. These gatherings differed somewhat from conventional focus groups where participants simply give their opinions about a set of issues, view documents, or debate a set of questions (Wilkinson, 1998) instead, it was a space to hear about each other's writing struggles, processes, and to discuss academic writing that we felt proud of.

3.3.2 Material Artifacts

Across a range of research disciplines including Physics (Barad, 2007), Health Sciences (Sandelowski, 2002), Social Psychology (Hydén, 2013/17), and Gender Studies (Ellingson, 2017), researchers have argued that there is lack of attention to the material and physical aspects of research. Saldaña (2014) alluded to sweat and how hands get dirty during analysis. In this vein, I suggest that this may also be true in the research of writing. Academic writing, for example, has not escaped the western traditions of privileging the cognitive over the body, making the conceptual, linguistic, and analytical aspects of writing more important than the material. Ellingson noted that embodied researchers, "each of us in our own ways provides embodied methodological paths out of the modernist, positivist land of theoretical allegiances and methodological rule-following" (2017, p. 153).

Although it could be said that there is no shortage of material text in writing research, the process of writing up research typically does not open up to considering the materiality of bodies. That is, noticing bodies and the materiality that surrounds research is set aside in the quest for cognitive interpretations of data. As a departure from this tendency, I included both material artifacts created by the women that they thought connected to the project. I foregrounded their descriptions of felt body experiences. I kept a journal of embodied responses and practices as a researcher. Throughout the research, the women were invited to share significant writing spaces, objects, and written pieces as part of their storytelling, and to describe their importance in their graduate school journeys. The genre or formality of pieces of writing they shared was up to them, but these writings included any papers they had written for classes related to their stories. In their interviews Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer all offered writing pieces that accompanied their stories and which form part of the discussion of data. These excerpts of writing provided another dimension of each writer and helped to flesh out a material understanding of each woman's perception of her experiences.

3.3.3 Reflexive Researcher Journal

Keeping a reflexive journal draws attention to another tenet of ethical bodies in research, that of its dynamic nature. Embodied research is complex and as a researcher, I needed to remain open to challenge and revision (La Jevick & Springaay, 2008). As much as I desired a concrete plan and to carry it out in every detail, I knew a plan without flexibility was a relationally rigid way to engage with the women and could cause harm or even trauma (Van der Kolk, 2015). In embarking on embodied research, I had no way to predict bodies, or the ways in which bodies respond to being noticed. I could only look to more experienced researchers and remain responsive. Helpfully, Ellingson noted that no single ethical standard can encompass all

situations that arise, because "bodies change during the course of research," (2017, p. 47). Moreover, "embodied ethics includes the responsibility to make sense of participants in ways that honor the complexity and evolving circumstances in which they live and in which they understand their identities" (2017, p. 47-48). This conception references embracing a range of practices that aid developing as an ethical and flexible researcher. I have found that creating art responses, mandalas, and journals in relation to my academic writing enables me to work out questions, solve problems and find ways forward in ethical ways.

As is my habit during my own writing process, I constructed written and creative responses for this work. I also kept a reflexive journal as part of the data as suggested by Janesick (2016) as a record of my thoughts, emotions, and embodied responses to my research process. This process included mapping out my ideas, creating several large Google documents which contained my pictures and inspiration for this project, writing reflections in preparation before and after interviews and focus group meetings, creating material art as intuitive responses to the design and implementation of the project such as drawings and mandalas (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Unfinished Mandala Created During Data Analysis

I now turn towards the possibilities embodied feminist approaches to research afford. As co-researcher with my participants, we embarked on an exploration of writing experiences with research tools informed by mindfully noticing what happens in our bodies. We also engaged in mindfulness exercises before and after interviews and recorded reflections, artwork, and researcher notes to maintain a bodily connection with the work of research.

3.3.4 Engaging Participants Around Data

As a way of extending the conversation around written data, I continued conversing with Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer about how they were represented. Toward the end of the project, I checked in with them about the details of their accounts during the second and third body-anchored interviews, and I asked them to read their individual chapters. In the writing of data, I had engaging in restorying and interpreting their original account though narrative smoothing (Spence, 1986). Taking up humanizing and critical feminist ways of conducting research, we engaged in dialogue so that they could respond to my restoried accounts (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014).

In some of our conversations, the women asked me not to share aspects of our conversations or for me to shift the way I wrote about them. This exchange was an opportunity for each woman to reflect and comment on the extent to which I had made a faithful representation, even if she differed in her interpretation. For me it was important feedback and in the interest of transparency as a researcher, I sought to go beyond a validation of what facts were conveyed and continue the conversation through an ongoing response to written data (Sandelowski, 2002).

I asked Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer to review their chapters and to comment directly on accuracy and representation. I did this by sharing a GoogleDoc with them so that they could note any discrepancies, misunderstandings, or places where they had insight. The banter that ensued about their individual chapters was a lively, collaborative, and joyful experience that generated much laughter. Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer did not hesitate to correct me, restate events, or indicate if I misinterpreted their motivations. I in turn, made every effort to shift

towards what felt true to them while maintaining an interpretation of data that was faithful to the purpose of the inquiry.

Engaging participants around data also shows an ethic of care and respect towards participant's experiences during the project (Ellingson, 2017). To account for these ongoing conversations, I created interludes after each woman's chapter to reflect how she reciprocated with comments, questions and what was learned. The interludes serve to make the research process more transparent and to acknowledge my role in interpreting the data. Having detailed my research activities and with an attitude of promoting productive interaction during the entirety of the project, I expand on the concept of reciprocity in research before going on to how I approached data analysis.

3.3.5 Reciprocity of the Study

At the beginning of this inquiry, grant funding was not available, and participants were not directly paid for their involvement. Instead, I offered a gift voucher and a writing journal as tokens for their participation. After careful deliberation, I worked with the idea of reciprocity rather than compensation and structured the design so that the women would benefit from the study *and* experience no harm as participants (Ellingson, 2017). I anticipated that talking about bodies might produce discomfort though various emotions and stresses. As a result, I actively checked in, paced interviews, and respected what participants felt comfortable discussing. In addition, I asked permission to conduct recording, and described in detail the mindfulness exercises or any procedure that was part of the design. I also recognized that each participant would experience the research differently according to their interests, life experience or positionality and paid careful attention to how each woman responded to the process of data construction.

Because of the intentionally embodied design, collaborative storytelling approach, and reflexive journaling, I hoped they would experience additional benefits from taking part. To begin, this research project created a space to connect with other adult women as a support system and a place of shared experience. Second, the opportunity to reflect on their writing experiences offered greater awareness of their writing process, strengths, and current growth as writers. Third, engaging participants around data provided opportunities for participants to shape the narrative and how data was represented. Last, opportunities for respondents to co-author and co-publish articles from this inquiry project are part of future implications for this study.

These benefits were carefully balanced with conducting relationships in the context of research with respect and care for participants concerning issues of power. As Ellingson (2017) noted about reciprocity in interviews, natural dynamics of power and resistance are inherent, which can result in a productive give and take between researchers and participants:

> Moreover, participants receive the experience of the researcher's embodied participation in the interview and witness their stories. Both participants exert power within the interaction, and although the interviewer arguably has more power, interviewees are not without the power to exert control or to enforce an agenda of their own. Power and resistance can be exerted in an interview interaction in a myriad of potential material ways. (p. 110)

During the research process, knowing that as the interviewer I embodied more power by asking questions of the women for example, I made sure that questions were open ended and that participants had freedom to take the conversation to issues and topics they wanted to discuss. Overall, the notion of reciprocity meant that an ethic of care for the women in the study, a tenet of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000), was integral to the design and implemented at every opportunity (Ellingson, 2017). With this in mind, I move on to the last section and describe my process of data analysis.

3.3.6 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was an iterative one, combining a reading of and listening to, and looking at video-recorded interviews. After each session, I worked to clean up and clarify the automatic transcription generated by Zoom. Listening to the tone and cadence of the women's voices helped me make more sense of the words I was reading in the transcripts. I kept listening and returning to the transcripts and sometimes searched them for keywords like body, feel, writing, process, and noted the contexts in which they occurred. Table 3.4 illustrates my procedure and references to the sources I used in the process of layering the data analysis.

Table 3.4 Layers of Data Analysis

Layer One: Listening, Noting and Tagging
First pass at reading whole interview transcripts. The cleaning up of extra words from transcripts, removing repeated words, clarifying, and correcting punctuation by listening to the participants' voices as they spoke (Boeije, 2009; Mensah, 2020).
Layer Two: Tracking the Trends
Relistening to the transcripts and seeing what topics came up for participants, journaling about the words and phrases (Ellingson, 2017; Janesick, 2016). Creating a table to keep track of this in one place by listing the topic, quote, context of the quote and the meaning the participant seemed to make in the narrative (Romeo, 2016). Seeing what trends came up for participants or where they differed on a topic. Making notes and developing questions for further interviews (Mensah, 2020). Looking specifically for places of embodied experience and metaphor (Haydén, 2013).
Layer Three: Reduction and Focus on Three Individuals
I began to think about what the different women's narratives were bringing to light (Chase, 1995). Metaphor was not as helpful as embodied history and the journey to graduate school. I wrote about the data to work out what I was seeing through chapter drafts (Ellingson, 2017; Janesick, 2016). It seemed there were similar topics, but each narrative expressed a different embodied experience. I chose three participants who seemed to exemplify complexity in their experiences of visibility, marginalization, and agency in their graduate school experience.
Layer four: Digging Deeper
Creating a deeper layer of analysis by looking at instances of embodiment with a greater degree of feminist criticality by returning to ask more questions of the data (Mensah, 2020). Noting the actions each woman took in her context and how this connected with writing. Returning to my research questions and noting where the data was pulling away from my original questions and shaping them (Mensah, 2020). Returning to transcripts and asking the women for clarification and their responses to written data. Engaging participants in dialogue around data (Ellingson, 2017; Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014).

Layer One: Listening, Noticing, and Tagging

In my first passes at reading and listening to whole interviews, I first cleaned up the

transcripts, removing repeated words, clarifying, and correcting punctuation depending on what I

could hear in the participants' voices as they spoke. This was one of the more troubling aspects of automatic recording online, because sentences would be broken up in strange places in the generated transcript. The only way to recover the sense of sentences was to listen to how it was spoken. I also added sounds, or actions by participants to the transcript. I noted in my journal on August 7, 2021, *"One thing I'm noticing about reading through transcripts is that "hearing" the voice inflection is so much more insightful to understand the sense of what the women are saying and their possible meaning."* After the process of neatening up, I highlighted and made initial comments relating to any metaphors and stories that surfaced, marking them so they could be found later.

Layer Two: Tracking the Trends

In a second pass at the interviews, I re-listened to them as a way of seeing where further detail was needed and prepared new questions for the next body-anchored interview. I also wrote about what I was seeing and hearing in my researcher journal. On December 14, 2021, to make sense of the data, I began doing some writing about my previous pass at the interviews,

> I'm starting to write up data and realize I haven't done a thorough enough job of neatening up interviews and coding them. I have to go back and relook and relisten. Today, doing some writing about data and thinking about how I'm going to discuss it has provided a sense of what I need to explore in the data. I've also tried two things so far, 1) searched words that the women talk about to see what comes up in interviews 2) thought about the broad themes I think I see and started to put them in the table I created.

As common threads emerged, I started a table (Table 3.5) to note the topic, the participant and direct quote, and what meaning they seemed to be making out of the conversation. For instance, age in relation to graduate study generated sub-topic such as connections with other students, adjusting to graduate school, and the demands of academic writing.

Table 3.5 Excerpt: Topics, Quotes, Context and Meaning-making by Participant

Topic	Participant Quote	Context	Meaning-making
Ageism: After reading, I searched "age" "old" and "young" in transcripts. Seen as both pos Reinventing self, being useful, having life experience, "ruling the world" and negative not normal, limiting, less legit, having missed out	**Jacqueline: Int#1 20:14** "You know, most people when they come to college they, you know they're in a little bit of shock and they're young people and isolated, but they immediately make friends their own age, who are in the same position as them, you know, whereas **when you're older there's nobody that's like you know that's good to what you're going through, it's harder to find you know, your people.** **Jacqueline Int#1 28:07** she's in her 50s you know so it's another like (example) You know **I think we're going to rule the world basically. Our age cohort.**	Jacqueline: talked about her move to the east coast and gradually moving towards NYC after being very exhausted. Then coming to campus. Jacqueline talking about another connection she made academically with a woman who is doing important work	Jacqueline: **relatability factor for older students** and "finding your people" Her perception that younger students can fit in more immediately. Jacqueline inspired whenever she connects with older women--sees these examples as proof of women her age and older having much to offer.

In between creating this table and re-reading, I returned to my reflexive journal to see what notes I had made and what impact my thoughts had on the study going forward. On August 3, 2021, I noted this trend of talking about age after the second body-anchored interviews,

> The more mature women sought greater challenge and satisfaction in their academic work, but the re-entry to grad school presented them with a sense that they were peripheral, non-mainstream and that the age gap between them and younger students disqualified them in certain respects. The most senior women in the study, Jacqueline and Katja developed strong narratives about themselves to sustain and see themselves as capable and good at what they were attempting, particularly as writers: "I was a great student" "I am good at writing" "I know this is something I have an ability in that others may not have--and a love of writing (Jacqueline)" ascribing themselves to stand out in the way that others saw them, their performance and their ability to do the work of grad school. They often mentioned how much it meant when their professors affirmed them or noticed their abilities such as writing, and grades meant a great deal to them--a marker that they truly had what it took to be there.

It was at this point that I realized that the age factor and the narratives the women created to feel a sense of legitimacy would likely be an important focus of the study and warranted deeper investigation. I returned to reading and listening and watching the videos again and again to dig deeper into the trends I saw. I also created notes and questions for further interviews and future group meetings.

Layer Three: Reduction and Focus

I chose my participants methodically, focusing the project on the accounts of three participants. This process consisted of continuing to note trends, revisiting my research questions, and deciding on the individuals and stories that best reflected the larger themes that consistently emerged. I decided I would focus on the women who most clearly exemplified these themes inwriting up the data. In addition, Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer had each shared a story in the group about an academic paper they felt proud of writing. They also shared the actual paper that they wrote as an artifact. I used these stories as a starting point for noticing where embodiment appeared in their stories (Haydén, 2013). The forthcoming chapters about each of the women explore this analysis in much greater detail.

Some data belonged in more than one category and so larger groups were made to be more inclusive of codes that came up together, particularly in story form. For instance, emotions surfaced alongside somatic symptoms such as nausea and muscle pain for Jennifer when under pressure to perform academic writing in a class. This experience contrasted with Jennifer finding a way into the paper in that same class in which the professor encouraged playfulness and experimentation as well as using traditional academic structures for a paper.

I then returned to my research questions to see what I was learning about the women's embodied experiences of academic writing. They were diverse, though they experienced

similarities related to the topics that came up. I looked for complexity in their meaning-making and in the narrating of embodied responses. I also noted how the women utilized writing as a form of agency. I wrote chapters about each one, trying to make sense of what I was seeing and hearing in the interviews through writing.

Layer Four: Digging in Deeper

Having teased out places of embodied experience in the narratives, I refocused on the experiences of Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer, going deeper in another layer of analysis. Although feminist criticality accompanied my analysis of embodiment in their stories, it was somewhat secondary earlier on. In this layer of analysis, I returned to how concepts of feminist criticality could inform a deeper interpretation of how the women perceived their embodied experiences. Looking at how they negotiated their situations, for example, brought their strengths to the surface more clearly. In Winnie's case, it became clearer how she was utilizing academic writing to express agency. For Jacqueline, her confidence as a writer enables her to enact other aspects of becoming an academic. Jennifer sought authenticity and expression through her writing voice. I had to make a reflexive move and refocus the analysis on my original questions to see if or where the data was pulling away from the original questions and bringing a new shape to them.

Below, I restate the main research question and sub-questions to bring them closer to my explanation of the analysis.

My primary research question is *When women re-enter the academy after a significant gap in their post-secondary education, what do the embodied experiences of these women tell us about their visibility within the institution and their agency to work against being marginalized?*

My sub-questions are:

1. *How do these women's perceptions of themselves inform how they negotiate this transition?*

2. *How do these women's embodied experiences inform how they position themselves in the academy?*

3. *What do we learn through these women's stories about how they participate in academic writing?*

The histories and identities of the women had become much more prominent in understanding their perceptions, and so as I wrote about the women, I included these aspects to talk about how identities and histories are carried within bodies into the here and now. I had to refine my questions somewhat to reflect what had come up in the narratives. I went back and listened to the interviews again in a recursive move to make sure I was listening well. I saw some gaps in the women's descriptions and asked them to more fully describe what they alluded to. With Winnie, for instance, I had not actually explored how she specifically racially identified, and so I asked if she would write about how, if at all she identified. She created a short writing piece in which she explored the experience of ambiguity and how she saw herself. In a more reflexive and thorough analysis, I interrogated my original research questions alongside Winnie's, Jacqueline's, and Jennifer's storied experiences as a whole.

3.4 Looking Forward

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I discuss the data by describing Jacqueline's, Winnie's, and Jennifer's experiences separately. By using their own words as much as possible and narrativizing some conversations in individual, body-anchored interviews, three distinct perspectives emerge from the women about their embodied relationship with graduate school and

academic writing in their discipline. I describe each participant and their journey of graduate study as constructed in our interviews and group discussion during the project.

Our conversations explored what, if any, connections we made between body and mind in the process of writing. In the individual interviews, their writing journey and personal history with higher education, leading to their reentry into graduate school take precedence. Drawing connections to the body, we gained greater awareness as to how body and mind work together to construct knowledge. We noticed how as women, we employ different strategies to resist, renegotiate, and sometimes capitulate to the cognitive demands of writing in academic settings, revealing its gendered practices and cognitive bent.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the larger trends across the three chapters and how they inform my research questions. I also discuss implications for this work and the practice of teaching writing with body awareness as a holistic and necessary shift toward the body in academic knowledge construction. In the final part of Chapter 7, I suggest the future research that could be explored as a result of my study.

Chapter 4: Embodying Ambiguity: Winnie

In this first chapter about the women in my study, I explore the experiences of Winnie, a woman whose stories reflect how marginality produced a different way of positioning her writing. I suggest in this chapter that Winnie's history and social context positioned her in ways that prompted a response shaped by critical literacy and activism. Similar to Jacqueline, graduate school was a means of changing careers for Winnie, and much like Jennifer, the purposes for Winnie's academic writing were motivated by a desire to resist dominant viewpoints. However, her feelings of marginality are complicated by perceptions of racial ambiguity in ways the other women's experiences were not. When she was positioned as marginal in her graduate school classes, academic writing became a way to speak out and represent views that were in the minority for Winnie, starting with her own. Exploring Winnie's stories of writing help to illuminate how the influences of culture, race, and gender shaped her embodied experience of writing academically.

As a woman in her 40s and a person of color who immigrated to the U.S., Winnie's narrative distinguished her from Jacqueline's and Jennifer's because of how intersections of race, gender, and perceptions of international students informed her stories of marginality (Crenshaw, 1991). Like Jacqueline and Jennifer, her undergraduate education provided a foundation from which to make shifts in her career, but she encountered institutional barriers that they did not. Winnie's tertiary education began with an undergraduate degree in the sciences, for which she did not write academic essays or research papers. Instead, she wrote cumulative, end of term exams to pass her courses. Thus, she did not enter graduate school with the same confidence as a writer as Jacqueline and Jennifer when she moved to the social sciences. However, she enjoyed engaging in personal writing and knew that others thought she expressed herself well.

During Winnie's undergraduate education, a culture of political resistance shaped her understanding of institutionalized racism. In 1994, the same year she graduated, her home country of South Africa began to emerge from an overtly racist one-party state and hold its first democratic elections. A rich culture of dissent and resistance to apartheid fostered activism at Cape of Good Hope University, and Winnie learned to think critically in every aspect of study. Activism on campus continually exposed the inequities that racism had produced in South African society by questioning the status quo through acts of resistance such as boycotts, speeches, and marches. I suggest that these formative years gave her the capacity to understand the marginality she experienced when she moved to the United States.

Winnie's narratives were compelling for several reasons. First, I noticed her ability to speak frankly about how she was perceived racially and professionally. She was also able to balance her personal experiences within the context and with the people around her. A key aspect of Winnie's narratives was the criticality with which she could read and respond to racist educational and work experiences. She possessed crucial racial literacies (Twine, 2004) that enabled her to "navigate racial belonging and racial hierarchies" at work and in her master's program (p. 901). In doing so, Winnie exemplified depth in racial literacy through her ability to read, write and speak about race and racism (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013), and these literacies enable her to problem-solve and make sense of the marginality she felt amongst women at work and in her program of study.

As a person of color in South Africa, Winnie readily apprehended that racialized societies rely on hierarchies and use aspects of identity to keep people seen as *other* on the periphery. Her story revealed how, as an immigrant to the United States, structural barriers prohibited access to further education at Southern State University and then later, perpetuated social exclusion at the

smaller, private Unity College. In addition, she grasped the irony of how her inclusion as a diversity student at Unity College worked to give the institution greater diversity but positioned her in a socially isolating situation. In my analysis, I forefront Winnie's history and racial identity to better contextualize her perspective and the purposes for which she takes up academic writing; to educate and to advocate for marginal voices. Throughout her narrative, Winnie's willingness to put her embodied experience of marginality into words ultimately made what she named the "silent messages" of discrimination more visible.

In the quote at the start of this chapter, Knoblauch (2012) observes that bodies are texts, and as such they are not fixed, uniform places to write from. Bodies are subject to changes in positionality, which can shift depending on context, and the body, in response, can transform to meet these shifts. Bodies *are* texts in that their histories are always being revised, rewritten and reconstructed. Knoblauch's words above point to the natural, improvisational, and creative movement of bodies in the telling of histories. Bodies, like all stories, she said, are never static. People take up new positions in the reconstruction of events and in relation to their stories as a way of continuing to make sense of experiences.

In the following discussion of interview and written data, I discuss how Winnie perceives mind and body work together in the endeavor of academic writing. I frame the chapter in three parts to explore her perspective. Her history as a critical thinker and identity as an occupational therapist emerge as foundational to how she navigated the inequities and social challenges of reentering study. I also explore the guiding beliefs she holds about writing, and how she acts to become more visible through her writing. Last, I move towards how she describes how she pictures the mindbody connection in her writing. In an analysis of my conversations with

Winnie, I offer interpretations of what meaning she makes of her experiences through a consideration of writing as an embodied practice informed by critical feminisms.

4.1 Winnie

> I guess I kind of liken myself as being a bit of a rebel or trying to be a part of change. So, framing that in writing and trying to utilize the opportunity, or the power of opportunity to not only make my point, but I think educate the reader, or even like the professor. And, hopefully, as part of a big sphere of people who are doing this that we shift the way we think, we do things differently.

Winnie joins me from her phone and her smile fills my screen. The familiar lilt of her South African accent is shaped by many years of living in the U.S. The rolling Rs of a young woman who grew up in Cape Town have now hardened, and the *A*s that are normally *Ah*s are now flattened, turning "aunt" into "ant". My American accent responds, and I find myself speaking with more definition, making the unconscious adjustments that seem to come whenever I speak to South Africans, drawing out and softening my tone. A mass of dark curls freely falls to shoulder length and sets off the warm brown tone of her complexion and her dark brown eyes. Winnie laughs out loud easily, routinely punctuating our conversation whenever she makes a joke about herself or on the many occasions that she finds irony in her stories. She has the gift of not taking herself too seriously.

Still, Winnie's sobriety about life is evident, and words of equity and advocacy ground our conversation together. Her cadence of speaking rises slowly and then quickly falls on one word, and then lifts in the next, creating pauses in her narrative. It is in these pauses that I have time to reflect on her meaning-making. I see a storying rhythm emerge as Winnie recalls her graduate experiences. Framing a vignette by boldly stating, "but I'm bossy, you know," she describes how she speaks her mind in a small group setting. She is careful to qualify unequivocal statements like, "I'm not going to allow the slacker to bring down my grade, and so I speak up,"

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and then quickly says, "but this is just my perspective." I learn that this is one way she tempers her ability to speak the truth and allow for other ways of seeing what she experiences. Her no-nonsense manner does not hesitate to call out the problematic, and yet a warmth and compassion emerges alongside these insights to render the places inequity and injustice have existed for her.

As the words I excerpted from Winnie's interview communicate, she positions herself as a rebel, or a change agent. She embraces difference as a way forward. Writing, as she sees it, is a means to change a reader's mind and hopefully, their actions. Her phrase "the power of opportunity" refers to her use of writing to evoke change in her context, and ultimately, in society. She sees herself as one among many who speak to power through writing. Winnie not only positions herself in this way, but she is also positioned by how others perceive her differences, whether it is race, gender, culture, her "bossiness," or her profession. In particular, the experience of how others wish to define her racially is a clear example of what Crenshaw called "intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different" (1991, p. 1242). Because of the way difference is often ignored or enhanced by marginality, it is first important to forefront how Winnie identifies racially as it contextualizes and deepens an understanding of her narrative.

4.1.1 Identifying with Racial Ambiguity

In a piece she wrote for this study, she expressed the complexity of racial identity living in the United States,

> How I identify racially is difficult depending on the context [what country I am in]. Since race is based on physical characteristics, it requires the person wanting to know my race to have a knowledge or understanding of the contributing factors of my diversity. In the U.S. it is constantly requiring explanation with seemingly little understanding.

Winnie communicates that when she puts her varied background into words, people in the U.S. cannot accept how she identifies racially. This lack of acceptance is a product of the social framework of race in this country that she does not appear to fit into.

The way her racial identity manifests on an everyday basis reveals a contradiction between how she sees herself and how she is seen by others. Winnie explains, "For those requiring my definition, I could be best deemed as 'other' considering that an identification of being black is largely seemingly unaccepted. Being visualized as 'brown' seems to remove the option of [me] being black." However, because racial distinctions are also defined geographically, how she sees herself is easily accepted where she grew up,

> In my birth land it is simple. I was defined as being a 'colored' person. It is based on the genetic 'mixture' of predominantly southeast Asian races with other races that came together over a period of time as a result of the impact of slavery. In that environmental context millions of people look like me so what I 'am' is clear to them.

By describing what it is like for her to fill out a form, she illustrates the problem,

> In recent years the phrase of a 'person of color' seems to best match the umbrella grouping that I would fall into. However, I have yet to see any form list that as an option. Whilst I sometimes choose 'other', it is not a classification I like because it provides no clear definition. 'Other' is not considered a minority. It could be viewed as marginalization at its best. You're simply excluded.

With these words, Winnie aptly illustrates her bodily experience of marginality, there is literally no space for her, even on a form. Ironically, she is required to define herself to others, but at the emotional and social cost of having no place in the culture where she lives.

Though "now, in reality, with the understanding of my genetic mixed heritage, I see myself mostly as a person of color," Winnie is also comfortable defining herself for others, even if others do not accept how she identifies. Without possessing critical racial literacies, the above description of her racial identity would not be possible (Twine, 2004). Winnie can navigate a

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position of belonging for herself amidst structural exclusion and socially being regarded as *other*. Amidst all the ways society has proposed to define her, she critically reads the official form as discriminatory and inappropriate to any descriptor she would give herself. However, her account is painful to read, and illustrates the emotional labor people of color perform, and that is embodied in everyday lived experiences.

