

DISEMBODIED NEOLIBERAL PARENTHOOD: UNDERSTANDING LACTATION
AMONGST CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by

KELSEY BENSON

(Under the Direction of Hilary Hughes)

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the material-discursive contexts available for lactation—pumping—amongst U.S. teachers who wish to continue nursing [a] child(ren) upon returning full-time to the classroom. Guided by critical feminist methodologies, I conducted interviews and focus groups with 11 teacher-parents who chose to lactate or nurse their infants while at school. I found that teachers face overwhelming obstacles to merging the conflicting demands of their private lives as parents alongside the work demands of their public lives as teachers. In making sense of the data using feminist theories of embodiment and neoliberalism as available discourses both structuring and structured by teachers' experiences with lactation in schools, I offer the concept of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood* as a way to both (1) describe the conditions of contemporary working parenthood, as well as to (2) point to some critical explanations for how the intersecting forces of global neoliberal capitalism and sexism converged in the bodies of my participants to render their experiences with pumping in schools emotionally and bureaucratically violent.

INDEX WORDS: poststructural feminism; Foucauldian governmentality; feminist theories of embodiment; lactation OR nursing OR infant feeding OR breastfeeding; speculative fiction; neoliberalism; feminism; qualitative research; classroom teachers; neopatriarchy; haunting OR hauntology; *homo oeconomicus*

DISEMBODIED NEOLIBERAL PARENTHOOD: UNDERSTANDING LACTATION
AMONGST CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by

KELSEY BENSON

B.A., University of Georgia, 2009

M.A., Georgia State University, 2011

Ed.S., Kennesaw State University, 2017

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2024

© 2024

KELSEY BENSON

All Rights Reserved

DISEMBODIED NEOLIBERAL PARENTHOOD: UNDERSTANDING LACTATION
AMONGST CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by

KELSEY BENSON

Major Professor: Hilary Hughes
Committee: Ajay Sharma
Elizabeth Wurzburg

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2024

DEDICATION

For Nolan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's hard to figure out where to begin here, as I'm overwhelmed by the support I've received throughout this journey.

First to my advisor, mentor, and general life coach, Dr. Hilary Hughes. Your words of wisdom have been everything to me. I didn't just start my doctorate under your mentorship, but my foray into parenthood as well. You've guided my becoming as a scholar, a teacher, and a mother. And as a person. Thank you for modeling a way to be in the world that I didn't know was possible.

To all my other mentors, research collaborators, and committee members—Drs. Amy Murphy, Ajay Sharma, Maureen Flint, and Elizabeth Wurzburg—thank you so much for all your help. For sharing your brilliance, for guiding me philosophically and methodologically and pedagogically, and for being patient through my more hardheaded moments.

To my participants: Thank you for trusting me with your stories. I hope I do them justice.

To the amazing teachers at Kaleidoscope Montessori—Ashley, Amelia, and Katie—thank you for keeping Nolan safe and making him feel loved. I could not have done this without you.

To my family—Mom, Ahmet, and Grandma Liz—thank you for watching Nolan so I could attend conferences and meetings, write papers and proposals, and do my homework. You have been the most loving and supportive village.

To my Other, Dylan—thank you for being a friend. One day we'll write that paper about The Blanket.

To my roommate: I hope it doesn't need to be said.

I love you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER	
1 PROLOGUE	1
Hogwarts: A [Revisionist] History	1
Introduction.....	3
Haunting (<i>Why</i>).....	8
Organization of the Dissertation	14
2 INTRODUCTION	17
Statement of the Problem.....	17
Pilot Study.....	18
Review of the Literature on Lactation in the Workplace.....	25
Purpose of the Study	28
Research Questions.....	30
Significance of the Study	31
Definition of Terms.....	33
Delimitations of the Study	38
3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	40
Part 1: Neoliberalism	41

	Part 2: Feminist Embodiment	52
	Part 3: Connecting Gendered Embodiment with Neoliberalism.....	64
4	METHODOLOGY	71
	Methods (<i>How</i>)	71
5	ANALYSIS.....	80
	Introduction.....	80
	Context.....	82
	Results.....	92
	Discussion.....	107
	Conclusion	111
6	CONCLUSION.....	113
	A Storied Aside.....	113
	Introduction.....	117
	Summary.....	119
	Discussion.....	128
	Recommendations for Practice	135
	Conclusion	139
7	EPILOGUE.....	141
	Introduction.....	141
	Context.....	145
	Methodological Refusal	146
	Arts-Based Research.....	148
	Speculative Fiction as a Form of Representation in Arts-Based Research.....	151

Using Fiction for Analysis in Education Research	152
Planting The Seeds.....	155
Looking Forward	160
REFERENCES	165
APPENDICES	
A Recruitment flyer	178
B Individual interview protocol.....	179
C Focus group protocol	180

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

Hogwarts: A [Revisionist] History

I'm a huge *Harry Potter* fan. If you've read the books, have you ever noticed how none of the Hogwarts teachers have children or partners? Dumbledore, Snape, McGonagall— all single and childless. As were Professors Flitwick, Sprout, and Trelawney. If they did have children and/or partners, how would they be free to patrol the corridors of the school all night long? How would they maintain homes and relationships, having to reside at Hogwarts castle 10 months out of the year? It's little wonder that Dumbledore simply dropped an infant Harry at the Dursleys' doorstep and scarcely checked in on him for the intervening decade prior to his enrollment at Hogwarts. Dumbledore had a school to run. What educator has time to raise a child?

Broadly speaking, U.S. workplaces are structured for an ideal employee that is White, typically-abled, cisgender, heterosexual, and male (Davies, et al. 2005; Oyèrónké, 2005; Young, 2020). This ideal worker does not get sick, require breaks, or take leave as required by new parents in their efforts to care for infant children. Ivancheva, Lynch and Keating (2019) refer to this unstated norm as the “hidden doxa of carelessness” (p. 451) undergirding contemporary workplaces, wherein pressures of marketization and neoliberal governance lead to an archetypical corporate worker rooted in norms of global hegemonic masculinity. This ideal worker “is highly productive, career-oriented, mobile, and free from primary hands-on care responsibilities” (p. 451): an individualistic, competitive fantasy that prioritizes efficiency and maximizes productivity in a single-minded pursuit of increasing profit-based bottom lines. Under

neoliberal regimes, domestic care work like that involved in maintaining a home, raising children, and caring for elderly family members is an inconvenient distraction that reduces the amount of visible, measurable work this carefree ideal worker can produce. As the Dumbledores, Snapes, and McGonagalls of our fictionalized utopias in education illustrate, schools as workplaces—teaching as a profession— is/are no exception. All this despite the fact that in education, as in other care industries (hospitals, daycares, nursing homes, etc.), there is [*should be?*] no profit to single-mindedly pursue.

I had my first and only child in October 2019 after finishing my sixth year as a classroom teacher and immediately prior to beginning full-time doctoral studies in January 2020. Giving birth to, nursing, and subsequently raising a child has led to a host of questions that, prior to becoming a parent, I had the privilege of not needing to ask. Returning to my *Harry Potter* example, these are questions that didn't occur to me upon first reading the series, such as: how would the Hogwarts teachers have secured childcare, had any of them ever started families of their own? Were there quality daycare centers in Hogsmeade that we (the readers) simply didn't hear about, as they weren't relevant to the White male protagonist's (Harry's) character arc? If Professor Snape had ever gotten over Lily, remarried, and had children, where would his family have lived? Would Dumbledore have found them a room in the castle? We can only hope that Snape's hypothetical life partner didn't have a career of their own they wished to continue after having had a child (the audacity!). If Professor Trelawney had ever decided to have a child, who would have covered her classes while she was nursing or pumping? Perhaps a long-term substitute like Professor Grubbly-Plank? Was there a refrigerator in the Astronomy tower where she could have stored her milk?

In this dissertation, I explore these wonderings through conversations with lactating teacher-parents (verbiage that I explain in more depth in Chapter 2). Lactating teacher-parents are educators who have recently had [a] child(ren) and returned to classroom teaching, though with the desire to continue nursing their children with their own milk. While at school, this meant that most of my participants had to practice pumping while physically apart from their children. I use lactation (or pumping) as a lens through which I explore the jarring mismatch between the body of the unstated corporate archetype— a body that is male by default— and the bodies of my participants as they navigated the unpredictable and time-bound process of nursing as full-time classroom teachers.

Though before I delve into the stories of my participants, I'd like to tell you some stories of my own. I begin in this Prologue therefore by introducing the *why* of what brings me to this specific topic in this particular place and time: what has variably been referred to as *haunting* or *hauntology* (Gordon, 1997; Rhee, 2021; Yoon & Chen, 2022), a methodology that I think with in bringing a critical feminist lens to the practice of lactation amongst teachers.

Introduction

We, the dead and the living, the past and the present, and what has happened here and happened there, all co-exist and are stored in our bodies.

- Rhee, 2021, p. 24

There is something interesting that happens to me whenever I share my dissertation research in public. It has happened to me each time I have presented findings: at every conference presentation and every class project. Most recently, I opted to compete in the University of Georgia's Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition. This forum challenges graduate students to condense the findings of their dissertation/thesis research into a single three-minute long presentation tailored to a lay audience. Competitors have one PowerPoint slide and

three total minutes to deliver their talk. Exceed this time, and you are automatically disqualified. I learned [the hard way] at this competition that memorizing three minutes of text is harder than it seems, and also not in my skill set: but I digress. Attached below is an excerpt from a reflexive memo I wrote in my dissertation journal that day at 10:15 am, as soon as I arrived home from the competition:

Just did the 3MT competition→ totally bombed. Forgot my transitions, ran over time. Definitely did not advance [to the next round]. Also my slide was clearly 0% effort. Whomp whomp!

But the most interesting thing happened after the presentations were finished. I turned around to congratulate [a doc student] from Nutrition Sciences, who had brought her baby to the competition and was nursing during the session, and [another doc student] from LLED started talking to us too. We talked for almost 20 minutes, well after everyone else had left, about everything related to nursing: about how no one knows about this shit until they have a baby themselves; how hard it is; how no one talks about it, or knows the laws [around lactation]; and how bad the laws are in the U.S. ([one doc student] is from Nigeria and [the other] is from Uruguay; both countries have paid time for parental and lactation leave for workers, including teachers).

It was such a beautiful space to share and commiserate– the session moderator joined us too (she had kids AND grandbabies). And I notice this always happens when I go to conferences. I think we all felt seen and validated– even though I clearly didn't “win”, that made it worthwhile <3

I later added in the margins: “*The work of feminism is making connections*” (Ahmed, 2017).

If I could add a note of celebration: I later learned through a College of Education email blast that the first doc student I spoke with from Nutrition Sciences advanced through two rounds of competitors from every department and every college across the university to place second overall in the 2023 UGA 3MT competition. In so doing, she beat a lot of graduate students who probably weren't balancing the contemporaneous pressures of nursing an infant alongside memorizing a three-minute speech for a group of score-card wielding judges.

It seems as though everywhere I go with this topic, with lactation, people are bursting with stories that need to be told. They tell me about nursing their daughter when they were a teacher 20 years ago and lament that it doesn't seem as though things have changed. They tell me how hard it was to nurse with no better option than to pump in bathroom stalls. They tell me how expensive formula was, and we talk about how hard it has become to find. Something in their bodies is looking for a way out, for a way to be seen, for a reflection in others, for some(thing/one) that validates their experiences.

It's been a long time since I dispensed with the notion that my work/research/teaching could ever "make a difference" in the world. As Dr. Stephanie Jones once said in a guest visit to our Orientation seminar (ETAP 9110), "There is plenty of good academic writing in the world. If good academic writing was all we needed to make changes, then the world would be perfect by now." My take-away is that I have no illusions about this research changing anything in the minefield of structural obstacles to carrying, birthing, and raising children in the United States. The best I am hoping for is that this research can become a space of healing for myself and for my participants; for making sure that they/we feel seen; for insisting that our stories matter; for honoring our ghosts so "they can come and go as they wish rather than haunting out of desperation" (Yoon & Chen, 2022, p. 87).

What follows, then, is a series of short stories that bring me to this research. If the purpose of haunting is mattering (Love, 2019), then I offer these stories as an insistence that they matter: that the ghosts that haunt me and countless others matter.

Interlude

Thursday, June 20, 2017

I walked out of the GRE testing center in the early afternoon, grateful to be finally finished with an exam I had been dreading for a while. It had gone much better than expected, I

thought. The test proctors had allowed me to bring in a pile of Preggie Pop Drops, a ginger candy for pregnant people that I used to suck on constantly to keep the nausea at bay. I was pretty sure this wasn't allowed, but considering I was four months pregnant and about to take a four-and-a-half hour test with only a single bathroom break, I think they took pity on me and made an exception. I had even worn an adult diaper— just in case. As I got in the car, eager to get home and change into normal underwear, I checked my phone for the first time since before the test began at 8 am that morning. I had a voicemail from my OBGYN that the results from the genetic screener were back. There was a problem.

I immediately called the office to speak with my doctor. Apparently the blood test— a routine prenatal screening for chromosomal and other genetic abnormalities— had turned up markers for high risk of trisomy-13, a terminal fetal anomaly that, until that moment, I had never heard of. I went straight from the testing center to the doctor's office; I needed a chorionic villus sampling and an ultrasound to confirm. Zack [my partner] was working and couldn't make it to the doctor with me, so I had to text him the news. It was, in fact, trisomy-13.

Apparently, the doctor explained, this condition leads to developmental issues in all major organ systems: eyes, heart, liver, lungs, brain. Most pregnancies with trisomy-13, he continued, end in a late-stage miscarriage. The few babies who do make it through childbirth with this condition sometimes live for only minutes before they die in their mothers' arms. Their few minutes of life are incredibly painful, he said, and always result in untimely death.

What should I do? I asked him. Maybe. Maybe I don't even remember at this point. Maybe this has just become another story I tell myself.

I do remember him saying that soon, I would be very visibly pregnant. People would be congratulating me; asking me if I've picked out any baby names; when I was due; if it would be a boy or a girl. I was teaching 8th grade at the time; the following Monday would be the first day of pre-planning. What would I tell my students? I thought to myself. That I was just waiting for my fetus to die?

The doctor told me that he knew what he and his wife would do if they ever got this same diagnosis. No pregnancy or birth was ever without risk, he said; if we ever wanted to try again, for a healthy baby this time, abortion was the safest option.

So the next day, I called my doctor's office to make an appointment to have an abortion.

The receptionist's tone was thick with judgment. "We don't do that here," was her only response to my inquiry, before she tersely hung up the phone. Two years later, when I became pregnant with Nolan, I would find out that my doctor did, in fact, have admitting privileges at a local hospital to perform abortions in these kinds of cases. But that's neither here nor there.

So instead of being able to go to a hospital to be treated by a physician we knew and trusted, we made an appointment at an abortion clinic in Atlanta.

At this point, I was about 17 weeks along. Following conventional wisdom, Zack and I had waited until we were through the first trimester to start telling people that we were expecting. After the first trimester, the risk of miscarriage decreases to less than 2%, the doctor had told us. We had done what we were supposed to do, like we always do. We waited until the 13th week of pregnancy, and then started proudly announcing the news to all our family and friends. It had been a happy month for us; sick and fatiguing for me, but happy for us.

What would we tell everyone now? All our co-workers here in the deep South, the Bible belt? My Trump-loving grandparents? Would we tell them about the abortion? Could I count on them all to understand?

Of course not.

So we came up with a lie. We would pretend I had a miscarriage.

The abortion was scheduled for Wednesday morning, July 26th. Unfortunately, this was right in the middle of my school's week-long pre-planning. This complicated things. Now, our lie had to be convincing enough not just to satisfy our friends and family, but also the school's bureaucracy. I couldn't just miss a day of pre-planning for no reason; I had to put in for sick leave. Would administration demand a doctor's note as proof confirming the legitimacy of my absence? Would they notice that it came from an abortion clinic?

I put in a request for sick leave and told my 8th grade administrator that I had a regularly scheduled prenatal checkup. Here the story cracks and bends into a lie. We would pretend that during the checkup, the doctor discovered that there was no heartbeat: that the baby was already dead. Wasn't this close to the truth anyways? We would say the doctor had no choice, and performed an emergency D&C to remove the fetus that same day. This lie would work, we agreed. It would explain why I was absent from school on Wednesday, but fully present and accounted for on Thursday. No need to burn two whole sick days over this. And hopefully it would be just tragic enough to shut people up about it.

*Zack and I arrived at the abortion clinic together at about 7 am. We were greeted by a small group of protestors camped out in the parking lot. There were only three of them, holding signs and yelling about God and Hellfire and damnation. As we hurriedly walked past them into the clinic, a young woman approached me. What had my baby done to deserve this? She asked. I didn't respond. But the question has stuck with me. What **had** my baby done to deserve this? What had **I** done to deserve this? What had Zack done? He wanted to be a father so desperately. Questions no one thinks to ask.*

I wish words could do justice to how I felt that day, as I spent seven hours stuck in the abortion clinic, alone, waiting for a procedure that would only take five minutes. Would it have helped if Zack were allowed to wait with me all day, instead of being forcibly relegated to the lobby while all the young women awaiting procedures were ushered into a second, interior waiting room? And why did it even take seven hours, you might ask?

Here's what I learned that day, dear reader: perhaps you're already aware. If not, I'm glad you're here. I want you to know.

There are laws in Georgia that require that people getting an abortion first see a counselor about their "options." Options like adoption, or simply keeping the baby yourself. Always options to save the life of the baby; never options to support the life and well-being of the parent. There are laws requiring that people getting an abortion have an ultrasound to look at a shaky, pixelated image of their babies before killing them. The ultrasound tech felt bad for me. "You don't have to look," he said.

Is seven hours just long enough to make people reconsider?

There were about 16 of us in that inner waiting room, sitting in ass-out medical scrubs, denied even the smallest dignity of wearing our own clothes, stuck listening to the sounds of protestors in the adjacent parking lot yelling about how we were all damned to Hell. We mostly sat in shameful silence, staring down at our feet for the hours it took for each person to be individually filtered through the process of seeing a counselor; getting an ultrasound; and securing payment, before we could finally get medical treatment and return, stoned on pain meds, broken in so many ways, to our loved ones in the exterior waiting room.

That was Wednesday. Back at school on Thursday, my 8th grade administrator let me know that we could work something out so I could make up for the professional development meetings I missed while I was out. How kind of her. Too bad there's no bereavement leave for losing a pregnancy. During a staff meeting on Friday morning, my milk came in.

Zack and I both eventually got blood tests to see if either of us was a carrier for trisomy-13. We weren't. That meant there was supposedly a 1 in 16,000 chance that we would have a fetus with this disorder.

But hey, at least I did great on the GRE.

Haunting (My Why)

When our own training as a researcher, academic, or even educator dictates how we must read, think, and write through disciplinary traditions and canons as well as reason, logic, objectivity, and independent thinking, how do you access such deeply affective realities that challenge everything you have learned and do not leave you alone and demand your work— that haunt you?

- Rhee, 2021, p. 10

After the abortion, I was amazed at how many people I knew who had suffered secret losses. A long-time friend who tried to conceive for three years, struggling silently through six miscarriages and several rounds of IVF before he and his wife were finally able to bring their twins into the world. My aunt, who had two miscarriages between my cousins. Another close friend who had had two abortions in secret; even from her husband at the time (now ex-husband). All these stories that were begging to be told, begging to be brought to light through the tiny crack in the door that my grief had opened up for them. There is no avenue for processing this type of grief: no body to bury, no ceremony or casket (Engel, 2020).

Though “behind” me in terms of Western conceptualizations of chronological time, these experiences live with me every second, reverberating into the present and haunting me in my work as a teacher-educator, a partner, a parent, a person. Yoon and Chen (2022) describe haunting as “a process of return and revisitation of the past to the present; a rejection of linear-sequential time. A memory of and ongoing agitation about injustice(s)” (p. 77). Our ghosts stay

with us through the “...affective and material traces— on perpetrators, on victims, on land, on time— though not equally, and not in the same ways” (p. 79), left by assaults on our personhood coded into inequitable systems and structures. Violence, the authors explain, is built into structures of society in myriad ways: through housing and building codes, healthcare policy, tax and zoning codes, baked into the structure of schooling through dress codes and zero tolerance policies. Injustices that our ghosts will not let us forget. I, for instance, am haunted by a week of time that began simply and routinely with a call from my doctor and that ended with a shirt helplessly soaked in milk. Haunting is about remembering “state-sanctioned, institutional violence” (p. 79), the things that the pervasive silencing and erasure encoded into our institutions would have us forget. But our ghosts need these stories told in their quests for justice. They force us to remember; they haunt as a way to seek more just futures (Yoon & Chen, 2022).

Yoon and Chen (2022) argue that heeding these hauntings as a research objective entails processes of witnessing and remembering on the road to transformation, a way to “affirm that the people in our studies matter, that their ghosts matter, that what has been erased matters” (p. 84). Haunting therefore begins with receiving and recording acts of injustice, even when we do not experience them directly as researchers (Yoon & Chen, 2022). Following this kind of *hauntology*, then, knowledge ceases to be the ultimate aim of research. Instead, the purpose of research first becomes witnessing as a way to call forth “your response-ability to your ghosts as a researcher” (p. 84). We (re)imagine new and equitable futures for our ghosts, making common cause with them such that we “go beyond the fundamental alienation of turning social relations into just the things we know and toward our reckoning with how we are in these stories, with how they change us” (Gordon, 1997, p. 21-22). Ultimately, we follow our ghosts in the name of a will to heal and in the process, are ourselves transformed.

The challenge here, of course, is to make sure that the ghosts that haunt us *matter*, when the disciplinary traditions of Science— logic, reason, objectivity— deprive us of a language for describing our realities, for asking these critical questions, and of a method for reaching out in connection such that we can work through our wounds and losses (Rhee, 2021). For instance, how might one write objectively about their own abortion? How might we approach the topic of loss in a logical and emotionally detached way, removing the tainted bias of our personal feelings? As a parent and a woman myself, I take up the concept of haunting as commensurate with a feminist commitment that the personal *is* political (Combahee River Collective, 1981): that the personal, cultural, and historical locations from which we “do” research are intricately merged. In other words, I begin with my own stories “because I can write only what I know and what I know is never separable from who I am” (Rhee, 2021, p. 3 - 4). Thinking with hauntology, I blur the boundaries between I, you, and we in the modern scientific epistemology (Rhee, 2021) by bringing myself into the narrative with my participants— centering the *why* of what brings me to this space – as an insistence that these stories matter.

Interlude

Nolan was due on October 4th, 2019. I had had a miserable pregnancy and eagerly awaited this day for more reasons than an end to my physical discomfort. My due date came and went, and with it, my anxiety mounted. On October 7th, my sister-in-law gave birth to her first child. They had begun telling everyone in our family the happy news when she was only ten weeks along, before she even got any genetic testing done. How nice for her, I had thought at the time. What self-assurance. She had been pregnant for nine months, and had a beautiful healthy baby to show for it. I had now been pregnant for a miserable 14 months of my life with nothing to show for it.

We of course waited until well into our second pregnancy to tentatively share the news. My body knew better. Our first pregnancy had taught us that it didn't matter how pregnant you were; being pregnant came with no promises for a healthy baby. When I was almost a week past my due date, we scheduled an induction.

I arrived at the hospital on Thursday evening, October 10th. We checked in and waited around for a while before we could be shown to a room. There, the doctors started me on Pitocin to induce contractions. At around 1 am on Friday morning, I was already in active labor.

The contractions weren't so bad at first, though they quickly redefined pain for me. Everything I had ever felt until that point in my life became simply a mild discomfort compared to labor pains. They would come in waves and last for two minutes at a time, during which I could scarcely breathe for the pain. 30 seconds to a minute later, they would begin again.

In March 2015, I broke my jaw. Shattered is perhaps a more appropriate descriptor. I was running 400 meter max effort sprints on a concrete sidewalk, hit a crack in the curb and went straight down. My jaw was cracked clean in half, straight down the middle. My four bottom front teeth were cast out at an odd angle, sinisterly pointing in opposite directions, and I had blood running down my shirt from a gash to my chin. When I was finally able to get an X-ray in the E.R. hours later, I would find out that my jaw was hanging off my face in four separate pieces. I remember not knowing how to respond when the nurse asked me about my pain level. "Maybe a four or five?" I had responded [out of ten]. It just wasn't that bad. I had driven myself to the hospital after the accident. I later needed surgery to have a plate drilled into my chin reattaching the two severed halves of my jaw, and metal arch bars wired into my top and bottom teeth for seven weeks while the bone healed. I had to carry around a pair of wire cutting scissors to cut the arch bars off just in case I became sick, so I didn't asphyxiate on my own vomit.

Contractions, by comparison, made that ordeal feel like a weekend at the beach.

After about 24 hours of labor, in the early hours of Saturday morning, October 12th, I begged the doctors to give me an epidural. "Don't be a pussy," my stepmother had texted me. "Do it naturally like I did." She had given birth to all three of my half-siblings in a rural hospital in New York in the early 90s. At the time, the hospital didn't even have an anesthesiologist on staff, so an epidural wasn't an option.

The epidural slowed down my labor even more, and I already wasn't progressing to the requisite 10 cm of dilation I would need before I started pushing. The doctors tried breaking my water; that didn't work. They tried stripping my membranes; that didn't work either. At around 3 pm on Saturday afternoon, the doctor warned me that if I wasn't at 10 cm by the time she returned after her rounds, then we were doing a C-section. She came back around 5 pm and thankfully, I was at 10 cm. It was finally time to start pushing.

I pushed for about an hour, but Nolan simply did not want to come out. Turns out he was big (surprise!): 9 pounds, 7 ounces. Good size for a first baby. When his head finally emerged, his right shoulder got stuck on my pelvis.

Up to this point in the process, everything had seemed to take an eternity. I had not slept since Wednesday night, and it was already early evening on Saturday. I had been in active labor for 41 hours. I had not eaten anything since Thursday afternoon. Did you know that digestion stops during labor? I had tried to eat an apple on Friday and immediately violently vomited it back into a plastic bag. I was exhausted and scared. And then suddenly, everything sped up.

The doctor yelled something to the nurses, who brusquely shoved Zack aside. One climbed onto the table on top of me and started forcibly shoving on my stomach. Another nurse watched the clock and started counting the seconds. 20 seconds...30 seconds....45 seconds. What

did all this mean? What was happening? Nolan emerged as five more doctors and perhaps as many more nurses rushed into the room. Neither of us, Zack or I, could tell you at this point how many people were in the birthing suite with us: it seemed like a hundred people in white coats and scrubs had suddenly flooded the room.

There was no cry. Why wasn't he crying? The doctor rushed him over to an incubation station in the corner of the room, one of those horrible glass rectangles with a flood light on top of it that looked like a heat lamp at a fast food restaurant. Still no cries. Zack went with them. What the fuck was going on? Who were these people? Was he alright?

Finally, I heard some feeble murmurs— Nolan's first strangled, pissed off cries. Zack stood over him next to some doctor I had never seen before, while my own doctor returned to my side to deliver my placenta and start stitching me up. I could barely see Nolan as the nurses fussed over him, wiping him off and poking and prodding him with various instruments. Zack got his phone out and started taking videos of our newborn child. This brought relief and rage; clearly he wouldn't be filming if something was horribly wrong, but was anyone going to tell me what the fuck was going on? What did all that counting mean? Was he going to be ok?

I would later learn that the doctor sent off my placenta to get tested for oxygenation levels, just to make sure he wouldn't have brain damage from oxygen deprivation while he was stuck on my pelvis for over a minute. Zack said that when he emerged, Nolan was completely blue and lifeless. His first Apgar score was 3 [out of ten]. But the umbilical cord had done its job, and he would be fine.

Well, except that the doctor had broken his collarbone tugging him out. It took 27 years before I broke my first bone; Nolan had broken his before taking his first breath. It would also take seven weeks to heal, a long and painful welcome into the world that made him yelp whenever I picked him up. It seemed like an eternity later— after all the X-rays, the routine cleaning him up, applying antibacterial ointment to his eyes, measuring of the hands and feet— when a nurse finally handed me my hungry baby so he could nurse for the first time.

He instantly latched. I had heard stories from friends who had trouble nursing: babies that wouldn't latch, or mothers that couldn't produce enough milk. I was so bad at being pregnant, so miserable and sick and tired. It seemed like every step of the way in the process of getting Nolan here something had gone wrong. But not this. We were good at this.

Bringing My Ghosts to Bear in This Research. I was proud of us. And nursing was the hardest thing I've ever done. In an attempt to illustrate its difficulty for those who may not have ever shared in this particular embodied experience, the chart below contains a snapshot of Nolan's feeding sessions from a single 24-hour period on Wednesday, October 23rd, 2019, data that I tracked in an app called Nara Baby:

Time	Activity
12:07-12:51	Nursed
1:32	Bottle, 3 oz pumped milk
2:57	Bottle, 3 oz pumped milk
5:10 - 5:37	Nursed
6:54 - 7:05	Nursed
7:39 - 7:59	Nursed
8:39	Bottle, 2 oz formula
10:14 - 10:46	Nursed
13:07 - 13:40	Nursed
15:44	Bottle, 3 oz pumped milk
17:09 - 17:50	Nursed
19:00	Bottle, 2 oz pumped milk
20:25 - 20:55	Nursed
21:40	Bottle, 1.5 oz pumped milk
22:36	Bottle, 1.5 oz pumped milk

As you can see, he fed 15 separate times that day for a total of seven hours and 40 minutes spent feeding (this chart also helps explain how he weighed 17 pounds, 10.5 ounces at his two-month pediatrician checkup). Every baby is different, so this feeding schedule may seem extreme.

However when I was nursing Nolan, I was no longer working as a classroom teacher. I had already transitioned to full-time doctoral studies, and therefore had a far more flexible schedule than the vast majority of regular full-time U.S. workers. This experience left me with a burning question: how exactly do classroom teachers *do* this? How can they find time in a jam-packed school day and space in a school full of children to privately pump milk for their children?

It takes support to nurse your baby, and every parent should be supported to feed their child(ren) however they wish. There are also specters that haunt those who've experienced hostile work environments when trying to be both a teacher and a parent still nursing: nightmares from their time spent nested in inequitable systems, assaults on their personhood that reverberate through the past and into the present. So I'm here, telling my stories alongside theirs—insisting that their ghosts matter as a means to advocate for other parents to have the time and space they need to enjoy every moment they have with their children. We will not be silenced; our suffering will not be erased. Our ghosts will be answered in their quests for justice.

Organization of The Dissertation

As you can already see, this dissertation does not follow a traditional five-chapter format. In this chapter, the Prologue, I have introduced the concept of haunting as a theoretical framework in which I situate my own stories: the *why* that brings me to this research. My *why*, however, departs slightly from the *how* of actually conducting this study. What brings me to this research—my hauntings—though they inform how I conceptualize why this research matters, are not the same as the theories I use to analyze my data. This may be because the lactating teacher-parents I spoke with were still *in it*—still nursing and caring for an infant child while also teaching full-time. My participants were largely still in survival mode. The ghosts were being created; the haunting was yet to come. I, on the other hand, have been haunted for years. Perhaps one of the limitations to thinking with haunting is that, while we are still living the trauma, the ghosts are still being created. Chapter 4 therefore details the methods I used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 2, Introduction, includes an overview of the study: the problem statement, research questions, and historical and geographic context in which all were situated. Next,

Chapter 3 is a literature review of two of the theoretical concepts critical to building a framework for understanding the experiences of lactating teacher-parents: feminist theories of the body and embodiment, as well as a brief review of the literature around neoliberalization discourses.

Chapter 5 employs traditional thematic coding to present the findings of this study through a framework for understanding the lives of lactating teacher-parents in schools that I call *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*. Chapter 6 summarizes the dissertation and provides concluding remarks, including a brief overview of the important insights arising from this study, a discussion of major findings, and recommendations both for practice and for future research.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the Epilogue, I return to the concept of haunting to represent the findings of a pilot study conducted in Fall 2021. As I explain in more detail in Chapter 2, this pilot study departs from the dissertation study in several key ways—not the least of which is that the lactating teacher-parents I spoke with were retroactively recalling their experiences with pumping as classroom teachers, in some cases years after the fact. The ghosts of their memories nested in inhospitable institutions therefore had time to settle in; the memories of their past traumas was visceral for all the six teachers I spoke with except one. They were still haunted. Therefore in the Epilogue, I think with theory, using haunting to answer my ghosts and the ghosts of my participants in their calls for justice. To do so, I leverage speculative fiction because of its uniquely emancipatory potential, writing a utopian short story of lactation in education to assign a hopeful counter-narrative to the plight of lactating teacher-parents in U.S. schools. In other words, I present a case for speculative fiction as a means to “blur and bridge the division of the fictional (affective and non-scientific) and theoretical (rational and scientific) worlds” (Rhee, 2021, p. 29). I hold up their stories as theory, exploring this space not as a means by which I purport to draw any grand conclusions about the plight of lactating teacher-parents,

but rather as a way to honor my participants, myself, and our ghosts by imagining a world free from the intersecting and oppressive forces of patriarchy and global neoliberal capitalism: a world where we can be invited into the space of schools as parents and people in all our embodied humanity.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

Statement of The Problem

On December 29th, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections for Nursing Mothers, or PUMP Act (S. 1658/H.R. 3110). The PUMP Act expands workplace protections for employees with a need to express breast¹ milk, specifically extending the requirement that employers provide certain accommodations to salaried workers— like teachers and nurses— not covered under existing law (U.S. Breastfeeding Committee, n.d.; Wage and Hour Division, January 2023). Prior to passage of the PUMP Act, the only federal protections for workplace lactation came from an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) passed in March 2010, which provided the following protections to U.S. workers wishing to practice pumping:

1. A reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for 1 year after the child’s birth each time such employee has need to express the milk; and
2. A place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk.

¹ Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the act of expressing milk as *nursing* or *lactation* or *infant feeding*, as opposed to the colloquial *breastfeeding*. As I will elaborate in more detail later in this chapter, this is an acknowledgment that people who do not identify as women or with having breasts can and do practice lactation (MacDonald et al., 2016), in addition to a refusal to perpetuate discourses which essentialize this form of labor as *women’s* work. I use *breastfeeding* or *breasts* to refer to infant feeding practices only when paraphrasing or directly citing another text.

However, between March 2010 and December 2022, the FLSA only covered *hourly* employees, leaving *salaried* employees specifically exempt from its umbrella of protections. According to the specific language of the law, this included any “learned professionals” whose duties required a “prolonged course of specialized intellectual instruction” (Fair Labor Standards Act, 2004). Lawyers, doctors, theologians, accountants, actuaries, engineers, architects, chemical and biological scientists, pharmacists, and teachers were therefore exempt. Since 2010, many states passed laws to fill this gap, including Georgia (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). Colloquially known as “Charlotte’s Law” (Taylor English, 2020), named after a Georgia teacher who sued after having been told by a supervisor that she would either have to stop pumping during her breaks or otherwise stay late after school to make up the time she missed, Georgia Code § 34-1-6 “requires employers to provide break time of reasonable duration to an employee who desires to express breast milk at the worksite during work hours. This break time shall be paid at the employee's regular rate of compensation” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). The short tenure of Charlotte’s Law has, however, now been rendered irrelevant by passage of the PUMP Act (2022) which extends federal FLSA protections for workplace lactation to most hourly and salaried employees. Therefore beginning on December 29, 2022, and for the first time in U.S. history, there are federal legal protections for agriculture workers, nurses, taxi drivers, home care workers, managers, and of particular salience to this dissertation, teachers, to practice lactation in the workplace.

Pilot Study

For the particular case of Georgia teachers, the PUMP Act (2022) is simply an extension of preexisting protections that should, theoretically, have been in place for workplace lactation since 2020 (theoretically being the operative term). My skepticism regarding a potential gap

between the *de jure* letter of the law and its *de facto* implementation stems from the findings of a pilot study on teacher lactation conducted in fall 2021. For this project, I worked alongside Dr. Ajay Sharma to investigate both the material and the discursive structures delimiting lactation practices amongst current and former classroom teachers. Using snowball sampling (Mertler & Charles, 2005), we recruited six participants with teaching experience spanning five U.S. states: New York, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina. In this pilot study, we asked teachers to retroactively recall their experiences practicing pumping while working as full-time classroom teachers. Our original research questions were as follows:

1. *What are the physical contexts available to middle grades educators for lactation in public schools in the United States? How are these spaces negotiated? What do educators practicing lactation require from these spaces?*
2. *How do middle grades educators conceptualize their adaptations of lactation behaviors? How do other support staff construct discourses around lactation while working full-time in middle schools?*
3. *How do the physical constraints and popular discourses surrounding lactation impact the decision-making of new parents while teaching full-time in middle schools in the United States?*

Theoretical Perspectives Informing the Pilot Study

Pursuant to the dominance of neoliberalism as a discourse in educational contexts in the United States, our starting point in this study was a poststructural understanding of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality (Foucault, 2008; Lemke, 2001; Oksala, 2013). We leveraged Foucauldian articulations of disciplinary power to understand how discourses simultaneously act upon and are (re)constituted by bodies (Foucault, 1977; Palmer, 1998). That is, discourses are

“heterogeneously realized in a variety of forms, not only in the textuality of representation and knowledge, but in the regulating principles and actions of institutions, in forms of everyday practice, in actual material arrangements such as that of architectural structure” (Hook, 2007, p. 179). We therefore approached the data with a view of discourse and materiality as mutually constitutive, intertwined spheres of influence both *structuring* and structured *by* the available realm of decision-making for teachers in the U.S. Furthermore, while aware of neoliberalism as a dominant discourse in U.S. educational contexts, we also endeavored to take up the concept with both caution and care to avoid (re)inscribing and (re)producing its hegemony. In education, neoliberalism has proven a difficult concept to pin down. This rascally ide(a/ology) has been taken up in ways that have tended to be “ahistorical, hegemonic, and monolithic” (Schmeichel, Sharma & Pittard, 2017, p. 211), coming to stand in as a placeholder for *any* unsavory policy change in schools. Rodgers (2018) describes neoliberalism as “the linguistic omnivore of our times, a neologism that threatens to swallow up all other words around it” (p. 78). Therefore, we tried to heed Brown’s (2015) warning to approach neoliberalism with “alertness to its inconstancy and plasticity” (p. 21), remaining attentive to its complex entanglement(s) with other discourses in education to [try to] avoid (re)signifying its instantiation as a form of hegemonic global truth. We did this by bringing neoliberalism into conversation with feminist theories that, as I explain in Chapter 3, also provide a lens through which we can understand the peculiarly gendered reproduction of the teaching body.

Findings From The Pilot Study

In our analysis, we found what seemed to be a level of carefully cultivated bureaucratic ignorance surrounding the legal landscape of protections around infant feeding practices in the workplace (Benson & Sharma, 2023). Alternately labeled “wilful ignorance” (Tuana, 2006) or

“wilful forms of silencing” (Anderson & Bunnin, 2020), feminist scholars have articulated the mechanisms by which certain marginalized (i.e. racialized, or in this case, feminized) discursive resources are strategically blocked with the aim of maintaining oppressive structures (i.e. patriarchy). Participants in our study, for example, repeatedly described how complex and confusing the process to secure parental leave was, and Human Resources representatives as unhelpful or even openly hostile. For instance, one participant was forced to return to work just 21 days after the birth of her second child because she was [incorrectly] told by an HR representative that she could not take FMLA leave twice in a single calendar year, and her two children are exactly 362 days apart. Another participant was shamed by an HR representative who implied that this teacher would be doing her students a disservice by taking the full 12 weeks of [unpaid] FMLA leave to which she was/is entitled, suggesting that she consider coming back to work after just six weeks instead. In addition, once they returned from parental leave, our participants were rarely offered assistance by administration and other building leaders in finding secure spaces to pump and carving out reasonable break time during the day for pumping. Only one participant in six described being proactively approached by her principal to discuss structures available for both support during pregnancy and to facilitate her return to work after childbirth. Despite being highly educated veteran professionals, the wilfully ignorant districts and administrators that should have been supporting the other five teachers in this pilot left them with limited understandings of how to make sense of what they could and could not do around pregnancy and lactation.

Participants were thus forced to resort to one of the only available discourses [they felt were] at their disposal to navigate the material and discursive obstacles preventing them from successfully pumping: that of the individualizing, responsabilizing script of neoliberal feminism

(Scharff, 2012; Rottenberg, 2014). According to neoliberal feminism, a rhetoric perhaps most popularly touted by former Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg in her 2013 book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, women should market themselves as consumer objects, working twice as hard as men for professional advancement in the workplace. For the teachers in our study, this mostly meant “figuring it out” for themselves, working tirelessly to “make it work” while pumping in school. For instance, without access to a secure, locked space to pump, several teachers papered over classroom windows to try to find privacy in their rooms, where they were repeatedly interrupted during pumping sessions by custodians, students, and other co-workers. Additionally, without a fridge to store their milk, several teachers decided to bring lunch boxes full of ice to school as a solution for milk storage. In other words, without informational and material support, participants had to use creative problem solving to find ways to merge the conflicting spheres of their private lives as parents and their public lives as educators on their own. What is important to consider here is that instead of (and, at times, in addition to) recognizing how the education system failed to provide accommodations to render workplace lactation an accessible practice, the teachers were, more often than not, left with no other choice than to “make it work” in unsupportive school climates, or else simply give up on lactation altogether (which several were also forced to do when workplace stress impeded their milk production). Most simply endeavored to “figure it out” for themselves, internalizing their in/ability to merge the two spheres of public and private life, leading almost invariably to feelings of failure and not-enoughness (Hughes, 2014). The problem with neoliberal feminism, however, is that it focuses on *individualized* responses to what are, in many cases, *systemic* gender, racial, and class biases in the workplace. Therefore this study suggests that neoliberalism feminism as the only viable discourse available for lactating teacher-parents is problematic

because, in addition to creating emotionally and bureaucratically violent experiences for our participants, individualizing a response to systemic problems leaves an inequitable status quo in schools intact and unchallenged.