Winnie's racial literacies are part of the way she interprets the world around her, and to better understand how she developed them, her educational history, work experience and relationships offer more context. The next portion of the chapter describes her educational journey and the multiple identities that she embodies.

4.1.2 Histories and Identities

Winnie's reentry into graduate school was part of a life journey shaped by crossing personal, cultural, and professional borders and barriers. Her intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991) as a woman of color, immigrant to the United States, occupational therapist, wife, and mother interlock to produce a sense of marginality that has shaped her perceptions and actions in the world. By her own admission, Winnie has felt in the minority throughout her adult life, and literally lists the experiences that make it so,

> In my profession as an occupational therapist in South Africa, it was mostly Afrikaans women who were OTs [occupational therapists], right so I'm a minority in the profession, and then [I was] in an interracial relationship, an interracial marriage, you know, there is a minority of that in terms of married couples, not just in the relationship yourself. And also, working in a community, for example, where there is different social stratum.

Calling herself a minority brings to mind not only holding different ideas, but of *being* different, of embodying a sense of difference at work, in marriage, and in the various communities she engaged in. Winnie's perception and lived experience have been one of cultural, racial, professional, and relational marginality. Winnie talked about herself as someone who, for

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various reasons, has been positioned to "stand out" on the margins. Putting her thoughts about feeling different into words, she said marginality was all encompassing, like "having the experience of being a minority in different contexts and in different places." Her history and circumstances have prescribed a feeling of being a minority, it is something she equates with complete exclusion, and which has been pointed out as social violence by Crenshaw (1991).

To find a way forward from this untenable social position, I discuss how Winnie reframed the positioning of "standing out" to position herself to "stand apart." She recognized a strategy that hooks (2014) articulated, how crucial it was that "black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony" (p. 16). For Winnie, standing apart was productive for her, and a way of anchoring herself within the border and boundary crossings of her life. Positioning herself on the margins, she could speak back to the same dominant voices that sought to place and keep her there.

When I met Winnie, she had been a resident in the United States for 25 years and lived in a city in the heart of the south. Her city, of about one million residents, retains a specific social culture in that the history of enslaved peoples in this region keeps social interaction mostly in groups defined by race. In 2019, Winnie adopted her sister's grandchild and for financial reasons, continued to work as an occupational therapist. As Winnie unfolded her story, I saw that she was indeed perceived as a minority and yet simultaneously took up this role. More pertinent to this discussion was how her personal narrative described the sense of purpose she gave to academic writing when she was in graduate school. Winnie was in her forties when she decided to pursue a master's degree in social work, and she was solely motivated by a desire to leave her current profession and to gain access to a different profession, thereby creating more career

options for herself. Going forward, I consider Winnie's educational history and her racial literacy to better understand how she engages with agency in her academic writing.

4.1.2.1 Educational History.

At the time Winnie was growing up in her home country of South Africa, the political situation was controlled by the Apartheid government. With the goal of separating race groups that were constructed by white colonists, the laws of the country kept people in prescribed racial groups, governing her family's access to land ownership, as well as social, educational, and economic opportunities. Much like the "separate but equal" doctrine in the U.S. and the Jim Crow laws of the south, colonization left its mark in the laws of the country (Blakemore, 2021):

> From 1948 through the 1990s, a single word dominated life in South Africa. Apartheid—Afrikaans for "apartness"—kept the country's majority Black population under the thumb of a small white minority. It would take decades of struggle to stop the policy, which affected every facet of life in a country locked in centuries-old patterns of discrimination and racism. (p. 1)

Where Winnie could live, receive medical care, and even what movie theatre, parks, campsites, and schools she could be at were regulated by racist laws.

These restrictions also limited her career options, but Winnie studied occupational therapy, choosing a competitive and specialized route within the options available to her. Becoming an occupational therapist as she saw it, would open up opportunities to travel and give her financial independence. She attended Cape of Good Hope University, an institution that "was there for people of color, because back in the 1970s, you needed permission if you weren't white to study at Atlantic University or at Two Oceans University." Her comment points to how, even within oppressive structures, Winnie improvised among the cultural resources and departed from the expected career choices for women of nursing and teaching (Holland et al., 1998).

After qualifying as an occupational therapist in 1994, Winnie worked for two years in a hospital unit that specialized in rehabilitation from traumatic injuries to the spinal cord because of gunshot wounds, diving accidents, and rugby injuries. She then relocated to the U.S. through a recruitment agency in 1997. After passing the National Board of Occupational Therapists (NBCOT) examination, she was certified to work as an occupational therapist in the United States. She went on to work for over a decade in various capacities in her city, taking contracts in hospitals, public schools, and adult rehabilitation centers. She knew that a person's quality of life encompassed more than physical rehabilitation, especially when there was a traumatic change in lifestyle because of a spinal cord injury, a stroke, or an amputation. A passion for addressing the socio-emotional needs of her patients grew as she saw that grief was often the result of a loss of function. Working in a variety of settings, her work experience led her to work in home health, and nursing homes before taking a two-year break from the profession.

Ten years of physical labor involved in moving and lifting patients was hard on Winnie's body. When she injured her back at work in an adult rehabilitation center in 2007 and had to take medical leave from her job, it opened the opportunity to listen to her body. Her lack of personal satisfaction and the physical labor of occupational therapy had begun to outweigh the good salary. "I couldn't do pediatric therapy for the rest of my life," she explained, "it's really, really tough." I saw in Winnie's reflection that she sought to bring alignment between her desired occupation and what she did every day, perhaps as a way of embodying her work more fully. Until this point, her role had been to work with people's bodies from the outside to bring about healing, but it did not fulfill her. As she got older, she also realized that she would not be able to sustain the physical demand, and it was emotionally exhausting as well. Her move towards better understanding grief seemed like a shift towards a more interior kind of healing with people. A

social work degree was both a means to stop doing what had become emotionally and physically unsustainable and move closer to embodying work she identified with more closely.

Some years earlier, the loss of an uncle sparked Winnie's interest in grief studies. When she took medical leave, it was an opportunity to further her knowledge about grief, and between 2007 and 2009, she embarked on a course in Death Studies. After five week-long trainings, she earned 150 continuing education hours and certification from the Center for Loss and Life Transition, which she now calls "my death certificate" (and bursts out laughing). At that first training she met a woman who worked for the procurement agency who invited her to apply for the position of family care coordinator.

"I did a little stint for the organ procurement agency, [in 2007]." She adds, "If there was an imminent death [at the hospital], I would walk alongside the family with the organ donation process." Although she did this for less than a year she says, "that's when I actually discovered the interest I have in grief work." To learn more about grief, Winnie began to move towards a career change and applied for a position at the bereavement center of my company, but because she couldn't "bill for services with my OT degree" for working with families dealing with the loss of their loved ones she could not pursue the position. A combination of desire and pragmatism guided Winnie. Motivated by a desire to focus more on emotional and relational work with patients, and to work with groups, she considered pursuing a social work degree.

A social work master's would provide the qualification to work clinically with people experiencing grief, and "[t]hat was the force that drove me, even though I really don't want to be a traditional LCSW [(Licensed Clinical Social Worker)]. It was really me trying to give myself an avenue if I needed it." Taking initial steps towards her goal did not come easily. "I never imagined that I would go back to school, I always said, 'I'll never go back!'" she explained, "But

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I wanted to pursue something I was passionate about, and I was trying to honor that within myself." As is common for adult learners, Winnie was highly motivated personally and professionally (Lin & Wang, 2015) and as I go on to describe, managed to overcome deep reservations about being a student again and she applied to graduate school.

4.1.3 Navigating Barriers to Graduate Study

For Winnie, contrasting experiences at Southern State University and Unity College (both pseudonyms) demonstrated explicit barriers and implicit barriers to inclusion in educational institutions. Winnie first applied to the social work program at Southern State University, a large, public research university located in the city center where she lived. Her application was rejected based on the admissions requirements for the social work program. She then turned to Unity College; a smaller, conservative Christian college located in a town an hour's drive away from the city. The application process and admissions process at Unity College was more welcoming, and Winnie was admitted and enrolled in the social work program. Below, I discuss how, in her journey back to graduate school, Winnie encountered both explicit structural barriers to admission and implicit, social barriers once she became a student.

4.1.3.1 Explicit Barriers

When Winnie applied to a master's degree program in social work at Southern State University in 2016, she hoped to gain admission to a graduate program in which she would be exposed to many diverse viewpoints rather than only a Christian perspective. She was required to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), a standardized test and a common barrier for older students (Colvin, 2013). It came as a shock when she failed the English portion because it is her mother tongue. "You see the bad test-taker that I am!" Winnie exclaimed, registering her fear of tests. Although Winnie was proficient in English and had previously studied in English,

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the language entrance exam did not reflect her actual reading and writing abilities. What it appeared to measure was her ability to take the standardized test. Although it had been over 20 years since she had been to university, Winnie describes why test-taking made her nervous about starting her graduate studies,

> I was afraid…I was deeply afraid because I always saw myself as a poor test-taker. I was afraid of having to sit down and study and then reproduce and be evaluated based on…You know, being able to answer questions. Again, I'm kind of more of a doer.

In the above excerpt, Winnie perceived tests as a cognitive exercise of memorizing and reproducing knowledge to be evaluated. Her narrative of herself as a poor test taker provides an example of knowledge that is disembodied. For her, taking tests was a disconnected kind of knowing, one that removed knowledge from the lived experience of her body. Therefore, as an adult reentry student, she feared that reentry to study meant she would be at a disadvantage in test situations. Winnie's aside, almost a throwaway comment, deftly contrasted test-taking knowledge with her embodied knowledge as a "doer," perceiving her strengths lay in the enactment of knowledge, not the reproduction of it.

Entrance tests are a common barrier for students who move from another country, particularly the global south, to study in the U.S. For example, English language exams such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) evaluate test takers in standardized English proficiency, an assessment that appeals to language rooted in colonial ideas of correct English and writing (Cushing, 2020). Consequently, a question arises as to what these exams propose to assess. As a result of a social construction of error (Anson, 2000), language requirements employed by many institutions proves to be a complex and colonizing practice towards applicants, regulating admission based on specific kinds of English language usage. Not only that, but the dominant narratives around tests as objective measures of knowledge are

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problematic and do not consider other factors such as the emotions that accompany test taking or embodied knowledge. For example, Winnie explicitly shared in the data that she felt "threatened" by testing, something that thus far has prevented her from going back to study. In Winnie's case, it was likely that cultural bias in the test itself interfered with her performing well and exacerbated her fears of testing, resulting in not passing the test.

For now, I point to how testing can disembody knowledge, rendering the cognitive visible and the tacit hidden. Thinking of knowledge as both cognitive and tacit makes a helpful frame to see how so-called standards lead to admissions requirements that operate as gatekeepers. Considering language homogenous or insisting on linguistic borders tends to legitimize practices of belonging and not belonging, and create "margins of exclusion" (Cushing, 2020, p. 443). Entrance tests, for example, fail to measure the diversity in speaking and writing the English language, requiring students to perform knowledge in one way while excluding others.

As Winnie's experience in 2016 reflects, the GRE, and Southern State University's requirement for applicants to surpass a certain threshold for admission, acted as an explicit barrier, discriminating against her knowledge of test-taking in the U.S. and English usage and ceding to the bias of the institution. Today, there is some irony in Southern State University's revision of requirements for international students. In 2022, the Southern State University admission website named South Africa among the "Countries of citizenship deemed acceptable to satisfy English language proficiency." While seeming to be more open, it almost seems the requirements have become more of a gatekeeper, now explicitly privileging some nationalities, and excluding others.

The GRE was not the only barrier to Winnie's graduate school admission. Another

significant barrier was the conversion of her undergraduate transcript of her degree conferred in

South Africa to U.S. grading equivalents. Winnie discovered this requirement only after her

application was rejected: "I don't know how I found out that I needed to get the certificate

converted, but I did. They [Southern State University] never provided me with that information."

As a result of submitting an unconverted transcript, her grades appeared to be too low to enter

the master's program. A friend urged her to appeal to the dean of the social work program at

Southern State saying, "If you don't speak up for yourself, no one else will." Winnie met with

the dean to ask for reconsideration of her application, but the dean politely turned her down.

Winnie explains how she perceived herself as a candidate and how that differed from Southern

State University's priorities,

> It was interesting that the place I wanted to be [admitted] would make no
> accommodation. And I thought that when you look at a mature learner, somebody
> who's coming back to school. I was in my 40s, so I was different than I was at 21
> and no accommodation was being made for that life experience. At the end of the
> day, it was all about the requirement.

By constructing entrance requirements that offered no admissions alternatives, Southern State

University structurally privileged cognitive knowledge as well as certain kinds of English.

Winnie concluded that, "At the end of the day it was all about the requirement," making sense of

rejection by pointing out what kind of knowledge was valued by admissions. By contrasting

cognitive performance with the embodied knowledge of a mature learner with life experience,

her description points to the empty space where embodied knowledge might be made visible but

was not. Because tacit knowledge was not something measured by grades or English tests, it

went unrecognized, and therefore denied. Were there alternatives to entrance tests to measure

knowledge, her application may have been seen quite differently. Winnie saw herself as an

educated, knowledgeable, experienced, and mature candidate, none of which had value to the institution until a test was passed.

Although Winnie advocated for herself, it was not enough to overcome biased perceptions of her international grades and performance on the language exam. Her experience shows how standardized tests favor American English and grading systems, discriminating against culturally diverse students from all over the world and within the U.S. itself. These evaluative testing structures are normalized in higher education and act to intensify exclusion of students who are educated outside the United States. This exclusion became more obvious when Winnie later learned that her converted GPA was high enough for her to ear her admission to Southern State's social work program.

At the urging of supportive friends, Winnie applied to Unity College. Before, standardized testing and lack of structural, institutional knowledge about admissions interfered with admission to Southern State University, but she now had more experience navigating the application process. Although she was unsure about going to a graduate program that she perceived to have "a prescribed, biblical view" and approach to academics, she applied at the last minute. Winnie contrasted a more personal reception at admissions at the smaller, faith-based Unity College compared to Southern State,

> They were open and affirming and welcoming, and they were all about, 'how can we help you do this?' So, they didn't have an English requirement, and when the transcript was converted, it more than exceeded what the requirement was.

Unity College offered admissions support, and she states that "they wanted me to be part of the program." The smaller university supported getting her grades converted, and her embodied, practical knowledge was seen favorably. For instance, at the online admissions interview, work as an occupational therapist was considered an asset by the dean. In addition, she was viewed as

someone who increased the diversity of the student body through her nationality, occupation, and life experience. They said her previous practical and academic experiences were valued and as a result, encouraged her reentry. In the fall of 2016, Winnie entered a part-time master's degree in social work at Unity College.

Reflecting on these two admissions experiences highlights a larger theme of inclusion and exclusion that comes explicitly in academic settings, and within that, the layered implications of test taking. Winnie ultimately discovered that because institutions normalize their own cultural and linguistic admissions processes, being admitted to graduate school was not a straightforward process. In addition, she needed to possess explicit admissions knowledge for each university she applied to navigate the process. Admissions requirements, in these two situations, appear to reflect the priorities of the institutions; In one case, a large public university who emphasized testing requirements and in the other, a smaller private college that prioritized admitting diversity students.

Once enrolled at Unity College, Winnie discovered that a move to the social sciences afforded diverse ways to demonstrate her learning, and she took full advantage. Personal reflective writing, for instance, helped her explore the values and stances she brought into the social work profession. However, other silencing experiences as an occupational therapist among many social worker students introduced a sense of marginality. Winnie found herself in the minority by virtue of how she was perceived racially, and that her professional expertise often jarred her classmates. In the next section, I explore how for Winnie, academic writing became imperative, and served as a way to speak back to the silencing she encountered.

4.1.3.2 Being Silenced: Unspoken Barriers

Winnie has been perceived as an outsider since she immigrated from South Africa to the

southern United States. For example, Winnie experienced conflict between herself and Black

American professional women at work and in her graduate program because socializing was

often defined by how she was identified racially. As her words attest, "I was not Black enough to

be Black, as horrible as it sounds, I mean that's pretty much the kind of thing that happens here

[in the south]." To those around her, she embodied racial ambiguity and did not conform to

socially constructed norms of race where she lived and worked.

In her first year of practice in a hospital, a conversation with a Black nurse helped explain

why she and the other nurses kept their distance. Winnie says,

> They didn't like me because I wasn't Black enough to be Black [American], and
> then there was my hair, and when I opened my mouth, I sounded British and that
> was white! But then she [the nurse] followed it up with, 'but then we got to know
> you and you're alright.'

Winnie's racial literacy enabled her to interpret what was happening to her. She explained, "So I

think I always find... because I'm a foreigner or...you know racially--that's a contributing factor.

It's just being in environments where I feel [I am] different." Because her colleagues did not

often verbalize these distinctions as the nurse above did, her feelings of difference were

embodied as tacit understandings, "[i]t was always unspoken," she said. When she reentered

graduate school, the sense of difference she had felt from her peers at work further intensified as

her identities intersected (Crenshaw, 1991).

This sense of difference from her classmates was embodied in three significant ways for

Winnie: (1) how she was perceived racially by other students, (2) how her disciplinary

background in science often set her opinions in conflict with social work students, and (3) how

her science knowledge in class created a hierarchy between her as an occupational therapist and

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those in the social work profession. Throughout our conversations, Winnie drew upon criticality to navigate these silent but ever-present feelings of being regarded as other and being positioned in the minority. In response to being on the margins, Winnie turned to her writing assignments to address the silences by fellow students and the silencing that accompanied them. Most significantly, she was able to articulate the direct bearing they had on her academic writing. Her narrative reveals how embodied writing became for her, a way to use her academic assignments to research and argue for her views, to counter dominant opinions in class, and even to pose unpopular opinions to her professors.

Unspoken Relational Conflict. The positive reception by the admissions office at Unity College was complicated by unspoken understandings of how she was perceived racially in the program. Winnie observed that there was a "race piece" to her admission to Unity College because the college expressed to her that they wanted to promote greater diversity. When asked to describe the social work students, Winnie says, "The class was majority Black [American], and the class changed [repeatedly] over time." Over three years of study, Winnie experienced multiple cohorts pass through the social work program and was consistently perceived by fellow students as different. I asked how this was so,

> For one, I was probably the only person in my class who came from a different profession other than social work to the program. The second difference was, I was somebody who came in with an international degree. Maybe that was also a bit of diversity there. But I think the other piece to that [diversity] was… I thought the factor was a race piece.

As she named the various aspects, it appeared that the admissions office was on the one hand including her, but on the other tokenizing her. The College, it seemed, valued her work experience and disciplinary knowledge, but what she *felt* was the reality of the "race piece," because she shifted the college's demographics. This move on the college's part positioned

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Winnie to *represent* difference, visually, professionally, and culturally. The College's desire to bring diversity to the program simultaneously reproduced the same feelings of social marginality Winnie had experienced at work. In addition to feeling different, the social context of the program was unsettling and did not create a strong environment for peer relationships.

Winnie described how the "group dynamics were really crazy" due to a high turnover of students in the program at Unity College. As a part time student, she said there was "no continuity or cohesion for learning," because students in the full-time two-year track and the accelerated one-year master's program were constantly cycling through classes with those who were in the three-year part time master's program. Because of this constant introduction of new students, during her three years in the program, she was always in new discussion groups in class. As a result, voicing her opinions meant constantly being reified as different, "I tended to be on the outskirts of the majority of the generalized thinking, it felt like that always."

It was not just that Winnie noticed her thoughts and contributions were outliers compared to her classmates', but also that she was marginal as a person. Being positioned as a diversity student thus placed Winnie's voice, and who she was, repeatedly in the minority. She explained, "if we broke up into groups or you were assigned to a project for the semester on a particular thing. There was this odd dynamic about me in the groups." This reflects what Crenshaw (1991) identifies as the social power to exclude others based on identities. But rather than shrink from a position of difference, Winnie chose to overtly embody it,

> So, I'm the person in the group who's going to make people accountable and do more work than I should, but I'm not gonna let the slacker drag my grade down. That's who I am, I'm a bossy one…and people don't like that.

The idea of "standing apart" as a stance that Winnie took up when she spoke about writing a paper for a class on the very germane topic of loneliness,

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I guess for me it's not just writing, it's how you say what you're trying to say. Depending on what it is you're talking about I mean, I guess, if you are writing a scientific paper, it's purely factual, but how do you find those lenses that are outside of the box, which nobody else is thinking about? [My approach was] How do I shape a perspective, and interpret the information you know, using a lens that wasn't the thing you could 'just see?' I think it was important to… [pauses] I wanted to…you know, stand apart.

Winnie was redefining the idea of difference to mean taking up a position not to stand out, but to *stand apart* in her work as a student. It seems her efforts to stand apart intentionally resisted the way she was positioned to stand out as different. I noticed how the embodied experience of marginality then informed the cognitive work she did in her writing. Winnie worked hard to distinguish herself from conventional thought, and to find perspectives for her papers that distinguished her from her classmates.

When she related these experiences, the degree of persistence it took for her to remain in the program as a part-time student became clearer. Social exclusion is an incredibly painful emotional and psychological experience, and yet the deliberate actions she took through her writing gave Winnie an agentic pathway forward. On reflection, Winnie mentioned that engagement with faculty, feeling respected through her writing, and experiencing strong instruction were significant supports during her graduate experience. As Cohen and Greenberg's work (2011) found, students' positive relationships with faculty were a key element in institutional support for part-time graduate students and was considered a persistence factor in their research. Feeling respected by faculty was likely important in countering Winnie's sense of being different in its negative aspects. With this in mind, I go on to consider the different disciplinary knowledge she possessed from her classmates. As a response to being silenced in class because of her science background, Winnie found herself turning to writing to counter dominant opinions.

Silenced Disciplinary Knowledge. As an occupational therapist, Winnie carried embodied

knowledge from her science background that allowed her to speak to the physiology of patient

care in her social work program. In her classes however, her knowledge of anatomy and

physiology also made her stand out. She elaborated as to why,

> Social workers didn't have the sciences in the same way. Therapists had to do
> anatomy and physiology, whereas the social workers didn't, so it was kind of *this*
> *silent thing going on,* because I guess I had this background of the medical science
> piece to it. So, whenever there was a discussion about that, if there was a question, I
> was always responsive in class discussions, and it seemed like my opinions were
> often in the minority (emphasis added).

Winnie is not only positioned as different socially, but her professional knowledge also differs.

As her earlier words attest, culturally and racially, her peers struggle to identify her, and in the

program, she was the only person with her medical knowledge and professional training. When

she expressed a dissenting view in class, she once again embodied difference, and it was an

oppressive experience for her. Much like Hill's (2011) personal account, she experienced a

silencing of her body. Even though Winnie brought the advantage of medical knowledge, it was

not well received from her particular body. Like her previous work colleagues, fellow students

could not accept *her* expertise from *her* body, with its ambiguities of race and accent. The silence

from the students around her was felt in class. When she found herself in the minority opinion,

Winnie turned to academic writing as a place to speak. In writing her papers, she describes an

attraction to research as a motivating purpose for her academic writing,

> I liked to do research. It was fascinating to me, and I became more interested in
> turning in a quality paper than finishing it. It was important for me to find the
> research-- to see what I could find to support [my point].

The silent resistance to her opinions in class responses made Winnie turn to research to fortify

her unpopular perspectives. As such, writing became a way to express these views and resist a

dominant culture of opinion. Winnie turned towards strengthening her arguments and increased

her resolve to voice unpopular opinions through writing. By using academic writing to express herself, Winnie speaks her truth to where she perceives the power to be, with the professor who reads the paper. Her assignments, in effect, became a way to speak back to the silencing effect of dominant viewpoints in class.

Unspoken Professional Hierarchy. Not surprisingly, Winnie made a connection between hierarchies she experienced in class and her professional work context that she called "unspoken." In hospitals, social workers and occupational therapists serve different roles in patient care. While occupational therapists focus on the rehabilitation needs of the patient, social workers advocate for their social welfare. An unspoken hierarchy exists when the two professions work on teams in hospitals. Winnie explained,

> *These are all unspoken things*, or these are *my perceived* unspoken things. That occupational therapists and physical therapists are higher on the ranking on the totem pole than the social workers. Because when you get together as a team, social workers are the voices that are really loud in terms of being advocates for patients, but they're not given the same respect (emphasis added).

In hospitals, then, Winnie was used to receiving respect for her opinions, but in class she experienced the opposite. Winnie noted, "*It was never said* but yeah I was the only person who came from a different profession, everybody else had some sort of social work connection" (emphasis added). The status of occupational therapists and social workers became reversed through a majority.

Winnie's embodied identities intersected to socially marginalize her in powerful ways. Crenshaw (1991) pointed to the importance of responding with resourcefulness to the particular effect of erasure, or silencing of women when race, class, gender, culture, and other identities interlock with one another, producing oppression. She stated, "the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; It can instead be the source of social

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empowerment and reconstruction (p. 1242)." In other words, although difference has been a tool of domination, it can be turned to a resource for empowering oneself or a marginalized group.

Winnie's ability to take on criticality as a disposition fostered an empowered position in the academic context where she studied. Winnie redeploys her position as a "diversity" student and outsider to the social work profession as a strength in her writing, even though those statuses also bring negative attention to difference. Her persistent response of standing apart and relishing difference even as marginalization intensified, allowed her to reconstruct a position of uniqueness and strength of her own making. To better understand how writing functioned as an empowering embodied practice, the next part of the analysis focuses on how Winnie's guiding beliefs shaped her response of writing to mitigate the experience of being in the minority.

4.2 Writing from Embodied Beliefs

As a writer, Winnie's education in science-based occupational therapy did not prepare her for the type of academic writing required in a Master of Social Work (MSW) program. She says, "I don't recall writing much in undergrad. It was very hard [in graduate school] because I felt like I wasn't equipped to do the writing assignments, because we didn't write [in my previous degree] as was required in this program." As I listen to her, I sense the exasperation of having to write papers without previous experience in certain genres. She describes having to write up a specific type of social work report – a paper in which "I got my butt kicked." However, she qualified this by saying that in her other courses, she "always did really well with writing." Winnie considers herself a strong writer outside of academics, "I love to write. It's something that I started prior to grad school."

Lived experience informed the personal and political beliefs that uniquely shaped Winnie's approach to academic study and writing. Winnie's histories and identities constructed

for her, a framework of meaning for interpreting her graduate school experiences. The previous section highlights how criticality informed her empowered responses to the challenges of marginality. In this section of the data discussion, I call attention to guiding beliefs that helped her navigate and motivated the purposes for which she wrote in graduate school. Delving a bit deeper into Winnie's educational journey provides further context for how her writing reflects her disposition of criticality, a belief in productive dissent and her belief in activism as a response to injustice.

4.2.1 A Disposition of Criticality

In the sense that education forms and shapes thinking, and universities are places of knowledge building, educational settings are places students form dispositions alongside the content they learn. During her undergraduate degree, Winnie was immersed in a culture of criticality during this crucial time of learning. For decades, professors at Cape of Good Hope University held long, cultivated discussions about race alongside teaching in their field and their pedagogical practices. As a result, students like Winnie developed criticality and the ability to resist the Apartheid government's policies through critical understandings of racial injustice and could challenge dominant, westernized thinking in subjects like the sciences. As an example, criticality in health care would look like refusing to pathologize health problems, but rather consider the person in their context, and bring more holistic solutions to bear on their treatment.