A second finding from the pilot study stems from the peculiar nature of lactation as a location of embodied conflict. Most workplaces in the United States— with schools being no exception— are structured for a default body that is male (Davies, et al. 2005; Oyêwùmi, 2005; Young, 2020). This means that the workplace itself, as well as the dominant values informing the experiences of workers, were/are designed with a body in mind that does not gestate life; nurse infant children; or bear primary responsibility for caring for children when they get sick. For example, despite how commonplace childbirth is, and how unique a physiological process, the districts where our participants work(ed) still did not have a specific process in place for navigating it. Instead, when securing leave with Human Resources, participants had to fill out forms for regular short-term disability or illness— the same forms one might use for a heart attack or a car wreck. Thorley (2021) thus argues that the practice of lactation in the workplace gives rise to “a dichotomy... where women perform the reproductive, corporeal work of breastfeeding, while performing the disembodied corporate work of the ideal worker” (p. 8). The values of the private sphere dictate that “breast is best”, that nursing an infant with one’s own milk is the healthiest, safest, and therefore preferred option for infant feeding. This is in stark contrast to the values of the public sphere, where the ideal worker does not get sick, require leave to have or care for children, or encounter any other obstacles to maximizing workplace productivity and efficiency. In other words, theorizing lactation as a location of embodied conflict refers to the fact that nursing an infant child is a practice that brings into harsh opposition the conflicting ideals of being a good worker and a good parent. If being a good parent means nursing one’s

child, and being a good worker means maximizing productivity and efficiency, then it is almost impossible for a lactating person— who must be available at any time, day or night, to respond to let down as it occurs, and then to nurse/pump for an indeterminate amount of time until the milk ducts are completely drained— to simultaneously embody both ideals. A critical guiding assumption informing this study, therefore, is the importance of acknowledging cultural norms around the body. This is a necessary first step in finding ways to be inclusive of and accommodate *all* bodies.

Based on data collected during the 2021 pilot study, a second guiding assumption that informed this dissertation study is the importance of understanding neoliberalism discourses— specifically how they delimit the options lactating teacher-parents perceive as viable. Neoliberalism, as a dominant discourse in U.S. workplaces, fashions the individual subject as a rational, autonomous, self-actualizing actor. Lactation, in stark contrast, “...represents a radical, alternative form of embodied subjectivity when compared to the idea of autonomous personhood held up as ideal in Western societies” (Hausman, 2004, p. 276). A schism thereby arises when policies like the PUMP Act (2022), originally intended to help lactating parents, instead end up unintentionally harming them. For instance, using the example of the Reasonable Break Time provisions from the FLSA, Boyer (2014) argues that policies embedded in neoliberal ideology fail mothers as they simply place more burdens on them to figure out solutions to lactation themselves. What she terms “neoliberal motherhood” (p. 270) is characteristic of a mode of neoliberal citizenship in which individuals are made responsible for the maintenance of their own health and welfare:

Under Reasonable Break Time, the responsibility for children’s health is achieved through an almost wholly individuated socio-technical system of breast pumps,

lactation rooms, refrigerators, and working mothers willing to discipline their bodies to the rigours of pumping at work. This costs organisations relatively little when compared with robust maternity leave, in terms of both maternity pay and lost labour. (Boyer, 2014, p. 281)

And since Reasonable Break Time provisions only leave space for pumping, it is far more convenient and less impactful on wage labor than bringing babies into spaces of wage work each time they need to be fed. Moreover, the danger to the type of disembodied approach represented by the Reasonable Break Time provision is that it presents the guise of a solution that makes calls for alternatives appear unnecessary (Boyer, 2014). Theories of neoliberalism give us a language for critiquing policies like the PUMP Act, and how their implementation reverberates with unintended consequences in the bodies of teachers practicing (or attempting to practice) lactation in schools.

This dissertation study therefore takes place during a critical turning point in the working lives of teachers practicing infant feeding upon returning to the classroom, as the ink has scarcely dried on the PUMP Act’s extension of federal legal protections to millions more American workers. It remains to be seen if this unfunded mandate is being enacted with fidelity. Or, as Benson and Sharma (2023) found, are neoliberal and patriarchal norms— an unholy union that Campbell (2013; 2014) terms “neoliberal neo-patriarchy” – that continue to predominate budgetary decision-making processes in U.S. workplaces working to dilute the impact of changes that should benefit lactating teacher-parents?

Review of The Literature on Lactation in The Workplace

Currently, few studies have been conducted about the working lives of U.S. teachers practicing lactation. There has been much research conducted about lactation in the American

workplace generally, and what scholars have been able to conclude paints a bleak portrait. Despite the well-established consensus among medical experts that lactation is healthier for babies² (Galtry, 1997; McCarter-Spaulding, 2008; WHO, 2009), in addition to being far less expensive than infant feeding with formula (which can cost upwards of \$1500 per year), lactation rates amongst parents in the U.S. remain low. One study estimated that of the 80% of U.S. women who initiate lactation, only 16% continue breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of the child's life (Boyer, 2014). Several scholars have concluded that low rates of lactation among working parents are the direct result of low levels of support for infant feeding practices in U.S. workplaces (Hentges & Pilot, 2021; Kim, Shin & Donovan, 2019; Wallenborn et al., 2018; Whitley, Ro & Choi, 2019). For instance, Wallenborn et al. (2018) surveyed breastfeeding mothers and found that one in five reported that their workplace was not supportive of the practice. Other studies have found that necessary support must come at the organizational level and include written policies and a family-friendly environment to support women who are breastfeeding (Dinour, Pope & Bai, 2015; Vilar-Compte et al., 2021). Although lactation-friendly environments—such as those with dedicated lactation rooms, generous parental leave, and flexible scheduling—have been found to increase employee retention, saving resources required to hire and train new employees (Kim, Shin & Donovan, 2019), returning to employment has been established as a primary impediment to breastfeeding duration (Hentges &

² The purported health benefits of lactation have been contested by some feminist researchers. For instance, Williams (2012) and Oster (2019) both point out that most studies of lactation are biased by the fact that women who have the time, space, and energy to practice lactation typically have access to education and financial resources that mark them as categorically privileged and therefore able to access different choices than women who do not. Therefore it is almost impossible to establish a causal relationship between health and educational attainment outcomes between babies who are and are not breastfed, since the same high levels of income and educational attainment possessed by parents would correlate with better short and long term outcomes for children even independent of lactation.

Pilot, 2021). Indeed, low levels of support for workplace lactation have been found to be correlated with low levels of job satisfaction (Whitley, Ro & Choi, 2019).

For the particular case of teachers, there is perhaps even more cause for alarm as a day in the life of a school teacher is notoriously scheduled down to the minute with direct instruction, morning and afternoon duty stations, and an endless stream of meetings for professional development, IEPs, BIPs, grade level, content area, collaborative planning, and so on. It is a unique characteristic of the teaching profession that you cannot abandon your responsibilities to supervise students for an errant minute in the case of an unexpected bathroom break. Even a scheduled doctor's appointment for routine care is a nuisance for teachers, as it requires advanced planning to secure a substitute teacher, who will also need copies of attendance rosters, seating charts, detailed instructions for what to do in case of inclement weather or a fire drill, as well as lesson plans for the day's instructional activities. Many teachers don't even get to eat lunch in solitude, having instead to supervise their students on cafeteria duty for lunch breaks that have been whittled down to the state minimum required break time of 15 minutes. Though at the time of this writing, I was able to find less than a handful of scholarly articles documenting the particular plight of lactating teacher-parents, it stands to reason that combining this level of rigorous, minute-by-minute scheduling with the often unpredictable needs of the body when practicing lactation is perhaps uniquely challenging in education.

What little has been written about lactation in teaching in particular mirrors the bleak portrait of U.S. workers as a whole practicing lactation. In a 2019 article in *NewsWeek*, Lee and Morris reported that many teachers are forced to wean their babies earlier than they would otherwise like because they are not provided reasonable accommodations (i.e. access to break time and a safe, private, and locked space) to practice pumping at school. There are financial

ramifications for parents as well, with some teachers being forced to resign or take unpaid leave in order to continue practicing lactation (Lee & Morris, 2019, March 20). In another investigation of lactating teacher-parents from *The Washington Post*, Brown (2015) found that in many school districts, the extent to which teachers were or were not supported to practice pumping came down to how accommodating individual principals were, arguing that “mothers shouldn’t have to depend on the largesse or understanding of their bosses” (Brown, 2015, August 2). Finally, Phillips (2020) conducted a mixed-methods dissertation study entitled *K-12 Teachers’ Experiences ‘With or Without’ Breastfeeding/Pumping Policy in the School Workplace*. This study leveraged Qualtrics survey data collected through non-probability purposeful sampling to conclude that “teachers are able to pump, but are met with challenges with a school culture and an environment that is not conducive to pumping or personal needs” (Phillips, 2020, p. vi). Based on over 2,000 survey responses, Phillips grouped the challenges faced by teachers into three primary categories – “privacy, accommodations, and support” (2020, p. 93) – though she also discussed how school culture plays a role in structuring access to all three. Based on the paucity of documentation available, it stands to reason that the current context for teachers practicing lactation in the U.S. is problematic. What remains to be seen, given our current and rapidly evolving landscape of legal protections for lactation amongst U.S. teachers, is how these policies are being enacted and what additional support lactating teacher-parents may require.

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this feminist qualitative interview study was to understand infant feeding practices among teachers who have recently returned to full-time work in the classroom following the birth of a child. Specifically, I aimed to understand how teachers are constrained in

their decision-making around lactation and how they conceptualize their responses and adaptations to structural, discursive, and/or temporal boundaries in the increasingly neoliberal context of U.S. public schooling.

In this study, I subscribed to a Foucauldian view of discourse and materiality as distinct but intertwined and co-constitutive in nature (Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Hook, 2007). While it would be simple enough, for example, to suggest that providing the material conditions necessary to facilitate lactation—time, space, and a fridge—would be sufficient to support teacher-parents, the co-constitutive nature of materiality and discourse complicates this picture. Discourses are not abstract concepts. In structuring the way(s) we think, and the language we have available to make sense of our shared realities, discourses influence and impact material structures. However, discourses also need a material basis in order to circulate and be effective and powerful (Weedon, 1978). My primary objective with this dissertation study, therefore, was to understand the material-discursive contexts that delimit the actions and practices of new teacher-parents who choose lactation.

Scholars have written about the material-discursive constraints placed on parents practicing lactation in the workplace in a variety of ways. Some have focused on the limited choices available to women constrained by job demands (Huppertz et al., 2018), emphasizing the impact of neoliberal policies that restrict options for breastfeeding (Thorley, 2021). However, it is not simply the maintenance of repressive structures that restrict options for lactation; discourses also work on the bodies of lactating teacher-parents in oppressive ways. For example, McCabe (2016) argues that neoliberalism molds maternal subjectivities according to marketized rhetoric of aggressive independence and self-sufficiency. Boyer (2014) offers the frame of “neoliberal motherhood” to describe the shifting context of working motherhood in the

contemporary United States as expectations are reshaped around wage-work and care-work. In applying these frames to the work of teachers, I leveraged a poststructural understanding that neither a focus on the material conditions in which teachers navigate lactation—the physical contexts of their schools—nor an exclusive focus on the discourses available to teachers—represented by the legal landscape of protections to which they *should* be entitled— would be, in isolation, a sufficient starting point.

Research Questions

I therefore sought an analysis of both the material *and* discursive contexts in which public school teachers navigate lactation, guided by the following research questions:

1. *What are the material-discursive contexts in which public school teachers experience lactation?*
2. *How do the teachers in this study navigate lactation in their existing school structures?*
3. *How are Georgia school districts taking up and enacting the 2020 Charlotte's Law?*

In order to expand understandings of what I refer to as *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*³, I interviewed teachers in a single county in Georgia with experience practicing lactation sometime since the passage of Charlotte's Law in 2020. Pursuant to disruptions in face-to-face learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020-2021 school year was excluded (as many districts continued distance or virtual learning for most of that year). This left the pool of eligible participants limited to those who had practiced pumping during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years, when the protections of Charlotte's Law (the same protections now

³ The decision to focus on neoliberal *parenthood* as opposed to neoliberal *motherhood* (Boyer, 2014) is intentional, as will be elaborated in the section entitled "Definition of Terms".

afforded to teachers nationwide through the PUMP Act of December 2022) *should have* applied to all public school teachers in Georgia. Initially, I attempted to further narrow the field of inquiry from the original pilot study (Benson & Sharma, 2023) to focus exclusively on middle grades teachers. Having worked as a middle school teacher for six years and thus being keenly aware of the particular scheduling challenges posed by the typical middle school model, this was the population with which I felt most knowledgeable. However, participant recruitment proved a singularly difficult task— a perhaps unsurprising revelation, given the time constraints faced by most teachers. Even more, when compounded with the incredible around-the-clock demands of infant care in the early days of parenthood, the ability of participants in my target demographic to find a free hour in the day to participate in an interview was virtually nil. The study therefore consists of interview data collected from five teachers from a single county in Georgia, all of whom had practiced (or attempted to practice) pumping at work following the birth of a child sometime during the 2021-22 or 2022-23 school years: one elementary teacher, one high school teacher, and three middle school teachers.

Significance of The Study

As previously mentioned, though much research has been conducted on lactation in the workplace in general, there has been little research conducted on infant feeding practices specifically in the context of public school teach(ers/ing). The first significant contribution of the current study is therefore that it responds to this critical gap in understanding.

Second, based on the implications of Benson and Sharma's (2023) pilot study, an important contribution of the current study is simply spreading awareness about the rights of teachers around lactation: (1) reasonable break time, and (2) access to a locked space to pump that is not a bathroom. Patriarchal structures are (re)produced through a carefully cultivated

silence about issues like women's health and their rights. If no one is talking about these issues, then the top-down changes coming from federal legislation like the PUMP Act of 2022 will not be effective. Real change will only come when the top-down changes are met by bottom-up, grassroots efforts coming from educators themselves to create spaces where their embodied experiences can be talked about. Otherwise put, in keeping these normal issues of health and reproduction in the dark, we miss opportunities to challenge the carefully cultivated ignorance that perpetuates the building and maintenance of inequitable structures. By sharing our experiences through research encounters with participants— who then go on to spread the word in their own networks of fellow parents and educators— top-down can meet bottom-up to disrupt these violent discursive silences.

Finally, this study points to a need to emphasize ways to make the invisible visible. Hidden structures in U.S. institutions like sexism, patriarchy, racism, classism, misogyny, xenophobia, imperialism, and Ableism are all enabled to survive and thrive because they are aspects of our shared culture in the U.S. that are largely hidden. When oppressive structures are normalized, it is difficult to see how they function; how they are maintained; and how exclusionary they can be, particularly in classroom spaces. By bringing light to the ways these hidden structures are maintained and (re)produced, we can bring to the forefront of our collective discourse critical conversations about how to change them.

In conclusion, though this study focused on lactation, its significance is not necessarily only about lactation: lactation simply provides an instance of a more violent phenomenon where exclusion happens because of entrenched patriarchy and dominant discourses of neoliberalism. Bringing oppressive structures such as these to light, then, creates space to start thinking through ways to change them. In this study, I therefore endeavored to move towards a conceptualization

of parenthood that provides room for honoring our embodied experiences; moves beyond violent binaries; and provides a critique of discourses of neoliberal neopatriarchy (Campbell, 2013; 2014) that continue to dominate U.S. workplaces.

Definition of Terms

Below, I explain how this study departs in several key ways from colloquial language used to describe infant feeding and other historically gendered parenting practices. The majority of scholars rely primarily on the traditional language of *breastfeeding* (Galtry, 1997; Hausman, 2004; Hentges & Pilot, 2021; Kim, Shin & Donovan, 2019; McCarter-Spaulding, 2008; Phillips, 2020; Thorley, 2021; Vilar-Compte et al., 2021; Wallenborn et al., 2018; Whitley, Ro & Choi, 2019) in reference to infant feeding practices, though sometimes interchangeably with gender non-specific terminology like *lactation* and *nursing*. All of the policy documents I came across to inform this research are predictably grounded in a language of gender binaries, referring mostly to breastfeeding *women*, *mothers*, and *maternity* leave (FLSA, 2004; PUMP Act, 2022; PWFA, 2023) in ways that a rising tide of critical scholars are arguing inaccurately (and violently) reifies the idea of an essential biological *woman* as exclusively capable of birthing a child and expressing milk (Averett, 2021; MacDonald et al., 2016; Smith & Bamberger, 2021).

Mainstream discourses in parenting and infant feeding practices also focus almost exclusively on *women* and *mothers* (WHO, 2009), despite an increasingly widespread awareness that people who do not identify as cisgender women, people who do not identify with the essentialization of their body parts as breasts, and/or people who do not prefer to conceptualize their parenting role as *motherhood* can and do have bodies that produce milk to feed their children (Denny, 2023, August 7; Rummler, 2023, December 7). In 2021, the *Journal of Human Lactation* released an editorial addressing growing concerns over the tendency towards gender

essentialism that can be inscribed in and reified by academic work that relies on binary conceptualization of gender. The editors write:

The words we use can and do erase and render invisible the caregiving and reproductive capacities and experiences of lesbian mothers, gay fathers, gender queer, gender non-conforming and trans individuals. Together these small but chronic erasures create a façade of homogeneity that reinforces a larger, structural, institutional, and intellectual social erasure. (Smith & Bamberger, 2021, p. 441)

The authors go on to describe how their goal in writing this policy statement was not gender neutrality, the “pretense that gender does not exist or matter” (p. 442); rather, they aimed for gender *inclusion* as a recognition that our assumptions about gender inform the way we do research at every level.

Conflating lactation with *womanhood* is a form of erasure that is being brought to light by the voices of practitioners, activists in online communities (for examples, see the LGBTQ+ news site *Them*, and/or *Reckon*, a website and daily newsletter on Black joy), and a small but growing body of research around the experiences of transmasculine individuals’ experiences with chestfeeding (a more inclusive way to refer to lactation that is not contingent on an identification with breasts). For instance, MacDonald et al. (2016) studied trans parents’ experiences with lactation, highlighting how the transmen practicing nursing did not necessarily perceive the practice as feminine. As Averett (2021) explains, there are also lesbian couples with only one gestational parent, non-binary parents whose experiences do not conform with either normative masculinity or femininity, and transmen practicing lactation, all of whose experiences are erased when conflating ‘woman’ with gender non-specific parenting and infant feeding

practices. Highlighting the experiences of LGBTQ+ parents creates the potential⁴ to de-essentialize motherhood by decoupling it from female identities and embodiment (Averett, 2021). Conversely, using broad brushstrokes to talk about the experiences of ‘women’ tends to obscure differences between and across *women*, such as how experiences vary across race and social class (Averett, 2021), while simultaneously erasing the experiences of queer and trans parents (Denny, 2023, August 7; Rummler, 2023, December 7).

In addition to the erasure committed when speaking of lactation and/or parenting in terms of ‘women’ or ‘mothers’, this use of language reinforces an implicit assumption that lactation is a problem of/for *women*, thereby committing the twin faults of gender and biological essentialism in (re)inscribing the mothering role onto the bodies of people read in society as women. The violence of Western binary logic limits our thinking in terms of essentializing lactation as a practice that only women can perform. This is a flawed premise for two reasons. First, when building on their foundational argument for the performativity of gender in *Gender Trouble* (2007), Judith Butler (2011) argues in *Bodies That Matter* that biological sex is not a natural category but a normative one. Binary sex as exclusively male or female is a norm in society, Butler argues: part of a regulatory process that produces the bodies it governs. In this way, the materiality of the body is always already wrapped up in the power relations that structure discourse around what is considered “natural”. Otherwise stated, the body is unable to function outside cultural constructions. Any discourse that paints an essentializing, deterministic portrait of human behavior or physical presentation on the basis of biological sex should therefore be viewed with careful scrutiny.

⁴ This is a generalization, obviously. Queer parents can reinforce dominant norms and values, while cis and heteronormative parents can work to challenge them.

Second, referring to parenting experiences as ‘mothering’ and ‘fathering’ naturalizes gender roles, cisheteropatriarchy, and biological sex (Averett, 2021) in ways that conflate being a woman with child rearing responsibilities and other undervalued care work that are not necessarily deterministic to *any* body. For cisgender women, the violence of binary logic as constructed in a Western ontology has led to a self-defeating tendency to essentialize embodied experiences by viewing them exclusively through the narrow lenses of our prescribed roles as *mothers*. In other words, people socialized as women are more likely to accept burdens of care work like cooking, cleaning, rearing children, and caring for the elderly— roles that anyone, regardless of assigned or perceived sex or gender, can perform— when they see these roles as being deterministic to their bodies, part and parcel to a biological destiny that naturalizes gender inequity. Averett (2021) argues against the potential violence of this essentialization when it serves to reinscribe the labor of *mothering* onto women’s bodies. She writes a call for feminist researchers to

...pay closer attention to the ways in which our research and conversations about mothering and fathering may naturalise biological sex, and consequently continue to essentialise motherhood, despite our efforts to do the opposite. Paying attention to assumptions that we make about whose parenting behaviours are considered ‘mothering’ or ‘fathering’ will allow for a reinvigoration of theorisation about mothering and gender inequality, moving these conversations in important new directions that decentre heteronormative, cisnormative and nuclear family models. (p. 285)

In other words, in generalizing the experiences of *women*, we may be unintentionally reifying and reinscribing the caregiving labor of parenting onto certain bodies. In fact, only some women

are pregnant or nurse their babies, and even then only for short durations of their lives. You can be a woman and not have children. You can be a woman and not have a uterus. There are infinite variations between and across people who identify as women. As Averett (2021) writes, “By leaving unquestioned the belief that female parents are mothers and that the parenting behavior they undertake is mothering behavior...we reify the notion that mothering behavior adheres to women’s bodies, and thus essentialize gendered embodiment” (p. 285). If we conflate the two in our scholarship—*woman* and *mother*—we naturalize the relationship between the non-gender specific caregiving responsibilities of a *parent* and the essentialist, biological role of *woman* as *mother*. Instead of obscuring our differences in essentializing discourses of biological womanhood, in this dissertation I strive for a language of heterogeneity and fragmentation that opens up the category of woman beyond these narrow, oppressive categorical limitations (Butler, 1995).

While all five participants [at the time of data collection] identified as cisgender, heterosexual women, this dissertation still begins with a refusal to take up the mantle of ‘woman’ as an acknowledgment that people who do not identify as women can and do nurse their babies. This is because when theorizing lactation, it bears differentiating between the specific, contextualized experiences of the participants in this particular study, and infant feeding practices in the abstract. In striving to avoid gender essentialism in this research, therefore, I leverage the terminology of *nursing* or *lactation* to describe the expression of milk, instead of the colloquial *breastfeeding*, as well as talking generally about *parenting* instead of *mother[ing/hood]* or *father[ing/hood]*. As academics, the way we word the world has critical ontological consequences; therefore I want to be attentive to how my own scholarship contributes to the way this discourse around lactation and the plurality of bodies is evolving.

Language matters because, simply put, "Discourse matters" (Sharma, 2021, p. 543). The language we use to word the world plays a powerful role in producing it, determining how and what we are capable of thinking and subsequently constituting individual subjectivities (Weedon, 1987). In other words, taking up certain language is a political move that becomes enmeshed in the way(s) we make sense of, move through, and subsequently act in the world. As Foucault (1997) famously stated, the point is "not that everything is bad, but that *everything is dangerous*, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (p. 256, emphasis added). My aim here is not to cast a shadow over generations of feminist scholars who have mobilized the binary category of *woman* to do their liberatory work; without their work I would not be able to do my own. Rather, I acknowledge this ontological commitment to language because, quite simply, we still have work to do.

Delimitations of The Study

For this study, I wished to learn from teachers who have had at least one experience working full-time as a classroom teacher while attempting to pump milk for their infant child(ren). Five people ultimately consented to participate in the study. For the sake of consistency in understanding district policies, they were all recruited from a single mid-sized county in Georgia. One of the potential limitations of the study is the heterogeneity of the sample, in that every participant self-identified as a cisgender, heterosexual White woman. Future research is clearly needed that speaks to a broader array of intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) experiences with lactation. In addition, three of the participants already had children prior to embarking on this study. Therefore they already had experience navigating the legal landscape of lactation in schools prior to having their second or third child, about whom they were interviewed for this study. This made them generally more knowledgeable (though this can never

be causally assumed) about what their rights were and how to navigate the material-discursive obstacles to pumping at schools than could perhaps be expected from someone who had never done it before.

Unfortunately, this study excluded potential participants who had practiced lactation while working as classroom teachers prior to the 2020 passage of Charlotte's Law that extended statewide reasonable break time protections to educators in Georgia. As the intended aim of this analysis was to explore how lactation is being taken up with the passage of legal protections that should, theoretically, create space for lactating teacher-parents to practice pumping, I chose to draw inclusion parameters around the stories of individuals who pumped after the 2021 school year. This primary criteria for inclusion was refined as a result of the findings of Benson and Sharma's 2021 pilot study, where we did choose to include the retroactive (re)tellings of educators who had practiced pumping at any point in their careers, and in any state in the country; those results, described above, have been published elsewhere (Benson & Sharma, 2023).

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

In order to understand the material-discursive contexts in which public school teachers in Georgia have been/are experiencing infant feeding practices, it is essential to first understand two distinct yet related spheres which give context to their decision-making. The first are the discourses available to teachers in schools as professional workplaces, and how these discourses work on/through the bodies of teachers to delimit the range of options they draw upon to navigate their experiences. Owing to the hegemony of neoliberalization discourses in U.S. workplaces— schools being no exception— this study was informed first and foremost by theoretical perspectives of neoliberalism; therefore this chapter begins with an overview of how the concept is being taken up within the context of the current study. The second, pursuant to the intimately embodied experience of nursing, is the body. Therefore I continue by reviewing feminist perspectives of the body and embodiment, bringing both into conversation with feminist theorizing on the impact of neoliberalization discourses on conditions of gender equity. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion of how these two intertwined discursive fields act on and enable an understanding of the materiality of teachers' bodies in schools. To my current knowledge, there is no existing literature where scholars bring feminist theories of embodiment into conversation with neoliberalism discourses to understand the practice of lactation specifically amongst teachers in schools. One of the current aims of this study, then, is to move the field forward in understanding the specific needs and challenges of teachers practicing lactation,

which I described in Chapter 2 as a critical juncture in a rapidly evolving landscape of legal protections surrounding infant feeding.

Part I: Neoliberalism

The concept of neoliberalism in critical education has become somewhat of a bogeyman, a catch-all term synonymous with a vague, creeping evil that is elusive and ubiquitous, yet that scholars generally agree pose a serious threat to public education (Apple, 2017; Gale de Saxe et al., 2020). Researchers have documented how neoliberal trends in the American education system, such as a precipitous rise in the frequency and weight of standardized testing, have led to rising racial and class inequalities in schools (Au, 2016; Brathwaite, 2017). Others have contended that manifestations of neoliberalism in schools are explicitly anti-feminist, as privatization and other education ‘reforms’ have contributed to the deprofessionalization of an overwhelmingly feminized workforce (De Saxe et al., 2020). However, neoliberalism has no face, no singular person or country or institution on which the academic community (or any other community for that matter) can blame its ills. It is everywhere and nowhere all at once: written into the fabric of our institutions; carved into the depths of our subconscious minds; present in everything from transnational fiscal policy to the way we decide what to cook for dinner. Over the course of the past few decades, this “rascal concept” (Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010, p. 184) has been contested, marshaled, and debated in education in various ways. Apple (2017), for instance, insists that neoliberalism “does not stand alone, and takes on different forms in different contexts” (p. 148), rendering it crucial to pay critical attention to the complex alliances and power blocs of conservative modernization that have been responsible for advocating policies of neoconservatism in various ways across time and space. I therefore approach this concept with caution and alertness of the potential to (re)inscribe the hegemony of

neoliberalization discourses, beginning with the next section which briefly reviews the literature on neoliberalism to situate the term and describe how its ideas frame this dissertation study.

What Is It?

Neoliberalism is generally understood as rising to prominence in the 1980s with the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the U.S. and Great Britain, respectively (Harvey, 2005). These two world powers ushered in an era of renewed cultural and ideological imperialism for the West through a series of economic reforms that shifted policy away from Keynesian welfarism: policies geared towards ensuring full employment and a robust social welfare system (Larner, 2000). Instead, these two administrations centered their political agendas around removing regulations to free markets, recasting the role of government as “focused on enhancing economic efficiency and international competitiveness” (Larner, 2000, p. 7).

Neoliberal policies generally include an emphasis on deregulation of industries and capital flows; tax and budget cuts; radical reduction in welfare spending; privatization of public goods such as education, healthcare, and prisons; the end of wealth redistribution; the financialization and commodification of everything; and a pro-corporate/anti-big-government political stance (Brown, 2015; Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005). In his 2005 book, *A History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey explains how and why neoliberalism emerged victorious as the single answer to problems of stagflation and the perceived failure of Keynesian economic policies of redistribution under a social and moral economy, paving the way for conditions that restored the resumption of active capital accumulation through the Reagan administration policies of deregulation, tax cuts, and attacks on trade unions⁵. Aided and abetted first by a Supreme Court

⁵ For instance, the Reagan administration fired 11,345 striking air traffic controllers after they ignored the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization’s orders to end the strike and return to work in compliance with federal court injunctions. All the fired workers were also banned from public service for life. As a result of Reagan’s

ruling in 1976 that established the right of corporations to make unlimited cash contributions to political parties and political action committees as protected under their First Amendment right to free speech— essentially establishing the legal precedent of corporate personhood— conservative forces were able to leverage values of individual freedom and turn them against the regulatory practices of the state. Harvey (2005) thus argues that this period in history was part of a structural, programmatic attempt to create a “neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism” (p. 42), meant to disguise the restoration of class power to a small number of economic elites by couching it in a language of individual freedom of choice.

Yet the government policy initiatives of the Reagan/Thatcher years alone paint an incomplete picture, for neoliberalism cannot be contained to an economic policy agenda. It has also taken the shape of an emergent ideology, a way of conceptualizing the world and fashioning individual subjectivities (Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010) deeply rooted in the economized values of individualism, market freedom and security, and minimal government (Larner, 2000). There is no singular neoliberal system or concept that scholars can point to, rather a complex and sometimes parasitical entanglement with other systems and discourses from which it occasionally incorporates strands and remakes itself in times of crisis (Fraser, 2009). In other words, neoliberalism “is better understood as an ethos or a pattern of restructuring that continuously rolls out and rolls back as it adapts and transforms” (Macrine, 2016, p. 311). Scholars have thus tended to theorize neoliberalism pluralistically, as a hybrid concept that manifests in a multitude of ways. Larner (2000), for instance, articulates neoliberalism as a threefold concept: acting simultaneously as policy, ideology, and governmentality. As policy, it

firing of the government employees, private corporations were emboldened to hire scabs instead of negotiating with unions in labor disputes.

gestures to a series of business-friendly measures that have circulated through domestic and global politics since the late 1970s; as ideology, it refers to a strand of ideas that restructure economic thought around the paradigm of the efficient market; and as governmentality, it refers to a “cultural regime that stamps price and profit onto the very souls of those who live under it” (Rodgers, 2018, p. 83).

Poststructural scholars tend to emphasize the latter of these three, signaling the emergence of neoliberalism as part and parcel to an ontological shift from classical liberalism wherein the market becomes the organizing and regulative principle underlying all human behavior (Lemke, 2001). Foucault (2008) refers to this shift as the emergence of *homo oeconomicus*, a subject that is “eminently governable” (p. 270) in disseminating the model of the market to *all* domains and activities— even to phenomena which are not specifically economic, but rather social in nature. In his celebrated lectures at the Collège de France in 1978-79, Foucault articulates the ontological shift that gives rise to *homo oeconomicus* as an inversion of the traditional relationship between the state and the economy. In stark contrast to the early liberal model, under neoliberalism the *state* does not define and monitor *markets*; instead, “the *market* is itself the organizing and regulative principle underlying the *state*” (Lemke, 2001, p. 200, emphasis added). The efficiency and productivity-driven logic of the market is no longer simply used when discussing business, but has bled into the dominant discourse around care industries as well, like hospitals, prisons, daycares, nursing homes, and schools: spaces that cannot ethically operate with profit as their bottom line. Brown (2015) argues that this ubiquitous economization of every aspect of life—even where money is not at issue— leads to a fundamental shift in the nature of being subsequent to the rise of *homo oeconomicus*:

When we are figured as human capital in all that we do and in every venue, equality ceases to be our presumed natural relation with one another. Thus, equality ceases to be an a priori or fundament of neoliberalized democracy. In legislation, in jurisprudence, and the popular imaginary, inequality becomes normal, even normative. (p. 38)

Otherwise put, the rising hegemony of *homo oeconomicus* as the default condition of Western humanity has forced a retreat of values of solidarity and cohesion, as economic logic subsumes our cultural capacity to articulate a collective future.

Drawing on Neoliberalism as a Lens to Examine Teach[ers/ing]

Recently scholars have pointed to the danger inherent in bundling together these three very distinctly different manifestations of neoliberalism: as policy, ideology, and governmentality. Neoliberalism manifests/has materialized in a variety of forms across space and time, and only by understanding it as a multivocal and contradictory phenomenon can we begin to make sense of the many struggles against it in which we are engaged (Larner, 2000). Rodgers (2018), as an example, argues that crowding different manifestations of neoliberalism under a single category obscures the different strategies of resistance and alternative possibilities that its various forms would require, labeling neoliberalism “...the linguistic omnivore of our times, a neologism that threatens to swallow up all other words around it” (p. 78). The field of education is no exception to this general trend. For example, Schmeichel, Sharma and Pittard (2017) conducted a literature review of how scholars in education are taking up the concept of neoliberalism, finding a tendency to portray its manifestation as “ahistorical, hegemonic, and monolithic” (p. 211). The authors describe accountability regimes in education as one example of how the term has been indiscriminately “slapped onto any unpleasant or unsavoury

educational practice, policy, or event" (p. 205). Accountability regimes existed long before neoliberalism's rise to prominence. Therefore it should only be considered an indicator of the dominance of neoliberalism "if it is shown to be nested in an overall audit regime in education that is governed by an economic grid of intelligibility" (Schmeichel, Sharma & Pittard, 2017, p. 206). Otherwise stated, if accountability measures are not part of an overall pattern of distilling all the manifold human elements of the learning process down to the oversimplified logic of efficiency in allocating scarce resources that an economic approach would entail, then simply attaching the label of neoliberalism to any accountability measures is a self-defeating practice as it eliminates our ability to understand the phenomenon in more complex ways. Therefore the authors conclude that a more productive approach would be to acknowledge neoliberalism's complex entanglement(s) with other discourses in education and the ways in which it "attaches itself to preexisting discourses to make sense and to appear to be reasonable and rational" (p. 208). Brown (2015) echoes this sentiment, cautioning "alertness to neoliberalism's inconstancy and plasticity" (p. 21) as a way to avoid (re)signifying its current instantiations as a form of hegemonic global truth.

While Schmeichel, Sharma and Pittard (2017) point out that indiscriminate use of the neoliberalism label as a stand-in for *anything* bad in education may be helpful in creating an easily recognizable common enemy around which scholars in education can rally, it is less helpful in identifying the plurality of different manifestations of neoliberal etiology in schools that might enable teachers and students to imagine effective mechanisms for fighting back. This fight is particularly salient in the current moment in education, as neoliberalism has ushered in fundamental shifts in what counts as good teaching, good students, and quality learning (Ball, 2003). Therefore attention to its various forms may be the only way to recognize what makes it

understandable and acceptable. For example, perhaps a hallmark of neoliberalism in education is the belief that the more we marketize education by bringing corporate models of competition into schools, the better we will be able to hold teachers accountable for high standards (Alvey, n.d.). This kind of logic has led to market-based approaches, such as merit-based teacher pay, which attempt to employ statistical models linking student performance to teacher performance. Despite research suggesting that test scores provide dubious evidence of student achievement (Au, 2008; Russom, 2012), and that these sorts of accountability policies actually end up widening education gaps for marginalized students (Russom, 2012; Schroeder, Currin & McCardle, 2018), neoliberal discourses of profit and privatization remain dominant in U.S. education. Guided by a nuanced understanding of the plurality of neoliberalization discourses, this study thus takes up the concept with careful attention to context— in space, history, and time— in order to understand how these often contradictory discourses continue to appear reasonable, even in the face of overwhelming evidence of their deleterious effects.

The following section provides a rationale for taking up this rascally concept to understand the lives of teachers in schools, particularly around two related aspects of the spread of neoliberal discourses in schools: trends in favor of privatization and the commodification of education. I contend that these two related trends have converged to create education spaces where the values underlying schools as institutions are increasingly dominated by the masculinized values of productivity and efficiency. Since lactation is a timely and unpredictable process, as well as representing a form of gendered care work that is generally undervalued, the efforts of teachers in infant feeding demonstrate the incommensurability of their changing bodies with the conflicting demands of the disembodied ideal worker. As I explain in more detail below, the usurpation of the collective values of education for the greater good of a democratic society

leads to a context where schools are increasingly hostile to the bodies of lactating teacher-parents.

Privatization. Privatization has had a deleterious effect on social services in schools and beyond. By privatization, I refer to the increasing tendency of government to deregulate the operation of social services in the public sector (such as prisons, hospitals, and schools), enabling the transfer of services historically owned by the state to private companies. A common example of how privatization functions in schools can be found in classroom assessment. Since the passage of No Child Left Behind by the Bush administration in 2001, the performance of schools and the quality of teachers has been rendered in quantifiable metrics by high-stakes standardized testing⁶. Ball (2004) explains that the result has been a change in both the meaning and the experience of education, as the datafication of teaching and learning (Benson, n.d.) has empowered unelected, unaccountable private companies to create audit regimes to evaluate and surveil the work of teachers and students in schools. Systems of high-stakes testing are thus used to render students, teachers, and communities highly visible as failures, “establish[ing] a system of surveillance and an environment of teaching and learning under constant threat” (Au, 2016, p. 56). Concurrently, as Rose (1999) describes, accountability quickly becomes the defining criteria for gauging the “success” of a school. Where social services have historically been entrusted to the government’s mandate to ensure universal service provision, audit regimes instead rely on “technologies of mistrust” (Rose, 1999, p. 155) which serve to “generate an expanding spiral of distrust of professional competence, and one that feeds the demand for more radical measures which hold experts to account” (Rose, 1999, p. 155). Instead of finding blame for system-level educational “failures” in the complex structures that influence student achievement (classism,

⁶ This is not necessarily a partisan issue, however; standardized tests have existed since long before NCLB, as well as the standardization of state curriculum, which dates back to the Clinton administration.

racism, and sexism in schools, for starters), this ontological shift instead leverages the aggressive individualism of a neoliberal etiology to find fault in individual-centered attributes, such as the “quality” of an individual teacher and the “ability” of an individual student. This logic is clearly flawed, and ill-suited to offer valid causal explanations for student performance in schools; it is, however, very well-suited to “the neoliberal purposes of accountability and governance of public education and the teaching profession” (Sharma, 2021, p. 553). And thanks to deregulation and privatization of education services, this failure is profitable. According to Love (2019), the four biggest testing companies in the United States— Pearson, ETS, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and McGraw-Hill— generate “\$2 billion [U.S. dollars] a year in revenue while spending \$20 million a year lobbying for more mandated student assessments” (p. 10). Private education profits soar as teachers and students struggle to find meaning in a system where their worth is reduced to numerical test scores.

Commodification. In addition to empowering efforts to privatize education, the rising hegemony of neoliberal etiology in U.S. schools has also led to a tendency to commodify the processes of teaching and learning. In what Ball (2004) refers to as a “process of objectification” (p. 17), the complex human relationships that undergird education are reduced to mere forms of production that can be standardized, calculated, and compared. Otherwise stated, when the neoliberal logics of efficiency, cost, profit, and productivity are applied to social services like education— what Sloan (2008) refers to as the rise of the “education services sector” (p. 589) — the worth of teachers is reduced to measurable inputs. Using what Sharma (2021) refers to as “econometrics” (quantifiable markers like test scores) to measure teacher quality and student achievement becomes the norm in a neoliberal etiology that “has reclassified teaching *as* economic conduct and teachers *as* educational workers whose worth is indexed as a measurable

input in econometric models” (p. 550, emphasis in original). Teachers and students alike come to be commodified as their worth is no longer considered an intrinsic attribute of their humanity, but increasingly measured through their performance (Ball, 2004). The result is a struggle for authenticity in the teaching profession, as the mania for increasing test scores can conflict with students’ human needs for support and connection in classroom spaces: needs that cannot be rendered in quantifiable metrics. Ball (2004) refers to this as “values schizophrenia” (p. 15), wherein educators’ commitments to their students as *whole* people have to be sacrificed at the altar of performance on standardized tests. In this context, “Value replaces values. Moral reflection is unnecessary, indeed obstructive” (p. 16). Since the value of building relationships between teachers and students cannot be quantified, it becomes tangential to the actual project of U.S. schools: to increase efficiency, productivity, and performance.

Connecting Privatization and Commodification with Lactation

Thus far, I have argued that it is imperative to understand neoliberalism as a dominant discourse in order to understand teachers and teaching. Educators’ infant feeding practices provide a devastating lens through which the impacts of neoliberalism in schools are magnified. Efforts towards privatization and commodification in education have increased distrust in the professional competence of teachers, leaving them in a state of constant fear for their job security (Ball, 2004). These high-stakes contexts force teachers into a subject position where their worth and value are aggressively focused on individual teacher “quality,” with “quality” increasingly being defined exclusively in terms of quantifiable metrics (Attick, 2017). When neoliberal etiology reduces the worth of teachers to measurable outputs, the most valuable characteristics an individual teacher can embody are productivity and efficiency. Lactation, in stark contrast, is an unpredictable process. You never know when let-down may occur, and milk supply is constantly

fluctuating to meet the needs of [a] growing and changing child(ren). In addition, completely draining your milk supply takes time. Therefore it is almost impossible to meet the conflicting, simultaneous demands of the ideal, disembodied corporate worker— whose only concerns are to maximize productivity, efficiency, and thereby increase student performance metrics— while simultaneously meeting the care demands of an infant child. This usurpation of the collective values of education for the greater good of a democratic society by the aggressive individualism of a neoliberal worldview leads to a context where schools are increasingly hostile to the bodies of lactating teacher-parents.

In addition to understanding the incommensurability of the values of a neoliberal etiology that predominate schools as workplaces with the values of the private sphere that shape parents' experiences having and rearing children, the overwhelmingly feminized nature of the teaching workforce renders it equally important to address how neoliberalism intensifies conditions of gender inequity and subordination (Brown, 2015; Campbell, 2014). Otherwise stated, focusing on how neoliberalism as a discourse acts on teach(ers/ing) is an insufficient lens through which to understand lactation unless we also bring it into conversation with theories of the body and embodiment. These theories give us a language for understanding two foundational assumptions for the way this study approaches bodies in workplaces: first, the centrality of the body in Western constructions of difference; second, that sex and gender are social constructions. The following sections thus explain how this study takes up theories from feminist literature on embodiment in order to provide a counternarrative to dominant, prevailing discourses of gender essentialism and biological determinism as they are leveraged to tie conditions of gender inequity to the bodies of people who move through the world as women. Instead, this literature gives us a language for understanding how the obstacles encountered by lactating teacher-parents

in schools are not matters of individual choice, as neoliberalization discourses might suggest. Nor are conditions of gender-based inequity in schools the “normal” or “natural” biological destiny of lactating parents, rooted in the materiality of their bodies. Rather, as I explain below, these patterns are etched into the patriarchal structures of our shared institutions.