As a newly trained occupational therapist, criticality naturally informed Winnie's writing of reports for patient's treatment plans during her practical internship in a very reputable hospital rehabilitation unit in South Africa. Winnie only discovered that she had been trained differently from students at Atlantic University and Two Oceans University when she began to work at the hospitals during her practicum. In contrast to how she was educated, she met practitioners and

students at the rehabilitation unit who were trained to diagnose medical problems in more discrete ways. Winnie explains,

> You see, the way of teaching was a method of critical thinking, which was very different to the other two universities if you know the way of teaching. They [white practitioners] were saying, you learned about pathology and then you learned steps about how to deal with it. Whereas I think [my university's] approach was, was to say, so and so is 68 years old and he's got this and this and this. How are you going to solve this problem? So I always came from this critical thinking approach.

Each of the provincial universities offered the same qualification in occupational therapy, but their approaches differed at a fundamental level. Degrees granted by Cape of Good Hope University, an institution for students of color, were based on qualitative research methods and criticality. In contrast, the other predominantly white universities valued quantitative research and so-called objective scientific approaches to healthcare.

Depending on where occupational therapists earned their degree, racial prejudice affected respect for practitioners. Winnie offered an example: "You know if you came from Atlantic University, there was a different level of acceptance [in the profession], but if you came from Cape of Good Hope University, there were *all the silent messages*" (emphasis added). These silent messages, as she explained to me, were tacit understandings about her qualification that were unspoken, but commonly understood among professionals at the hospital. Her education and training positioned her as less respected than if she had studied at the predominantly white Atlantic University or Two Oceans University.

Winnie was literate in the ways racism created hierarchies and status in her profession (Twine 2004). These understandings later helped her navigate being in the minority and directed her to use writing as a critical response to dominant viewpoints expressed in class. Ironically, when Winnie began to practice as a therapist in the U.S. and returned to graduate school it was the racial literacy she gained during undergraduate study that helped her negotiate the racial

boundaries and border crossings of culture. Graduate school in the United States unfortunately presented another opportunity to draw on a disposition informed by criticality to understand these experiences of inequity.

4.2.1.1 Activism as a Response

Revisiting Winnie's educational history is crucial to understanding her response to the discrimination she later encountered in work contexts and her graduate program in the U.S. Similar to her home country, racism often manifested as "unspoken" ways of being and interacting for Winnie. Her phrase of "silent messages" evidenced her embodied knowledge that inclusion and exclusion were embedded in contexts, not only in language.

Winnie's experiences of inclusion and exclusion became further complicated by moving to a new country, and a culturally different, yet familiar racial experience in the U.S. For instance, Winnie physically embodied a typically white profession in a female body of color. Although Winnie said it was common to be a woman in occupational therapy, people of color were in the minority. She saw that this dissonance caused those around her to feel uncertain about how to identify her racially alongside her job. Her reading through the lens of criticality and race, explained for her, why as she put it, "I was given this exception of acceptance in a white profession" in the hospitals. Colleagues treated her with respect for the profession but excluded her socially. When she went to work on contract in a hospital with a new team, she was often met with colleagues that would not disagree openly with her, but simultaneously did not accept her as one of them.

Winnie's interpretation of this experience reflects a narrative of how race functions to both include and exclude her in her profession. "So…I get this exception to the rule of acceptance in a predominantly white profession, and I'm not perceived to be Black." The

misreading of her racial identity by colleagues was a painful realization, but not an unfamiliar one, and Winnie drew on her racial literacy and criticality when she reentered graduate school. When she found herself in the minority, she did not become silent, but used writing as a form of activism to both represent her perspective and to educate others as a productive form of dissent.

4.2.1.2 A Belief in Productive Dissent

Winnie held a belief that productive dissent was a way to change dominant thought and influence the actions of those in power. This guiding belief enables her to use writing in strategic ways to navigate her experiences on the margin in graduate school. Positioned as different, she takes up a position to "try and be a voice, for those without a voice," in her writing. Her narratives show a deep resolve and purpose to use writing to educate others and advocate for herself and others in the minority.

Although the majority of her classmates were women of color, she was often outnumbered when Winnie took a differing view in group discussion. She related a class discussion about spanking, when once again, she found herself resolutely taking an unpopular stand against it, despite disagreement from her peers.

> So, the idea of spanking. I remember that day in class I was furious. I was one of two or three people in the class like, 'no for spanking' and everyone else was like, 'no, but yeah for spanking,' and I was just like, 'no!'

Winnie's exasperation about this incident was palpable. It is not surprising then, that she turned to writing to advocate for her views and those they represented. She goes on to describe how writing a paper about her stance on spanking for that class served to represent a dissenting voice within the majority,

> I talked about this in a paper. You know, I'm going to dig my heels in about this, and build an argument, and add in the context etc. So, I think that I take on responsibility, maybe, to try and be a voice, for those without a voice.

Winnie's resolve to be heard was palpable. She uses all the academic writing tools at her disposal, the research, the rhetoric and her creative description, to voice her viewpoint in writing and to represent the well-being of children.

Winnie took action by writing, and in making sense of her actions, concluded that she was "trying to utilize the opportunity, or the power of opportunity, to not only make my point, but I think, educate the reader – even the professor." This small addition of "even the professor" addresses the person she perceives with power in her situation, someone who can influence others. Her belief in productive dissent is evidenced by using writing to advocate and educate in hopes of changing dominant thinking. Taking her thoughts further, she articulated how words of dissent become embodied in the reader and eventually lead to change,

> Maybe that's giving myself too much credit for what I think the power is, the power of writing. Even just with an exchange of a paper to a professor that reads it back. The Professor reads, they consider it, they think about it, then maybe it becomes a part of… it becomes a part of them, you know, and influences what they say.

Winnie's words were powerful as she explained the process of how a professor might change their mind through the physical transaction with text (Rosenblatt, 1988) and that this text might become embodied. Without any formal theory around this concept, Winnie intuitively understood the mindbody connection in both reading and writing.

That is to say, Winnie felt the need to act by voicing her ideas in a paper. Unable to deny her viewpoint, the class discussion provoked an embodied response toward where she perceived the most power. As she perceived it, power resided in the professor and "what they say." She advocates for her position through writing, a transaction between her and the professor, believing that a well-crafted argument might cause a reconsideration on the reader's part. Not only did she believe that the professor would reconsider dominant views but possibly change how they speak. She did not place the power in herself, but in the embodied exchange of a paper.

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Winnie also interpreted how the mindbody relationship might work. She proposed that in the exchange between her writing a paper and the professor reading and returning the paper, her ideas might "become a part of them [the reader]". The evidence of mindbody working together, then, is taking an action that results in "influencing what they say." Criticality forms a foundation for Winnie that empowers her to believe that even among dominant voices, her writing can influence and change things. Winnie's guiding beliefs of responding through activism and productive dissent provided a strong motivation for her academic writing to center marginal ideas and amplify her voice.

4.2.2 A Writing Sample

In the writing sample Winnie provided for this study, entitled "Multicultural Diversity in Groups," she discussed the need for social workers facilitating groups to be culturally literate, starting with themselves. She took a unique angle, viewing diversity as separate from and complemented by multiculturalism. This perspective reflects her own embodied experience of being both racially diverse and multicultural. The essay is a treatise arguing for greater awareness and understanding about how group dynamics become more complex when groups become more diverse ethnically, culturally, and racially.

Her structure is like a sandwich, cradling her personal experience in its center. She begins with academic language and definitions by writing, "the terms 'culture,' 'ethnicity' and 'race,' are often mistakenly used interchangeably within our society. It is imperative to understand the definitions and their distinctions." After she defines her terms and the purpose of her essay, Winnie begins to write about her personal experience,

> I consider myself relatively culturally competent, although I recognize that this is an ongoing and lifelong process. My own cultural exposure is that of someone who was borne into a society of Apartheid in South Africa 21 years before its first democratic election where Nelson Mandela became president.

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By switching to the personal, she employs a disruption in her tone and the way she conveys

further information. Subsequent to arguing that leaders and those who facilitate groups must

possess and display cultural competence, she weaves in her personal information to show why

she identifies as a culturally competent person. She concluded, "I consider my multicultural and

diversity training to mostly be that of my life, having had to learn to navigate in different

environments where I was the outsider or marginalized." By doing so, she plainly tells the reader

that she knows what cultural competence is because she has known the absence of it. She speaks

for herself and for those like herself, who find themselves on the margins of American society,

> Expanding my own diversity through developing the matrix of people I interact
> with provides me with opportunities to get to know how people are the same and
> how they are different, how their unique culture impacts their frame of reference
> and in turn how that impacts their lives here in the United States and around the
> world.

With every sentence, she implicates herself to increase the awareness of the reader. This section

of personal disclosure ends with a statement reflecting her personal belief in "the goodness of

people, bringing a unique value to society regardless of where they come from or what they have

been exposed to." In this indirect appeal for the reader to be equitable, Winnie points out how

she wishes to be seen by those who consider her different. After making her point, these heartfelt

sentiments lead to a new section in the paper.

Next, she delves into the ethics of leaders and how she thinks cultural competence is

fostered, calling on a combination of "the values by which one is guided along with the

awareness of one's cultural foundations" (DuBois & Miley, 2014). Her language becomes formal

once again, and the appeal is rational, stressing the benefits of learning to become culturally

competent. The conclusion of the essay suggests solutions somewhere between the rational and

the heartfelt by describing the vital skills someone with cultural competence should have: to be

able to make space for others different from ourselves, not overgeneralize about group

characteristics, and to recognize that each person is first an individual before belonging to a

group.

I pause to explore this example because at first glance, it would be easy to underestimate

what Winnie achieves through her writing. She used her writing to make space for a perspective

that was not as visible as other standpoints. By highlighting that multiculturalism is another

aspect of diversity, she argues that good practitioners must become culturally competent as well

as embrace diversity to reflect the makeup of the U.S. She then used the idea of difference to

maintain a strong sense of her own identity and to stand apart in her writing.

I found that Winnie's narratives resisted the idea of *Americanization* or acculturation into

the deep south in which she lives. Through strong relational ties, her cultural identity remained

anchored in South Africa, by means of her language, her multiple heritage(s), and her family. I

interpret this as an embodiment of identity which emerged in her writing. As a means of

demonstrating agency on her part, she anchored herself in the act of standing apart, enabling her

to resist and speak back towards the marginalizing and racism she encountered when she

immigrated to the United States. It was no different in her writing.

Writing becomes a productive activity for Winnie. As a result of exploring her personal

experiences, she works on the idea that diversity is made up of culture, race, and ethnicity; she

presents cultural competence as a solution for social workers in her paper. Her recommendation

was that practitioners needed to have an embodied sense, or stance that difference as a good

thing, and to beware of essentializing individuals according to their cultural, ethnic, or racial

groups. To make her piece effective, she drew on the personal voice to inform the academic

argument. This action on her part led me to believe that she saw the cognitive and the emotional

as a combined experience. By writing and using both aspects in her paper, she illustrates the rationale for her perspective and an emotional engagement with the topic beyond facts. The process she described leads me to how she embodies her writing through emotional connection.

4.2.3 Connection Through Emotion

Winnie clearly expressed a mindbody connection when she discussed how she engaged with her academic assignments, recounting the process of writing treatment plans as "heartfelt" and "emotional." Through story and explanation, she expressed a cognitive and emotional interaction in her academic writing, "You know you personalize. Can you say you personalize a thought? So, when something is personal you activate your heart." When she wrote up treatment plans for clients, she simultaneously advocated for their well-being. She would focus on the person she wrote about and consider their conditions alongside their needs. Taking up a care perspective (Gilligan, 1982) or an ethic of care (Hill-Collins, 2000) her critical feminist consciousness humanized how she took the facts of an individual case and related them to how that particular individual should receive treatment. The connection of emotion and writing in her profession were inseparable:

> I'm not sitting there crunching numbers. I'm writing about people. Whatever I have to write about – you know, however academic that really is, behind that you know, Mr. so and so had a stroke, and how do you do a particular thing, but behind that thing is a person. I mean that's the context, you know academic writing could be different, in different fields, but I think, you know I'm in a helping profession. I can't divorce – could never divorce my academic writing from emotion, from feeling.

I found that the emotional connection to writing was not a sentimental one, but rather one of holistic, relational care. Emotion is the embodied connection in her writing that informs her as a practitioner. So, she could not merely think her way through a treatment plan without compassion for the person receiving care. We explored this idea of emotion in her writing, and it

led to an understanding that for her, the thinking work of writing must be connected to the personal.

4.2.4 The Power of the Personal in Academic Writing

Winnie surprises me by talking about the power of vulnerability in her academic writing. One of the first writing assignments given to her by a professor was a social work paper in which she answered a series of writing prompts. She explains, "it was all about what my ethics were-- what is your responsibility to your family? What is your expectation…you know, of the world to you, people to you, family to you?" These questions presented an invitation to vulnerability, a vulnerability that required introspection on Winnie's part,

> It was very helpful because it gave me an opportunity to concretize things I didn't realize. So much of how one functions…you don't know consciously, maybe you're not aware of why you're doing what you're doing or what things are influencing your actions or lack of action.

Personal writing like this essay gave Winnie the opportunity to examine her beliefs as a practitioner first with her professor. She said practicing vulnerability through writing created a new capacity to understand boundaries as well as make a personal connection, "I think I'm developing a boldness to be vulnerable because when you are asked to write something personal there's also a caution like, okay, how much do I share?" Winnie says she "took a chance" by doing this type of writing early in the semester because the professor didn't know her. However, the professor responded with respect and thanked her for what she wrote about, "It's powerful because it allows people to get to know you or see a piece to you that they maybe wouldn't see." Later in the course, she expanded personal writing to work with the idea of disclosure that she would need to exhibit as a social worker, "There is this power of therapeutic disclosure. It takes a lot of discernment." She extends this idea by elaborating on the decisions social workers make in the therapeutic context,

> We think about, why am I going to disclose? Sometimes you're not always thinking
> about why this is valuable to disclose--to connect? Or is it dangerous to disclose
> this? Can this be an obstacle? So, I think, through academic writing, and having to
> do self-reflection, it's a way of cultivating that.

Demonstrating a care perspective (Gilligan, 1982) or an ethic of care (Hill-Collins, 2000) and the ability to practice appropriate disclosure with clients are two of the vital skills Winnie developed as she learned to include the personal in her academic writing. As her writing sample I discussed above demonstrated, she also used what she learned from personal writing to great effect when making an argument.

Winnie's development of personal writing expanded into her practice from prompts given by her professor to an organic way of writing for her during graduate school. Using an embodied writing process, she went about answering academic questions,

> With academic writing I use music in the background, and that [process] just kind
> of unfolded organically. As the writing unfolds, I shift into an emotional space that
> fuels the vulnerability, because then you know it unlocks this… Okay, frees me,
> just to tell the story of whatever is attached to the question you are answering. So,
> I'm a big thinker, but I'm also a big feeler.

The meaning Winnie brings to this experience is that reflective, embodied writing allowed both the cognitive and emotional parts of herself to be present, and she was free to answer an assignment with her whole self. I wondered if the opportunity to be vulnerable in her writing was a key experience that showed her that emotions could inform the cognitive aspects of writing. Although she recognized that it can be a dance between what to share and what to reserve, Winnie concludes, "I think the more vulnerable, the better the writing in terms of the content, because it's so much more of myself." There was pleasure for her seeing "more of myself" in the writing, and in a sense, she became more visible, no longer occupying the margins, but now on the center of the page.

Her writing experience exemplifies how teachers can practice embodied writing in a clinical setting to foster connection between content and students' personal relationship to learning. I too, had experienced personal writing assignments from my professors in graduate school, and found it impactful. In English Education, perhaps it was expected writing practice, but perhaps not as much in social work programs. Winnie's ability to put this process in words was striking. Her link between vulnerability, emotion and good writing highlights a depth of thinking that goes below the surface, requiring empathy for herself and for those she writes about. She credited this type of reflective writing in an academic setting for developing her ability both as a writer and a social worker. The embodied invitation to share her history, life experience and personal beliefs caused learning that was more than intellectual in her classes. As I conclude Winnie's chapter below, I recognize the detail with which I have described her history, writing and education. I did so to flesh out her stories and to describe a perspective shaped by a less familiar cultural context than the United States.

4.3 Concluding Thoughts

Stories function on two levels in the sense that they are individual, and they are also social. Individual narratives, for example, are shaped by individual histories as narrators make meaning of their lived experience. Narratives are also social in character and reflect the larger social cultural ideological and historical conditions of where they are told and heard (Chase, 2003). Thus, how a person identifies herself or is identified by society in terms of culture, gender, race, ethnicity, language, age, and other social markers is embodied in the stories they tell. What emerges from Winnie's stories is a portrait of the social context she lives in everyday, marked by multiple identities that shape her perspective and interpretation of experience.

In sum, Winnie's stories reveal a woman who literally carries the embodied history of racial inequity in her body. Her ability to engage with criticality reveals this embodied knowledge and shapes a unique perception of self and her relationships with those around her. From the outside, the complexity of embodying racial ambiguity from the perspective of others positions her on social margins, a position from which she speaks to power during her graduate school experience (Crenshaw, 1991). Using personal experience and academic argument, Winnie uses writing to become more visible. Positioned by the college as a diversity student, her social reality is one of exclusion based on racial and professional identity. Critical racial literacies empower her to respond with agency in writing, and she chooses to "stand apart." Although she was physically and socially marginalized, her words cannot be. Her professors must read, grade and respond to her work, and this is how she hopes to change the way people like her teachers think and speak.

In addition, Winnie embraces moral reasoning in how she takes up writing assignments (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988), demonstrating a feminist ethic of care for her social work clients (Hill-Collins, 2000). Her connection to emotion in her writing is far from sentimental, but is a connection to empathy, humanizing her clients and their treatment plans. Writing takes on a productive purpose, enabling her to work with mind and body in her work. Her recommendations for clients are drawn from an engagement with the personal or as she put it "personalizing a thought" about the individual she writes about.

As a premise for exploring Winnie's narratives about graduate school, I relied on the concept that stories, as they are told, are in the process of becoming embodied by the teller. Chase notes the importance of noticing the process of embodiment or, "what narrators accomplish by telling their stories and how that accomplishment is culturally shaped" (1995, p.

274). In the stories she relates, Winnie's embodied experience manifests in several ways. Her narrative is embodied in the telling of an embodied experience. She can articulate what it means to embody racial ambiguity in the personal (interior) and the social (exterior) ways this plays out. As she reads her situation through embodied criticality, she can act with agency by putting herself in the texts her professors read as assignments, thereby embodying the text. And finally, through her narratives, she in turn embodies the narrative by accomplishing a purpose for the narrative, that of having a voice amidst experiences of being silenced.

Winnie's story ultimately invites an examination of marginality through the intersection of her identities as a woman, a personal of color, an international student and occupational therapist. In social contexts, these interlocked identities increase her sense of difference and produced both silences in her interactions and a feeling of being silenced in graduate school. Her perception of these interactions is read with criticality, based on her embodied history of oppression in her homeland. Refusing to remain silent, she takes up a position of standing apart to distinguish herself from her peers and writes her academic papers with agency. With the aim of changing the minds of those in power, such as her professors, she writes to express non-dominant views and raise awareness about people in positions of marginality. As a result, both she and her embodied knowledge become more visible as do the vestiges of oppression that remain in academic institutions.

Interlude 1: Engaging Winnie

An interlude such as this one follows each woman's chapter, as a space to discuss the conversations I had about the written data with each one. These short pauses offer a place of response and reflection from Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer after the restoried accounts. As a part of member checking, I engaged with each woman about faithful representation about their individual data through continued conversation. This process most certainly deepened relationships with each of the women and added another layer of richness to their accounts.

Kim (2016) cited Spence (1986) to discuss how the failure to faithfully represent data, and therefore people, is an ethical issue that must be carefully considered. According to Spence, ways to maintain integrity in the ethics of interpretation include paying attention to nuance and being sensitive, recognizing that stories are not fixed, guaranteeing confidentiality, and taking the reader and participants into consideration.

As a white woman, I felt this obligation weighed more heavily with me when discussing Winnie's chapter with her than with the other women in the study. Although I had cultural knowledge of racism and racial identity in the South African context, my own story was not one of discrimination or marginalization. I still have only a beginner's understanding of the historical and traumatic impacts of racism born of slavery and the inherent social bias involved in categorizing a person's value or opportunities based on skin tone.

Winnie raised the theme of race spontaneously in our conversations, and I identified that it framed her interpretation of experience. I must admit that talking about racial identity was a place of discomfort for me in the analysis, in the writing and interpretation of data, and in collaborating with Winnie about her account. Because of an awareness that it was not her job to explain racism to me, I strove to balance clarifications about her own words and lived experience

with not asking her to explain the broader dynamics of racism that my own privilege affords, and which have caused her pain. I was aware that probing questions about these experiences could be re-traumatizing and intrusive.

For instance, initially, I had not asked how she would identify racially. When I thought about approaching her, I considered my husband's similar experience of racial ambiguity and referenced this when I wrote a text to her. I asked if she was willing to share her thoughts about how she identified herself and I gave several options to respond. As examples, I said she might write a paragraph, or we could get on a call and just chat, or she could try a creative response of her choice such as a poem. Her first response was, "Just a paragraph!!?" Her second response, which stayed with me for many days afterwards was, "It's a conundrum." It was a puzzle because racial identity was complicated by living in the southern United States as well as in the global south, each with their unique constructs around race. In addition, her racial identity was bound up with her profession and interracial marriage.

After our text exchange, Winnie had some ideas to work with and decided writing would be helpful in exploring her thoughts reflectively on her own. My inclusion of such a large section in her chapter about racially identifying attempts to convey (in her words) the complexity of bringing language to the experience. In addition, it was challenging to articulating this level of detail about an embodied identity that impacted every aspect of her life.

Other responses to her chapter draft were in comparison, energetic and forthright corrections to where I had gotten facts wrong or interpreted something in a way she needed to clarify. As with Jacqueline and Jennifer, once I had written a relatively whole chapter, I wrote an email to her, asking for feedback:

Dear Winnie,

I have finally gotten a draft of your chapter to share. I have written about your experiences using a frame of embodiment and feminist criticality to interpret the experiences we have explored together. I feel at this point, I'd like to ask you to offer some feedback if you are willing! What I would like to do is share a GoogleDoc and ask for your comments. What I would ask is for you to highlight and add comments in the Google Doc about the following:

1. Add any corrections to details, dates, age, places that I didn't get right.

2. Although we may see things in different ways, mark any places you feel strongly about discussing with me as far as interpreting your stories faithfully.

3. Ask any questions that come up for you.

Unlike Jacqueline or Jennifer, Winnie turned on the text color to bright red (reflected in italics below) and wrote her comments and corrections in between my words in the chapter. This delighted me and was a welcome way to revise the assumptions I had inadvertently made in interpreting and restorying by "filling in the gaps" between events and actions (Spence, 1986 in Kim, 2016).

On one occasion, she countered my statement about her motivation for returning to study by both highlighting the error and writing into the text which is added below,

> Winnie was in her forties when she decided to pursue a master's degree program in social
>
> work, and she did so with the idea of **greater fulfillment in her work** *[this is not true.*
>
> *My single motivation was to give me access to a field I was wanting to enter as I want to*
>
> *get out of my profession]* and creating more career options for herself.

In another instance, she corrected my interpretation of how well the professor knew her and interjected,

> Winnie says she was able to do this type of writing because it happened in a context where she felt respected by her professor and that she felt seen *[actually at this point I was taking a chance because the professor didn't know me. But I decided to take the chance with the personal disclosure. It was the first assignment shortly after starting the course and the degree]*, "it's powerful because it allows people to get to know you or see a piece to you that they maybe wouldn't see."

In both cases I revised the text to reflect her account.

A surprise in her final comments to me was the extent to which she felt that she was doing valuable work by engaging in this project when she wrote,

> *I really felt humbled and at the same time so affirmed to have the privilege and honor to be a part of your study. Talk about making me feel seen!!! Thank you so much for not only what you did for me but how you did it. I am so moved by YOUR agency and ability to confer value, respect of persons and equality without patronizing me… something I have also felt through being seen as the "exception to the rule."*

However affirming this was to hear, the overall sensation I felt was relief. I had been holding a lot of tension about how to write Winnie's chapter and had often had to process biases on my own. For instance, it was easy to assume that she liked her profession as an occupational therapist because she made a good salary doing it. I did not realize at first the extent to which she wanted to get out of a job that was extremely draining physically and psychologically. I processed what assumptions I might carry by talking with colleagues and my advisor about my perspective on Winnie's career options. They helped me to be more willing to get things wrong

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and re-approach talking about my questions with Winnie. She was always willing to engage and talking about her story appeared to be like her writing, another form of helpful reflection. Throughout the process of checking in, I felt there was trust and good will as we worked out how to talk about the data together, and we both welcomed the ongoing contact.

Through engaging with Winnie, I learned to be more direct with follow up questions as a researcher. I found that it was important to 'just ask' with simplicity and humility about what I was wondering. In addition, offering a range of ways to stay in communication and providing various ways for participants to respond was also an important discovery. Getting to know Winnie over time showed me that sending texts worked well for checking in and they opened up our conversations. For future research, I see varied approaches as indispensable to staying engaged with participants throughout the research process.

Chapter 5: Embodying Curiosity: Jacqueline

The discussion of data in the next chapter explores the academic writing experience of Jacqueline, a woman whose stories reflected an embodied curiosity. In a refashioning of her identity, Jacqueline positioned herself as an emerging academic and used her writing to work out the questions and concepts that upheld her research work. Her narrative brought to light a disposition of feminist curiosity marked by questioning normalized concepts of neurodiversity in the discipline of developmental psychology. I suggest in this chapter that the idea of feminist curiosity (Enloe, 2004, 2017; Zurn, 2021) best describes how she undertakes her own academic inquiries and her writing. In this process, the mindbody connection showed up as an intertwined relationship between questions produced by her lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 1966) and intellectual pursuits. Consequently, through her return to study, Jacqueline embarked on a refashioning of herself from mother, teacher, and pre-school director towards that of an academic researcher and writer.

In addition, I discuss how Jacqueline's return to study as a woman in her sixties positions her very specifically in the social context of graduate school. The social isolation she experienced in graduate school because of ageism was compounded by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and prompted her to develop social systems that supported the achievement of her master's degree. She sought out intellectual community through other relationships within which she could grow and share and engaged in writing as a heuristic process (Murray, 1990; Sorcinelli & Elbow, 1997). Jacqueline and her stories of academic writing offered a unique picture of how meaningful inquiry is grounded in the lived body. Jacqueline's narratives provided insight as to the social and academic experience of older adults who enter graduate study much later in life.

Moreover, her perspective as a mature adult student informed a deeper understanding of a refashioning of identity embodied in her reentry journey to the academy.