Part II: Feminist Embodiment

As stated above, understanding how neoliberalization discourses work on/through the subjectivities of teachers in schools is an incomplete starting point unless we also endeavor to understand the interrelated, mutually constitutive relationship between discourse and materiality in the body itself. Infant feeding practices are an intimately embodied experience, therefore it is critical to understand how power acts on/through the body for lactating teacher-parents in schools. This first subsection thus brings neoliberalism as a form of what Foucault (2008) calls governmentality, “...that is to say, the way in which one conducts the conduct of *men*” (p. 186, emphasis added), into conversation with feminist theories of the body and embodiment to make sense of the material-discursive fields in which possibilities for lactating teacher-parents are structured and delimited.

I begin by explaining how this study leverages the Foucauldian concept of governmentality as a necessary starting point to understanding how power works not against, but *through* individual subjectivities with the rise of technologies of the self that produce and normalize prevailing relations of dominance and subordination. I then draw on feminist theorists who describe what Foucault misses— forms of embodiment that are particularly feminine— in articulating his theories of power from the point of view of a default body that is necessarily male.

Foucault’s Disciplinary Power

In his 1977 book, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault recounts a detailed genealogy of the evolution of punishment in Western society to demonstrate how the expression of power has shifted over time. Even though new forms of democratic government no longer seek to control bodies through the public executions and torture once commonplace amongst the sovereign kings of Europe, they still seek control nevertheless; the operative difference, for Foucault, is that control is now expressed not as an external controlling force *over* peoples' bodies, but *through* their bodies by focusing the onus of control on their minds. Foucault argues that the modern, shared architectural structure(s) of hospitals, schools, factories, and prisons has facilitated a reconfiguration of punishment to more "humane" forms of surveillance. These institutions produce obedient citizens— what he calls "docile bodies" (1977, p. 135) — who comply with social norms not because they would otherwise be threatened with corporal punishment, but because their behavior is constantly, incessantly sculpted to ensure that they fully internalize and embody dominant values and belief systems. This is accomplished in the physical characteristics of shared institutions through (1) partitioning, which reduces the complexity of a cultural system into discrete, observable parts (such as the division of school buildings into separate classrooms); (2) the use of disciplinary time to force people to regulate their own movements in efficient, productive ways down to the very minute (such as bell schedules in schools and timers used for each task); and (3) the contemporaneous rise of new branches of social science (such as Education) that existed primarily to make any and all difference visible, and thus "correctable".

As an illustration of the architectural underpinnings of disciplinary power, Foucault draws on Jeremy Bentham's (1791) Panopticon. The Panopticon is a theoretical design for a circular prison where all the prisoners' cells line the outer walls of the prison, at the center of which there is a watchtower. All the cells open up to the watchtower, which is covered with one-

way glass, making all the prisoners simultaneously visible to whoever is watching, while none of the prisoners can, in turn, see their observers. This ensures that prisoners never know when they are being watched and are thus forced to assume that they are constantly observed; therefore, they regulate their own behavior according to the norms established by the institution. The physical structure of the institution thereby ensures the automatic, continuous functioning of power by an anonymous, interchangeable individual. Thus arises a new “microphysics of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 169) that, through partitioning into cellular spaces and the efficient allocation of disciplinary time, renders all subjects “meticulously subordinated cogs in a machine” (p. 169). Discipline, as Foucault describes it, becomes a *technique of power* whereby individuals are simultaneously subjected to *and* the bearers of power situations—rendering the physical exercise of power unnecessary. This expression of disciplinary power requires individualizing mechanisms that function to objectify people to make individuals knowable and describable: a means of control and a method of domination.

It is a relatively simple task to observe how disciplinary power can be a useful concept for understanding schools as shared institutions. Drawing on the example of standardized testing provided in the previous section on neoliberalism, we can think of the rise of the examination as a route to making our students knowable: for measuring and comparing their merit. Disciplinary time also becomes a governing principle of the way the body functions in U.S. schools through the ways we track and measure attendance and tardiness. The micro-penalty of time clearly manifests in bell schedules, awards for perfect attendance, and incessant drives to maximize instructional time by providing ‘bell to bell’ instruction. Schools also provide surveillance mechanisms for close monitoring of the bodies of students through disciplinary codes attached to behavior, such as impoliteness and disobedience, where students receive disciplinary referrals for

something as simple as rolling their eyes at a teacher; speech, which is permitted from students only under certain circumstances (when they first raise their hands) and in certain places (the cafeteria and the playground during recess, but not in the hallways or in classrooms); and sexuality, where dress codes are designed to mark indecency but really end up policing the clothing, hairstyles, and perceived hygiene of students. Foucault (1977) writes that “a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency” (p. 176). Thanks to these techniques of constant surveillance, power exercises its hold over and through the bodies of students in schools without ever having to resort to force or violence.

The usefulness of Foucault and subsequent generations of poststructural scholarship to understand education is not limited to students, however, but can be a helpful lens in understanding the lives of teachers as well. In this dissertation, I primarily draw on evolving poststructural articulations of power. In poststructural theory, power is no longer conceptualized as something that one person has *over* another, as was the case with the application of torture that forced bodies to subdue to the will of the various monarchs in feudal Europe. Now power can be understood as exercised *through* the disciplining of our own bodies to the norms of shared institutions. As Foucault (1977) explains, modern expressions of power are dispersed and anonymous, identified neither with a specific institution or apparatus. Power is invisible, and rendered thus by impressing upon the subject a constant, compulsory visibility. It is also scattered, originating in multiple different processes: not top-down as was the sovereign power of yore (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2003; Foucault, 1977). However, despite being non-orchestrated and decentralized, this does not mean that its application is random; rather, it becomes important

to recognize that “these forces are not haphazard, but configure to assume particular historical forms, within which certain groups and ideologies do have dominance” (Bordo, 2003, p. 26-27). Power is (re)created through the most minute aspects of the organization of space and time in ways that privilege and (re)produce the dominant norms of our shared institutions– norms that, as I argue in the previous section, are predominated by the neoliberal values of productivity and efficiency through concerted efforts towards privatization and commodification of education spaces.

Bringing Foucault into Conversation With Feminist Theory

What is missing from this revolutionary (re)conceptualization of power and its function(s), however, is an understanding of how disciplinary norms work in peculiarly gendered ways. Here feminist theories of embodiment have built on the work of Foucault and other poststructuralists, arguing that there is a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine; one that Foucault ignores, as his writing is steeped in the same Western bio-logic that relies on the White male body as the default for society. Bartky (1997), for instance, argues that there are disciplinary practices that engender the docile bodies of women differently than those of men. Failure to recognize nuance and difference in embodied ways of being risks

...perpetuat[ing] the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed. Hence, even though a liberatory note is sounded in Foucault’s critique of power, his analysis as a whole reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory. (p. 132)

Therefore, although Foucauldian understandings of power and the way(s) it acts on/through the body are an important beginning point, this section additionally considers gendered forms of embodiment. Alternately referred to as “practices of femininity” (Bordo, 1997, p. 91);

“technologies of body confidence” (Wood, 2017, p. 323); pursuit of “the perfect” (McRobbie, 2015, p. 7); and “normative femininity” (Bartky, 1997, p. 148), feminist scholars have articulated the different ways in which women’s bodies become docile bodies: “Bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement’” (Bordo, 1997, p. 91). Diet, makeup, and dress become organizing principles regulating time and space in the daily routines of many [middle class] women, structuring their pursuit of an elusive ideal of femininity (Bordo, 1997). For example, Bordo (1997) builds on Foucault’s articulation of technologies of *power* through understanding diet and beauty culture as technologies of *femininity*. No one is physically forcing modern Western [White?⁷] women to contort their bodies to the cult of skinniness through diet and exercise, nor is anyone compelling us to perform our genders by doing things like wearing makeup or painting our nails (Bordo, 1997). However, the body is the bedrock on which the social order is founded, meaning it is always simultaneously “*in view* and *on view*. As such, it invites a gaze, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation– the most historically constant being the gendered gaze” (Oyêwùmi, 1997, p. 4). The body is therefore the primary vehicle through which normative femininity and its presumed heterosexuality, social class, race, and appearance are centered (Bartky, 1997).

Drawing on the aforementioned poststructural understanding of power as dispersed and anonymous, the absence of a formal or centralized structure for enforcing the production of femininity “creates the impression that [it] is either entirely voluntary or natural ” (Bartky, 1997, p. 143). The dispersion of technologies of femininity are such that they are rendered

⁷ I would be remiss without mentioning that, in much the same way that early poststructural theory has defaulted to a body that is male, mainstream second-wave feminist theory defaults to a body that is cisgender, heteronormative, middle/upper class, and White. The unstated assumption in some feminist texts that talk about “women”, such as Bordo’s examples of regimes of diet and exercise, is perhaps unintentionally exclusionary. Though these theories are helpful to think with, I prefer a pluralistic, expansive understanding of “woman” as a category.

simultaneously *hyper*-visible and *invisible*: everywhere and nowhere at once. The invisible functioning of power makes it seem as though Western women have no one to blame but themselves for contorting their own bodies to the pathological stress of abiding by the violent norms of patriarchal systems.

The Centrality of The Body in Western Constructions of Difference

In a Western ontology, the way we conceptualize the body is dominated by a discursive split attributed to Descartes, colloquially known as Cartesian mind/body dualism (St. Pierre, 2000). The body and the mind, in a Cartesian-sense, are separate; not only are they separate, but there is a hierarchical relationship between the two. The mind is associated with logic and rationality, lofty and high above the temptations of the flesh; the body, on the other hand, is only a trap from which any rational thinker must escape (Oyêwùmi, 1997). The body is associated with debase, animal-level instinctiveness, with debauchery that one must overcome to avoid seduction away from God, and with corporeal instincts for gratification that one must master in order to transcend the limitations of the flesh (Bordo, 2003). Cartesian mind/body dualism gives rise to a binary: a series of false dichotomies between culture and nature; rationality and irrationality; and logic and emotion, wherein men are associated with the former and women the latter. Through this process...

... the White, bourgeois male came to be the 'norm' that is implicitly associated with the rational and transcendent mind, while women, people of color, people with disabilities, and other marginalized identities were understood to be more closely tied to the materiality of their bodies and therefore subject to an objectifying gaze. (Young, 2020, p. 686)

This traditional, hegemonic masculinity continues to be defined in opposition to a femininity that demarcates women as emotional and irrational. In stark contrast with the male default, women are unable to overcome the embodiment which renders them hysterical because of their periods, pregnancies, and menopause, and through which they become marked as different, inferior, and abnormal.

Of great importance here is the degree to which embodiment has become synonymous with biological determinism in the Western epistemology. By biological determinism, I refer to the commonplace notion that individual human behavior is directly, causatively linked to one's genetics or some other unalterable attribute of their physiology. Biological determinism as a cultural bio-logic in Western paradigms deflects attention away from structural injustices, like systemic racism, classism, and sexism. Instead of focusing on systems-level explanations of continuing oppression, biological determinism is weaponized to justify the subjugation of minoritized people by tying the sources of oppression to immutable characteristics of human physiology. As Oyêwùmi (1997) explains, "The distinctive contribution of feminist discourse to our collective understanding of Western societies is that it makes explicit the gendered (therefore embodied) and male-dominant nature of all Western institutions and discourses" (p. 8). For instance, the commonplace notion in the United States that women are not fit for leadership positions because they are too emotional is used to normalize the fact that just over a quarter of members of Congress and barely 10% of CEOs in the United States are women (Elting, 2023, January 27; Leppert & Desilver, 2023, January 3). Another famous example can be found in the publication of *The Bell Curve* in 1994, an overnight bestseller written by two psychologists. This book suggests that human intelligence is substantially influenced by both inherited and environmental factors, ultimately recommending policy changes like the elimination of welfare

programs as a means of discouraging poor women from having babies (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Discourses such as these obscure the role of structural and institutional racism, classism, Ableism, and sexism that privilege and perpetually advantage certain people on the basis of their perceived gender and sexuality, their socioeconomic circumstances, and their race, instead finding fault for conditions of marginalization in the bodies of the marginalized themselves. Through the centrality of bio-logic as a body-based framework, a default body that is White, typically-abled, cisgender, heterosexual, and male (Davies, et al. 2005; Oyêwùmi, 1997; Young, 2020) becomes inscribed into the social reality and justified as natural, normal, and inevitable.

Understanding Sex and Gender as Social Constructions

Poststructural feminist theorists of the body and embodiment have questioned the apparent naturalness of conditions of inequity by illustrating how completely our discursive realities are constructed. The body itself, in a poststructural worldsense, can be understood as a site of struggle, one that is shaped, trained, and stamped with historical forms of selfhood (Bordo, 1997). It is not a prediscursive reality, as prevailing discourses of biological determinism would lead us to believe (Butler, 1997; Young, 2020). There is no “natural” division between men and women, and assuming as much naturalizes history and the social phenomenon which express our oppression (Wittig, 1997). Rather, poststructural feminist theory foregrounds the idea that the language we have to describe the world “does not simply point to preexisting things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). Otherwise stated, reality is constructed through language and historically, temporally situated cultural practice. For instance, Butler (1997) points out that the body is not simply a blank slate onto which normative cultural scripts are etched, as if it were “a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations” (p. 410). On the other hand, bodies cannot be

adequately understood as ahistorical, pre-cultural, or natural objects in any simple way.

Embodied selves do not preexist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies, rather they are “inscribed, marked, engraved by social pressures external to them... the products, the direct effects of the social constitutions of nature itself” (Young, 2020, p. 686). In sum, when we conceptualize history itself as a social construction, much like the body, neither can be separated from the discursive fields in which they are embedded.

As an example, Butler (2007) famously argues that gender is a perpetual performance. The performativity of gender is neither passively scripted on the body, nor is it wholly determined by nature. It is neither an individual choice nor something that is forcibly imposed on people. Rather, gender as a performative act is “put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and with pleasure” (Butler, 1997, p. 415). They compare the contemporary functioning of technologies of femininity to a play:

Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler, 1997, p. 410)

Simply put, Butler (2007) argues that the performativity of gender is thus never a singular act, but always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms. In addition, Butler (2011) argues that biological sex as well is not a natural category, but a normative one. Binary sex as exclusively man or woman is a norm in society, they argue, part of a regulatory process that produces the bodies it governs. In this way, the materiality of the body is always already wrapped up in the power relations that structure discourse around what is natural. The body is unable to function

outside cultural constructions. The very notion of an essential sex is also constituted by the very strategies through which the performative aspects of gender are concealed. In other words, Butler (2011) describes both gender and sex as constructs that are forcibly materialized through time. Neither are static facts or conditions of the body, but processes whereby regulatory norms—like normative masculinity and femininity—materialize. Otherwise stated, “Corporeality is shaped by the broad social, political, and economic structures of society, and the material body simultaneously shapes these structures” (Young, 2020, p. 686). Feminist theory thus helps us understand the body—both its assigned sex and gender— not as a static description of what one is, but a norm through which one becomes knowable according to pre-established norms which “qualify a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (Butler, 2011, p. xii).

Using a Feminist Lens on Embodiment to Understand Lactation

To summarize, bringing the literature on feminist theory in conversation with Foucauldian understandings of power and how it works on/through the body helps establish several critical assumptions that inform the current study. The first is that the structural obstacles to practicing lactation that teacher-parents encounter in schools are not normal or natural, as dominant discourses of biological determinism might contend; rather they are cultural constructions etched into the structures of all our shared institutions. This is an important point of departure in imagining just futures for lactating teacher-parents. Biological determinism as originating in Western Cartesian dualism would have us believe that the oppression gendered bodies face in schools is unchangeable, as it originates in the biological destiny of women to gestate and lactate. In this dissertation, I make no such assumption. Instead I focus on the constructedness of our shared institutions, for what has been made can be remade anew. In other words, thinking with poststructural theory begs the question of how we can (re)imagine schools

outside neoliberal and patriarchal discourses that invite, rather than reject, the bodies of *all* educators— including those practicing lactation— into the spaces of U.S. schools.

The problems posed by this rather idealistic theoretical perspective, however, are also expounded by feminist theorists who, as I explain above, articulate how wholly our institutions (in their current forms) exclude the bodies of anyone who is not a cisgender, heteronormative, typically-abled White man. There is thus no analogy for accommodating, in terms of space or time, an embodied practice like lactation in U.S workplaces. This theoretical assumption is consistent with the findings of a pilot study conducted in fall 2021, wherein we (Benson & Sharma, 2023) found that lactating teacher-parents struggled to find (1) time to pump in the school day, (2) secure (locked, interrupted) spaces to pump, and (3) places to store their milk. Support for lactation amongst teachers is thus a dubious prospect. The discursive fields that predominate in U.S. workplaces instead draw heavily on the neoliberal norms of aggressive individualism and individual choice, (re)casting every problem as individual instead of structural or social. For example, Young (2020) draws on Foucauldian biopower to explain how normal bodily functions, such as lactation, are subject to a medicalizing gaze and thus reconceptualized such that they can be quantified, measured, and optimized. Under this gaze, Young argues, social and material obstacles to lactation are obscured in favor of an approach that transfers the responsibility for lactation labor exclusively onto the shoulders of individual parents. When taken in conjunction with the centrality of the body in Western constructions of difference, which presume (1) a binary between man and woman, masculine and feminine, which positions the embodiment of Woman as Other, and (2) sex and gender as social constructions whose performances are enacted on/through the visibility and materiality of the body, lactation becomes a space saturated with conflicting, contradictory meaning(s) for teacher-parents.

Part III: Connecting Gendered Embodiment with Neoliberalism

Thus far, I have argued that understanding the experiences of lactating teacher-parents in schools requires first understanding (1) neoliberalism, as a dominant discourse in education spaces, and (2) feminist theories of embodiment, which give us a language for understanding gendered subjectification processes and their role in (re)creating conditions of inequity for those socialized as women. Scholars have articulated the means by which neoliberal values have come to dominate U.S. workplaces; they have also articulated the mechanisms by which parenting itself becomes enmeshed with discourses of neoliberalism. However, this work has not yet been done specifically in the context of lactating teacher-parents and their efforts at pumping milk for infant children while working full-time in schools. Therefore this final section reviews what feminist theorists have theorized about manifestations of neoliberalism on conditions of gender equity, concluding by emphasizing the importance of bringing these ideas into conversation to understand their implications for lactating teacher-parents.

Neoliberal Neopatriarchy

British scholar Beatrix Campbell coined the term “neoliberal neopatriarchy” (2014) as a lens through which we can understand how regimes of patriarchy have evolved alongside neoliberalism to exacerbate global conditions of gender-based violence and oppression. Under neoliberal regimes, she explains, the state becomes subordinate to the market, resulting in a repudiation of social solidarities and welfare states (Campbell, 2014, May 25). When privatization and attacks on regulation of labor markets and redistribution of wealth in welfare programs become the norm in government policy, the dismantling of public infrastructure supporting family, children, and the elderly means the cost of providing care is increasingly returned to individuals. And these individuals, as Campbell (2014) points out, are

disproportionately women who continue to bear the burden of almost 75% of austerity measures through the unpaid work they do in the home cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly. Brown (2015) calls women the “invisible infrastructure” (p. 105) supporting regimes of financialization, as government support for families retreats and the sexual division of labor (re)centers women in traditional roles as provisioners of care for households, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. This seismic change has impacted women far more than men, since the majority of women now participate in the labor market for the majority of their lives in addition to this undervalued and/or unpaid care work (Campbell, 2014, January 6). In these contexts, Campbell argues, feminist agendas cannot possibly flourish since “social solidarity through the medium of welfare states is the minimum necessary condition for society to take the side of women” (Campbell, 2014, p. 24). In other words, when regimes of neoliberal financialization predominate in domestic and international government policy, gender subordination is intensified and fundamentally altered.

It is this contemporary context of precarity that Campbell (2014) has articulated as neoliberal neopatriarchy: an evolving resettlement of traditional gender hierarchies, a new (re)configuration intricately intertwined with neoliberal discourses that provide cultural contexts where the gender-based violence of normalized sexism continues unabated. Far from making progress on gender-based equality, neopatriarchy describes a contemporary social context where “the old sexual contract is recognised as unsustainable but retained in modernised form. Neoliberal neopatriarchy is the new articulation of male domination” (Campbell, 2014, p. 13). Freshly imbued with strands of the neoliberal values of efficiency and individualism, neopatriarchy is a concept equal to the paradoxical task of describing a world where messages of girl power reign supreme, but where gender-based violent crimes such as rape continue with

rampant impunity. Otherwise put, the patriarchy “is not dying. It is changing” (Campbell, 2014, p. 18). Internationally, neoliberal neopatriarchy can be seen through the proliferation of structural adjustment policies imposed by financial organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Domestically, it can be seen in the U.S. through what Butler (2019) refers to as formal policies of “abandonment” (p. 7), as the Church steps in to provide basic services once provided by the state in exchange for ideological exposure. Families once supported by government subsidies are now forced to come to their local churches for access to services like food pantries and affordable childcare, all at the low cost of indoctrination into the Christian values of heteronormativity and a traditional patriarchal family structure (Butler, 2019).

I argue that the predominance of neoliberal neopatriarchy in education spaces leaves teachers with few viable options for merging the conflicting spheres of their public lives as educators alongside their private lives as parents. When the values of school workplaces normalize a productive, efficient default body that contrasts sharply with the unpredictable, time-consuming nature of feeding an infant child, teacher-parents are left with two equally unpalatable options: leave the teaching profession altogether, or else find a way to figure it out for themselves in hostile and unsupportive workplaces. Being pushed to individualize a response to lactation in unsupportive work contexts is commensurate with a fundamental shift in the gendered subjectification process of contemporary professional Western women. The next section briefly describes the rise of neoliberal feminism as a dominant discourse structuring the work lives of working women in the U.S.

Neoliberal Feminism

In feminist academic circles, the shift in how subjectivity is (re)made as concurrent with the neoliberal values of individualism and personal responsibility have been articulated by some poststructural feminist scholars as the rise of the *neoliberal feminist subject* (Rottenberg, 2014). Two primary characteristics define the contours of the contemporary neoliberal feminist: (1) an aggressive, competitive individualism (McRobbie, 2015), and (2) the absence of any significant critique of capitalism (Rottenberg, 2014). First and foremost, the contemporary neoliberal feminist subject accepts full “accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus” (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 420). Using fine-tuned, continuous metrics of calculation, the neoliberal feminist subject perpetually makes and remakes herself in competition with other women. David (2017) calls this the hallmark of the “selfie generation” (p. 20), a responsabilized subject who accepts the basic tenets of gender equity despite knowing that sexism and misogyny persist. Since the social and structural conditions of inequality under global capitalism have not changed, but individual avenues for the advancement of a very few highly educated White women *have*, neoliberalism has facilitated the internalization of this change from a political to an individual affair (David, 2017). The result is production of a particular kind of subject who is wholly responsible for her own self-care and well-being; one who maximizes her potential and achieves success through self-scrutiny and what Favaro (2017) calls “micropractices of self-government” (p. 297). Banet-Weiser (2017) mobilizes the example of ad campaigns from multinational makeup corporations like Always and CoverGirl, which have shifted the messages in their marketing to focus on self-love, improving self-image, and fostering body positivity. Girls are fashioned as wearing makeup not to please men and be better subjects of the male gaze, but as empowering themselves *for* themselves, and in their own right. By actively practicing

modified consumption habits, tirelessly following the advice of experts on relationships and parenting, makeup artists and hairstylists, dieticians and personal trainers, women can remake themselves from passive *objects* of the male gaze to active *subjects* who freely choose to engage in breast augmentation or liposuction to please *themselves* (Banet-Weiser, 2017).

In addition, the neoliberal feminist subject leaves no room for a critique of capitalism or any of the structural constraints producing gender inequity. Previous iterations of feminism, particularly the second-wave of the 1970s, were collective in nature; this is directly contradictory to the “fashioning of neoliberal subjectivities that derive moral self-worth from navigating challenges, and opportunities, individually and self-responsibly” (Scharff, 2012, p. 11). As ideal neoliberal subjects, young women feel good about themselves when able to demonstrate that they are capable and industrious managers of their own lives. They thus distance themselves from collective forms of organizing and acknowledgement of structural constraints associated with feminist politics since such an acknowledgement would be tantamount to an admission that they are not able to individually and responsibly manage their own lives (Scharff, 2012). As McRobbie (2015) writes, “all ideas of gender justice and collective solidarity are thrown overboard in favor of ‘excellence’ and with the aim of creating new forms (and restoring old forms) of gender hierarchies through competition and elitism” (p. 16). Structural inequality is hereby (re)cast as the purview of individuals to solve. Demanding anything from the state or even from men as a group seems an anachronistic concept for a generation of women who have already internalized the source of gendered oppression as an individual affair (Scharff, 2012). Neoliberal feminism thus eviscerates a critique of the capitalist global order and proves to be no match to the neopatriarchy retrofitted by capitalism for the current times that continues to

(re)produce and exploit a precarious gendered workforce and exacerbating gender inequity around the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described how this study is situated in the theoretical perspectives of neoliberalism and feminist embodiment: two intertwined discursive fields that enable several critical departures that form the basis for this study's approach to and understanding of the lives of lactating teacher-parents in U.S. schools. The first section reviewed neoliberalism as a pluralistic, rascally concept that manifests at times in the forms of policy, ideology, and governmentality. For the purposes of this study, I focus primarily on poststructural articulations of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, elaborating in the second section on how I think with Foucauldian articulations of disciplinary power to understand how discourses both simultaneously act upon and are mutually (re)constituted by material bodies. This second section brings Foucault into conversation with several basic tenets of feminist theories of embodiment—mainly the centrality of the body in Western constructions of difference, as well as sex and gender as social constructions—in order to elaborate on particular technologies of gendered subject formation that Foucault perhaps misses in defaulting to the same White, male body that serves as a norm in all Western structures and institutions. I conclude by briefly discussing the implications of all of these intersecting concepts for the embodied practice of lactation, though the literature in this regard is extremely limited; as I mention in the introduction, no one has yet (as I am aware) brought these distinct theoretical concepts to bear — neoliberalism and feminist theories of embodiment—in understanding the specific practice of lactation on the bodies of U.S. teachers.

All of the theoretical concepts expounded in this chapter are foundational assumptions structuring how the current study understands the bodies of lactating teacher-parents in schools. In the next chapter, I elaborate in further detail on the tenets of poststructural theory— this time, taking up their implication(s) for how the current study conceptualizes and approaches the doing of qualitative methodology.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Methods (*How*)

If haunting is the “why” that brings me to this research, then what follows is the “how” of conducting it.

Participants

As this study is interested in the experiences of lactating teacher-parents, people whose time is understandably precious and notoriously scarce, participant recruitment proved difficult. Initially, I endeavored to restrict the parameters of the project to middle grades teachers in Georgia who returned to work following a parental leave and [attempted to] pump(ed) milk for their infant children sometime in the 2021-22 or 2022-23 school year. There were two primary reasons for these specific time and geographic parameters: first, Georgia’s law protecting lactation for teachers in the workplace was not passed until 2020, so I wanted to learn from teachers who had practiced lactation *AFTER* it *should have* gone into effect. Second, I wanted to limit the scope of the study to in-person school, which eliminated the 2020-21 school year since, prior to widespread public availability of a COVID-19 vaccine around March 2021, many districts moved classes to remote instruction. Ultimately, in an effort to keep the scale and scope of the project manageable, I also decided to restrict data collection to teachers within a single county in Georgia. This had the additional benefit of ensuring a measure of consistency in district-level policy regarding lactation (though variations in individual implementation across different middle schools within the same county would certainly still be a factor to consider).

Participant recruitment efforts began in October 2022, after having secured IRB approval to begin the project. I initially intended to use opportunistic sampling methods, posting recruitment flyers on public Facebook groups for teachers and parents that permitted solicitation. This did not go as planned, perhaps because I am not currently a consumer of social media myself and therefore did not understand digital etiquette surrounding these types of groups. Teacher groups have become extremely private and difficult to access unless you are currently working in a given district yourself. All members have to be approved in advance by group moderators. Rarely is solicitation for a project like this permitted. This level of digital privacy protections is understandable, since teachers on these forums discuss sensitive matters that could easily be misinterpreted or weaponized against them in the hands of the media, parents, or administration. Plans to recruit participants via social media were accordingly scrapped.

I then pivoted to recruitment via snowball sampling (Mertler & Charles, 2005) by reaching out via email, text, and polite conversation to people I knew with connections to current teachers who had recently given birth to a child and practiced lactation. I also posted recruitment flyers all around the University of Georgia's College of Education building, Aderhold Hall (see Appendix A), with information about the study, as well as a link to a Google Form where prospective participants could leave me their contact information if they were interested. The latter of these recruitment efforts was mostly in vain. Most of the eventual participants in the study were people I was connected with through field instructors, student teachers, and professors with experience working in the particular district where I ultimately decided to limit the scope of data collection. This district is located in a mid-size city and serves approximately 12,000 students across its 14 elementary, four middle, and three high schools. It was also

selected opportunistically, based on the likelihood that I would have sufficient connections to successfully recruit participants there.

Five women consented to participate in the study, each having between one and three children at the time of data collection. One of the potential limitations to the study is the demographic heterogeneity of the sample, in that every participant self-identified as a White, cisgender, heterosexual woman. Future research is clearly needed that speaks to a broader array of intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) experiences with lactation. The chart below contains more specific information on participant demographics relevant to the study:

Participant	Grade level	Content area(s)	Years teaching	Number of children	Baby's birth date	Duration of parental leave
1	6	GenEd/ SpED ELA	5	3 (third)	May 2022	13 weeks
2	8	Admin	12	1	Jan 2022	8 weeks
3	6	Math	11	2 (second)	Sept. 2022	6 weeks
4	3	Gifted	11	2 (second)	Feb 2022	11 weeks
5	11	U.S. History	8	1	October 2022	12 weeks

Though participants were all currently working in the same county at the time of data collection, their experience spans four different schools: two middle, one elementary, and one high. Since the research questions concern lactation practices, which are inherently restricted by district policies, I thought it more important that all teachers come from the same county than from the same individual school. Participants' teaching also spans several different content areas, including one inclusion teacher, one gifted teacher, and one administrator. Participants had between one and three children at the time of data collection. For two out of five participants, this study concerns their experiences with lactation with their first and only child. For the other three participants, this was hardly their first rodeo: two were practicing pumping with a second

child, and another with her third. All are mid-career, veteran teachers, with classroom experience ranging from five to twelve years.

Data Collection

Individual interviews with each participant were conducted and audio-recorded via Zoom between November 2022 and January 2023. Signed consent for participation in the study was obtained at the time of participant recruitment. In addition, participants' rights were verbally reiterated at the beginning of each data collection encounter. Guided by feminist methodological commitments, I attempted to create an interviewing context that fostered equitable relationships between myself and participants. According to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011), feminist interviewing as a method is intended to “guard against the colonizing effects of social science research at each stage of the research process” (p. 23). Following their lead, I employed a malleable, unstructured interview protocol (see Appendix B), endeavoring for each interview to be more of a talking partnership with teachers that was dialectical and open-ended (Rapport, 2020). Though this lofty aspiration is [somewhat?] impossible, my ultimate aim was to try, wherever possible, to avoid (re)producing “the exploitative relationships of traditional forms of social scientific research, [instead aiming] to work with participants in respectful and ethical ways that allow women’s voices to be heard” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 23). Out of respect for the scarce resources that are a teacher’s and a parent’s discretionary time, interviews were limited to approximately 30 - 45 minutes. Each data encounter was compensated with a \$20 gift card to participants’ preferred coffee shop or store, though most insisted that they did not need to be paid for their time. This was mostly done at my own behest, a poor attempt to assuage a guilty conscience for the time I felt was stolen from them, their families, and their infant children.

Given their feminist consciousness-raising potential, I also initially aimed to host a focus group for all interested participants. Focus groups have the potential to reduce the power and influence of the researcher, leading to a more “nonhierarchical egalitarian research process” (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 115) that rejects a stance of objectivity and detachment from data encounters, instead insisting on “the fundamentally interactive nature of the interview” (p. 120). This, however, proved to be a thorny scheduling problem, since all the participants were full-time teachers and parents of infant children at the time of data collection, which took place in the middle of the school year. The focus group was scheduled for Sunday, February 5th, and four out of five participants expressed interest in attending. Ultimately, however, only one was able to be there— Participant 3— so I pivoted to turning this data encounter into a follow-up interview. Participant 1 later emailed that one of her three children had fallen ill with the flu, and Participant 2 later sent a message that she had simply forgotten but that she would be interested in rescheduling. I then decided to reach out to all participants for an optional follow-up interview, in which only Participant 2 had time and space to partake. Participants 4 and 5 never responded (understandably so). They all had/have a lot going on, so it already felt like a lot taking even a half-hour from these over-extended people in the first round of interviews. My gratitude could never be enough to thank them for the invaluable stories they shared with me.

Data Analysis

During each interview, focus group, and follow-up conversation, I wrote out analytic memos in a data collection journal that I revisited immediately following every interview for a second pass at reflexive recordings of ongoing reflections (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed, first using Otter AI (a password-protected transcription software service), at which time all participant demographic information was

replaced with pseudonyms. Given current technological restrictions, these types of transcription programs have limited accuracy contingent upon thickness of dialect, talking speed, and quality of recorded audio, so I personally listened through each interview twice to correct any miscues. Both of these processes— memoing and transcribing— are heavy with implication in a social constructivist paradigm of qualitative research. Transcription as well has been critiqued as necessarily ignoring the relative intended “meaning” of certain nonverbal cues such as eye gaze, gesture, tone, and posture (can we ever really know what this body language “means” anyways?). This study thus dispenses with the notion that I, as the researcher, could ever be simply “a fly on the wall, passively copying down ‘facts’ about ‘what happened’ . Rather, these descriptive accounts collect and emphasize different features and actions while ignoring and marginalizing others” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 9). While I attempted to render transcriptions that were as faithful as possible to inflexion, pauses in speech, and tones of [what I interpreted as] sarcasm in the occasional dry laugh, the result is always necessarily going to be a two-dimensional flattening of what is already a retroactive (re)telling of a uniquely human experience: which in itself is still an alternative to *not* creating space for these teacher-parents to share their stories and feel heard.

I then uploaded each anonymized transcript to the Atlas TI software system, a qualitative data analysis program that helped facilitate two rounds of inductive coding (Bendasolli, 2013). While I acknowledge the tensions and contradictions inherent in coding as a method, I also wanted a place to begin. This is the only way I knew how. The initial round of codes were mostly derived directly from the data: by using keywords or phrases taken directly from the vocabulary employed by participants themselves (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). During a second cycle of coding, I developed higher level categories from the initial code list, thinking

through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of the data alongside my reflexive memoing. The result was a smaller, more manageable number of themes than produced after the initial round of analysis. The chart below contains a list of all codes generated across seven total data encounters and two rounds of coding.

Round 1	Round 2	
Awareness of legal rights Body doesn't "fit" Commitment Compromise Context Disciplinary our bodies to a schedule Figuring it out/making it work Gratitude Guilt Holding so many things at once Isolating Lucky Missing out Need for a streamlined policy/procedure Never thriving, always surviving Not enoughness Resistance Stress Support Time	Evidence for neo-patriarchal norms	Internalized gendered subjectification process
	Dis/embodyment	Not-enoughness/impossibility
	Figuring it out yourself	

Next, following Jackson and Mazzei (2012), I tried successive rounds of what they term “plugging in” (p. 5) in order to extend the productivity of thinking at the limits of conventional qualitative methods. In their 2012 book, *Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research*, the authors describe the tension of approaching interviews given the poststructural understanding of voice as always partial, incomplete, and therefore a flawed signifier for ‘Truth’ in qualitative research, as our stories are always re-told and re-membered in certain ways during a continuous

process of meaning-making. In deconstructing concepts like ‘Truth’ and knowledge, poststructural thinkers have argued that neither can be entirely free from the human subjectivity that defines their parameters, but that “it is power that pervades the very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms, including the subject position of the critic” (Benhabib et al., 1995, p. 39). Knowledge can never be separated from the knower, therefore far from being objective and universal, all scientific understanding necessarily exists within shifting fields of power relations. However, instead of abandoning the interview process altogether, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) instead advocate seeking out voices that, “even partial and incomplete, produce multiplicities and excesses of meaning and subjectivities” (p. 4). Viewing the conundrum of voice as a site of potential productivity led to the concept of “plugging in” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 5) as a way to leverage not just entire theoretical frameworks, like critical theory or poststructuralism, but specific *theorists* (Foucault, Butler), and even specific *concepts* from those theorists (power/knowledge, performativity). Plugging in thus entails three maneuvers:

1. Putting philosophical concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they *constitute or make one another*.
2. Being deliberate and transparent in what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept (deconstruction, marginality, power/knowledge, performativity, desire, intra/activity) and how the questions that are used to think with *emerged in the middle* of plugging in; and
3. Working the same data chunks repeatedly to “deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest” with an overabundance of meaning, which in turn

not only creates new knowledge but also shows the *suppleness of each when plugged in*. (p. 5)

Plugging in can therefore become a productive site for thinking of my data as a “threshold” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 6), a both/and space that can be either exit or entry, but has “no function, purpose, or meaning until it is attached to other things different from itself” (p. 6).

Conclusion

I employed plugging in as a form of analysis in two ways: first, in Chapter 5, I think with traditional thematic analysis through iterative rounds of inductive coding, plugging in the frame of *neoliberal neopatriarchy* (Campbell, 2014a, b, c) to help understand the material-discursive realms in which my participants navigated lactation. Then, I explore perhaps more uncharted territory in the Epilogue, Chapter 7, when I think with speculative fiction (Bereola, 2018, December 3; Dow et al., 2023; Persohn, 2022, April 12; Toliver, 2020) as a way to (re)imagine just futures for lactating teacher-parents outside the inequitable strictures of the present. In other words, Chapter 7 answers my ghosts in their ongoing agitations for justice as I write a utopian short story— not of what *was* in these teachers’ experiences with lactation, but of what *could be possible* when we [attempt to] think outside the oppressive, interlocking structures of capitalism, sexism, and racism in our shared institutions (hooks, 2020; Pharr, 1997).

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Introduction

As previously stated in Chapter 2, this study is uniquely situated to anticipate the changes promised by recent federal legislation expanding the landscape of protections for teacher-parents: first, the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (PUMP) Act of 2022 that provides employees with (1) reasonable break time to express milk and (2) a place (other than a bathroom) that is “shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public” to express milk (S.1658/H.R. 3110); and second, the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) of 2023, which requires that employers provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant workers such as frequent breaks, seating if their job requires standing, and a modified work schedule (U.S. EEOC, n.d.). Though both of these federal laws expand unprecedented *federal* protections to teacher-parents, prior to their passage, several *states* – including Georgia– passed laws providing similar protections to both salaried and hourly workers. Colloquially known as Charlotte’s Law (2020), so named after a Georgia teacher who sued the state after having been told by a supervisor that she would need to either stay late to make up the time she missed while pumping or give up the practice entirely, Georgia Code § 34-1-6 protects the rights of teachers practicing lactation upon return to work in schools following the birth of a child to reasonable break time and a secure location to pump (English, 2020, August 24). As the participants interviewed for this study all had their children and transitioned back to work in Georgia schools between January and October 2022, their experiences fall in a narrow gap that anticipates what the

protections of Charlotte's Law could potentially mean for similar teachers across the nation now that federal laws have expanded lactation protections for all U.S. teachers. It should be noted, however, that teachers in the case of Georgia are also unique in that it is one of a minority of U.S. states that ensures any amount of paid parental leave for teachers. In May 2021 Governor Kemp signed HB 146, providing three weeks of paid parental leave for state employees (including teachers), therefore this data cannot be thought of as generalizable to other contexts across space and time in the U.S. There are, however, trends that this data point to which can perhaps be used to anticipate challenges.

In this chapter, I theorize the data collected from five participants regarding their experiences with lactation in a single county in Georgia alongside critical feminist perspectives of embodiment and neoliberalism to shed light on the lived realities of lactating teacher-parents. In order to understand lactation as a location of embodied conflict, successive rounds of analysis helped me to fine-tune a concept I call *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*. This concept illustrates the need to reconceptualize policies—like the PUMP Act and the PFWA—embedded in neoliberal values that view the autonomous individual as the basis for Western citizenry, as lactation represents a unique relationship where a child is both separate from but dependent on the parent (Hausman, 2004). *Disembodied neoliberal parenthood* emphasizes (1) the role of neoliberal neopatriarchy (Campbell, 2013; 2014) as an organizing principle in society, and how it acts to dilute legal changes that *should* benefit these parents, and (2) the competing subject positions into which lactating teacher-parents are forced when the different values and expectations which dominate their public lives as teachers collide with their private lives as parents in the all-too-visible sphere of pumping in the workplace. Though recent legislation has been passed with the best of intentions of helping parents, I argue that these measures actually

fail them when the dichotomy between the reproductive, corporeal work of lactation clashes with the disembodied corporate work of the ideal worker, ultimately placing more burdens on parents than anyone could reasonably bear. I conclude not just with recommendations, but with questions about ways that we can perhaps leverage the experiences of lactating teacher-parents as a catalyst to think about and do things differently in schools.

Context

There are several layers of understanding necessary to situate the experiences of participants in this study in space and time. First and foremost, these teachers find themselves in a tumultuous political landscape in the U.S., with schools often representing a focal point of controversy. The five participants in the current study are no exception. The 2021-22 school year during which these teachers gave birth, returned to schools, and began pumping marked perhaps the first year of “normal” instruction subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic, where mask-wearing, remote learning policies, and vaccination have represented points of ideological rupture with teachers and students living the front lines of vitriolic frustration and anger in their communities. Though 2022 and 2023 have seen landmark gains in the federal protections provided to teachers who wish to practice pumping in the workplace—namely, the aforementioned PUMP (2022) and Pregnant Workers Fairness (2023) Acts—there has also been a series of conservative legislative efforts impacting pregnant people and parents. For starters, the fall of *Roe vs. Wade* in June 2022 was a historic defeat undoing half a century of legal protections for pregnant people in the U.S. to access abortion. Soon after, Georgia joined 23 other U.S. states that passed near total abortion bans with its controversial heartbeat bill, which bans most abortions after six weeks’ gestation.

In addition, the same time period has seen an explosion in anti-trans legislation across the country. Over half of U.S. states have introduced laws hostile to trans people, mostly centered around the right to participate in sports competition and the ability of doctors to provide gender affirming care (particularly to youth). On July 1, 2023, Georgia joined the ranks of other conservative Southern states like Texas and Florida when Governor Kemp signed SB 140, restricting gender-affirming care for trans youth (Mawn, 2023, July 15). The wave of legal challenges to the rights of trans people to exist are reminiscent of the bathroom bills that swept the nation in 2016, and again teachers find themselves at the forefront of conservative backlash (Ranschaert, 2023). According to NPR reporting, of the more than 126 bills that were introduced in 2022, 63% centered on schooling, many banning transwomen from competing in sports (Nakajima, K. & Hanzhang, J., 2022, November 28).