Jacqueline's stories were compelling because she called attention to how lived experience informed her research path and the refashioning of herself as an academic. For example, as pictured her writing in words she articulated the interplay of generative cognitive work alongside the body she writes in. In addition, as a researcher and writer, Jacqueline illustrated how her ability to focus while writing functioned to process her thoughts and understand complex concepts. This ability brought to light a disposition of curiosity in which the act of questioning was more important than arriving at answers. Also, her rich relationship with reading and writing (Rosenblatt, 1994) prior to entering graduate school allowed her to navigate the complexities of forging an academic identity and new career, all aspects of her stories that were instructive.

Furthermore, Jacqueline's academic interests and writing were motivated by a desire to understand behaviors she had witnessed as a teacher of small children. Able to critically question accepted views of the autism spectrum because of her lived experience, she argued for models that understand autistic behaviors as part of the spectrum of human behavior. Her story was one of leaning into academic writing to work out her life questions and forging a new way of being in the world (Lakin, 2009; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009).

In the literature and methods for my study, I have emphasized the importance of attending to bodies as a rich source of knowledge. The visibility and the invisibility of female bodies makes such a venture an intentional and explicitly feminist one. Female bodies are visibly marked by age, gender, race, and sexuality within academic culture in ways that particularly position them. Female bodies are also made invisible by these same markers when individuals are grouped together. It is by noticing the uniqueness of each body's experience, including one's

own, that new questions surface and embodied knowledge emerges. Noticing where embodiment appears then, is a conscious noticing of how the knowledge of bodies is embedded in everyday life. Paying attention to how bodies are socially situated (Gee, 2000), is one way to expand the idea of academic knowledge to a more embodied one.

When it comes to individual narratives, Chase (1995) noted that social and cultural contexts give parameters for the possibilities of the stories that can be told and the constraints by which they are bound. For instance, Jacqueline's current academic achievements were bound within a narrative of the educational expectations of her family. She summed it up by saying, "I was never expected to go to college, you know. We just couldn't afford it." Her stories are also framed by the possibilities of her teaching experience, financial independence, support from family, reading and writing abilities.

To give a preview of Jacqueline's chapter, I begin with a more detailed introduction of Jacqueline herself, and what it was like to meet with her. I continue by offering context for Jacqueline's return to study through her histories and identities as a mother of four, a teacher and a pre-school director. I then explore her transition towards graduate school after a 30-year gap. I discuss how undergraduate studies enabled her to chart a path not only as a student in a developmental psychology program, but as an emerging academic who followed her interests and research experiences. I describe how she engaged in community with others to develop her academic writing as a precursor to embarking on a master's degree. Within this background, I discuss the embodied beliefs she inhabits, framed by a disposition of curiosity in the feminist sense (Zurn, 2021) to explore her stories about writing. Last, I offer a writing sample and some discussion around what makes her writing successful academically and yet demonstrates an embodied sense of advocacy for those on the margins.

5.1 Jacqueline

> If it [a concept] hits something that I'm really fascinated with, then I start to do the research and see what other people are saying, and then it leads me to other things and I get you know, caught up in it-- it becomes part of my body.

When the Zoom camera opens at our first interview, it is the artwork on the wall behind Jacqueline that first draws my attention. A color portrait of a young Stevie Wonder dominates the center, with black and white photos of other artists and writers surrounding him. As if taunting the musicians, a xylophone hangs on the wall in rainbow colors, just high enough to be out of reach. A doorway to another room provides a lintel as a shelf for travel artifacts, a clay horse, African figurines, and two small vases. A collector's aesthetic is palpable in this background. But Zoom backdrops are misleading, and I come to learn this is not Jacqueline's home. Like many of us who come to New York as a student, she is renting a room in someone else's apartment.

When I suggest we start with a mindful grounding exercise, she noticeably shifts in her chair and adjusts the phone, her body poised and ready. I do too, as if the mere mention of our bodies piques awareness and shifts our focus away from conversing. We take a moment to center ourselves by taking a few deep breaths, scanning through our bodies to notice tensions, and last, to place our feet flat on the floor, grounding ourselves in the present, in our respective rooms and with one another. In this posture, we resume conversing and I begin with a few questions about how she got to graduate school. Jacqueline's hands move like an orchestra conductor, coaxing out the notes of a story or explanation. As if searching with her hands for the right words, she teases out what she wants to say. I follow her gestures and I realize how helpful it is to see more of her body. Zoom allows me to record our interviews easily, but it can at times obscure the

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body. I become aware of how intently I focus on Jacqueline's face and hands, trying to read each expression.

At the time of this interview, I admit I thought that my study about embodiment would focus on the gestures, expressions, and movements of participants, and imagined that being in person would help me focus on the body more. However, as the study progressed, I realized that embodiment emerged in ways I did not anticipate. When I looked at Jacqueline's stories about her reentry to graduate school and the papers she wrote, it was the embodied knowledge that she carried with her and the refashioning of her identity that stood out, rather than the physically embodied aspects of our conversations. Thus, the idea of embodied, intuitive knowledge as a result of perception (Polanyi, 2012/1958) became a very important way to see the body's presence. The personal knowledge gained by perception is knowledge that comes through the body of experience. Beyond intellectual concepts or a mere seeing of something, it is an interior knowledge that a person can act upon. In other words, perception is for action (Gibson, 1979), knowing something in a way that compelled a response, or as Paulo Freire might have said, led to praxis (1970).

As the above quote from Jacqueline's interview attests, an intense curiosity accompanied her academic work and writing. Jacqueline often used the word "fascinated" to describe her relationship to the research aspect of her master's degree and the concepts she works with. For her, research and writing went hand in hand as she worked to understand and apply the concepts of neurobiology and the literature surrounding autism as a spectrum of behaviors. To better understand her interest in children's behaviors, I continue with what she revealed about her experiences as a pre-school director and the multi-step journey toward her goal of graduate school.

Jacqueline's relationship with academic writing was both a learning activity and a way to synthesize the teacher-knowledge she carried with more abstract, theoretical concepts. Her embodied knowledge rose to greater visibility through the insatiable curiosity that motivated her research and writing processes. As a context for her stories about writing, I begin with how she described her personal and educational history and what I describe in this project as embodied identities.

5.1.1 Histories and Identities

Jacqueline's journey to graduate school was marked by ambitious forays into academia and a reinvention of herself as an academic, a writer and a researcher later in life. Her academic work was also embedded in social and professional relationships that supported and nurtured her journey, which she hoped would culminate in a terminal degree. Step by step, she cultivated the skills and connections needed to successfully support herself, gain expertise and participate in academic life. Moreover, Jacqueline had a strong aesthetic and musical sense about her. Proficient in piano and flute, she is cognizant of bringing the aesthetic qualities of music into her writing work.

Jacqueline grew up in the 1960s. She got married in her early twenties and her family quickly grew to include four children. While pregnant with her youngest son, she started teaching a small group of seven other children in her own home. After five years, the tiny school moved to a larger space where more children attended and she gradually began to hire teachers. In the growing coastal city of California where she lived, this playgroup developed into a preschool that she owned and ran for a further 25 years. Ultimately as director and owner of the school, Jacqueline employed 16 part-time and full-time teachers, with an enrollment of 90 children.

Over those years, Jacqueline grew deep roots within this community of parents, teachers, and children. She pictures the atmosphere of the school as a family,

> Although our school became larger, we were still very much a family school, and everybody was real close. The teachers all knew the parents, and everybody went out to dinner together and we kept that really strong sense of family community.

To her, the parents were close friends and the staff felt like her "kids." Her words conveyed how important this sense of community was, and how it provided mutual physical and emotional support as well as a sense of purpose for her.

But this season of Jacqueline's life ended in 2009 with a deep personal loss, a prolonged time of grief, and ultimately led to the sale of the pre-school she founded. The death of her son changed the relationship with the parents and staff because, "he grew up in the school and I associated it with him." She and the parents at the school hardly knew how to relate afterwards, "Being a bereaved parent is a difficult position to be in in our culture. Parents…well, you're kind of like their worst nightmare." Her comment intimates that Jacqueline felt she visually embodied the loss of a child as she stood greeting the parents at the school every day. From a position of mutual support, she was now positioned as having to process her own grief and that of the parents who meant well but needed comfort too. Daily, she confronted the fact that "we lost him but they [the school] was still there." Eventually she distanced herself to cope and became more reclusive and home bound.

After two years of bereavement, Jacqueline thought about what she wanted to do next. Close friends asked why she didn't go and study further – something she had always wanted to do. "First, I didn't do it because of the kids, and then I had the school," she reasoned. But as she considered the possibility, she felt excited about the prospect of obtaining her undergraduate degree and going on to graduate study. Her own children were grown, she was financially

independent, and she no longer ran the pre-school from day to day. The staff team, who had been running the pre-school in her absence, began to gradually take over its ownership and management.

Jacqueline's decision to leave this nurturing community can be interpreted as one that was connected to identity renovation, or improvisation (Holland et al. 1998). Loss had created a juncture in which the identities she had embodied provided coherence and meaning, but these ways of being now no longer made sense for her future. Journeying towards graduate study opened an opportunity to reconstruct her life in ways she had not let herself until now. As Holland et al. (1998) call on Bakhtin to say, "We are always in the activity of making sense of what is happening to us as one who will respond. We are always authoring the meaning of action" (p. 279). In stepping away from the identities she embodied as a school founder and director, Jacqueline moved towards authoring herself as a researcher and writer. Over the next seven years, she went on, as many mature reentry students do, to forge a new sense of herself (Lakin, 2009).

Somewhat like Winnie in the previous chapter, who had to confront the limitations of her body as an occupational therapist, Jacqueline's life events created a fork in the road. Mezirow (1993) described this adult learning experience as a "disorienting dilemma for which established patterns of thought and action become dysfunctional, 'trying harder' in old ways does not work and we become compelled to redefine the problem" (p. 144). A cataclysmic loss had changed the way Jacqueline experienced her school "family," and she was forced to redefine the problem of relating to them. The process of reentering study positioned her to relate in a new way by following her desires and exploring the questions she had from her life's work as a teacher. Like many older adult students who envision the remainder of their lives as productive and vibrant,

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she sought greater fulfillment, but also wanted to contribute to society in her later years (Lakin, 2009). In 2011, Jacqueline embarked on navigating the college admissions process, and the refashioning of herself as a writer and researcher of children's behaviors began.

5.1.1.1 Educational History

In the 1972, Jacqueline finished high school at 17. As one of six children, her parents told her that they would probably not be able to afford to send her to college, but she did earn an Associate of Arts degree in music at Bridgeway Community College (a pseudonym) before marrying and starting her family. When she later decided to reenter study after a 30-year gap in her formal education, she had to revisit her qualifications before applying to study human development at Orange State University (a pseudonym).

Based on her previous degree, Jacqueline thought she could start as a junior at a four-year college, but because she wanted to move from the humanities to the sciences, she found out that a degree in human development had different foundational requirements. As Couch's (2004) study noted, when mature women reenter study after a 20- to 30-year hiatus, what they wish to study or where they want to further their education can differ greatly from when they were last enrolled. As a result, Jacqueline had to find out the value of the college credits she already had and what she still needed to do go to a four-year college.

After a lifetime of work experience, it may have felt humbling to restart her undergraduate degree, but Jacqueline saw it as an opportunity to reengage in social interaction and the stimulation of ongoing learning (Couch, 2004). She was not intimidated by having to write academic papers, she had means to support herself, and at 56, was relatively free of family constraints. So, when Jacqueline returned to study at Bridgeway Community College, she had few competing interests, a common challenge for younger reentry or so-called nontraditional

students (Fisher-Thompson & Kuhn, 1981; Padula & Miller, 1999). She took the required courses to transfer to Orange State University and enrolled in additional subjects of interest to her such as anthropology, logic, and advanced writing. She then transferred as a junior to Orange State University to pursue a major in human development.

After she completed her undergraduate degree in 2015 from Orange State, and with her mind set on graduate school, Jacqueline began to enact and embody the life of an emerging academic. She sought out research work, reasoning that "I knew that I would probably be going into psychology, and I'm interested in research, so I had to get some experience under my belt." To obtain qualitative research experience, she worked as a research assistant. Over the next year and a half, Jacqueline simultaneously held four different research fellowships, three of which she volunteered for at Orange State University, and one at a lab at a nationally competitive research university.

Off-handedly, she added that working for different research projects "made for lots of people to write letters of recommendation!" But this comment belies the sense of community she was rebuilding by seeking out a network of people for apprenticeship and support within academia. Lakin (2009) described how, "Many older adults want their communities, including educational organizations, to see them in a variety of roles: as learners, contributors, mentors, and mentees" (p. 37). In the process of refashioning her identity, Jacqueline positioned herself to embody the different experiences and capacities academics take up. These actions suggest the way older adults take risks and try on new personas as they reinvent themselves (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009).

Her confidence was not typical of many older students who struggle with navigating the sometimes-mysterious nature of academic writing or negotiating the demands of study and work

experience (Colvin, 2013). She often referred to her competence as a writer and researcher, her publication opportunities, speaking opportunities and strong support network of friends. I had noted Jacqueline's solid sense of confidence in her speech as an embodied way of picturing herself as an academic. About academic writing she said, "Writing is one of those things which I have some talent in and not everybody does. I know that writing is one of my skills." Statements such as these were typical of her in our conversations, as if by speaking with confidence, she was renovating her strong writerly identity into the context of academia.

Jacqueline, to my mind, was enacting and inhabiting the body of a student, but also a savvy academic who knew how to engage. For example, she described an active creation of academic connections, and an understanding of how research tended to work in the world of psychology, "I think that were I to pursue a PhD, it would be that I continue to pursue my research with this internship and end up communicating with other people that are working on similar things." As she waited to make the right connection to a PhD program, Jacqueline worked as a research intern. She also currently participated as an academic by presenting her work to students in her previous graduate program, presenting at conferences, and continuing her academic writing, which she hopes to publish. Her ability to grasp and participate in academic life was not only remarkably astute but also embodied the new identity she saw for herself. That is why, in the upcoming section, I discuss Jacqueline's deliberate and well-planned transition to graduate school, the challenges of her relocation to the east coast, and her graduate study during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.1.2 Transitions to Graduate School

At the time of joining my research project in the summer of 2021, Jacqueline had just finished her thesis and graduated with a Master's in Developmental Psychology at a graduate

college of education in the Northeast. The onset of COVID-19 had delayed her completion by a year. It was from this high point of graduation that we reflected on the process of entering graduate school. Embodying a nomadic lifestyle, she described the transition to the east coast in the summer of 2018,

> I had to give up my apartment. I had to sell or give away everything that I owned. The family heirlooms, things I gave to others, to my siblings, because my kids' generation doesn't want those things, my mother's beautiful ornate library table. They're like what am I gonna do with that? But one of my brothers wanted it. And I sold my car. I ended up in a space where I don't own even one piece of furniture.

Jacqueline packed up her life into four suitcases and left the remainder of her belongings behind in storage. At just over 63, Jacqueline enrolled in graduate school taking even greater risks than she had already (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009). By "crossing boundaries, cultivating new roles and explore new environments" she continued to forge new identities (Lakin, 2009, p. 36).

However, she said the toll on her well-being was "just so overwhelming, physically, emotionally and spiritually, that I was completely depleted." Before starting classes, she took time to restore and nurture her body, staying with family for a few weeks. She house-sat for friends over the summer and got a feel for the city before finding a place to live. But when she arrived at graduate school, there were social adjustments that made the transition even more challenging.

5.1.2.1 Experiencing Social Isolation

Jacqueline's previous life, embodied as a pre-school director, was a highly visible job, carrying with it the privileges of being known and respected because of her work. Encompassed in mutually supportive relationships she had built over time, reentering undergraduate study had been exciting and intellectually stimulating. Because she remained located in her home city, and near family, she made friends easily and continued to maintain her life-long friendships and

contact with family while she attended undergraduate classes. In early research about reentry students, Miller's study (1988) noted that for over half of the participants, the greatest source of support was social connections such as female friends who had studied previously or finished their degrees. But Jacqueline's move in 2017 to graduate school was a socially lonely and isolating one in comparison to her undergraduate experience,

> I mean it was huge. You know, here, instead of being in a place where I had tons of family, tons of friends that had been my friends since childhood. Close, close friends through the school, just having that, being surrounded by that and all the physical and emotional affection that comes with that, to being almost in total isolation [because of COVID-19].

Relocating to a graduate program across the country placed a vast distance between Jacqueline and her long-term relationships, support systems and even people her own age. Within one year, what was already a dramatic physical, emotional, and socially isolating experience was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of working toward her degree. Jacqueline would have to create new communities of support if she was to survive graduate school.

5.1.2.2 Experiencing the Age Gap

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, older adult students like me and Jacqueline had few ways to connect and socialize during graduate school. In 2021, the year Jacqueline graduated, the Univstats.com website reports that out of the 4,547 students enrolled at our college, 210, or 4.6% were over 50, or what are termed older adult students (Lakin et al., 2008; Padula & Miller, 1999). Compared with 2,745 students aged 22 to 29 who comprised 60% of the student body, older adult students were a marginal community just because of age. As a significant but underrepresented group, Myles (2017) noted that older adults would likely face discrimination, especially since universities were slow to accommodate them.

Four of the women in the study, including myself, discovered that age simply made making friends, networking, finding study partners or locating other mature students at the college much harder and more cumbersome. Indeed, Jacqueline and I had never met until I started asking staff and faculty if they knew of other students my age. Jacqueline summed up the general difficulty of meeting and making friends in her sixties at our college,

> Most people when they come to college, they're in a little bit of shock and they're young people and isolated, but they immediately make friends their own age who are in the same position as them. Whereas when you're older, there's nobody that's going through what you're going through. It's harder to find your people.

Jacqueline's experience as an older student is quite literally an embodied difference and positionality marked by age and stage of life. Although she considered herself a person that easily made friends with younger people in undergraduate and at the labs she worked at, "I was able to do that, then, but none of that worked at [our school of education]." Logistically it was nearly impossible to meet "your people" in natural social settings. She elaborated, "I wasn't in the same class [cohort] and it was very rare that I'd have the same people in my classes." As she also discovered, adult learners usually attend night classes, making it possible to work during the day and support our degrees. There was little time or opportunity to find friends as people came into school to attend class and immediately headed home afterwards.

Furthermore, our programs alone made it unlikely our paths would cross because graduate studies are somewhat siloed, and students take only a few courses outside of their programs. Students who studied part-time at the college represented 45% of all enrolled students and were not physically present on campus during the day. Jacqueline noted that she made just a few friends while in her graduate program and said there was "just one person that I would say became a close friend and then, when I went away for COVID and was gone for like nine months, I connected again, and she was gone." Jacqueline did not live on campus for any length

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of time and therefore did not have the advantage of meeting other students casually. But

Jacqueline was resourceful and thought of a solution to the difficulty of meeting and making

friends at the college as an older student.

She intended to approach the provost with the proposal of creating a networking group on

campus for older students. Although it appeared that improving supports for non-traditional

students is a low priority for many institutions due in part to allocation of funding (Colvin,

2013), Jacqueline hoped that a student-initiated network to support the social needs of mature

adults at our institution would ensue. Her embodied experience of isolation led her create a

proposal to change things for students that would come after her returned to the idea that

perception is for action (Gibson, 1979), and knowledge is for praxis (Freire, 1970). People act

when knowledge is part of them. In light of the idea that people engage most deeply in learning

through embodied knowledge, in the next section, I discuss how Jacqueline's embodied beliefs

supported her graduate studies.

5.2 Writing from Embodied Beliefs

The previous section highlighted how as an older adult student, Jacqueline's social

experience was shaped by perceptions of age and a sense of being marginal in student life. In the

next discussion of the data, I take note of the embodied beliefs that she brings to her writing

practices. Alongside a curious disposition, Jacqueline's strong desire to engage in communities

of like-minded people, her love of reading that motivates her writing, and her use of academic

writing to become more visible in spaces where older adult women are expected to remain

marginal all reveal academic literacies that govern and guide her writing practices.

As a writer, Jacqueline was more confident than either Winnie or Jennifer, who admitted

that graduate school was intimidating. "I was completely prepared and wasn't at all overwhelmed

or intimidated," she stated. Previous graduate experience has been noted as a strength for reentry students (Dessommes, 2003), because it makes academic terms, theories, and procedures less daunting. But knowing how to write in one discipline does not always transfer to another. For instance, Jacqueline's experience contrasted with Winnie's, who also made a disciplinary move to the social sciences and found that scientific writing had little in common with how to write in a social work program. Having taken a more gradual path towards her area of study than Winnie, and taken a few graduate classes, Jacqueline acquired some conventions of writing expected of her in psychology. She explained,

> At Orange State, you're required to do a senior research project. You have to get your own research [data], you have to compile it and show all the charts and explain your methods, just a complete research paper.

Working with a live data set and independently researching her own topic brought lived experience and theory together, corroborating behaviors she had observed as an educator for two and a half decades. "It was basically what I had done as a preschool teacher, I was observing, and I was interviewing preservice teachers on child behaviors and how these children went through a trauma," she explained. This experience brought a validation of her embodied knowledge of children into the inquiry process and invited her to ask research questions connected to what she learned in her classes. It was this project that gave her greater confidence in her research and writing skills and consider pursuing academic research.

The disciplinary writing norms she developed during the senior research project and her human development degree also prepared her for entering a master's program. In addition, she had direct mentoring, "You take another class where one of the teachers is your advisor and mentor and as you start to work on your own project, you are constantly getting feedback and it was really good [preparation]." In this sense Jacqueline's experience was ideal, making the

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transition to graduate study more fluid and putting her on similar footing to students who move from undergraduate to graduate school in their twenties. Unlike many older adult students who discover a much larger gap in their academic literacies, she brought not only life experience, but the embodied know-how to support her graduate study.

5.2.1 A Disposition of Feminist Curiosity

Jacqueline often refers to herself as someone who can be a focused researcher and writer, using the word "fascinated" to describe when "I come across an idea that's really amazing to me." Her forays in reading research articles and academic literature employ metaphors like "going down a rabbit hole," or "diving in and coming up six hours later." It is as if curiosity has a life of its own in Jacqueline, taking her hand and leading her to investigate until she is satisfied that she has grasped a concept. It begins with reading,

> For the thesis specifically I had a basic idea in mind, and then I spent like months going through CLIO [a digital academic search engine] and just pulling up just folders full of papers and reading through all these different things.

Then she turns to the writing to work out what she needs to know more about,

> So there was all that research so when I sat down to start to write a section I had all of that knowledge on that section to kind of draw from and then what kind of happens with me is, I outline, so I will make an outline of what I want to say, and then the sentences kind of just come to me, you know they sort of flow. I think that's the part of me that's been a writer my whole life.

Then she reshapes the writing

> [Then it's] adapting that skill to academic writing. I'll go through later and edit the sentences but try to keep that kind of flow-- what came out of me initially because it's that's where the beauty is, I think. That's the connection to like the greater knowledge of that subject and how it kind of flows through my understanding, and my skill with creating language.

Rosenblatt (1988,1994) theorized the direct relationship of reading and writing for authors as one of cognitive relationship, each process verifying the other. From her description, something more

embodied occurred for Jacqueline. Speaking of knowledge within her, she pointed to an engagement with writing beyond the mind, a sense of "keeping that kind of flow" of ideas, going to "where the beauty is.". "I can get lost in it," she said, calling on psychologist Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) concept of flow. Flow can be explained as a state in which attention is given to something in a way that it becomes a source of motivation. In this state, a person can lose themselves, lose track of time and do an activity just for the sake of it. Jacqueline dropped down into this state and purposefully connected to a sense of identity, the "part of me that has been a writer my whole life," describing how knowledge "flows through my understanding and my skill with creating language." To my mind, her experience was one of mindbody, a deeply aesthetic and felt experience that to Jacqueline, was both pleasurable and motivating. In this mode, she paid attention to where the body led thought and she engaged in "creating language."

In addition to finding writing generative, I observed that many of Jacqueline's research questions originated with herself, something Zurn (2021) suggested was a feature of not only authentic inquiry but was also particular to feminist curiosity. For example, questions about her experience with children's early development, such as the ability to focus for long periods of time or a keen interest in certain subjects or activities. These observations sometimes included traits she saw in herself. Reflecting on her academic path, she said that "the reason I had come to school was to study children's behaviors in terms of the physiology behind them--as a way of explaining behaviors." For Jacqueline, pursuing a degree in human development and then a master's in developmental psychology became a way to understand links between what she had witnessed for 25 years, psychological aspects of behavior, and what is known about the biological brain.

I found it interesting that her approach to inquiry very naturally took up the character of feminist curiosity. I saw a pattern in that her research questions about autistic traits came from her own life and experience of teaching children. Life questions then led to an investigation of the literature about behaviors she had witnessed as a teacher, which she worked out in writing. Writing then led to further questions about whether these behaviors fit in with a range of behaviors in the general population. In a sense, without her lived experience and embodied knowledge of children, there was no inquiry. Her way of working differed from positivist approaches to inquiry where curiosity is speculated upon, and differences are dissected (Zurn, 2021). Instead, curiosity was generative in that it led the way, creating connections and more questions for Jacqueline.

Jacqueline combined thorough investigation on her own and then moved outwards from herself to community, looking for other people who are asking similar questions. Zurn's distinction in his essay *Feminist Curiosity* (2021) helpfully draws out the active and collaborative nature of curiosity,

> Feminist curiosity uses questions and investigations, explorations, and wonderings, to listen, to follow, and to respond in an interdependent space of collective inquiry. This is feminist curiosity plain and simple. (p. 6)

It was this desire to be a part of a larger community and a larger conversation that Jacqueline manifested, by gathering, networking, and creating collaborations with the scholars she meets. For instance, as an older adult at the college we both attended, I assumed that there were just not a lot of people my age to socialize with, and until this study I did not seek anyone out. Jacqueline thought quite differently about this lack of social connection. She, in effect, asked the question, why is it so hard to meet other students my age at the college?

Her desire to form a group where we could socialize and network was her way of registering the question at the administrative level, challenging the idea that small populations at the college didn't need or want social support while studying in their program. It challenged an almost willful blindness to the way separate programs at the college made it hard for older adult students to meet, discover areas of mutual interest, and support one another.

Jacqueline's curious disposition also caused her to question accepted assumptions made about human behavior. As Enloe (2017) argued, "what allows us to be feminist is the questions that we ask, not the answers that we have. And it allows us to be more candid about what we don't know." Understood in this way, feminist curiosity aptly described how Jacqueline went about her academic work. In a shift of focus away from the search for certainty and a move towards exploration, feminist curiosity departs from seeking to explain or confirm knowledge and engages in cycles of inquiry. It is more inclined towards and resonates with theories of embodiment instead of a preoccupation with cognitive knowledge. Because Jacqueline's questions came out of her life, for example, she sought solutions in everyday practice. For her, exploring theory brought further understanding to the wide range of expression that she had witnessed in children, and her research provided more helpful practices for teachers.

As a result of her research questions and writing, Jacqueline positioned herself as part of a small group of people who hoped to redefine what is considered normative behavior in her field of study. Her main interest was reimagining autism as a series of discrete behaviors. She explained it as, "certain behaviors present in all of us, and when it presents extremely, then we say they have this disability, autism, when in fact we've all got it. I see these behaviors spread out all over in the general population." She spoke more authoritatively on the subject, had a background in the literature, and was poised to engage as an academic around her subject. As

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well as informing her approach to inquiry, her disposition of curiosity set the tone for the way she engaged with writing. In our conversations, her stories shed light on the ways her writing functioned in her life as a place of joy, efficacy, and motivation. Jacqueline's narrative exemplified the importance of, and pleasure writing that had in connecting her with like-minded peers and intellectual community.

5.2.1.1 Writing Connections with Likeminded Peers

A year or so after stepping away from the running of her preschool, Jacqueline discovered an online community where she grew as a writer. Before she thought of reentering school, she found a Facebook group solely dedicated to grammar and writing. The group drew people from many different countries, and it was a forum for lively discussion,

> You had to write at this super high level to make a comment, so I'm on this stupid Facebook group, and I'm trying to make a comment on the thread. And I would literally spend hours composing this comment, knowing I would get challenged in the research behind it, or my thinking informing it or on my grammar.

When I suggest that perhaps she has found her people, her hands move with a sense of fitting or building an object, and she explains what it was like. She described it as "a training ground, so that when I went into Orange State University, I felt really prepared." As if molding a ball of clay, Jacqueline relays how both the Facebook group and the community college research course helped her grow as a writer. To her surprise, she had found intellectual friends in an unexpected place, "on this stupid Facebook group." To match the level of writing in the discussion on Facebook, she not only made sure her grammar was impeccable, but expressed her ideas with clear evidence and rationale.

A sense of satisfaction comes over Jacqueline's expression when she recalls her ability to craft strong writing as well as engage with a group who like to "geek out" over language. "We quickly got bored with just discussing composition," she said, and so "we started discussing

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philosophy and politics. I even went on vacation with four of the women several times!" It was as if she had discovered another dimension of community, one that started with a stimulating cognitive connection, continued with the experience of growth as a writer, and embodied the emotional component of ordinary, companionable friendship. Listening to her reflect on the role the group played in her life, I wonder if the experience was a kind of academic literacy, preparing her for meaningful connection and relationship with other scholars. Just as Jacqueline manifests the importance of relationships for her in this experience, I saw that she found other relationships generative and motivating, such as the ones between herself and her professors, and the strong relationship between reading and writing.

5.2.1.2 Literacy as a Reading and Writing Relationship

As a result of growing confidence about engaging in an academic community through Facebook, Jacqueline went on to experience a sense of efficacy and success as a writer at Bridgeway Community College, where her class papers generated affirmation from a writing professor,

> He came to me afterwards and he said, your writing was above the level of everybody in all the other classes, you must have gone to such an excellent high school. [she laughs] and you know my high school was really crappy—the worst in the county. But I read a lot, when I was little.

Her last comment, almost a throwaway, redirected the conversation to where her writing ability came from, her deep love of reading. I use the word love intentionally to stress that her relationship with books is, by its very nature, friendship, a sense of belonging and connection.

Despite a lack of formal writing instruction in school, Jacqueline credited her childhood reading ability for knowing how to write well,

> I was a lucky little kid who didn't have a lot of friends as a kid. My friends were books and the people in them, and I read constantly. And then, when I started

writing, it was always commented on that I had a certain skill in writing. But I read a lot as a kid.

As this story unfolded, two mentions of her childhood love of reading sandwiched the story of her professor's praise. In the telling of these intertwined instances, I sense how significant this incident must have been in affirming her as a writer. She inserted the comment about reading twice to point out where her writing ability comes from. The sense she seems to make of the story is that a relationship with reading might be directly credited to the feedback she was getting about her writing. The way she talks about it implies that her own reading relationship fostered her writing. I see how internally she explains writing ability, but externally she may have also interpreted from her professor's comment that she had what it took to do the academic work of continuing with her studies.

5.2.1.3 Becoming Visible Through Writing

Recognition from teachers about her skill in writing seemed important and highly motivating for her because it came up on several occasions in our conversations. It may support a narrative that excellence in her writing is one way she made herself visible. But it also rendered the emotional aspect of having her writing seen or read by others, as with the professor who noticed her writing ability in her undergraduate writing class. It seemed important that her writing ability was seen by both her instructors and other academics. In the second interview, Jacqueline added an interpretation of what writing meant to her in the next stage of her professional and life trajectories:

> So yes, writing means a lot to me. It's been my ticket out, it means now I've given up everything in my life to invest in my ability to comprehend these concepts that I want to research and to be able to write them, and express them, and give talks to express them to other people. I guess you know my future now over the next 20 years is staked on my ability to do this, so yes, it's very important to me.

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In a sense, Jacqueline is reinventing herself and being reinvented as she tells this story. It is not a story in isolation from the context of her relocation east to attend graduate school but embodied in it. It is also a continuing story about how writing, throughout her life, has provided ways forward for her. In the narrative, she pictures herself as an active academic, researching, writing, and sharing her ideas with others for the next 20 years. It is the new story of her life and brings with it high stakes and a strong sense of purpose as she literally lives into this description. In a sense, this is a necessary narrative, one that propels her forward, but also one that makes sense of what she has left behind. Her writing appears to function in a similar way, helping Jacqueline work out her thinking and the areas of research she wants to pursue. Below, I explore how she described her writing processes and discuss samples of the writing work itself.

5.3 A Mind in a Writing Body

For Jacqueline, writing academic papers for her classes provided the means for making crucial connections in her studies. She made sense of new theoretical concepts by working out their meaning and application through writing her papers. It was also a way she explored her academic interests. During her undergraduate studies, her advisor arranged for her to enroll in a few graduate classes to build up her science background. At Orange State University, she discovered that neuroscience courses focused on the area of human development, and Jacqueline's interest in developmental psychology grew. The readings in class focused her attention on the brain's biological role in human developmental stages, from brain growth in children to its degeneration in older adults. During this course Jacqueline made connections between the functions of the brain and the behaviors she sought to study. Upon reflection she said,

> I never thought of it before, but it was those two papers that I spent much more time on than was required and just really put a lot into and then I could springboard into other stuff later on [in my studies].

Looking back at her writing, Jacqueline realized that it was her undergraduate papers and her senior project that confirmed the area of psychology she wanted to focus on. In particular, the paper she wrote for a graduate class about aging and neurodegeneration while still in undergrad "that made me realized the reason I had come to school, which was to study children's behaviors in terms of physiology, as a way of explaining behaviors." For example, the graduate neuroscience classes that she took changed the way that she started to think about autistic traits, because it informed her embodied knowledge from a biological standpoint. With this knowledge, she could challenge views about autism that are generally accepted through her class papers. In making sense of her research interests, Jacqueline credits her writing for bringing together her interests and what she was reading in dense, and complex research studies in psychological journals.

5.3.1 A Writing Metaphor

We talked about memorable papers in our interviews. Leaning forward, Jacqueline admits that there were only a few papers she became emotionally attached to. The phrase, "emotionally attached" got me curious and I asked her to tell me more. For Jacqueline, this referred to any paper that held a lot of interest for her, such as the paper about aging. In that instance the kind of writing she did was working out new ideas and knowledge. Emotional attachment appears to take the form of an embodied and focused curiosity both in the research and writing process and, "it becomes part of my body" she said. As we conversed, she likened the relationship between researching and writing as one of reciprocity. That is, researching served her writing and writing served her in working out complex concepts.

Jacqueline also pointed to the tensions and frustrations of academic writing she experienced, and the conversation quickly led to an active metaphor, in which she made meaning by understanding one thing in terms of another (Haydén, 2013). She described academic writing as "women shopping" for a dress. Below, Jacqueline describes two different experiences, one of writing in a way that is like stream of consciousness about a topic, and the other is writing (or revising writing) that requires greater substantiation,

> The writing, you know, because it's academic writing, sometimes after you write it out, you realize that it's not substantiated enough and then that's the really hard part because you have to find something that substantiates something you already have. I compare it to... women shopping. So, for instance, if you were to go shopping with one of your friends and sort of like in a stream of consciousness, walk through, pick whatever. 'Oh, this is interesting Oh, that is interesting', that's one experience.

Here, the experience of research reading is rhizomatic, one interesting find leading to another. Her tone is languid, relaxed, and companionable. I get the feeling of pleasure that comes with just looking to see what is out there.

But a large part of writing in developmental psychology is substantiating ideas in multiple ways and with many references. Working backwards from something she has already written to find the reference is a different kind of research reading. Jacqueline goes on to say,

> A completely other experience is, if you have to have a blue dress, it has to be X long and it has to fit like this and your chances of finding that are so slim, and you can drive yourself NUTS like trying to fit stuff into that criteria, and you have only one reference or maybe two that are backing it up and you realize that's a big concept, it needs a couple more --oh my God is that hard to find (emphasis original).

"Women shopping" conveys a sense of being in motion and portrays writing as an active search for a dress. A dress is something that women wear, and it interests me now as I read, that I can't help but picture the idea of shopping for the right dress as a way of 'dressing' the work of writing so that it is presentable to other academics.

One way to read this is how Jacqueline's experience of writing in the academy is illustrated by having to find the right dress, as if for a specific occasion. The image suggests that what makes writing academic is that it has markers of credibility and propriety in conveying our ideas and the ideas of others. Traditionally accepted ideas about academic writing include implicit assumptions, such as referencing the lineage of an idea or how various genres of writing should be undertaken. These are often learned through drafting and feedback from teachers, alongside more explicit rules such as are contained in the APA Style manual or the Purdue Owl website regarding citation and attribution of literature.

Jacqueline's gendering of this experience is unmistakable, and even though it may appear frivolous at first, I thought about how dressing in acceptable ways has always been a social norm for women when entering cognitive, masculinized spaces. In one of the gatherings, Jacqueline referenced the ways her generation of women were socialized,

> Especially women our age, we lived through that time when women started to come into their own in business and in academia. We were taught that in order to be listened to and respected, we had to imitate men and even lower our voices a little. We needed to look masculine--what were we going to wear with our clothes that looked vaguely masculine, that all of this garbage stuff. And we still have that in our heads.

Dressing her ideas in academic writing conventions are similar. Jacqueline knows that to be taken seriously in her academic work, her writing must have the academic markers of legitimacy. For instance, when writing about her ideas in academic spaces, it would be easy to minimize 25 years of pre-school teaching experience and believe that it cannot compensate for the correct citation of something she knows to be true about children's behaviors. As her writing sample attests, she has become expert in these writing moves.

In addition, Jacqueline's metaphor can also be read as a description of the different processes she employs to produce her academic papers. On some occasions, "it is like a stream

of consciousness" at others, the writing goes hard, and as she put it, is "super-frustrating at times." The challenge of revising writing is no doubt a common experience, but what was helpful in Jacqueline's metaphor was the picture she painted of exploring ideas and then deciding on the ones she wanted to work with. Then there is a point at which the search became dogged and specific, a place where only the exact reference or substantiation would do. Through metaphor, the body was active, searching, enjoying, even groaning with knowing she was onto something, but the struggle was in how to 'prove' what she knows.

Jacqueline was bringing at least two kinds of knowledge together as she wrote, one was tacit and the other was referencing the work of others that validated her knowledge in the academy. Before, she knew something intuitively, but now she has the tools and she has learned the language to have the argument. The meeting between theory and practice is the dance of mindbody at work. What Jacqueline described was her internal embodied knowledge finding the conceptual to describe, affirm and communicate what she knew.

5.3.2 A Writing Sample

Perhaps it makes sense to look at a piece of Jacqueline's writing to show the kind of writing she's required to do, her proficiency, and how she made her argument. She offered a writing sample from her master's thesis, in which she worked to craft her thoughts and knowledge into elegant, but extremely compact sentences. Below, I share excerpts of her work as indicative of this combination of elements.

> Hypothesis
> I propose that our current understanding of autism as one complex developmental condition is functionally inadequate. As I will establish in the sections following, the definitive genetic architecture of autism remains undetermined (Gernert, et al., 2020); the complex, obscure pathogenesis is still largely unknown (Pangrazzi, et al., 2020); a recent genome-wide association study found autism-related genetic modifications to be non-exclusive and frequently also indicated in other neurodevelopmental conditions (Grove et al., 2019); the neurobiology of autism is

still a mystery (Postema, et al., 2019); a viable autism biomarker has yet to be identified (Frye, et al., 2019); and heterogeneity remains the most common descriptive factor (Courchesne, et al., 2020; Marrus et al., 2020; Hewitson, et al., 2021).

This paragraph, detailing the first hypothesis of her paper, is a rare occasion in which "I" is used in Jacqueline's writing. I get a sense of gleeful activism in the way she makes her point. In making her case, she employs the expected conventions to expose autism as a term that attempts to define behaviors that are largely unknown and essentially mysterious. The skills she uses in these two sentences include, knowing how to write a hypothesis statement, evidence of familiarity with the literature, citing multiple sources of evidence from studies and what was found, and rhetorically, she offers her rebuttal in one sentence: that the only thing known about typical autistic behaviors is how diverse they are.

In other parts of this excerpt, she utilized other conventions of writing in psychology that favor third person constructions that qualify, define, or explain, but rarely use passive voice. Compare the more personal tone of her hypothesis to an explanation of the harm of the deficit model (Dinishak, 2016),

> The deficit model as applied to neural differences sees autism in terms of deviations from the norm, with the norm promoted as a behavioral and culturally defined neural ideal, and the autistic individual defined in terms of 'a list of deficits (that) over-emphasize autists' weaknesses, sometimes to the complete exclusion of mention of strengths or neutral differences associated with autism.' (n.p.)

Somehow, in the crafted academic precision in her writing, there is something else I sense; a love of language and a sense of compassion for her subject(s). Although her reasoning appeals to the cognitive, it is anything but cold. Her second hypothesis contains a proposal that refuses to accept western norms of diagnosis and exclusion of people who are not "typical,"

> Hypothesis 2
> I propose that equally untenable is the cultural practice of dividing the human population by utilizing the questionable binary of neurotypical people, defined as

those with neurocognitive function operating within a socially acceptable range, vs neurodiverse people, as measured by one's neural distance from the designation of typical. These definitions give rise to questions of how far from typical can one stray and still be considered healthy-normal per 21st-century Western-cultural standards (Armstrong, 2015); and what about individuals with some typical traits and some atypical (Happé, et al., 2006); and, if that last question encompasses a significant minority of people, then what operationally constitutes typical?

In between the lines of this well-crafted proposition are people. Jacqueline proposes that such marginalization through comparison to neurotypicality is "untenable," a forceful, activist word that conveys that a shift is needed in the way typical is defined. At once she attacks her own culture and advocates for a consideration of commonly accepted behavioral norms.

What Jacqueline succeeded at doing in these examples reflected both a comprehension of academic conventions and a resistance to them. She set aside distancing, positivist assumptions about her subject with a hypothesis that resisted exacting proofs and instead focused on social change for people who are positioned as marginal by definitions of autistic behavior. She embodies feminist curiosity in that her questions are those of her own life, and from this stance, she can call into question widely accepted models and participate in the wider academic discussion. Below, in my concluding section, I sum up the insights that Jacqueline's stories offer.

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

Narratives are complex renderings of experience. Chase notes that only by "[a]nalyzing the complex process of narration in specific instances" do we learn what makes certain narratives possible *and* problematic for the narrator (1995, p. 290). Moreover, narratives are social in nature and are constructed with others. Cultures, for example, provide both the resources and constraints of narratives (Holland et al., 1998).

One thing that makes narrative interesting is to try and understand how the person telling the story uses their cultural resources and works within cultural constraints (Chase, 1995). One

of the early constraints of Jacqueline's life were her educational expectations. She clearly had some exceptional abilities musically and strong reading and writing literacies. However, her family circumstances did not allow for a full academic exploration of these skills during her twenties. On the other hand, Jacqueline had a desire to teach and eventually opened a school, a part of her narrative that exemplified embodied knowledge of children, pedagogy, and the running of a business. When this period of life changes, she draws on these resources and the support of her community to venture towards a long-postponed goal, going on to study at the graduate level.

Furthermore, integral to her stories is a pattern of identity construction that inevitably accompanies storytelling. Jacqueline's narratives surrounding her reentry to graduate school provide a sense of what it was like to refashion her identity to embody what she perceives to be the life of an emerging academic. To step into a new identity and embody another, she draws on an unfulfilled desire that she had long ago, which is a common motivation for women who reenter study later in life (Couch, 2004; Lakin, 2009).

Embodied identities such as a preschool teacher, a good writer, mother, and businesswoman all richly inform and support this reinvention and new positioning of herself, because she uses the questions she has about her life, about what she has seen, heard and experienced, as well as the dissonance among these experiences. People tell her there are clear and narrow parameters for how we diagnose autistic behaviors, but Jacqueline sees something different in her lived experiences with children. She has seen a vast range of children's behavior that has convinced her falls within the range of human behavior in general. She problematizes the idea that individuals with autism are like a whole other category of people. Further academic study allows her to undergird what she has already intuited.

By looking at her stories of writing, Jacqueline engaged in writing processes that paid tribute to her ideas and how she decided to structure them for academic papers. She learned as she wrote, and she wrote as she learned. Although her work is highly conceptual, she uses her writing to work out complex concepts in a reciprocal relationship with her reading. In this pattern, she used what she learned in her academic study to push back and argue for her experiential truth by employing academic authority to back it up. A disposition of feminist curiosity guides her process, evidenced for example, by a focus on the questions she asks rather than a positivistic search for concrete answers. She searches for a new perspective, instead of trying to confirm what is already known. In this way, she distinguishes herself through her writing and research abilities and receives recognition within her discipline.

Jacqueline's stories highlight the improvisations and renovations mature students make as they reenter study at the graduate level (Holland et al., 1998). Her social experiences as an older student and efforts to create community indicate that mature students need more ways to connect and collaborate during their programs of study. Ultimately her work is a very personal one of refashioning identity by drawing on social and cultural resources, to discover that embodied, personal knowledge has a crucial place in her academic work. Because of a personal transformation, her work with others in this space has the potential to change the ways autism is conceived in her discipline. Her practice of questioning based on lived experience also reaffirms feminist inquiry practices based on questions arising from an individual's personal and professional knowledge. Last, her actions also continue to raise questions about how women might engage in the transformation of identity and what role academic writing plays in this process.

Interlude 2: Engaging Jacqueline

When I contacted Jacqueline about reading her chapter, she was in the throes of summer work and needed time to reply. She and I exchanged a few emails about the doctoral process, and she divulged that she was watching my dissertation journey to decide if she would apply to programs. In between talking about her future, we brainstormed pseudonyms for our institution and, as always, her wit came through.

I did not specify as to how she was to comment on her draft and Jacqueline's responses came through an email. She found it best to copy quotes into a new message and then elaborate on the details or clarifications for her draft. I opened the email to read,

> Hi Jen, I like it! I mean, it's not exactly how I would portray myself (I see myself as infinitely more attractive and with less hand movements when I talk, lol), but it's as accurate as it probably needs to be to convey your salient points…

To be honest, I had been more worried about her correcting my grammar! But in her comments, I learned some surprising facts about Jacqueline's years after high school. She helped me with the chronology of her story and matter-of-factly filled in some gaps. To the sentence I wrote that read, "Jacqueline grew up in the 1970s and became a music teacher after high school." she replied,

- I was born in December of 1954 and graduated high school in 1972 at barely 17 because I skipped the 2nd grade.
- I never worked as a music teacher.
- I volunteer conducted a girls' choir in my hometown for about 2 years, and was offered a position to conduct an experienced adult choir at a church in a much larger town a short distance away for about a year while in Community College getting my AA in Music.
- I pretty much for the most part was a stay-home mom with my brood of little kids, with occasional hours at a part-time job in a social-research firm, random babysitting for extra cash, and for several years my friend Susan

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> and I fixed up found items & thrift-store treasures then sold them at the Flea
> Market (which was fun & made a lot more money than babysitting!).
> - When my daughter (kid #3) was 2 1/2, I shamelessly lied my way into
>   getting the job as installation tech for the phone company, climbing poles
>   and working with wires. Tool packing! That was a good union job.

Narrative smoothing (Spence, 1986), or the process of narrativizing (Mishler, 1995) and

restorying data so that it makes sense was clearly a hazardous one. I thought I had done a decent

job of verbally recapping Jacqueline's experiences when interviewing her, but clearly I had not

ascertained enough of the details. A narrative process of "integrating events and happenings into

a temporarily organized whole" took much refining (Kim, 2016, p. 197). As with each interview,

every interaction I had with Jacqueline (and with Winnie and Jennifer, as well) brought

clarification and new data. The process was one of deciding, beyond the simple correction of

facts, what storied information served the work of embodiment and what represented the women

with integrity.

In my restorying of Jacqueline's narrative, the task of including relevant data was

challenging because of the many directions her narrative took me. Therefore, in writing her

chapter in over more than six drafts, choosing the most important information to convey was

how I learned to write about the data. I kept in mind that telling her story in a way that helped

readers to have enough empathy to learn about her experiences was the point (Kim, 2016). As we

also discovered, the tensions of anonymity also come up with becoming more accurate.

Jacqueline's closing to her email read,

> All this being said, you might be slightly changing some of the facts to protect my
> anonymity, but, realistically, who else on this planet has my bio? Anyone who ever
> knew me would recognize this as me! And I'm fine with that.

I realized through Jacqueline's comments that there are delicate dances both researchers and

participants play in narrative research. In engaging around Jacqueline's account, representation,

anonymity, and the desire to become visible were at play with one another. As a researcher, I was most conscious of the ethics of representation and protecting participant's identities. In Jacqueline, and in Winnie and Jennifer too, I saw the desire for their experiences to be both seen and heard. To negotiate these awarenesses, ongoing communication and conversation with participants became crucial.

I also learned to strike many balances in my data writing. At times it was honoring the voices of the women, at others, it was thinking about how their stories might connect to readers and serve the broader context of education or making simple changes to protect anonymity. Finding a way through each of these challenges was a point of growth for me and an acknowledgement that each study was an education in itself about research methods and writing about participants. The only way to start finding how to be a narrative researcher was in the act of doing of narrative inquiry.

Chapter 6: Embodying Voice: Jennifer

In the first chapter, Winnie provided a perspective of embodied experience in that racial ambiguity informed her negotiation of a graduate journey in social work. Like Jacqueline did much later in life, Winnie navigated study as a way to enact a career change in her forties. Her criticality supported an embodied understanding of living on the margins of ideologies and race. The mindbody connection as an emotional and cognitive relationship in her studies enabled her to use writing in particular ways, most notably, to speak to power. In these ways, graduate study was a means for both Jacqueline and Winnie to support a reinvention of themselves, returning to study in a new area of expertise and thereby positioning themselves to fulfill a desired future.

In this chapter, the narrative of a third woman in my study, Jennifer, offer further understanding of the complexity of older adult women's graduate study experience and a negotiation of identity, visibility, and marginality. Jennifer's stories about her return to academia at the age of 61 embody an attempt to reconcile complicated and seemingly opposing ideas about writing and academic forms of writing. As an older adult, her experiences resemble Jacqueline's in that she was acutely aware of her age in relation to her peers. She also connects being a strong reader to being a strong writer. Over time and through teaching writing to her students, she has developed confidence in her writing voice.

Unlike Jacqueline, however, Jennifer did not see herself as measuring up to her peers in the forms of academic writing expected of her in graduate school, and unlike Winnie, she often held back on sharing her embodied teaching knowledge in class. In the following exploration of Jennifer's embodied experience of writing in graduate school, I suggest that in making sense of her experience, she positioned herself in her stories as choosing between either-or propositions, such as function or form. As she expressed it, "What is the job of academic writing? It's to

convey scholarly ideas and I'm pushing back on the forms." By positioning herself as resistant to academic writing norms, it created a space for her own knowledge of writing, gained through her lived experiences as a fiction author.

Jennifer's family history of social resistance served as a cultural resource (Holland et al., 1998) for taking up an ideological stance of resistance to genres of academic writing. Jennifer's beliefs revealed personally embodied ideologies about writing and performing knowledge, showing how academic writing norms often present older adult students with a whole new language in which they must convey what they know (Bartholomae, 1986). For Jennifer, this process created dissonance with her lived experience.

Jennifer's embodied experiences were compelling and interesting for a few reasons. First, visceral descriptions about her physical and emotional experiences during her studies amplified underacknowledged and embodied aspects of graduate study. For example, how mature students negotiate social marginality due to perceptions of age, emotional aspects of academic writing, and the physical toll of cognitive stress. Second, she was able to describe the physicality of her experience in ways that located her experiences specifically in the body.

In addition, Jennifer's accounts rendered some of the complexities surrounding the relating of narratives. Her stories embodied a strong writerly identity that she set up against perceptions about academic writing, thereby creating perceived binaries. I found that these binaries were embodied places of struggle for her identity and voice. These perceived binaries in her stories brought to light the internal and external pressures she struggled to come to terms with as a graduate student. Often, these struggles were put forward in her narratives as absolutes, against which she saw herself resisting. As a result, Jennifer's perceptions of academic culture and writing expectations focused her attention on finding legitimacy and voice as she negotiated her studies.

The importance of her perceptions and the actions that they prompted lay in Jennifer's manner of storytelling. I found her narrative consistent with other meaning-making patterns surrounding her experiences. By exploring Jennifer's experience through an embodied lens, complexities of perception, attention and interpretation of her academic experiences come to light. What mattered was how she perceived them and then took action to negotiate them, calling to mind how radical theories of embodied cognition propose that perception is for action (Gibson, 1979). What I identified was an ambivalence about whether she belonged in academia at all, and this ambivalence showed up as embodied responses. Her emotional and physical experiences in turn, complicated her interpretation of graduate school social culture and academic performance.

Ideas about academic performance come from somewhere, and I have previously discussed how schooling in particular gives rise to students' understanding of how the construction of knowledge is performed. Writing, as a social practice, implies that who we write with is significant (Gee, 2000) because writing occurs in specific contexts with shared understandings (Prior, 2006). Writing is also understood and performed by human bodies, and so I rely on the idea that we *are* our bodies (Fleckenstein, 1999) and thus the act of writing reflects an ongoing relationship of the body with thought processes, bodies that carry histories, identities, and physicalities.

Bloom (1998) noted that a feminist perspective, while focused on gender, must also problematize, contextualize, and localize the multiple ways women have of understanding their lives, given that their history and experiences inform their current and changing situations. Going through graduate school is one such change. Thus, individual stories can help change the taken for granted ways knowledge is produced and represented. Since writing remains the dominant

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way knowledge in the academy is taught, performed, evaluated, and elevated, so too our bodies participate in this experience of learning, performance, and evaluation.

In the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Peter Maclaren's discussion of the enfleshment of ideas (1988) is helpful in picturing ideas themselves as embodied, not abstract, floating detached thoughts of the mind. He recalls the idea that as humans we are both producers of ideas and produced by them and stresses that the "fleshing out" of ideas is experienced in a dialectical, or rational and sometimes contentious relationship both outside the individual and within. This interior and exterior conversation reflects an ongoing negotiation of meaning-making. The exterior aspect is often embodied in cultural and social structures like metaphor and symbols. The interior is a subjective level, a place where ideas are held and known by the physical body. Both aspects reside in our flesh and inform one another. Returning to graduate school surfaced a negotiation of both external and internal conflicts for Jennifer, and these struggles were reflected in the perspectives and structures of her narratives.