Though all of the lactating teacher-parents concerned in this study identified, at the time of interviews, as cisgender heterosexual women, the fight over trans students is particularly salient to their experiences as well for at least two primary reasons: first, their work in schools, where they serve as daily witnesses to and perhaps practice an unwilling complicity with systems of oppression impacting the very students they have dedicated their professional lives and competencies to protecting; second, Butler (2019) argues that conservative backlash against gender ideology is actually a concerted effort to shore up traditional gender roles. Trans people, by merely existing, represent an embodied challenge to the prevailing cultural belief that gender is biologically deterministic: that there are men, and there are women, and that their differences (and, by insidious extension, their subsequent oppressions) are rooted in their bodies. If, as prevailing cultural myths suggest, the source of oppression originates in the bodies of the oppressed themselves— meaning, for instance, that it is only “natural” that women do the often

unpaid and chronically undervalued domestic labor of cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly— then we can continue to take their care work for granted. To admit that the binary categories of man/woman, male/female, mother/father are culturally constructed, and that the real truth of human biology is only to be found in difference, is a conversation about continuing sex and gender-based inequity that conservative forces wish to avoid by erasing the bodies and experiences of trans people. Therefore, as Butler compels us to ponder, the liberation of all women— even cis het women for whom the binary poses, on the surface, no clear and present complication— is inextricably tied to the fates of trans people. Or, as Angela Davis (1971) famously put it, “If they come for me in the morning, they will come for you in the night.”

To complicate a complex political landscape for teachers even further, as part of a nationwide backlash against teaching critical race theory (which wasn’t/isn’t actually happening), on July 1, 2022, Georgia passed HB 1084, the Protect Students First Act. Otherwise known as the “divisive concepts” bill, the stated purpose of this vaguely worded piece of legislation is to regulate teaching that individuals or one racial group may be considered responsible for or participate in systemic racism, consciously or unconsciously, or that one racial group is inherently superior or inferior to another (Dennis, 2023, July 10). It specifically bans teachers from discussing nine different concepts in their classrooms, and also mandates that school districts implement policies and procedures to evaluate complaints from parents about instructional materials containing divisive concepts (Pendharkar, 2022, November 11). In early 2023, Katie Rinderle, a fifth grade teacher at Due West Elementary in Cobb County, Georgia, became the first teacher fired based on the divisive concepts bill after she read her students the book *My Shadow is Purple* by Australian author Stuart Scott. This children’s book— which Rinderle purchased at her school’s book fair and her students chose as their class read aloud— is

not about race at all. Rather it tells a story of mutual respect and self-exploration through a character who refuses traditional male/female binaries by choosing not a pink (for girls) or a blue (for boys) shadow, but a purple one. Jones and Kurtz (2023, July 13) argue that the primary function of the divisive concepts law is to instill a culture of fear and doubt in teachers, who self-censor instructional materials and classroom discussions out of a legitimate fear of retaliation. Clearly U.S. teachers are in a challenging spot at this particular juncture in the nation's history, particularly so in the case of Georgia. And despite some historic victories for parents in schools as represented by the PUMP Act (2022) and the PWFA (2023), when taken in conjunction with the attacks on their bodily autonomy represented by the fall of *Roe* and nationwide waves of anti-trans legislation, it is perhaps safe to assume that the prevailing discourses both structuring and structured by the embodied experience of lactation rendered life for the women in this study far from simple.

The School District and Community

This study was conducted with teachers from a single district in Georgia. The district, which I will refer to as Common South⁸, is located in a relatively large town, which I will call Sunnydale⁹, of approximately 129,000 residents (accgov.com). The Common South School District (CSSD) serves 12,940 students at 21 total schools: 14 elementary, four middle, and three high schools (ccrpi.gadoe.org). In Sunnydale, rates of both poverty and income inequality are higher than state averages. The median household income in Sunnydale is \$59,628, only 90% of the state average median income of \$66,559 (censusreporter.org). The percentage of people living below the poverty line is 16.9%, about 20 percent higher than the state average of 14%

⁸ A pseudonym

⁹ Also a pseudonym

(censusreporter.org). According to data collected by the non-profit organization Feeding America, food insecurity is prevalent in 13.5% of households in Sunnydale, affecting an estimated 17,330 of the county’s residents. Predictably enough, CSSD is a Title One district, with all of its 21 schools serving mostly low-income families. This is not to say, however, that Sunnydale is not a city of tremendous wealth, rather that it is one of tremendous income *inequality*. In fact, CSSD is abutted on its southwest border by a place that I shall call Orange County¹⁰. In stark contrast to CSSD, Orange County School District (OCSD) is overwhelmingly wealthy and White: of its 8,645 students served across 11 total schools, approximately 79% are White and only 6% are identified as “economically disadvantaged” (ccrpi.gadoe.org). According to U.S. News and World Report, OCSD high schools are not only among the best in the state of Georgia, but rank in the top 7% of high schools across the nation based on econometric indicators like math and reading proficiency, and college readiness (Allen, 2022, April 28). Attached below is a side by side comparison of English Language Arts and Math College and Career Readiness Performance index scores (out of 100) from 2022 for the two districts:

English Language Arts

Level	Elementary	Middle	High
Orange County School District	100	94.02	100
Common South School District	47.96	44.14	52.76

Math

Level	Elementary	Middle	High
Orange County	100	100	100

¹⁰Also a pseudonym.

School District			
Common South School District	52.86	43.11	41.57

Overall CCRPI scores

Orange County School District	92.5
Common South School District	49.6
Georgia (state) Average	63

As the above data suggests, CSSD schools are therefore in the precarious position of serving a population that has been ill-used by the Sunnydale community at large, which has a long history of controversies: for instance, the abuse of eminent domain laws in the 1960s to forcibly relocate entire communities of color from their homes to make way for development projects (Queen, 2022, August 9); or the attempted clandestine removal in 2015 of human remains of former slaves found during an expansion project to a historic building (Donovan, 2019, April 1). Legacies of slavery and segregation in the deep south are topics that Sunnydale has proven time and again to be reticent to confront, legacies of intergenerational trauma and epigenetic inheritance that teachers in CSSD confront in their teaching and learning with students each day. Despite the fact that the greater Sunnydale population is mostly—approximately 55% – White (accgov.com), CSSD is only 20% White, approximately 48% Black, and 25% Hispanic, with 100% of students classified as “economically disadvantaged” (ccrpi.gadoe.org). This racial divide is because many socioeconomically privileged families, instead of enrolling in Sunnydale’s public schools, send their kids to one of the area’s seven private K-12 schools (accgov.com). Therefore, as elsewhere in the U.S. (and perhaps nowhere

more starkly than the deep south), the racial and socioeconomic divides in CSSD are one and the same.

Perhaps pursuant to these challenges, CSSD policies provide evidence that the district is more focused than might be typical for a large southeastern school system on equity and inclusion. For instance, in early 2023, the CSSD Board of Education voted to rename two elementary schools after some of the first Black women teachers to integrate the district in 1966 (McCarthy, 2023, February 15). Their employee handbook is also rife with examples of progressive commitments, beginning with their stated core belief in equitable and accessible education as basic rights of every child, and as central to fulfilling the promises of democracy. They spell out these commitments to equity in specific policy documents concerning curriculum content, staff training, student access, district support, and student evaluation. There is not currently, however, any specific district policy regarding lactation, or pumping. The only mentions of pregnancy in the entire Board of Education handbook of policies and procedures are found in relatively boiler-plate policies on sexual harassment, Family and Medical Leave, and Paid Parental Leave. On July 11, 2023, I reached out to two district employees via email— one a representative for Open Records requests, and the other a contact person for Special Projects—to ask about the district’s handling of lactation. Both confirmed that there is, in fact, no specific policy surrounding lactation amongst classroom teachers, though they made sure to adamantly reiterate that the district adheres to federal law on the subject.

Individual Schools

Teachers interviewed for this study taught across four different schools: one elementary, two middle schools, and one high school. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the original parameters of the study were intended to reflect my own teaching background by focusing on middle level

educators. I was a middle school teacher for six years, so middle grades is the context that I know best. However, because it was perhaps more important that the participants in the study have been afforded the *de jure* protections of Charlotte’s Law, and excluding the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years because of disruptions to in-person learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the pool of eligible participants was extremely small. Thus participant recruitment was difficult. In response, I was compelled to expand recruitment criteria to elementary and high school teachers in the district– a move that added unexpected and welcome depth to the stories participants shared. Below are brief descriptions of each of the four schools¹¹, and of the lactation contexts described by the teachers I spoke with from each:

Blueberry Elementary. Blueberry Elementary is a picturesque neighborhood school on the west side of Sunnydale serving 533 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. I spoke with a third grade gifted teacher named Jamie, an 11 year veteran who at the time of our conversations was nursing her second child. At Blueberry, gifted services are provided via a push-in model, which meant that Jamie had no homeroom and thus a relatively flexible schedule for pumping when compared with other teachers with morning duty stations. At Blueberry, there is no dedicated space for lactation, so Jamie pumped in a laminating room in the library, located one floor below her classroom, that she shared with another nursing teacher. Jamie put a sign on the outside of the door to make sure that she wasn’t interrupted in this space, and administration gave her a key so she could lock the door. Blueberry Elementary does not permit teachers to have refrigerators in their classrooms, so Jamie stored her milk in a common fridge in her grade level workroom.

¹¹ As with the city and school district where the study took place, all individual schools and teachers have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities and confidentiality.

Cherry Pit Middle. Cherry Pit Middle School is located far outside Sunnydale city limits, on the southwest corner of Common South County. It serves 643 students in grades six through eight. I spoke with a sixth grade teacher of five years, Leslie, whose instructional time was split between General Education and Special Education English Language Arts and who, at the time, was pumping for her third child. Because Leslie had already done this twice before, she knew that her administration was legally obligated to give her some time and space to pump, which her instructional coach interpreted as 30 minutes twice per day. Since she had a co-teacher during her lunch period, giving her flexibility to return to class just in case her pumping session took longer than expected, the first of these sessions was during her lunch time; the second was during her collaborative planning meetings. As her planning team were all women, Leslie said that they all felt comfortable with her simply pumping at the back of the room while the team met. Cherry Pit Middle moved into a brand new school building in 2019, however despite recent updates to their facilities, finding space to pump still proved to be an issue for Leslie. She ended up finding private space in an electrical closet to which she was given the only key. Cherry Pit also did not allow teachers to have private fridges in their classrooms (apparently telling staff that this would be a fire hazard), so Leslie stored her milk in a communal fridge in the grade level work room.

Butter Toast Middle. Butter Toast Middle is the highest performing middle school in the CSSD, and is home to several revitalization projects. Located right in the heart of Sunnydale, Butter Toast has a free community medical clinic; houses gardens and a chicken coop in the school courtyard; and, for the last four years, has been piloting a restorative justice program to cut down on suspension rates, particularly amongst Black boys. At present the district is building a permanent replacement for the school, set to be complete in 2024. The teachers I spoke with

seemed to eagerly anticipate this change, as space in the old building BTMS currently occupies is scarce for its 742 students in grades six through eight. Indeed, a glance at the campus reveals a bit of the chaos of growing pains, with trailers crowding the grounds and optimistic signposts featuring illustrations of what the newly constructed building will look like adorning the visitor parking lot. I spoke with two educators from Butter Toast: the first an eighth grade administrator, Casey, who had just given birth to her first and only child. Casey's 13 years of experience were all at Butter Toast— first as a teacher, then an academic coach, prior to being promoted to admin. The second was a sixth grade Math teacher with 11 years of experience, Robin, who was nursing her second child at the time of our interviews. Casey was able to pump in her office, which has two doors that she kept locked and a large window over which she drew the blinds during pumping sessions. Though she had never been walked in on while pumping, Casey still wore a nursing cover during pumping sessions because it made her feel more comfortable with the practice given the unpredictability and reactivity of her position as an administrator. Robin was one of a few lucky teachers to have both a refrigerator and a sink in her classroom, which facilitated pumping tremendously. She did, however, have issues with privacy in the space, having been interrupted while pumping several times by custodians despite having posted a sign over her classroom door. She first tried placing her trash cans outside her classroom door so the custodians could continue their work without disruption to her privacy while pumping. When this did not work, she ended up borrowing Casey's office space.

Crisp Romaine High. Cherry Pit Middle is a feeder school for Crisp Romaine High School, which serves 1,509 students in grades nine through twelve in the same southwest corner of the county. Here I spoke with Jesse, an 11th grade U.S. History teacher of eight years about her experiences nursing her first and only child. Jesse's situation was unique compared to the

other four participants, in that she was the only woman-identifying member of an otherwise all-male Social Studies team. She was also supervised by a male administrator, rendering her uncomfortable broaching the topic of pumping with her teammates. Though Jesse speculated that she perhaps could have arranged for a fridge or used her classroom to pump, she also worried that custodians, admin, and building security officers would all have keys to her space. When taken in conjunction with the lack of support she felt in the building for her lactating body, Jesse decided instead that she would feed her child directly each day. As her partner worked from home, which was only a few minutes from Crisp Romaine High, he would drive to meet her in the parking lot each day with their child so Jesse could nurse in the back seat of their car during her planning period.

Results

Evidence for Neopatriarchal Norms

The teachers in this study repeatedly cited three primary supports as being critical to facilitate nursing upon return to work in schools: (1) time to pump, (2) a secure, private space for pumping, and (3) a refrigerator in which to store their milk. And they rarely, if ever, had access to any, much less all three of these necessary supports. Beginning with time, teachers are expected to supervise students practically every second of the eight-hour school day, with two primary exceptions: during their planning periods and their lunch periods. Indeed, all of the classroom teachers I spoke with attempted to pump/nurse during these times. However, their attempts were fraught with difficulty for several reasons. First, lactation can be an unpredictable process, with let-downs occurring at frequent and sometimes unexpected intervals throughout the day and night. The juxtaposition of the chaotic unpredictability of let-downs against the rigid, inflexible scheduling of the school day forced teachers to adapt creative solutions in their

attempts to fulfill the conflicting demands of both. For instance, Jesse and Leslie both made a habit of wearing padded inserts in their bras. Similar to menstrual pads, these adhesive pads are designed to absorb excess milk. Despite this precaution, Jesse described being mortified one day when milk leaked through her shirt in front of her 11th grade students. Second, even these scarce moments of discretionary time during planning and lunch periods can be crowded with meetings, or with mandatory student supervision duties during lunch. For Leslie, Cherry Pit's practice of regularly scheduling after-school meetings complicated the razor thin margins for timing her expression of milk:

We have so many [meetings] after school, for a while it was like two a week. And I don't want to stay after school. Like, I'm pumping. I wanna get back to the baby so I don't have to do a last pump, so I just haven't been going. And I know I'm, I'm sure it'll, I don't know if it's going to be in my evaluation that I'm not staying for these meetings, but I'm not going to.

In these instances, Leslie had to choose between compliance with the irregular demands of her job to stay after school for meetings, or open herself up to potential disciplinary measures for not attending. She described this as adding considerably to the stress of pumping in school.

Even where these teachers were free to forgo lunch duty in favor of a pumping session, teachers repeatedly bemoaned the notoriously short duration of lunch periods in U.S. schools. There is no way to predict how long it will take to fully empty milk ducts during a pumping session. Lunches, on the other hand, ran between 15 and 30 minutes, after which most teachers had to immediately return to directly supervising students. Leslie described feeling lucky to have a co-teacher during her lunch period, since it gave her a little more wiggle room to return to class if her pumping session ran longer than expected:

That's the hardest time where I'm kind of—and I'm lucky. My co-teacher, like if I run late— I don't know if you, I don't know if you remember pumping but like, sometimes it just does not happen in 15 minutes! I have to keep going. [My co-

teacher] is good. Like he's awesome about just saying, "Cool". And he'll lead the class. Like we're very much a co-teaching model.

The abrupt, jarring transition back from lunch also proved difficult for Robin, who felt similarly forced to find creative solutions to adapting her routines and procedures around returning from the lunch room:

So for the first five minutes of third period, they just read a book and they know it. Because that gives me time to pull up the presentation, take a deep breath, like, kind of get everything situated and get them situated as well, because I know I am not my best self when they come in. Because I'm so like, not scattered, but mentally just like all over the place. Because I had to completely check out. Instead of, [with] my first [child], I was able to kind of work while I was pumping. And so I stayed in, kind of "school-mode" a little bit more. But this time I have to completely check out in order to relax enough to get enough.

As with Jesse and Leslie opting to wear padded leak-guards, Robin's decision to transition back from lunch with a Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) starter stemmed from incongruity between the unpredictable bodily demands of lactation and the rigidly regimented bell schedules in schools.

There was, however, one participant in this study, Casey, who worked as an eighth grade administrator at the time she practiced pumping, and therefore did not have the same daily schedule of uninterrupted teaching and supervision that the other four teachers in this study shared. Admittedly, I therefore went into our interviews assuming that she would perhaps have a more flexible schedule than classroom teachers with more leeway to schedule her pumping breaks. Casey quickly rectified this misconception by describing her daily schedule, which is largely constructed around the free time of the eighth grade teachers she supervises. For instance, if she ever had to meet with her grade level team, it always had to be during their eighth grade planning period, meaning Casey could never pump during that time. In addition, much of

Casey's job entailed responding to student behavior issues, which are, by definition, impossible to anticipate. Below she describes a situation that popped up out of the blue on her radio:

So there was one day where I had just set up to pump. And I heard like— you know this. You were a teacher. You know the difference between kids just being loud and “there's about to be a fight.” I heard the “this is a fight” sound. And I was like, and I like, heard something come over the radio. You know, we have a code: there's a 10-10 on the B-Hall. And I'm like, no one responded immediately. It was like a three-second [pause], and no one had said anything. So I'm like, okay. So I take my pump off and like, button up my bra. And I was like, this is what I'm doing.

This unpredictable schedule clashed immensely with her highly organized attempts to schedule pumping breaks at 9 a.m., 12 p.m., and 2 p.m. throughout the day. Casey credits the stress of scheduling as being a primary reason she decided to give up nursing and switch to formula far earlier than she had originally hoped:

So at the beginning, my goal was to pump three times a day. I did— like I, my nursing journey was *a lot* at the beginning. And I really wanted to be committed to exclusively feeding my daughter breast milk. I made it to nine months without supplementing with formula, which I'm really proud of. And I know, people make all, the, whatever, choice people make is the best choice for them and their family. I get that. But my goal was to make it to a year. I think that pumping at work was one of the reasons that I didn't make it to a year, which... I don't know. I have some feelings about.

Unfortunately, Casey was not the only educator I spoke with who was forced to give up on lactation because of the stress of trying to reconcile it with her school schedule, as Jamie describes below:

So I actually stopped nursing and pumping when my daughter, I think she was about eight, almost eight months old. She's 10 months old now. It just kind of got a little bit too laborious. Yeah, and I just couldn't commit to doing it anymore, not for, for what I was, the output I was getting at school. It just became too stressful, and I just didn't want to do it anymore.

For similar reasons to what Jamie describes above, Jesse described wanting to explore other job prospects, like teaching virtually. In addition to complicating lactation, Jesse said, her school

schedule was simply taking away from too much quality time in these early days of her child's life. As the experiences of these educators illuminate, the time-bound minutiae of everyday life in schools conflicts with the embodied demands of parenthood. Particularly in the early days of an infant's life, caretakers need to conserve and expend their energies to contour to the unpredictability of a child's evolving feeding and sleeping habits. This need was not easy to reconcile with the rigidity of their schools' bell schedules.

The second primary need teachers described was for a secure, private space in which to pump. Instead, they described being frequently interrupted during pumping sessions. Custodians, students, fellow teachers, and other building staff had variously walked in on several participants in this study while in the vulnerable state of being semi-undressed with their breasts hooked up to a mechanical pump. As Robin explains below:

When I pump in my classroom, it's very likely that a custodian will come in, even though there's a sign over the lock that says "Please Do Not Disturb." They'll like, lift up the sign to come in. Because for them, it's like they have a certain amount of time to do their job, kind of thing. So I actually put my trash cans outside of my classroom before I pump in sixth, and then they come back to vacuum later.

For this reason, Robin switched to pumping in an administrator's locked office, though this space did not have the added benefit of a sink for cleaning pump parts like her own classroom.

Leslie explains why she also switched from pumping in her familiar classroom in favor of an electrical closet— a space that was markedly less comfortable (and sanitary), though at least met her bare minimum expectations for security:

I mean, it *is* an electrical closet. I could probably bring you and show you. It's not as welcoming, but it doesn't have any windows. And I do teach, like I get it: I don't want to ever have a kid walk in on me [while I'm pumping]. And I did. I used to pump in my classroom. And I had a couple of custodians walk in a couple times to vacuum and I was like, "Okay, I gotta figure something else out."