In the following discussion of interview and written data, how Jennifer's stories were constructed revealed a meaning-making of embodied writing experiences shaped by her perception of what graduate school required. Through a narrative analysis, I follow Chase's (2003) thought that the shaping of stories reflects the embodied experience of the person telling them. In Jennifer's case, there was a fight for her voice and a sense of legitimacy as a writer and teacher. Going forward, I discuss how Jennifer's ideas about writing were first shaped through an embodied history of creative fiction and non-fiction writing as a product for the market. Next, I discuss several ways in which Jennifer's narrative makes sense of re-entering graduate school in both contradictory and reconciling terms, revealing that the demands of academic writing are embodied as both internal and external. In addition, her narratives show ambivalence around her place in graduate study. I frame the discussion in three parts, embodying writing through a

disposition of resistance, embodying voice, and embodying the physicality of writing. My

concluding thoughts bring forward the questions her narrative raises and the strong writerly

identity she enacts even amid uncertainty.

6.1 Jennifer

> I come into the academic space with all the ideas about writing that don't come from academia. I feel like academic writing can improve from more of what we know to be good writing in the outside world. And I think we actually have a certain advantage [as older women], which is as you know, our reading and writing practices come from reading the newspaper, from reading articles, and from reading novels…I don't know if I'm ever going to write a paper that's in typical academic format.

Jennifer and I sign onto our first Zoom interview. In the Zoom frame, her silver pixie cut

jumps in all directions due to some well-placed gel and gives her an animated expression. She

wears stylish but studious glasses. Comfortably dressed in a zipped sweatshirt, she has just been

out for a walk in the park near her apartment. Jennifer leans in when she talks to me, and as we

talk, I learn about her 91-year-old mother who still lives on her own, the joggers who won't wear

masks, and her First Year Composition students. Adopting an almost conspiratorial demeanor in

conversation, she speaks as if we share secrets – as if we both understand something well, but

few others do. It is true that we share a similar stage of life, a love of writing and the goal of

earning a doctoral degree, but she makes me feel like she's hooked my arm and we are having a

cozy chat. Often, it is as though she whispers in my ear, and then at some mutually understood

irony we both lean back and laugh knowingly.

We already have some familiarity. Having met before in person at our college of

education, we take a few moments in our interviews to catch up before I start recording. On

Zoom, she often brings her hands up to screen level or even tilts the screen to show me

something when emphasizing a point. Jennifer's demeanor is open, talkative and she is eager to

share. No one has ever really asked her to talk about her graduate school experiences, writing or otherwise. I sense her curiosity, and she beats me to the questions as we begin. Jennifer asks me, "Why this study?" I share that this research project was born of my own writing experiences and the struggles I faced in my body as when I was in my master's program. I found that there was just a limit to "thinking out" my papers in graduate school. The harder I tried to work cognitively, the more my body registered complaints until I listened to it. Most of these struggles had to do with writing my class papers.

She immediately responds by sharing her challenges with the performative aspects of writing, "Heck, what am I doing getting a doctorate starting at 63?! And that's performance anxiety, but that's just the story of my life, like anything I do where I feel pressure to perform." This comment feels like the perfect on-ramp to start with the questions I have prepared but I pause and ask if we can do a short mindful exercise. I am hoping to understand more fully how women embody their stories, and so begin by intentionally noticing our bodies. I hope we can have a sense of how it feels to be here, now, in this zoom room together. We practice getting grounded in our bodies, the same way I am learning to do in my writing and research. Settling into our chairs, we close our eyes and pause to notice our weight in the chair, the places in our bodies we feel discomfort, and most of all, take some deep breaths.

I return to the quote at the beginning of Jennifer's description, because it aptly summarized the contradictory nature of her narratives. She pictured herself as standing outside the conventions of academic writing and as a woman who brought knowledge to academia through everyday experiences of reading and writing. Although Jennifer was positioned by her embodied history of ideas, she also positioned herself in skepticism about whether she will ultimately conform to the writing norms she encounters in graduate school. In a discussion of her

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narratives, I start with her journey towards graduate study and the lived experiences that shaped her understandings about writing.

6.1.1 Histories and Identities

After college, Jennifer took a publishing job in her twenties. She says she went in as an editor and emerged as a fiction writer. Four decades after graduating with a B.A. in English Literature, she looks back at her first career, saying, "[t]hose were the days when series fiction for young adults [YA] was becoming big business. An industry. With its own section in the bookstores." For the 20 years, she made a living writing and publishing these novels. Although she credits this time as one where she learned the genre of the novel and to "become a writer" under pressure, her tone held disdain for her own capitulation to capitalist publishing. Although she was independent and could provide for herself, she also characterized herself as "a factory," reducing the type of writing she did to a product. This depiction of her work felt soulless, writing churned out simply as a commodity to meet a commercial demand and fulfill a paycheck. She even sought anonymity saying, "I sometimes told people I was a typist."

Today, she sees this trade in fiction as doing a grave injustice towards young audiences, and how the business of selling popular fiction marginalized young people of color, "Recently, I've been thinking about the normalized whiteness in all those kids' books from the last couple of decades of the twentieth century." She advocated for publishing more diverse stories at the time, but her editors assured her there was no market for it. "It was all about business," she said. Rereading her books today, she reflected, "I knew about racial injustice, but I was also complicit in my portrayal of 'diverse' characters' through a position of white privilege." Burnt out and needing a challenge after two decades, she left publishing and changed careers to become an educator. Her work in a public school connected to our university opened the door for her to

apply to graduate school. Although she has always felt professional in her ability and identity as a teacher, she struggled with how in society and even in her family, teachers are not granted the professional respect they deserve. As a result, Jennifer's ambition to be seen as more professional in her work was a strong motivation for her reentry to graduate school.

6.1.1.1 Journey to Graduate School

In 2001, Jennifer made a transition to being a middle school teacher in the public school system, and in line with her personal life, her professional world became more culturally and racially diverse. To get certified to teach by her state, she went to what she describes as "a real fly-by-night master's program." Although she gained a master's degree, she says that the program was not like going back to an "academic" space, one where there was a robust exchange of ideas and high academic expectations. But with this certification, she went on to teach middle school for another 13 years before applying for graduate school. She considered the start of her Master of Education (Ed.M.) at 61 her reentry into an academic space.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she achieved her Ed.M., and at the time of the study she had just entered the doctoral program. But she will point out that her passion is working with teachers. She founded a company to foster teacher's creative writing in 2014 and facilitated retreats to foster teachers' creative writing endeavors. In fact, that is how we met. I was pushing myself to publish a paper in an academic journal and came to the retreat only to find it filled with classroom teachers who wanted to share their fiction and poems around a huge fire at night. I met and listened to some amazing teacher-authors that weekend. These retreats were envisioned by Jennifer to support writing teachers' personal practice of writing and serve to recognize teachers as the professionals they are. Jennifer's desire for greater regard for the teaching profession and her own work also sheds light on her motivation for going back to study,

> I was looking for the exchange, and I was there for fun and I do love talking shop and intellectual pursuits for themselves, but I was also looking for the legitimacy that I should have gotten as a classroom teacher.

A desire for connection and respect spurred her towards a graduate degree, but also a need for internal validation as a teacher, "I was trying to prove something to myself, to address an insecurity as an educator, because it's something that carries so little professionalism or professional dignity." Re-entering graduate school, for Jennifer however, surfaced feelings of uncertainty and doubt. She wondered if as a classroom teacher whether she belonged there, alongside all the younger aspiring graduate students. As my experience also attested, anxiety among adult students returning to study is common, and can present an emotional barrier to study (Malamed, 2009). For Jennifer, the anxiety she felt about not fitting in generated a narrative she told fellow students. Perhaps like Jacqueline, who admitted that the stakes were high for her when she returned to graduate study, Jennifer felt an internal pressure to explain why she was getting her master's in education at this age,

> I utilized a psychological disclaimer when I went back so that I wouldn't get myself all worked up. It was not untrue, but I leaned on it. It was, 'I'm just here for fun, I'm just here for myself' and I needed that not to feel so insecure, not to feel out of place, which I was. It was not untrue, but there was a lot of internal pressure.

To relieve feelings of internal distress, the narrative she told fellow students about why she was there validated the pursuit of a graduate degree without increasing her own internal anxiety. Jennifer was an experienced middle school teacher in a teacher preparation program amongst many young graduates who had not yet stepped foot in a classroom. I thought to myself that the fact that she felt it necessary to create this script about herself to fit in required a closer look.

Jennifer's feelings of being out of place were "entirely because of my age" and as she shared, "my awareness of myself as a much older person in that environment was just constant." Surrounded by students in their late twenties and early thirties made her visible in ways she

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wished she were not. Her story functions as a way for her to regain her own sense of agency because the experience of visibility brought about questions of whether she belonged there. In a setting where age marked her, I interpreted that although she couldn't do anything about how her physical body defined her, she could shape the story of why she was there.

Besides perceiving herself as visually "much older," there were also experiences that signaled that her classes were envisioned with younger people in mind. For instance, she shared how a professor asked students in one of her graduate classes to read a poem without any historical context, and explained how her embodied historical knowledge changed her response and learning experience,

> I didn't need the contextual information because I knew about the historical period in the poem, and maybe was one of the only people in the class who did. So, I definitely felt like my [learning] experiences were colored. I always felt like I had to back up and take the lesson, as if I were coming in younger in order to really get it, you know what I'm saying? Which is just boiled down to say I was just always aware of my age.

Most of her fellow students had come to graduate school within just a few years of finishing their undergraduate education and had little or no teaching experience. As a result, she took on adjusting herself to the majority of students instead of bringing her own knowledge of reading to the conversation with her classmates. She constantly monitored herself, "not wanting to be a know-it-all, or take up too much oxygen in the room." Again, Jennifer felt the need to compensate for physical and historical markers of age. Like her story that she was "here for fun," in adjusting how she positioned herself in class discussion, she made the stakes lower for herself, and made it possible for her to enjoy the intellectual interaction.

Jennifer's focus on her age brought realizations such as an "awareness that the experiences I brought into the classroom were much closer to my teacher's." There were times, she admitted, that she challenged her professors about educational practice in ways that students

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with less professional experience did not. On the one hand, she had a wealth of experience as an educator. On the other hand, she held back at times, aware that younger students were exploring their teaching practice differently than she was. Age, in her case, created both a physical and psychological barrier which at times impeded her from bringing her whole self into the classroom (hooks, 1994), and at other times, served to emboldened her. Her actions call to mind Holland et al.'s (1998) ideas about identities being improvised within specific social contexts. As they suggest, "Agency lies in the improvisations people create in response to particular situations, mediated by these senses and sensitivities" (p. 279). Aware that perceptions of her age were limiting, Jennifer worked within these constraints to engage in ways that felt empowering to her. After all, she sought to prove something to herself, and to find "the legitimacy that I should have gotten as a classroom teacher." With the idea of improvisation in mind, her actions make sense in her situation. She was working with the resources she had to create a place for herself in her program.

Having offered some insight about Jennifer's motivations for reentering graduate school, and her self-described social experience once enrolled, I go on to discuss her academic writing experience more specifically. Her disposition of resistance and ambivalence about academic writing also prompted improvisations when it came to her class papers. It became evident that being in a graduate program surfaced the embodied beliefs she has developed over time about what she called "good writing." Below, I describe her disposition towards writing her papers and explore how her belief in her own voice and the embodied physicality of writing shape her approach to her studies.

6.2 Writing from Embodied Beliefs

When Jennifer returned to graduate study, her understanding of what she calls "good writing" has been shaped by personal growth as a writer and her practice as a teacher of writing. That is, after leaving publishing, she was able to develop her voice as a writer, and in teaching her students, better apprehend what strong writers do. Her growth also convinced her that "writing for a market and what sells" produces bad writing. These convictions carried over to her studies so that when academia presented her with writing conventions and requirements at the graduate level, she perceived them as similar constraints to publishing.

In her mind, the publishing conventions she was once constrained by in her fiction writing were replaced by different writing norms, and this experience produced an embodied sense of anxiety and ambivalence. "I do feel like what I'm most insecure about in grad school is that I didn't come in with all those tools and when I learned those tools, I'm not sure I really subscribe to all of them." As an older adult, she admits that she did not come to graduate school equipped to write academic papers and had to apprentice what she called "tools." On the one hand, she says she found explicit instruction helpful, and on the other, that these conventions reminded her of limitations she had experienced before. In these disclosures, Jennifer registered her sense of uncertainty that having begun to learn "those tools," for example, the structure of a research paper, how to write about theory, framing, and citing, she does not necessarily agree that these forms are how she wishes to go about her writing.

Her use of the word "subscribe," as I read it, compares it to her publishing experience, in which she had to agree to and be bound to materially produce writing in a certain form in order to be published. It is as if she feels she must buy into academic writing in the same way. As a graduate student, she finds herself positioned in a similar dilemma to when she wrote for a

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living. Ambivalence arose because she is once again caught between the writing requirements for her degree and how best to express her ideas. "After all," she stated unequivocally, "academic writing is once again a kind of writing to spec." To make sense of her ambivalence, she then relegated academic writing to the same kind of writing she did to sell her stories.

Before, she had to meet externally imposed deadlines by her publisher as part of the job. She didn't mind it, "because that's what I did for a living, I was paid, it was like okay, you have to do this, sit down and do it, so the somatization was less [than in graduate school]." When she reentered graduate school, she described how this struggle with time pressure and the expectations of academic writing was felt by her as an internalized, somatic distress, sensations she experienced in her chest and stomach as anxiety. Jennifer pictures it as her exterior world clashing with the interior,

> And so, there's a clash. Not only an external clash with the deadline now but there's an internal clash because I've taken this on myself. It's like, do you need to go to Ph.D. school at this stage in life?

The clash that she feels somatically revealed her ambivalence in the form of a question, and she interrogated herself, was studying at her stage of life how she wants to spend her time? Discomfort in the body about external deadlines and internal choices was so strong that it caused Jennifer to doubt whether these two aspects of study could be reconciled. She did see herself as lacking the tools to do academic writing, but her question is one of time and investment, not whether she is a good writer. The discomfort surfaced another question: whether learning to write for an academic audience was worth her desire to be seen as professional.

Jennifer identified as a good writer, someone who had already "found" her voice. Taking up this position, she reflected the idea of identity as a hard-won standpoint that provided

direction for her (Holland et al., 1998). On this account, she described how her writing identity had changed over time,

> In my process of writing those books, I had all kinds of instructions, I was writing to all kinds of restrictions. They were a formula. I had to write this many words about these characters and in this amount of time. And the amount of time was sometimes two weeks, and I had to write a whole book, and I didn't revise that writing at all. When I stopped doing that I was like okay, done, I have to find my voice as a writer, and since I was able to stop writing for a living, I stopped writing to spec.

Her words juxtaposed "writing to spec" against the idea of "voice" in her writing, revealing a sense of anxiety about adopting one over the other. As a teacher, she had developed her voice in the writing that she did for herself, "Mostly creative non-fiction," she said. After she stopped "writing to make a living" she went through a process of finding her voice over a long period of time. When she reentered graduate school, it was like going back to writing to spec, and Jennifer also did not enjoy writing for only one person, the professor. Consequently, academic writing and her own writing felt potentially incompatible with one another, because one way of writing was for others, and the other was writing she did for herself. The latter is the writing she identifies with, writing that embodies her voice. Taking up this identity also reflected an embodied disposition of resistance, something that long preceded her identity as a writer.

6.2.1 A Disposition of Resistance

Perception is deeply shaped by how cultures regard identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender. As the granddaughter of Jewish immigrants, Jennifer had a political and social outlook defined by the close cultural community in which she was raised. Jennifer culturally identified herself saying, "I am a retired middle school English teacher. White. Jewish. I grew up talking about race and class and equity at my dinner table, with my first-generation activist parents." Holland et al. (1998) suggested that cultural identity acts as a grounding for individual identity

and agency. Looking back on the way she grew up, she was immersed in an environment of

debating political ideals and the telling of stories of struggle for economic and racial justice,

> My bedtime stories were about my parents' participation in the Civil Rights movement--the boycotts of Woolworths, for example, or the violent Paul Robeson concert in Peekskill where racists were throwing bricks through the windows of the bus my dad was on.

Jennifer positioned herself in a culture of social justice conversations and grounded her identity

in an intellectually and ethnically diverse Jewish community. She gave further context for her

family of origin using a term I was unfamiliar with, "I was a red diaper baby, whose

grandparents came to this country looking for a refuge from hate, and whose parents were

willing to fight for their ideals." Even though I am from New York, this is new terminology for

me. I came to learn that the phrase "red diaper baby" signifies identification with communist

ideals, and the communist party in the U.S. Setting itself up against capitalist ideals of

exploitative work, Jennifer's Marxist orientation around labor and justice continually comes

through her narrative about her writing. She identified as a person who was willing to fight for

her cultural ideals, and it was a culture of resistance to oppression that informed how she

engaged in her graduate program.

6.2.1.1 Resisting Formulas

Just as a struggle around academic forms produced ambivalence from Jennifer, it also

produced a response of resistance, or "fight." From her perspective, academic forms re-presented

a scenario in which she was going back to writing that she perceived to be formulaic, or "writing

to spec." In the past, it was this type of writing that made her "feel like a fake." She explained,

> That's a huge problem for me, personally, because I've done that already. Obviously an extraordinarily different kind of spec but I'm not interested in writing to spec. I'm much more interested in continuing to develop how I write.

In Jennifer's narrative she consistently used the word "formulaic" to describe academic writing, setting it against her expression as a writer. "I love the ideas. I usually don't love the form, the obtuse language, or the insistence on hewing to a proscribed structure rather than allowing form to follow function," she reflected. In consistently storying the relationship as one of conflict, it portrayed the ideology she pushed against, and gave a sense of "fight" with academic conventions. She went on, "I use that word 'fight' because it's fight or flight, ok? And I'm feeling fight." Her meaning seemed to be that she saw two choices, either stay and fight, or leave the program.

As an instance of producing and being produced by the ideas of academic writing (Maclaren, 1988), Jennifer's words reflected an ongoing embodied fight for identity within herself. In this sense, her age and experiences produced an ability to maintain the identity she has established, and to push back on adopting a whole new set of writing conventions. Jennifer's disposition of resistance drew on her cultural identity to position herself as someone in the continuous process of finding her voice, something she is willing to "fight" for. I go on now to explore the recurring theme of voice in her writing and the form that it took in her writing.

6.2.1.2 Embodying Voice

As this discussion intimated, Jennifer's writing was embodied through a process of finding her voice. She also referred to voice in her writing as a mark of authenticity. That is, if her true voice comes through, the authentic Jennifer becomes visible. Voice, for her, is literally a *thing*. The way she describes it, voice is something that can be lost, or it can be found, or possibly, it can even contain her identity as a writer. For instance, she sums up her struggle to find her voice in her writing by saying, "I didn't find my true voice until I stopped writing to pay the rent." By this statement, she gives materiality to the thing that is her voice. She also indicates

that finding "my true voice" required a disconnection from "writing for a living." That is to say that previously, she exchanged her (voiceless) writing for wages, something she is no longer willing to do. This is because a crucial aspect of writing that has voice is that it contains a reflection of self. She explains how this happened,

> Well, first of all, I started writing for myself and I found my voice over a long period of time. Fundamentally it's because I offered myself an opportunity to develop my own voice and yeah, teaching [writing]. I got better as a writer, because I had to break it down with my students, and teaching writing has really been how I learned to write. Facilitating healthy writing experiences and healthy writing identities with my students has also taught me about that.

Alongside her personal growth and finding her voice, the teaching of writing has helped Jennifer understand how students form their writing identities. I offer the writing samples she shared below to better understand what she means by voice, and why fighting for it was important to her.

6.2.2 A Writing Sample

As with Jacqueline and Winnie, samples of Jennifer's writing provide material examples of how patterns of meaning are borne out in the embodied experience of writing. Jennifer's sample differs because she shared two versions of the same writing piece. The two examples allow a direct comparison between a piece that she wrote for herself and how the same writing piece was edited for an online journal. To compare them, I start by noting the distinction between a cognitive and embodied look at these writing pieces. A typically cognitive-dominant approach might analyze the two pieces, either by comparing them linguistically, or by simply interpreting that different article are written for different audiences and therefore the articles would need to reflect this difference.

However, when viewing the writings from an embodied perspective, Jennifer's experience of working with editing revisions provided insight around her meaning-making of

voice. Jennifer related that she felt that due to the edits, she "lost" her voice, "The final piece was fine, but it wasn't really my voice, you know, I had no vote [in how it was published]. In my opinion, I had no voice, my own personality was not in it, and I felt that I could have edited it in a way that retained my voice." She said the story had a direct comparison to working with academic genres, "I feel like that's how I'm working in academia. I'm trying to find a place where I retain my voice, my style, the way I write, and the way I argue and the way I research, without necessarily cramping my own writing style." Here, Jennifer fights for retaining voice, and it appears that she creates less of a binary when she believes she has more of a vote, such as in her academic writing.

In another conversation, she retold the story and said, "for example, my blog is 100% my voice," setting up another binary for the purpose of storytelling. Because this story came up twice and she elaborated on its meaning I took it to be important. Here was how she interpreted the same story again,

> [The editing was] probably with good results structurally but with, in my opinion, poor results in terms of voice. Anything that had voice was taken out, and I kind of had to push back against the removal of certain little pieces. But the worst thing was, [I was] forced to remove the interrogative mode, and land somewhere [with a conclusion], and at this point, I just thought, do what they want you to.

The conclusion she came to was cognitive, rational, cold. It was not far from the experience of writing raw drafts for her fiction novels and then submitting them to editors to change for consumption by the market. She made a move that makes rational sense but ended up omitting her voice, what she felt to be the heart of the writing piece. In the end, she accepts a loss of voice in exchange for being more visible in the public domain.

Initially her reasoning and meaning is clear: that voice, for her, was embodied in asking questions, what she calls "the interrogative mode." This action of asking questions is connected

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to voice and her practice as a teacher. She had ended the blog article with a series of questions and an invitation to dialogue. These are omitted from the journal article by the editor, and she is asked to be conclusive and have the answers. Jennifer registers a surrender to the editorial process as she has in the past by telling the story in black and white terms – terms that make it make sense to her but takes no emotional pleasure in the writing.

Furthermore, in comparing the two excerpts, what was missing were the asides she used to create conversation with herself and her readers. Jennifer embodied the blog text through her voice. "I write with parenthetical asides, a kind of edgy humor, and little self-deprecating jokes." Removing these personal asides changed the piece from reflection about inequity in writing books to assuming a teacher's voice, advising other educators about creating a more diverse literary curriculum. I found it helpful to create a table (Table 6.1) for the two sections to compare as well as to identify the patterns that support the understanding Jennifer has of her voice in her writing. Consider the differences in voice of these two samples:

Table 6.1 Comparison of Jennifer's Blog and Journal Article

Blog article quote	Journal article quote
Excerpt #1 All through the 80s and 90s, I pumped out YA and middle grade genre fiction. I started out editing teen romances. I went on to write my own – series books produced under tight deadlines where I sometimes had to smack out the whole thing in two weeks. I was a factory. I sat down at my IBM electric typewriter and wrote 35,000 words and didn't look back. Didn't reread. Didn't edit. (To my former students, close your ears, my darlings.) I sometimes told people I was a typist.	**Excerpt #1** But throughout the 1980s and 1990s, I pumped out commercial young adult and middle-grade fiction. I started out editing teen romances and went on to write my own series fiction, produced under deadlines so tight I sometimes smacked out a whole novel in under two weeks. The books were big business, marketed to deliver a frothy, irresistible confection to the largest audience.
Excerpt #2 After inventorying my books, I did another inventory of my curriculum for the last twenty years. Whew. A good list of reads for my oh so varied students. Beautiful books by authors of so many backgrounds. (I corked the rest of the rioja.) And there was my classroom lending library--a labor of love and obsession of which I was always annoyingly proud and was full of windows and mirrors, book choices where any member of my class could find a reflection of themselves, or an opening into someone else's world. This didn't negate the box of teen fiction, but could I forgive myself, just a little? I'd learned. I'd gotten better. The students I'd taught had read diverse works of literature. They'd also read classics.	**Excerpt #2** After surveying my old novels, I did an inventory of my curriculum for the past 20 years. Whew. A good syllabus for my mix of students. Beautiful books by authors of so many backgrounds. There was also my classroom lending library, full of Bishop's windows and mirrors — book choices where any member of my class could find a reflection of themselves or an opening into someone else's world. A few of the many books that my middle school students had loved in recent years included the fantasy novels "Akata Witch" by Nnedi Okorafor and "Children of Blood and Bone" by Tomi Adeyemi; and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel, "Purple Hibiscus," all three tying into a related unit in social studies on West Africa; Elizabeth Acevedo's novel in verse, "The Poet X"; Jason Reynolds' "Ghost," and the graphic memoirs "American Born Chinese" by Gene Luen Yang and John Lewis' "March."

In her narrative, Jennifer's perception of her blog as "100% my voice" and the article as, "I had no voice" portrayed the two as opposites. Interestingly, she placed the phrase "I had no vote" in the same sentence as "I had no voice." Her sense of social justice was embedded in this interpretation and appeared to mean that having no voice is like having no vote. It makes me wonder if "I had no vote" meant to her that the dialogue was cut off, the reflection was lost, and the personal response disappeared.

With this story, I emphasize that narratives employ structures of meaning that are cohesive for the teller. As Johnson (1987) stated about the embodied nature of narratives,

> When it comes to explaining how it is that humans experience their world in ways that they can make sense of, there must be a central place for the notion of "narrative unity." Not only are we born into complex communal narratives, we also experience, understand and order our lives as stories we are living out. Whatever human rationality consists in, it is certainly tied up with narrative structure and the quest for narrative unity. (p. 171-2)

Jennifer's interpretation seemed consistent with her larger cultural and historical narrative in which having a vote means having a voice. In other words, Jennifer's narration was not random or chaotic, but rather strove to reflect her context and other experiences so it made the most sense to her. Importantly, Jennifer's story made the point that her voice was embodied in her writing. Relaying the story as a binary was a form of meaning-making itself because it sets one thing against its opposite, highlighting the struggle between having a voice and losing a voice. Besides the more overt idea that having a voice in the public domain was democratically tied to being able to have a vote in society, her story was organized in a way that reflects a pattern of interpretation she consistently uses. Namely, she was engaged in the struggle to express her voice and she resisted disembodiment, or, as in this case, accepting a loss of voice in her writing.

To go on, the blog post was a form of personal writing in which she, in a rant, interrogated how her whiteness was normalized and other perspectives were made marginal. For the article to be marketable for the magazine, she had to take on a tone of advising and informing other educators, moving from embodied voice to the realm of here-is-what-you-can-do-in-your-classroom. Thus, she shows that on the one hand, voice can manifest in writing, or on the other, be "removed" in order to fit the expectations of an audience. The removal of her voice by the editor disembodied what Jennifer wrote, and her protest against this removal is, in the feminist sense, an attempt to return to the body. As Cixous (1976) words about women's writing recall,

"She must write herself…By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been confiscated from her" (p. 880). Although this way of shaping the story sets up an either/or argument, it fits the meaning-making pattern Jennifer repeatedly used, creating a cohesive structure of interpretation for her embodied experience. Jennifer summed up in no uncertain terms her disdain for some forms of academic writing and what they produce,

> Academic writing can improve from what we know to be good writing in the outside world. There's this thing called academic writing, and we need to throw it out the window, and think about good writing period, and how we achieve it. We actually have a certain advantage [as older women], which is as you know, our reading and writing practices come from reading the newspaper, from reading articles, and from reading novels.

"Throwing academic writing out the window" was perhaps an extreme solution to the cognitive demands of academic writing, but in her summary, Jennifer again used extremes to make her meaning clear and emphasized that women use a range of reading sources to understand good writing. She was not always this black and white in her meaning-making, but in making her point, extremes served the purpose of a cohesive narrative for herself and honored the writing knowledge she carried. In addition to this pattern of meaning-making, Jennifer revealed a physical awareness of the demands that writing placed on her physical body. Below, in a discussion of Jennifer's physical experience of writing in graduate school, two instances reveal how attention to her body changes Jennifer's perception of how thinks she must write papers in her graduate program.

6.2.3 Writing Embodied Through Physicality

An aspect rarely discussed in the literature is the physicality of academic writing. Author Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) offered insight into the intense corporeal struggle of her writing process through poetry. In her poem, *Poets have strange eating habits,* "the balking mare" personified the embodied writer, drawing on sensations such as plunging, falling, burrowing, and feeding,

calling the reader to ride these embodied experiences with the writer. As I related in the introduction to my study, it was my struggle with the protests of my body while writing that initially brought me to my research project. Although I acknowledge that both men and women may experience writing as a physical struggle, it is, as I have argued, the masculine bent of the academy that focuses writers on the cognitive, to the exclusion of physical embodied experience. Beyond the trope of the writer who goes for a walk to think, writing, in the academy, and for those apprenticed into it, rarely involves a paying attention to, or being present in the physical body. But as I have suggested previously, bodies resist being ignored. To restore this imbalance, it is often women's writing such as Anzaldúa's that calls writers back to the body.

In this section, I relate Jennifer's narrative of writing papers for class as a sensate, emotional, bodily experience, pointing to the importance of attending to the writing body. Body awareness is foundational to understanding how women's ways of writing differ from "the norms that influence what we think is possible to write" (Gilmore et al., 2018). Norms that are written on our bodies though others--editors, reviewers, our own selves (Pullen, 2017), reproducing as these authors suggest, a form of "violence to each other" (Gilmore et al., 2018, p. 4). Since academic writing is largely produced in the nexus of teachers' relationship to their students, it is crucial to explore how teacher-student relationships in turn can support embodied identities, histories and voice and thereby embrace the body. As Winnie's narrative also depicted, the personal writing she engaged in with her professor, was one way to bring embodied knowledge to her academic work. Winnie discovered, as did Jennifer, that writing practices that invite personal experience also open the opportunity for a dialogue with our bodies and with one another.

In the following narrative of writing experiences relayed by Jennifer, I explore her depictions of the mindbody connection as creative voice and somatic experience in her writing

process. In both instances, a dialogue with herself, her professors and her papers offer a deeper understanding of the physicality of negotiating her academic performance through writing. In the first example below, I explore how academic writing in her doctoral program produced physical symptoms of anxiety Jennifer could not disregard.

6.2.3.1 A Somatic Connection: Pleasure and Pain

In her doctoral program, writing papers for class revealed that for Jennifer, academic writing was a mixture of cognitive work and embodied tensions that straddled a pleasure-pain continuum. When faced with a recent writing assignment, she used the words "somatic" and "somatization" to describe physical manifestations of anxiety and discomfort. The connection she made between mind and body was that class assignments produced physical sensations of intense anxiety. On the Zoom screen, she demonstrated exactly where she felt the anxiety in her body by pressing her fingertips to her chest, adjusting the camera so I could see where, and emphasized, "because I feel it here, and I feel it in my stomach, and my whole digestive system feels it." Then, making a typing motion with her fingers, she says, "and I feel it in my hands."

She had to write a paper in which she was required by the professor to work with the work of several theorists they were reading in class. For Jennifer, this form of writing was new, intimidating, and she felt unprepared. She said she entered the class "without the tools" to write academically about theory. As a start, her professor used explicit instruction to inform how she could go about writing the paper. The clear instructions and models made writing expectations more visible, but at one point she got stuck in performance anxiety,

> The embodied experience was horrible. My muscles hurt; I was so clenched. I wasn't sleeping, and I'm still winding down. My mind was on all the other things I wasn't doing that I needed to do, I was anxiety-ridden. I was upset physically; you know I can still feel it in my body.

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In talking through her concerns with the professor, he suggested she write imaginatively to explore how two theorists might talk to one another. "Suppose you take the two theorists and picture them in a bar having a conversation," he proposed. Taking up a dialogue with Jennifer, her professor recognized her embodied funds of knowledge as a fiction writer (Freire, 1970; Moll et al., 1992). This invitation provided a way for her to start writing her paper, at least to "write the fun parts." Through this dialogic exchange (Fecho, 2011), Jennifer finds a way to put the ideas of the two theorists in the same room.

By drawing on her ability to write dialogue, Jennifer experienced an embodied sense of "flow" in writing the fun parts of the paper (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Turning her attention towards writing in a way that accessed her embodied knowledge of writing for pleasure, the pleasure becomes a source of motivation. Like Jacqueline experienced a sense of losing herself for hours in her writing, so Jennifer lost track of time and does an activity just for the sake of it. Jennifer closed her eyes and explained the physicality of what this felt like,

> I mean that physically when I say there's a relationship between me and the page, okay, there's a give and take flow that releases energy and takes energy in it's like there's a kind of breathing mechanism going on, so you know it feels good, it feels you know, I don't feel this [inhales and holds], I feel this [releases breath].

Reflecting on the finished paper, she was able to reconcile anxious physical discomforts with a deep sense of enjoyment. Ultimately, what she wrote gratified her and brought pleasure to the reader:

> The good part was that I had a paper, so I had to sit down and write something and because I pushed the formula, because I pushed the limits of the form, I enjoyed it. And having to turn in this paper, which from his [the professor's] comments, he enjoyed reading, it was gratifying to me because I thought I've provided him with a little bit of pleasure.

This commentary by Jennifer illustrated how in the writing process she was able to draw on pleasure while pushing through difficult physical sensations during her writing process. A

dialogue with her professor was part of negotiating a new genre of academic writing. In this process, she engaged with the text of her life and the expertise she carried (Fecho, 2011). Once started, she experimented and found a way to "push the limits of the form," which allowed her to enjoy the set-up of the piece. The process however was anything but smooth, and Jennifer acknowledged that bringing in scholarly approaches to the paper presented an interruption to her sense of flow in writing,

> But as soon as I have to think about having to cover all this ground and I've got to work in their [the scholar's] words into what I'm saying, and I need to go back to the book and find what page that quote was on or that word was on. Once I started getting into that, then I started feeling uptight again.

Within the ebb and flow of drawing on her embodied knowledge and learning something new she reflected that academic writing is not the exacting perfection she pictured it to be, but was more flexible and fluid,

> You can sit down and write something that's not perfect and then it's a beginning. I had to turn in something that I really didn't like very much so I can do that, and it's not as bad as I think.

Here she alluded to relaxing about her writing somewhat, and a discovery that academic forms bring different types of writing together. In the above interpretation, there is a sense of Jennifer reconciling her ideas about writing despite a struggle with her somatic experience. Jennifer's account reveals a common experience of older adult learners. Many feel anxiety about ways they are unequipped to enter into academic discourse and therefore professors are critical mediators of both the skills and the apprehensions students have about writing in academic settings. What may also be common is that students feel they must focus on cognitive work rather than normalizing the struggle. To set about working harder cognitively does not appear to help. As Jennifer's account demonstrated, processing writing ideas in dialogue with her teachers and herself led to a less dichotomized perspective and an ability to see her work in more holistic

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terms. Her symptoms of anxiety around writing seemed to have been produced by ideas of academic writing and being able to perform without "the tools." Her account shows that students need to acknowledge the physical experience of writing in the academy and that it requires more attention and understanding by educators.

6.3 Concluding Thoughts

To sum up, Jennifer's embodied experience of reentering the academy provided a narrative of meaning-making in which her embodied history conflicts with the demands of graduate school and her perceptions of herself at this stage of life. Holland et al. (1998) noted that people are caught in the ongoing tensions of past histories and new discourses that either attract or impact them. In other words, the negotiation of her graduate school experience is not merely a cognitive experience of navigating ideas about writing, but an embodied encounter between embodied history and the new discourses about writing that confront her. Especially in terms of her identities as a writer and teacher, her narrative revealed that in this process, she is in dialogue with the listeners of her story, with herself and her teachers.

Although she uses binaries to make sense of experience, her storytelling reveals how these binaries create a place of protest, to address feelings of ambivalence. Relating the story in this way produced in her an ability to respond with resistance against academic conventions, thereby affirming a sense of her authentic self. She represented this authentic self as having voice in her narrative. In addition, by placing examples of writing side by side, it makes more visible that for her, voice meant to have a say, and thus the ability to bring her very self into her writing.

By exploring how she embodies her writerly identity and career as a teacher of writing, the data also reveals instances where Jennifer discovers that she cannot live in absolutes all the time. Thinking in binaries surfaces as a way to cope while she determines whether she belongs

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there or not. Meanwhile, she has opportunities to see that there are ways of working that support both her voice and the conventions that she needs to make use of.

Jennifer's experiences also raise complex questions of identity and belonging for older adult students reentering graduate school. The experience of being visibly older than her fellow students and in the minority due to age produces another kind of narrative for Jennifer, one that seeks to explain her presence in graduate school to herself and others. Saying that she is there for the engagement and intellectual growth "for fun," serves to only partially address why she is there and alleviate her anxiety about the internal and external pressures of studying. Ultimately, a sense of belonging as a student in academia eludes her. Before the completion of the study, she decided to stop pursuing a Ph.D. and focus on teaching and writing with teachers. But she is successful in negotiating where her sense of identity is anchored most strongly and this knowledge guides her towards where she can reconcile her embodied experiences, stage of life and a sense of voice in her writing.

This chapter concludes my work with individual participants' stories, and after an interlude about engaging Jennifer, I move on to a broader discussion. In the next chapter, I look across the data to see more widely how this inquiry speaks to what I have learned about how women who reenter study at a later stage in life negotiate transitions to graduate school. I also consider what implications there are for mature women, graduate programs of study, institutions going forward.

Interlude 3: Engaging Jennifer

My email alerts would not stop pinging. Google comments popped up like meerkats and I realized it was Jennifer posting comments on her chapter. Every time she clicked "comment" I would get an email. Eventually, I silenced my notifications. Four hours later, I got a text message to say she is ready for me to read her responses. The email reads just like the teacher that she is,

> Okay. Now you can go and read all my verbiage!! You are doing super interesting and important work. The feminist aspect is something I hadn't thought much about and is fascinating. Vital material. And your writing is clear, compelling, enjoyable... and keeps us moving forward.

Despite the fact that she was down with COVID-19 and resting in bed, she agreed to read and comment on a fairly complete draft of her data. Rather, it is my restorying and interpretation of our conversations. My urge to read the comments and respond immediately was strong because I was so curious to know how the chapter I wrote read to her. I texted her to say I saw the messages coming in, but I would wait before reading her feedback. Reading later that day, I was not surprised when her thoughts often began with "100 off" or, "Another absolutely not" or, "Not precisely" followed by further explanation and detail. There were also cases where she agreed, and Jennifer elaborated made affirmations and extended the conversation.

Member checking with Jennifer became an interactive process. We engaged in the text I had written and worked together to authentically represent her experience and the purpose of the study. As an example, at one point she felt what she had said was identifiable and reflected badly on the situation. It prompted the exchange below:

> Jennifer:
> This chapter is making me think about why I reacted so strongly. That aside, the inclusion of that piece makes me 100% not anonymous --I don't care about that. I stand behind our interviews, my writing, my strengths and foibles. It's all good. However, this also 100% exposes **** and the negative things I said

Jen De Cerff:
Ok so I think we need to brainstorm here a little bit. If you think using ***** as a specific example is too identifying, we can de-identify it in some way because that is not the intent here. it should not be identifiable to the reader as you point out. Or, we could look at using an academic writing sample that you wrote for another class and talk about the idea of voice, because voice is so important in your narrative

Jennifer:
Really the only serious academic writing I have done was for this class. You did good work on the **** piece, and it works well for your thesis. So let's figure out how to de-identify it--and me--further. It will be an interesting exercise.

Jennifer: I don't want to suggest that you should take it on yourself to read a couple of my academic pieces--I don't want to presume to center myself so much... but they do offer another take on how I attempted to synthesize or retain voice with academic form.

Our conversation about how identifiable the piece was, her voice, and whether to use a different piece ended up as a fruitful discussion. I needed a broader sense of how she incorporated voice into her writing, and she needed to be at ease with why I wrote about her voice in that way. By engaging back and forth with what Jennifer was and was not comfortable with, we came to a decision to keep the analysis of the writing piece in the chapter and de-identify the context further.

In another comment, Jennifer's words made me realize how one piece of her history out of context led to a single story on my part (Adichie, 2009). It was easy to see how I had conflated white privilege at her work with a lack of awareness of racial injustice when she was growing up. Speaking about it with me, her comment reads,

> You base a lot of the chapter on that one piece of mine--and what you do with it is really interesting. Your discussion of voice, of my voice, of how I cast things as binary and a fight are all very keen and smart and good food for my own self-reflection. (Thank you.) But that piece also led you astray about the racial climate of my youth.

In this instance, she sent me another piece of writing and we talked more about how she worked with her voice in academic writing. Further conversation ended up eliciting more background on how her parents raised her and I included these details in the final version of the chapter.

Engaging with Jennifer around her chapter seemed both enlightening and self-reflective for us both. I found that it gave me greater awareness about representation. Though it had to do with correctness, I saw that the spirit of the writing and whether she felt empowered by the process of disclosure mattered too. Looking back, Jennifer had not considered the value of seeing her narrative from a feminist perspective because of her orientation around social justice, and she found it insightful. Another thing that happened when we continued to engage around data was that she ended up restorying some events herself in the comments. This was key, because it showed how stories she told last summer looked different to her the following summer, mainly in the way she would express, qualify, or make meaning out of them. As a way of accounting for how bodies (and minds) change in research (Ellingson, 2017). It made me wonder if further work was needed about how stories change over time could be another way to understand embodiment more fully in future.

The opportunity to interact with Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer through the writing up of data was a dynamic and exhilarating part of the project. Their individual responses varied in ways that affirmed their personal reality and created an opportunity for us to see through one another's eyes. Each of these brief interludes opened possibilities for us all. What to include, explain, revise, and remove were all crucial conversations and decisions that brought the project towards greater clarity and insight about embodiment. Though I realize these brief interludes cannot fully represent our experiences, they serve to give a sense of what it was like and make the process of co-construction more explicit.

Chapter 7: Exploring Larger Themes and Implications

Paying attention to the individual stories of women's experience matters at personal, political, and institutional levels. Individual interviews revealed that as part of marginalized groups, Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer had never been asked about their graduate experiences and they valued the opportunity to talk about them. They asked me many questions about my experience and were rigorous about communicating any perceived misunderstandings about how they were represented. As Enloe (2004) argued, paying attention to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, ability, and other marginal identities is a politically responsive action towards greater social justice in academic settings. Thus, opening the door for storytelling and conversation in academic research and publishing women's accounts engages issues of justice and equity around women's knowledge.

The purpose of my research inquiry was to better understand how narratives about writing bring forward the embodied experiences of mature women who negotiate a return to graduate school. Specifically, I sought to address the question of what these embodied experiences tell us about these women's perceptions of themselves, their visibility within the institution and their agency to work against being marginalized. I include myself in this inquiry that was borne of questions about my embodied experiences of writing in graduate school. Through a process of women constructing knowledge together in conversation, a picture of social inequity around women's embodied knowledge(s) and ways of working emerged, highlighting that there is still much to be done in research, and more so in praxis.

To think in more detail about the implications of the data and the discussions of Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer, I return to my sub-questions in the upcoming section and discuss the larger themes in my study. I also discuss the limitations of this study and then go on to propose

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its further implications for women graduate students, educators, and graduate institutions. Areas for further research follow, and I conclude with some final thoughts.

7.1 Larger Themes and Insights

7.1.1 Perception and Identity

Although my project did not expressly seek to explore questions of identity, a connection between perception and identity was one way embodiment manifested in Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer's narratives. If perception is how individuals come to know themselves and the world around them (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), people rely on intuition, emotion, sensation, and their physical bodies to make sense of cognition, or mental processes. In a complex interplay, the mindbody experiences what becomes, to each individual, personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1966). In relationships, personal knowledge then, has a communal aspect of coming to know *with* others (Gee, 2000). Thus, as a basis for knowledge and meaning-making, embodiment encompasses the entirety of experience in and through bodies. Knowing then, comes from conscious awareness and consists understanding of mental states, bodily sensation, environmental surroundings, and is mediated by physical and social interactions (Gibbs, 2011).

7.1.1.1 A Positioning of Self in the Academy

Perception, then, not only leads to knowing about something, but it also leads to knowing how something works, how it looks, feels, acts, or reacts. The systems and culture of the academy are social in nature, and they must be read and responded to. Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer entered this social environment, and each made sense of it differently. Each used their embodied identities to do this and to take up positions that made it possible (within constraints) for them to participate. Highlighting Winnie's embodied knowledge of racism and a disposition of criticality for example, showed her understanding of how power and hierarchies work, and

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how this embodied knowledge directs her in responding to exclusion. Pushed towards the social margins, Winnie took up a position of "standing apart" from her peers. Holland et al. suggest that subject positions are either "acted out or refused" (1998, p. 14). Winnie's refusal to take up a disempowered position on the margins resulted in her redefining "stand out" to "stand apart." It is from this place that she can then undertake a critique of the dynamics of cultural literacy as she did in her essay. Furthermore, her account of undergraduate study suggests that the formative nature of educational environments in developing criticality, racial literacy, and the importance of experiencing agentic stances is essential to holistic education. This foundation provided her with an embodied identity that carried an understanding of power structures and marginalization, helping her navigate her graduate experience with agency.

In a different move, Jacqueline positioned herself through competence as an emergent scholar. Through a process of developing as a writer and researcher, her journey towards graduate school was one of curious exploration and gaining expertise in academic skills. Her passion for study is motivated by her life's questions. She worked with agency against invisibility as an older adult learner through taking risks, crossing social boundaries, and entering new environments. Jacqueline also leaned into an embodied identity of directing and organizing to position herself as advocating for support for mature students, addressing a social gap in graduate student interaction. Her actions illuminate the challenges of being "seen" and included as an older adult in student life, and how programming in graduate schools carries bias in favor of younger students.

In another positioning move, Jennifer mediated the age gap she experiences in her graduate program through constructing a self-narrative. Countering possible assumptions her classmates might use to position her, she took up a narrative of, "I'm just here for fun" to reduce

her own anxiety about age. Inhabiting her identity as a writer, Jennifer participated by claiming a self-determined space amongst her classmates, and not as someone trying to become an academic. In this role, she felt greater freedom to engage in various embodied identities, such as an experienced teacher, successful writer, and adult learner. Although her narrative presented itself in binaries as she made sense of experience, she acknowledged places in her writing where she found creative spaces within academic constraints. For each of these women, embodiment manifested as an engagement with identity in the positioning of self. Their individual accounts chronicle perceptions of self from the margins and enactments of personal passion, refashionings of self, and purposeful career choices within the social complexities of their graduate school experience.

7.1.1.2 Visibility and Voice

Having taken up or pushed back on subject positions, for Winnie, Jacqueline and Jennifer, visibility and voice characterized their enacting of chosen positions. For example, as a response to standing out, or high visibility, Winnie asserted herself in group work by telling herself that she's "not going to let the slacker bring down my grade, and so I speak up," positioning herself as a group leader or organizer for an assignment. In her individual work however, Winnie perceived that speaking from the margins in class has a limited effect in class discussions resulting in silence and erasure. She turned to developing strong arguments in her assignments and speaking to power by engaging the professor. Using her lived experience and professional expertise, Winnie represents alternate points of view than those accepted by the majority in class.

Somewhat differently, Jacqueline's stories pulled away from the struggles that Winnie and Jennifer expressed in a confident embodiment of writing and other academic activities. As

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an emergent scholar, she pursued excellence in academic writing to participate in the academy and embraced academic writing culture to represent her theoretical concepts. Within her discipline, Jacqueline relied on her previously developed writing abilities and found ways to express her ideas on her own terms. Writing, as a craft, became a way to distinguish herself and her perspectives on autism. Throughout her academic journey in her program, Jacqueline emerged from the margins and made herself more visible by networking and letting people see her take on various academic roles such as researching and presenting.

Jennifer, on the other hand, engaged in dialogues of "pushing back" on academic writing forms and embodying identity through her voice. Putting her voice into a paper through creative writing became a way to navigate and enjoy academic writing. Although she found ways to balance her need for putting her voice (and therefore herself) into her papers, Jennifer ultimately feared that this type of writing was taking her away from the personal writing projects that she wanted to pursue. The dissonance that this realization creates brings into question whether she should pursue her doctorate or invest in writing for herself.

7.1.2 Interior and Exterior Dimensions of Embodiment

Because knowing is an individual and social experience, both the internal and external ways people know about self and the world contribute to meaning-making. To understand how people make sense of what they know, narratives are as much for the teller as the listener. As meaning-making activities, for individuals and communities, stories function to explain and understand the world (Seidman, 2006). Clandinin and Connelly (2006) described the varied nature and relational quality of data as "field texts" and stress the importance of situating storied experience three-dimensionally in "the temporal, the personal or social and place" (p. 48). As such, stories are richly textured by when, with whom, and where they happened.

What became of interest in our research project was how each woman negotiated both external and interior realities of embodiment during their studies (Maclaren, 1988). As Winnie's, Jacqueline's, and Jennifer's stories all convey, embodiment has an exterior and interior quality. Each individual woman's exterior reality, in social and political settings position them through race, gender and age. This positioning produced ways they were expected engage in as a part of laws, culture, communities, or family. Winnie, for instance, is positioned as only taking up certain careers in the political structures of Apartheid. Jacqueline, as one of six children, was not expected to attend university or become a scholar by her parents. Raised in an intellectual environment of social protest, Jennifer enrolled in graduate school to elevate her teaching career to be regarded as professional by her family. Each engaged in negotiating positions of self through interior perceptions of identity while also being positioned by exterior social and political realities.

7.1.2.1 Passion: Embodied Motivation

Alongside their exterior experience, the women in this study described an interior reality, that had to do with what they thought and perceived about themselves, and what they desired for their lives. Passion, in this sense, is wrapped up in desire and manifests as longing, curiosity, and ambition. Winnie desired to change her career and to honor a longing within herself. Jacqueline wanted to engage with other scholars of like mind and zeal within an academic community, thereby contributing to knowledge about autism. As a teacher, Jennifer fought for an external respect for her profession that matches her self-regard for her work as a professional. As a writer, she fought for her "pure" voice to characterize her writing.

In ways that highlight women's use of the erotic (Lorde, 1978) these women engaged with the life-force energy of passion as a motivation for their graduate journeys.

Winnie's, Jacqueline's, and Jennifer's narratives displayed both passion and desire, fueling

reentry to study and enabling negotiation and engagement in refashioning's of identity. If

embodiment is to be valued in academic spaces, paying attention to how women engage with

passion gives clues as to how pursuits of knowledge bring to light the mindbody.

7.2 Implications for Practice

Academic institutions are places that resist change for a myriad of reasons. As a result, it

requires that many forces come together simultaneously for major shifts to happen (Diamond,

2006). Educators themselves are typically slow to change their practice and adopt new ways of

thinking (Taylor, 2003). However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many other societal

factors, now is a time of unprecedented change and re-examination of educational practice.

These changes point to the fact that personal survival, and the survival of institutions is at stake.

Here are tremendous opportunities for shifts in practice that previously seemed unimaginable. A

move towards embodied awareness in the way knowledge is built, represented, and experienced

no longer appears "extra" or impossible and now, perhaps more than ever, it makes sense. In a

discussion of the implications of my project below, I engage what I have learned and the

questions I still have. I ask how we can possibly go on as we always have, and what can women,

educators, and institutions do to practice education in ways that are mindfully embodied?

7.2.1 Implications for Women

The implications for mature women reentering study later in life range from the deeply

personal to the practical. Whether it is towards embodied knowledge, women's ways of

knowing, or inclusion and equity, a move towards graduate study later in life requires some self-

reckoning about what we as women want, and the self-belief that the knowledge we carry is

valuable. On a personal level, women bear embodied aspects of identity that can support study

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and resourcefully sustain them in reentry. Returning to the position of student is a learning position, but not a place of second-class knowledge. As Winnie's and Jennifer's accounts suggest, feeling unfamiliar with academic culture and its social environment can easily give rise to beliefs of not belonging, performance anxiety, and ambivalence. As the data from my study suggests, age and self-confidence are also related, and older reentry students frequently underestimate their abilities, working harder than their younger counterparts to make up for perceived shortfalls. Despite many barriers and a complex array of responsibilities, reentry women are statistically more likely to achieve higher grades than younger students, because of clear goals and strong motivation (Lin, 2016), and this evidence suggests that with support, they are likely to succeed. For older adults, there is a balance to be struck between cultivating humility around lived experience at the same time as believing they have much to offer. It appears this balance is an important one to maintain, helping them to engage their expertise in relevant ways, and may ground older adults in the disorienting dilemma of graduate study (Mezirow, 2000).

On a broader scale, we women vote by our presence and can determine what programs offer by seeking out programming that reflects embodied and holistic ways of working. More than half of graduate students are women and graduate programs can and should reflect multiple entry points and various ways of representing knowledge. During the application process, it is easy to forget that programs are seeking out graduate students, especially at the master's level, because they are a source of revenue.

I mentioned that I was surprised to be readmitted to a master's degree after so much time had elapsed. As an older student, I thought I needed to be extra-impressive in the admissions process, but the reality is that many institutions use this process to simultaneously court students

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towards master's enrollment. Once accepted and enrolled, I discovered the scarcity of funding for master's degrees, and that institutions often rely on tuition from these programs for financial survival (PBS Newshour, 2017; Weismann, 2021). There is a need for women who reenter study to make discerning choices by about what kind of engagement they want, what will actually enhance their career opportunities, and what the culture of learning is like at a given institution.

In addition, for mature women it is crucial to anticipate, as Jacqueline did, that graduate school introduces powerful pressures to perform within that institutional culture, be it in cognitive or other ways. Graduate study positions students to prove knowledge in very specific ways and going in cold may not prepare adult women for this reality. It may be possible to find ways to engage in academic settings or gain experience beforehand. Auditing courses, seeking research experiences, and taking undergraduate or non-degree courses are all ways to try out how academic skills are apprenticed. As they begin their graduate journey, these experiences can prepare women as they seek the best environments for their future study goals.

On the practical aspects of navigating study, choosing a program that will point in the right direction for a desired career change is crucial. While this may not be a linear process, like Jacqueline's, prospective applicants can network with kindred spirits and find networks of community and belonging. These communities can support women as we seek the best program and educational environment for ourselves. It is important to carefully research graduate institutions for their pedagogy and practice, faculty engagement, and supports for adults. Otherwise, the status of being accepted into a competitive program may overshadow whether it is a good fit. Researching the pedagogy of the program and talking to former students will bring greater alignment of goals and institution.

Once in a graduate program, finding agentic ways to cope and support oneself can bolster and strengthen mature women as we find our way. Personal practices that sustain embodied ways of working individually and in community are crucial. Reflective journaling and personal writing can be a starting place for working out thoughts, emotions, and dilemmas. Exploring lived experience, engaging in working out ideas through writing, art, music, or other mindbody practices are all ways of recentering the body and recognizing the knowledge bodies carry.

7.2.2 Implications for Educators

The importance of understanding knowledge and learning as embodied cannot be understated. As the narratives of the women in my study attest, reading, writing, and learning the academy is a mindbody endeavor. Although experiences and perceptions differ, older adult learners bring with them bodies of lived experiences and funds of knowledge (Freire, 1970; Moll et al., 1992). Consequently, for educators themselves, recognizing and becoming literate in embodied knowledge is part of professional development and good pedagogy.

7.2.2.1 Implications for Personal Practice

Educators need to develop explicit body awareness. This includes their own embodied practices of teaching and writing. By this I mean going beyond intellectual or critical reflection and delving into awareness of how their own cultural and personal knowledge is embodied and enacted. Body awareness makes implications for practice a personal journey. Educators must be willing to get to know themselves and be able to talk about, locate and recognize what it is they carry as knowledge and what they act upon in their writing and teaching. A caveat here would be that personal awareness of one's own embodied practices only creates foundations for supporting students in engaging their own bodily knowledge. If what works for oneself works for others would not always apply, but merely guide the exploration and discovery of helpful practices.

What is crucial is whether in large or small practices, teachers must welcome an awareness of bodies into classroom praxis. Dialoguing with students about their emotions, sensations and writing practices helps students to discover their own body as a source of knowledge. Creating space for students and teachers to be present in their bodies appears to be an implicit start in becoming more embodied educators. An obvious suggestion from the data is personal writing in the forms of reflective essays, writing about literacy history and writing for full presence (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013), are all places to begin. In addition, pausing in class for a few moments for students to ground themselves in their bodily sensations (such as comfort and discomfort), locating themselves as fully present honors the body as knower. Students need opportunities to experience that their personal knowledge matters, is relevant and is valued in the process of learning.

7.2.2.2 Implications for Inclusion

As the narratives of Winnie and Jennifer suggest, learning is connected to a sense of social and relational belonging. Therefore, including all students in a community of learners is an embodied undertaking. It is not only head knowledge that will cause students to feel that they belong in academic settings, but also a matter of whether they feel their bodies belong there too (Hill, 2011). As it has been affirmed by the experiences of the women in my study, regardless of factors that can be socially marginalizing such as age, race, culture, or professional expertise, there is a need for social belonging because it supports learning experiences. With a recognition that creating an authentically inclusive community within classroom settings is an art and not a science, educators must be committed to an ongoing process of equity and inclusion of all bodies and embodied identities. In addition, being cognizant of their own racial and cultural literacies (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013), and by engaging in culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Gay,

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2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tisdell, 1995, 1998), adult educators can affirm, celebrate, and embrace the varied embodied knowledges that enter their classroom.

As was also affirmed by Winnie, Jacqueline, and Jennifer, relationships with faculty provided a strong foundation for their confidence, sense of self efficacy and coping emotionally while in their graduate programs, even when faced with exclusion by their peers. Fleishman (1992) described the importance of visibility for reentry students stating, "Whatever the method, the important thing was that the professor validated or affirmed the student's existence in meaningful ways" (p. 80). Like any person that finds themselves on the margins or in the minority, special treatment feels awkward and can be just as isolating as discrimination. Teachers themselves can do the personal embodied work of recognizing the more peer-oriented coaching, mentoring and guidance that supports mature students (Fleishman, 1992; Offerman, 2011; Padula & Miller, 1999) Part of this work is to recognize when they have failed to differentiate between the needs of different age groups of students in their support. It is from a stance of awareness that more authentic validation of and affirmation of a range of student bodies can occur.

The women in my study also relied upon strong feedback from faculty to grow in academic literacies and practices. Explicit instruction about the technicalities of academic writing, and dialogue about assignments alongside recognition of their embodied knowledge were important factors in their growth and writing development. In addition, as older adults, they felt some sense of common experience as teachers with their professors and enjoyed a sense of collegiality. Therefore, particularly at the graduate level, educators can become aware of well researched persistence factors for graduate students (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011) which include faculty relationships of support and respect.

7.2.2.3 Implications for Teacher Education

Another area of implications to consider is that of teacher preparation. Teacher education programs attract a majority of students who identify as women, which, according to the OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2019) Education at a Glance Database, is mainly because of less competitive salary prospects for men. This statistic raises at least two questions. First regarding the reasons for a chronic gender imbalance of students within programs. In relation to my inquiry, a second concern is why, if women are in the majority, cognitive approaches to learning continue to prevail. What OECD (2019) notes is that although women represent the majority of educators in primary, middle and high school, this majority drops to 44% at the tertiary level. That is, the majority of educators in college and graduate school are still men, especially at leadership level, who determine the culture of admissions, pedagogy and assessment. This being the case, addressing the challenge of taking on more embodied approaches as mainstream teaching practice needs to be engaged within these ranks.

With regard to academic writing in graduate programs, Winnie's and Jacqueline's narratives chronicle transitions from one discipline to another and the different expectations of writing within each. Their writing samples offer clues as to the distance or proximity writers take up to be effective in communicating and publishing their work within given disciplines. It seems that teachers developing their own writing awareness and skills would reflect directly on expectations of how they teach their own students to write. Not only was personal writing helpful in bridging these differences and creating awareness in Winnie and Jacqueline, but it also appears that in each discipline, direct mentoring, feedback, and the use of model and mentor texts served to develop writing ability at the graduate level.

In addition, at a professor-student level of interaction, Jennifer's account suggests that differentiation concerning age within master's programs is crucial. She expressed that as a mature student, she felt she had more in common with her professors than her fellow students. Although many students seek their master's degree with certification directly out of undergraduate study, some older students enter master's programs as a move to change careers, for professional development, or to attain an advanced degree. Teacher educators can expect and prepare for diverse teaching experiences and teacher identities to enter their classrooms. Just as we can explore reading and writing identities through personal writing, so too, teacher preparation programs can explore the development of teacher identities over the life course.

7.2.3 Implications for Institutions

When it comes to older students, a major focus of institutions has been student success. Previous studies of successful students, like that of Pitts (1992), cited creating friendships, trusting instincts, encouragement from professors, strong support services, and appropriate academic advising as critical factors in the ability of the older student to "stay the course" (Colvin, 2013). Previously, Pitts (1992) cited Beer (1989) to highlight the role and responsibility of the institution in this success:

> Providing a classroom climate that promotes self-direction, mutual respect, and esteem can make women students more comfortable in expressing their views. All these aspects go beyond policy measures and speak to the institutional culture. The environment that is cultivated and what becomes normalized in the teaching and learning environment is an intuitional concern. Consequently, institutions may need to develop new models for teaching and learning which are sensitive to women's perceptions. (p. 73)

Because his recommendation endorsed "sensitivity," Beer assumes that there is still a dominant academic culture for women to fit into. Being "sensitive" to women's needs is admirable but could be interpreted as patronizingly walking on eggshells. This approach does not

address overwhelmingly cognitive and masculinized measures of success and knowledge construction, nor does it consider that current academic cultures may require reconstruction at fundamental levels. To my mind, feminizing academic culture is not helpful, because it does not address the entrenched structural and socio-cultural aspects that determine, for instance, how women obtain tenure and promotion within masculinized structures.

What is needed is an interrogation of historical assumptions that underly what kinds of knowledge are valued and what are marginalized and *why* this is so. A conscious engagement with embodied knowledges that embraces the many ways embodied knowledge manifests is necessary. This conscious engagement includes reconceiving and recognizing knowledge as multiple, multifaceted, and connected to embodied identity. As a start, it means a radical departure from relying on typically used measures for admission such as standardized testing, language exams, and entrance examinations to academic institutions. Within graduate programs, typical conventions associated with the attainment of degrees such as theses and dissertations must broaden to include other ways to include how knowledge is performed.

Letting go of such deeply held philosophical attachments to ideas and practices of rigor, rationality, objectivity, and cognition seems virtually impossible because of how normalized and relied upon they have become. These beliefs held in place by hefty anchors such as commitments to valuing certain knowledge, language, and cultures of knowledge over others in subjects like the teaching of English (Brass, 2012). Another such anchor is the financial survival of investments in the financial viability institutions, so the stakes are high for those vested interests are linked to them (PBS Newshour, 2017). In addition, repetition of the same long-established practices only serve to entrench, and not liberate institutions from these attachments. However, if education is to be a truly human and humanizing endeavor, it is worth interrupting these

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assumptions to ask if this well-worn path ultimately serves the ideals as well as the practicalities educators aspire to. That is, that students fundamentally benefit, grow, and flourish in the process of getting an education. To my mind and my body, moving towards embracing bodily knowledge, multiple ways of working, and multiple means by which embodied knowledges are made visible are essential to redefining what institutional cultures value and practice.

The considerations that the women in my study raise draw attention to mature women and so I focus there. Continuing to ignore the increasing prevalence of women over 50 in graduate education also calls for changes in institutional values surrounding knowledge. At a disciplinary level, this includes changes to the ways students are asked to perform knowledge by adopting new modes of assessment. Academic writing that reflects women's ways of writing differently is one such example (Gilmore et al., 2019). Change is needed in the kinds of writing that is both done and is valued by academia. Women's writing can and should display feminist ways of being and engaging in academia (Ahmed, 2003). However, institutional change will require that these ways of working are also explicitly valued and honored. Winnie's experiences at a large state university demonstrated that entrance tests can prove problematic and introduce unconscious bias into the admissions process. Alternative means to show knowledge must be created for prospective students to access graduate admissions.

In connection with an intent to sustain programs that value women's knowledge, I suggest where an appeal for change might be made. Noting that it is unlikely that change in institutions will occur of its own volition (Diamond, 2006), institutional cultures that value degree completion, success rates and their own survival, must recognize that, in reality, mature students experience of study and their completion of degrees is connected to their survival as institutions. For instance, how will administratively heavy institutions whose are experiencing

dropping enrollment survive the social realities and changes surrounding higher education at this time?

Consider that women are more likely than men to attain their degrees (NCES, 2019) and that older reentry students are more goal-oriented, motivated, and persistent than their younger counterparts (Lin, 2016). These factors make their completion more likely. It is crucial to call attention to redirecting funding to create environments that recognize the bodily experience as well as the practical and social supports that women and older students need to thrive. Making this a priority seems highly compatible with an institutional goal of degree completion. Just as Winnie and Jennifer refused to remain silent, and make their voices heard, so too, women are not "lucky to be here" and their educational needs are something institutions and graduate programs must consider if they wish women to enroll, graduate, and succeed.

As part of reflecting on the scope of my study, I make a note that my work aimed to understand experience and was not an intervention. Thus, the data analysis was descriptive and interpretative of experience rather than looking at the impact of any designed, methodological practice in academic writing. Therefore, implications for individual women and educators for example, have opened up considerations of how to ensure they get the educational experience they desire, or how teachers create environments that embrace the body in their classrooms. This study also highlights how institutional cultures continue to value disembodied measures of achievement, leaving the onus on students to perform in certain ways, and teachers to engage in evaluating knowledge with cognitive bias. The priority given to entrance tests at large, state institutions and minimal attention given to the experience of mature students becomes evident, pointing out that institutions have made few major shifts since predictions that this demographic was a growing and important one throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Myles, 2017; Schmidt, 1983).

Implications for my study also confirm the work of other educational studies, such as the value of personal writing as a personal and classroom practice (Banks, 2003; Jackman, 1999; Olvin, 2008; Woodcock, 2010), and socially (Gee, 2000; Prior, 2006) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007; Tisdell, 1995, 1998). Before moving to final thoughts, I note the limitations of my study below, recognizing the bounds of this study and taking time to discuss further inquiry that results from this work.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

7.3.1 Socioeconomic Considerations

A significant limitation of my study relates to the socio-economic status of the women who participated. None of the women described fearing that they would not complete their degrees due to lack of financial means. They were all self-supported (due to saving money from their previous occupation), had economic support from a partner, or still had a job that partially sponsored their tuition. Paying for their studies was challenging but not insurmountable. This is not usually the case for many women who reenter study, and lack of financial resources is a common reason for interrupted studies or dropping out of either undergraduate or graduate degrees (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). Payment of fees can also act as a barrier preventing initial or continued enrollment (Colvin, 2013). To understand current socioeconomic barriers to studying at the graduate level, further qualitative inquiry should be conducted with a more diverse sample so that funding a degree does not rest solely on financial resources or social capital.

7.3.2 Considerations of Attrition

Attrition in graduate study is extremely high at 50% particularly in doctoral programs (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). My inquiry does not take into consideration that many women start

graduate degrees but do not finish them due to the complexities of balancing their studies with their job, family responsibilities and time constraints (Lin, 2016). My interviews were also undertaken after the fact, and all the women except Jennifer had achieved graduate degrees at the master's level. Jennifer was an interesting example of attrition because she completed her Ed.M. and had moved into a doctoral program during the research phase of the project. As her experience suggests, her perceptions of age, the pressure of time constraints, the needs of her aging mother, and the anxiety surrounding her doctoral studies all contributed to her leaving the program.

My study also did not specifically address the challenges of remaining enrolled. Mercer (1993) for instance, admitted that "too little is yet known about what causes some older women undergraduates to persist to graduation and others to drop out" (p. 153). To better understand these factors, there would be great value in recruiting women before they enroll and following their journey in more of a longitudinal study. Recruiting women who were unable to finish their degrees, and those who failed to gain admission to graduate programs would bring greater understanding to the current challenges facing mature women desiring graduate degrees.

7.4 Areas for Further Research

My project opens areas of further inquiry related to embodiment. There is much to be discovered about the experience of bodies during learning, and there is space for reconceptualizing embodiment altogether (Migliore, 2017). As I mentioned above, understanding a more diverse range of women's experiences *while* they undergo their graduate studies would be of benefit. In addition, a longer-term study that followed women though their degrees would also provide a more in-situ perspective compared to reflecting on experience as they see it now. Taking a more interventionist approach such as forming groups and engaging in supportive

embodied practices should be considered as a way for women to discover useful personal ways to attend to embodied knowledge.

In my reading of the literature, dance, drama, and movement recurred as particularly supportive to learning and embodied pedagogies, bolstering writing practices and multimodal expressions of knowledge (Dunn, 2001; Fedukovich, 2017; Snowber, 2012). A broader range of modalities for knowledge construction, perhaps through creative arts and discussion might be explored. I imagine that affinity groups of women could be formed for the purpose of sharing their experiences and providing community during graduate school, providing greater insight as to how institutional cultures of support for older students might be fostered.

7.4.1 Trauma, Pain, and Turning Points

Although the women in my study did not go into extensive detail about traumatic events or painful experiences, these experiences were alluded to in the data. In my readings, the impact of trauma on the body and its relationship to learning has been found to be significant in younger learners (Van Der Kolk, 2015) and the impact of trauma on learning has been given attention in trauma studies already (Dutro & Bien, 2014; Ohito, 2018) An ongoing and essential area to explore is the role of difficult lived experiences for older adults related to engaging with their learning experiences. More specifically, I am interested in how these events or experiences inform transitions and turning points that lead to study. That pain, or the navigation of it, may provoke agency in women and motivation towards changing their careers and constructing new identities for themselves bears further inquiry.

7.5 Final Thoughts

It is tempting at this point to say that embodiment is everywhere, but that would air brush the complexity I have sought to explore. Throughout this project, I have wrestled with defining

embodiment, struggled to say where it was and where it wasn't to be found, how it looks and what should be done to become more embodied. What has become more evident to me is that despite the ubiquitous presence and importance of bodies, the concept of embodiment for some people floats somewhere between, "oh of course everything is embodied" to a blank stare and some fidgeting that says embodiment feels too far removed from daily life. I might argue that for many people perhaps embodiment seems too close and intimate a venture.

Interrogating bodily knowledge is also a journey of trust that happens over time and with interpersonal safety. For individuals to work on trusting that their bodies guide them is a very conscious and vulnerable journey of awareness in a within educational systems that constantly work towards dis-embodiment. Educators who lead their students in mindful awareness must also provide ways for students to engage and disengage based on what feels comfortable and safe for them, and not as another demand for conformity.

Thus, embodiment is an active experience and not a static one of merely acknowledging the possession a physical body. Ellingson cites Trinh (1999) to say, "We do not *have* bodies, we *are* our bodies" (emphasis in original). By seeing bodies as doing bodies, the shift from *having bodies* is towards *being bodies,* making possible a shift in viewing identities as being fixed to active bodies that constitute selves" (2017, p. 258). Therefore, theorizing about embodiment must account for experience that leads educators to practicing and promoting ways of being in the world alongside their students.

To go beyond theory, embodiment envisaged as *being bodies* must lean deeply into praxis, as I have done in this study, to *do the work* of embodiment. By that I mean that as much as I have learned about embodiment by reading and thinking about it, I have learned far more in the daily, intentional practices of connecting with my own body and inviting others to do the

same. Therefore, explicit attention must be given in research and in institutional cultures as to how the *experience* of embodiment gets suppressed (Tobin, 2004), marginalized (Darder, 2009), or amplified simply by ignoring or paying attention to it. Education, educators, and human beings only lose out by dismissing or devaluing what relationships between bodies offer, or by shutting down the passionate life-force that moves through them (Lorde, 1978).

The phenomenon of marginalizing bodies in education is not a new one, but it persists. The residue of cognitive of dominance in the praxis of writing in academic settings silences embodied knowledge and ways of working. A deference to and general acceptance of these norms reveals a continued colonizing of the female body (Darder, 2009) that cuts off the ways bodies speak, know, and move as they learn. As long as we hope for equity for women in the academy, cognitive dominance in demonstrating knowledge must be addressed on an individual basis, in teacher practice, and through academic structures.

Not only that, but more women's stories must also come forward so that a better understanding of embodied knowledges may speak back to knowledge construction in places of learning. This emergent picture demonstrates that the mindbody connection in academic writing is a nexus worthy of continued exploration. The stories told by the women in my study showed areas of productive struggle and places of abject frustration with academic forms of writing available to them. In our conversations, we gained a clearer idea of what agency looked like for each writer, and what they did to counter and excel at what has long been understood as gendered ways of proving academic knowledge. The working out of theory and praxis was of critical importance to these emergent scholars and there is passion and joy in their pursuits. Exploring the mindbody connection allows us to see the possibilities beyond the sticky problem

of the exclusion of the body in academic writing endeavors and to reconstruct these spaces to embrace what bodies know.

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Appendix A: Description of the Study

STUDY TITLE: The Body We Write In: Reentry Women Narrate An Embodied Experience of Writing In Higher Education (TC IRB # 21-287)

Lead Researcher: Jennifer DeCerff
Academic Sponsor: Dr. Bob Fecho
Director of English Education
Teachers College, Columbia University

Jennifer DeCerff and researchers from the English Education Department at Teachers College, Columbia University are recruiting participants for a study inviting women to share their experiences about writing for graduate school in a supportive environment. In particular, this study is interested in different types of college writing and explores the holistic experience of writing. This study may help us to better understand the mind-body connection in academic writing.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a woman of at least 30 years of age, have reentered academic study after a period of time as an adult, and would like to discuss your experiences of academic writing. Participants from all disciplines and institutions are invited to fill out a short survey if they are interested in sharing their stories.

The study will take place virtually on zoom. You are invited to join the discussion over a 6-month period by attending one meeting per month for one hour for a total of six hours.
You will be asked to interview with the researcher and engage in focus groups with other participants. The women in the group will discuss their writing experiences through mindful practices and share their stories. Participants are free to share their writing as examples of their experiences. Member checks will also be conducted to ensure data is represented faithfully.

If you participate, there is no anticipated direct monetary benefit, but you will receive a gift voucher for $60. In addition, you will be in a supportive environment with others who may have similar experiences. Reflecting together on our writing experiences may result in greater awareness of our writing process, strengths and current growth as writers.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Jennifer Decerff at
jad2278@tc.columbia.edu

Appendix B: Initial Survey Questions

Writing Experiences of Women Reentering Higher Education Survey

This survey is part of a study that invites women to talk about academic writing in graduate programs. During the study, women will be invited to share their experiences and work in a supportive environment with their peers. In particular, this study is interested in different types of writing and explores the holistic experience of academic writing. Activities for this study include interviews with the researcher and focus groups with other participants. Participants from all disciplines and institutions are invited to fill out this short survey if they are interested in sharing their stories!

* Required

 Email *

1. Your name *

2. Your current age *Mark only one oval.
20-30 years
30-40 years
40-50 years
50-60 years
Over 60 years
Other:

3. Which answer best describes your race/ethnicity? (Please check all that apply)
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American
Latina/o/x or Hispanic American
Non-Hispanic White or European American
East Asian or Asian American
South Asian or Indian American
Middle Eastern or Arab American
Native American or Alaskan Native

4. Which answer best describes your gender identity? *
Female
Male
Non-binary

5. What type of program are you currently enrolled in? *
A Bachelor's degree program
A Master's degree program
A Doctoral degree program
Other:

6. What discipline/department are you part of and what is your specific area of interest?

7. Which of the following experiences do you identify with? (check all that apply) *
After completing high school, I had a break before going to college
I work full-time
I am financially independent
I have family responsibilities such as siblings, parents or extended family to care for I am a parent
I study part-time
I have a GED or high school equivalency

8. How much time was there between the completion of a previous qualification (high school, college or certificate) and your current course of study?
Less than 5 years
Between 5-10 years
More than 10 years
More than 20 years
Other:

9. When returning to study for a degree, many adults compare community/state colleges, non-profit and for-profit institutions. What type of institution was the best fit for you and why?

10. What life events or circumstances led up to your decision to return to college? Please share anything you believe directly relates to your decision:

11. Are you interested in discussing your writing experiences in higher education with a group of peers? Please share your thoughts below:

12. What questions would you like to ask about participating in this study? *

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation Example

(Emailed)
Dear (Part),

Thanks so much for taking the survey and for sharing the project with _____. I think you are a great candidate for the project, and I'd like to invite you to participate! I think that the work we'll be doing together is going to be joyful, generative, and useful for supporting mature women as they return to grad school as well as embracing the strengths we bring to our fields.

Thanks for the question you asked about the mind-body connection in academic writing in the survey. It refers to how the mind and body work together when we do something like writing. So as we talk about our experiences, we'll also be paying attention to not only what we think about, but also what, if anything, we experience in our bodies as well. As you said, when we meet, we'll chat about it more.

If you would like to join the study, I'd like to set up a time convenient to you for an initial interview over Zoom, so we can get to know each other better.

You would know from participating in other research projects that it requires giving your written consent. I have attached the informed consent and can also send you a printed hardcopy. Once you've had a chance to read it, please note any questions that come up for you. We can go over it together if you like and talk through the best way to sign it.

Looking forward to talking more,
Jen De Cerff

Appendix D: Initial Individual Semi-Structured Interview

Initial Embodied Interview in chunks 45 min- 1 hour

Introductory conversation about what we'll be doing together: a focus on first-hand experience, how it might flow, and the option to stop at any time, pause or register questions, epiphanies, discomfort or concerns, a reminder that any experience, no matter how seemingly insignificant is of importance.
Mindful exercise to pause and connect with the body and become more present. 3 breaths

Purposes of the initial interview: Establish a sense of rapport through a shared activity, identify any felt experiences related to going back to college. Identify a few early writing experiences. Tell a short story about one instance and what it was like.

Body anchored Interview as theorized by Stelter (2010).
Body-focused Interview Protocol suggested by Tantia (2021, p. 168-171)

Part 1: Warm up
Grounding- please get comfortable where you are, take a moment to pause after your day, and take a few deep breaths, inhaling through the nose and then slowly out through the mouth. You may want to close your eyes. Feel the weight of your body in the chair and scan your body from your head to your feet to notice if you are holding any tension in a part or parts of your body. Just acknowledge that tension as part of how you come to the group today. Take a few more deep breaths and open your eyes when you feel ready, open your eyes and take in your surroundings. Notice what is on the walls of the room, where you are seated in relation to other furniture, the noises from the house, or the street outside.

Video awareness: You will notice that the Zoom camera is on because as a research interview, I have asked for permission to record. Note how you feel about the camera being on. What would you like to say about that? Even if it seems silly, what discomfort might it introduce for you? Is there anything you'd like to do to make it less noticeable or awkward?

Topic: Early academic writing assignments
Part 2: Intro

Please elaborate on how you came back to study/ college. You mentioned…. how do you remember knowing that was the right choice for you--was it a gut feeling, a dream for you or a practical decision? What else can you describe about that decision?

What are some of the emotions and sensations you associated with going back to school?

Possible Prompt: What was the first writing assignment you remember doing when you went back to college? Can you talk about what made it memorable? How do you remember it?

1. Describe how you understood the assignment, or what you did not understand about what you needed to write?
2. Imagine you are writing that assignment. As you look back, what, if any, awareness's did you have while writing in class, online, or preparing that assignment?
    - Probe: What sensations in your body were you aware of? how would you describe those sensations?
    - Probe what emotions were you aware of during this experience?
    - Probe: what thoughts were you aware of at the time?
    - Probe: what was this experience like for you? Is there a picture that comes to mind?
3. Can you say more about what stands out to you or what supported you writing? What or who helped you as you worked on that paper?
4. How is your experience writing for an assignment different from your experience of other types of everyday writing?

Part 3: Repeat the grounding exercise and ask the participant to sense the chair they sit in, the ground under their feet, and to take 3 deep breaths and encourage them to stretch by doing this as well. Thank them for their time and effort, make eye contact if possible and ask if they have any questions, concerns.

Appendix E: Second Individual Semi-Structured Interview

Purposes of this interview: Check in from transcript about any accuracies and interpretations, giving each woman a chance to elaborate or revise their comments, ask more in-depth questions about actual writing experiences and the experience of their body as they write

Reconnect with some light conversation and how it's going for them since we met last and anything that came up for them. Beforehand, *read the transcript of our previous interview* and write down any misunderstandings, clarity issues and further questions that it sparks. Create specific follow up questions for each person

Reminder of video recording and to verbalize any current discomfort or
- Grounding exercise to bring us into the present moment: 3 breaths, grounding the body in a chair, awareness of the room.

Topic: other writing experiences, supportive experiences at the University,
Possible Prompts:
1. Since we last talked, has anything come up for you that you want to mention? Are there other writing experiences that have come to mind?
2. As a (teacher, social worker, OT) what are you trained to notice about the body?
3. When you work with people in your job, what are you conscious of noticing?
4. So to connect that to your own experience, when you went back to grad school what did you notice about that as a physical, bodily experience?
5. What did you notice about your body if anything when you were writing?
6. How do you think the body and mind work together when you are writing?
7. What are you aware of about yourself now as a writer now that you were not when you first went back to study?
8. Is there anything that you've wanted to bring up or talk about that I haven't asked about yet?
9. Is there any writing that you can share that you've done that you'd like to share as a part of the study?