In stark contrast, as an administrator, Casey had the rare privilege of being able to pump inside her own locked, private office. However, the security of her office alone was not a panacea, for it was still a space clearly designed for work and not for lactation. In one particularly frustrating incident, Casey described spilling her carefully, diligently pumped milk onto her keyboard as she tried to multitask—working and pumping simultaneously:

So I think just like, as I think about like, bringing, like pumping was already stressful, like sitting at home by myself, like not having to worry about a cover, and being able to take, you know, whatever off and put whatever on to make it more comfortable. Being able to, like sit comfortably in a, in a chair that's like, you know— you make it your space when you're pumping at home. And it's like, what that space is for...whereas at work, I was like, *forcing* it on to a setup. Like, I've spilled milk on my keyboard. Like, like just things— because that's what I had to work with. And like, I got accustomed to pumping with a cover on. Because even though my space— after I learned about my blinds— was private and locked, you just never know.

As Casey explains, attempting to “force” lactation onto a physical, material context for which it was clearly not designed added additional stress to the already difficult task of expressing milk to feed a growing child.

Unfortunately, Casey was not the only participant to describe her school as a space poorly adapted to the needs of her lactating body. At Blueberry Elementary, Jamie and another lactating teacher shared a laminating room in the back of the library as their pumping space. Like Casey’s office, this space was at least secure. They both had copies of keys, and the media specialist agreed to serve as sentry to protect against unwelcome intrusion. Though again, as was the case with Casey’s office, security alone did not mean that the space was welcoming:

The actual space of the room— I mean, it wasn't a, it wasn't like a super comfortable place to like, go and pump, right? It's definitely set up for kids. So like, the table is low. There was a— it was basically a stool that I could sit on, you know, like, it wasn't like the most glamorous comfortable place to be doing this for sure. But — and it was kind of hard because, you know, I would, I was trying to keep everything clean, obviously. So I would like, spread out like, some bags that I would bring from home to like, put my [pump] parts on, to kind of like, set

everything up, because I didn't necessarily want it on the table that everybody had been touching, you know? (Jamie)

Jamie did everything in her power to make this space as comfortable as possible for pumping, like buying special pump wipes to quickly sanitize all the pump parts after each use, since there was no sink in the room to more thoroughly clean her pump parts. However, between the time needed to walk down to the media center, set up her pump parts, pump until she got a let-down, clean the pump parts, walk to the work room to store her milk in the communal fridge, and finally return to her classroom, Jamie estimated that each pumping session took around 45 minutes—time that she simply didn't have during the day to pump. Ultimately the converging space and time constraints led Jamie—like Casey—to also start supplementing with formula much earlier than either had originally intended.

The stress and strain described by Casey and Jamie of the converging incongruity of the time demands of teaching with the inhospitable spaces in their schools for a practice as intimate as lactation were echoed in my conversations with Jesse. However, she was unique amongst the other educators I spoke with in that she did not even bother trying to force pumping onto such a poorly accommodating context. Rather, she met her children's other caregivers—alternately her partner, who worked from home, or her niece, a recent graduate they hired to help with childcare—in the school parking lot each day so she could nurse her child directly.

And so I really only have time, when I'm working, to pump once a day. When I get home, I'm pretty full. And I pump and that gets about a bag. So it's like on the weekend, I'll try to stockpile a little, but we're just barely keeping up. So it's a little stressful. But [my child] does come, so she—we live really close. And so she's come every single day during my planning to visit me. And I'll sneak out and feed her. And you know, I mean, I should be allowed—I don't know if I'm really “sneaking”, because as long as I take care of my duties, I *should* be allowed to run out there—I would assume—and see my daughter. I'm not sure.

What was perhaps most interesting about Jesse’s creative problem solving was that she repeatedly referred to her time with her child– nursing in the back of a vehicle in the school parking lot– as “sneaking.” This feeling of having to abscond from the school building gave Jesse’s lactation practice an air of criminality, as though Jesse distinctly felt as though she was doing something *wrong*. Indeed, she described feeling hesitant to reach out to administration for support with infant feeding for fear that, once they found out what she was doing, they would order her to stop. As this case illustrates, these educators repeatedly described school contexts where their lactating bodies simply didn’t fit into the prearranged temporal and physical limitations of the structures of schooling. The result were experiences of overwhelm, stress and anxiety, as they tried earnestly to “force” their bodies to fit into material-discursive contexts that simply did not correspond with their needs.

It is important to note that these two primary impediments to successful efforts at continuing lactation– time and space– are both theoretically promised to teachers in the *de jure* writing of Charlotte’s Law, now extended to teachers nationwide through passage of the 2022 PUMP Act. In the context of this study, I think through the challenges my participants endured as evidence for the overwhelming predominance of neopatriarchal norms in schools. British feminist scholar Beatrix Campbell articulates *neoliberal neopatriarchy* as an evolving resettlement of traditional gender hierarchies, a new (re)configuration of patriarchy intricately intertwined with neoliberal discourses that provide cultural contexts where the gender-based violence of normalized sexism continues unabated (2014, May 25). Under neoliberal regimes, the state becomes subordinate to the market, resulting in a repudiation of social solidarities and welfare states. When privatization and attacks on regulation of labor markets and redistribution of wealth in welfare programs become the norm in government policy, the dismantling of public

infrastructure supporting family, children, and the elderly means the cost of providing care is increasingly returned to individuals. And these individuals, as Campbell (2014, January 6) points out, are disproportionately women, who continue to bear the burden of almost 75% of austerity measures through the unpaid work they do in the home cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly. Brown (2015) calls women the “invisible infrastructure” (p. 105) supporting regimes of financialization, as government support for families retreats and the sexual division of labor (re)centers women in traditional roles as provisioners of care for households, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. This seismic change has impacted women far more than men, since the majority of women— including the educators in this study— now participate in the labor market for the majority of their lives in addition to this undervalued and/or unpaid care work (Campbell, 2014, January 6).

Neoliberal neopatriarchy and its localized manifestations have not been articulated in the specific contexts of U.S. schools, nor have they been theorized through the particular lens of lactation as an embodied practice. As the examples of these teachers illustrate, the individualizing logic of neoliberalism leaves individuals with few options but to recast obstacles to nursing as *choices* they are making/can make, thereby obscuring the limitations imposed on their decision-making by the physical and material *structures* of U.S. schools. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that their struggles were a failure of *individuals*, either on the part of individual participants in this study or even necessarily the administrators, district personnel, and co-workers who should have been ideally positioned to support them. On the contrary, time and again in our interviews, these educators talked about how supportive their collaborative teams/co-teachers/partners were in attempting to support their efforts at lactation. Nor do I intend to suggest here that the teachers in this study were embodying values of neoliberal feminism, the

“lean in” rhetoric famously touted by Sheryl Sandberg (2013) that counsels working women to somehow paradoxically overcome the obstacles to achievement in U.S. workplaces by simply working twice as hard as men. Instead, I think with neoliberal neopatriarchy (Campbell, 2013; 2014) as an organizing principle in society to argue that the challenges they faced were *systemic* in nature, rooted in the material and discursive structures in which we all circulate. Thinking with neopatriarchy as structuring the workplace for a default body that is, by necessity, male, I interpret the creative problem solving devices adopted by my participants – such as the leak guard pads worn by Jesse and Leslie, or the pump wipes Jamie used– to be evidence of the extent to which the material-discursive structures in schools failed to support their efforts at lactation. Otherwise stated, these women were not neoliberal feminists, but actors surviving the best they knew how within systems dominated by neoliberal discourses that normalize(d) a productive, efficient body, one unencumbered by the undervalued care work of gestating, birthing, and subsequently nurturing infant children.

I also argue here that because of the predominance of neopatriarchal discourses in schools, the intended impact of sweeping legal changes like Charlotte’s Law (2020), the PUMP Act (2022), and the PWFA (2023) are diluted. While the PUMP Act technically protects a teacher’s right to reasonable break time and access to a locked space that is not a bathroom for pumping, it also does not specifically define what constitutes a “reasonable” amount of time, nor does it specify that pumping spaces need to be sanitary, welcoming, or anything other than private. The PUMP Act also does not even mention access to a refrigerator for milk storage. In other words, these legal protections leave districts with broad latitude for subjective decision-making around how they are implemented in local schools. And when the subjectivities of the decision-makers are rampant with the values of productivity, efficiency, and maximizing student

performance, it is easy to see how considerations for the bodies of lactating teacher-parents can fall by the wayside, leaving teachers to mostly navigate the process in isolation.

In the following section, I explain how, as a result of the failure of neopatriarchal structures to accommodate their evolving needs (being forced to “figure it out” for themselves), the teachers described jarring schisms between the viscerally embodied practice of lactation and the disembodied character of their work in schools. I then discuss how this schism resulted in feelings of not-enoughness for the teachers in this study.

Dis/embodiment

Given the incongruity between the time-bound minutiae of scheduling and the lack of spaces private and comfortable enough to be conducive to lactation, participants often described feeling as though their bodies didn’t fit, or didn’t belong. In the anecdote below, Leslie talks about how even the simplest oversights in routine school operations like scheduling standardized tests could lead her to feel physical pain:

And I think about like, they changed my—this is another thing—they, they changed the schedule. So during testing, I wasn't like, basically, I was an hour late to pump. And nobody thought about it. And no, like, I didn't think about it because I'm too busy getting these kids ready for an interim test. And so it got to the point where I was like, oh my god, someone's gonna have to go and cover me because I'm gonna get sick. Like I was, like, super hurting.

While supervising this test, Leslie’s breasts became so engorged with milk that she ached with pain until a patrolling administrator eventually came down the hall and was able to relieve her.

Feeling engorged was described by Robin as akin to having to “hold it” when you need to pee urgently:

But when I'm at home, that's totally fine, because I'm just nursing and then I can pump off and it's beautiful, and I build a stash. But at school, there's not really an opportunity to do that. So you just kind of like, hold on to it, you know. And so it feels almost like you just have to pee really, *really* badly. And you can't like, do anything about it, or like you...Like sometimes I'll pump and I'll be in the middle

of a let-down, and I have to stop to go back to class. And so just kind of the fluctuation of the amount that I'm able to pump in a session causes a bit more stress in my body as well.

Not being able to respond to the most basic bodily functions impeded Robin's milk production, leading to huge fluctuations in the amount she was able to pump while at school. Though the feeling was different for Leslie and Robin– the former feeling pain, the latter feeling as though she had to pee urgently– both described stress from attempting to force their bodies to conform to the school schedule.

In stark contrast to the incongruity between school spaces/schedules and their lactating bodies, several of these teachers talked about having no trouble with nursing and pumping in their homes. They primarily ran into difficulty with their milk supplies while at work. As Casey explains,

And all of that, like, I don't– that was fine for me. It's like, those things, like, I enjoy the nursing experience and journey that I've been on with [my child]. It's the other pieces outside though, like, how do I maintain this when I'm not with her? That's been too much.

Trying to balance lactation alongside her full-time teaching responsibilities led Casey to do things that she reflected on as “wild,” such as pumping while sitting in line at a drive-thru window to grab dinner, or while responding to emails at her desk. Not all of my participants were able to multitask in this way, however. Robin, for example, described having to deliberately disengage from her school responsibilities in order to be relaxed enough to get a let-down. When I asked how she managed juggling it all, she replied:

Um, I guess that's impossible? I tend to be very intentionally one hat-ed, if that makes sense. So when I'm at school, as a teacher, I'm trying to be really focused as a teacher, so I don't let other things from home kind of get in my mental space... And then when it comes to lactation, I very much have to completely detach from school, and then re-engage afterwards. So there's nothing– I can't do any work, or think about the fact that I'm there. So most often, that looks like, I put in my headphones so that I don't hear anybody, and I listen to music or watch

something on my phone or play a puzzle app— just anything to kind of get my mind off of my teacher life.

In stark contrast to the ease with which she described pumping and nursing at home, Robin had to completely disassociate from her job responsibilities in order to get a lactation response while at school. The disorienting experience of trying to pump while in school was a motivating factor in Jesse’s decision to nurse her daughter in person in the parking lot during her planning period.

These brief intervals provided a “connection time” for them to be together physically...

...because we were together 24/7. And I abruptly had to go back to eight hour workdays. So yeah. So I'm, like, afraid of losing that...and [teaching] can be really rewarding work. But I'm looking for something virtual if at all possible next school year. I just don't want to miss so much of every day with her.

Jesse’s example highlights an important point about pumping in schools in general. Even when teachers have sufficient time and space for it (which participants in this study rarely did), providing infants with pumped milk from a bottle is still a shadowy substitute for the ability to nurse one’s child directly. Casey explains how it wasn’t necessarily the nursing *itself* that was stressful, but trying to manage lactation when her child wasn’t physically *with* her:

I don't mind nursing her, like when we go on road trips, and when I'm with her all day on the weekends. Like, it's not that experience that was adding the stress. It was scheduling the pumping. It was getting up in the middle of the night, because I didn't have enough time to pump during the day. It was pumping in the car because I didn't want to miss class. It's just all those things, I think is where, what led me to, to, to choose to supplement [with formula] like we are now.

Jesse and Casey’s explanations highlight how the right to pump in schools is merely a disembodied alternative to the intimate physical connection between parent and child that nursing as an approach to infant feeding represents—a choice obscured by the taken-for-granted assumption that return to work for teachers necessarily entails physical separation. When taken in conjunction with the stress of scheduling and the hostility of the physical spaces available for pumping, it is little wonder that the participants in this study talked about continuing lactation in

schools as stressful and overwhelming, with at least two— Casey and Jamie— abandoning the practice altogether.

Not-enoughness

When their teaching responsibilities and school structures conflicted sharply with their embodied needs as lactating teacher-parents, the participants in this study were left with feelings of not-enoughness (Hughes, 2014). No matter what they tried, how hard they worked, or how many creative time-saving devices they adopted, these teachers described their returns to work after having a child as awful, stressful, and overwhelming. Pittard (2015) calls this the impossibility of the *good enough woman teacher*, an elusive subject position when “even *good enough* has become unattainable within discourses of neoliberalism and gender normativity” (p. 18). As Jesse explains:

It’s really stressful. It’s overwhelming. It’s hard to keep up. Because, you know, that’s just, those are just a couple of aspects of my life, you know. There are people who want to connect and get time. And then, and like, tomorrow night, I need to come back up here for a Teacher Appreciation Night, because some students picked me to walk out on the soccer field with them, you know, so it’s like, that’s another couple hours that I have to leave my baby again, you know, and it’s like, you don’t want to let the students down. It’s hard to balance at all. It really is.

As this example points out, teaching responsibilities do not end when one’s contracted eight-hour day is over. Despite constantly rushing to maintain what Casey called a “delicate balance,” these teachers described always feeling behind, as though they were missing out on things. Finding time to pump meant that Jamie had to miss out on planning meetings, which she attended over Zoom but found that this was a poor substitute for in-person communication; pumping in the car meant that Casey missed out on bedtime routines with her husband and child while commuting to her evening doctoral courses; and Robin lamented having to miss fun team-building activities at Butter Toast Middle, such as duty-free and First Friday lunches, in order to squeeze in time to

pump. So strong was her feeling of overwhelm that Robin adopted a strategy of compartmentalization between her work and home lives to cope with the reality that she could work “24/7” as a teacher and still not get everything done:

And especially after having kids, I rarely actually do work at home. Because I just can't. After the kids go to bed, I'm just so exhausted. And I know I'm going to be up at night [nursing]. So I just, I don't pull out my laptop. And that means that things don't get done.

As Jamie puts it, there is simply “never enough time” during the work day, a reality that Casey articulated as “accepting that something’s gonna fall.” She summarizes the feeling of knowing that even her best efforts could never be enough to master the conflicting demands of education alongside the around-the-clock demands of caring for an infant as simply “shitty:”

I guess it's just like, this acceptance that I'm not going to be good at all the things all the time, and figuring out which one to let go at different times. But how that feels is just like, I mean, it feels shitty. It feels shitty to acknowledge, like, just say, I'm going to do a bad job at something all the time. It's just, I have to pick which one is not going to be the best. And unfortunately, I know there are going to be times when that is going to be like, I need to, the ball I have to drop is something that I want to do with [my child], and let my husband or friends or family kind of pick that up, which I know they will. Which is, I'm so thankful I have that support system. But that feels really shitty. Um, so I guess just that... I guess that's that, just what that feeling is: it's bad. But I just don't know any other way to operate through this.

Because the neopatriarchal discourses predominating in their workplaces normalized efforts to *individualize* the aforementioned *systemic* obstacles to lactation, causing them to try everything in their power to “make it work,” the participants in this study were left with internalized feelings of failure when their exhausted bodies simply could not master the conflicting demands of their public lives as teachers alongside their private lives as parents. In this instance, we can view lactation as a location of embodied conflict, a practice that brings into harsh opposition the conflicting values of being a good worker and a good parent. The values of the private sphere dictate that “breast is best,” and therefore practicing lactation is the ideal. This is in stark contrast

to the values of the public sphere, where the ideal worker's productivity is only impeded by the inconvenient necessity of having a body requiring restroom breaks or sick leave. As Thorley (2021) argues, the workplace is dominated by norms that value a more mechanistic male body and production. The result is that the practice of lactation in the workplace gives rise to “a dichotomy... where women perform the reproductive, corporeal work of breastfeeding, while performing the disembodied corporate work of the ideal worker” (p. 8). Attempts to master the conflicting values of both worlds left participants feeling “shitty,” exhausted, and “overwhelmed.”

Discussion

In this study, I have tried to bring the theoretical concepts of neoliberal neopatriarchy and disembodiment into conversation by showing what they look like in the lived experiences of lactating teacher-parents. In moving towards a framework for understanding the experiences of teacher-parents, I propose the concept of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood* that combines Hausman's (2004) concept of embodied mothering and Boyer's (2014) neoliberal motherhood with a refusal of gender-specific language (mother[ing/hood]) that essentializes the bodies of people read in society as women (Averett, 2021). According to this concept, neopatriarchal contexts (Campbell, 2013; 2014) disembody the experience of parenthood in two primary ways. First, the medicalization of infant feeding values the technology of lactation— the actual milk produced— above the relationship cultivated between parent and child during lactation (McCarter-Spaulding, 2008). In a disembodied approach, only the milk is necessary, so there is no need to address other components of gender equity visible through the act of nursing: for instance, the absence of federal paid family leave in the United States. Full embodiment would imply the necessity of having the parent and the infant physically present somewhere together,

either in the workplace or the home. A disembodied approach conceptualizes milk as a *product*, versus the relationship between parent and child in lactation as a *process*; this view allows employers the convenience of only needing to secure employees with space to pump and store their milk, thereby skirting the more difficult quandaries of parental leave, onsite child care, and increased job flexibility (McCarter-Spaulding, 2008).

Second, neoliberalization discourses fashion the subject as an individual, a rational and autonomous, self-actualizing actor. Attention to forms of embodied subjectivity departs sharply from dominant discourses, as the act of lactation is a unique physiological relationship between a parent and child that has no analogy in the masculinized default body which predominates U.S. workplaces (Hausman, 2004; Davies et al., 2005). This form of embodied subjectivity, in which the parent has a child that is both separate from but dependent on them, gives us a lens through which we can evaluate how wholly current political regimes exclude lactating bodies (Hausman, 2004). When neoliberal logic comes to govern our workplaces, the ideal worker comes to be defined by a masculinized ideal that is productive, efficient, and maximizes his own human capital. Foucault (2008) articulates this ideal as *homo economicus*, a subject position that is male by default. Lactating teacher-parents cannot physically embody this ideal while prioritizing the unpredictable, timely, and around-the-clock demands of pumping milk for their children. As Wendy Brown explains in *Undoing the Demos* (2015), when *homo oeconomicus* becomes the governing rationality across all spheres of life—not solely those market-based transactions, but public life, welfare, education, and our private lives as well—

...there are two possibilities for those positioned as women in the sexual division of labor that neoliberal orders continue to depend on and reproduce. Either women align their own conduct with this truth, becoming *homo oeconomicus*, in

which case the world becomes uninhabitable, or women's activities and bearing as *femina domestica* remain the unavowed glue for a world whose governing principle cannot hold it together, in which case women occupy their old place as unacknowledged props and supplements to masculinist liberal subjects. (p. 104 – 105)

In other words, women remain the “invisible infrastructure” (Brown, 2015, p. 105) doing the vast majority of cooking, cleaning, childcare, and of course, lactation around the world—work that, in many cases, is uncompensated and/or undervalued. And yet without that gendered labor, the world would be a very unkind place indeed. The teachers in this study tried their hardest to live up to the masculinist ideal of productivity and efficiency governing their school workplaces *while simultaneously* pumping milk for their children—an endeavor that, given the viscerally embodied nature of pumping juxtaposed against the disembodied ideal of *homo oeconomicus*, almost invariably doomed their efforts to failure. If the presumed body is male, then there is a friction with the lactating body. The performativity required can only be performed by a male body. Bringing *any* body into U.S. workplaces that is not typically-abled, White, male, English-speaking, and of course, unencumbered by traditionally gendered care responsibilities, is playing a rigged game indeed. Thus, this study highlights the critical importance of moving towards a conceptualization of parenthood that provides a critique of discourses of neoliberal neo-patriarchy (Campbell, 2013; 2014) that continue to dominate U.S. workplaces.

Furthermore, thinking through these teacher-parents' experiences with the concept of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*, I argue that policies like the PUMP Act (2022) and the PWFA (2023), though originally intended to make the lives of lactating parents easier, may actually end up harming them. As the creative problem solving attempts by these educators

show, policies embedded in neoliberalist ideology fail parents, as they simply place more burdens on them to figure out solutions to lactation themselves (Boyer, 2014). This helps explain the tremendous gap between the *de jure* protections of Charlotte's Law (2020) to which teachers in this study should have been entitled, and the *de facto* conditions available to them for lactation in schools. Despite the existence of a supportive legal framework, these teachers still largely struggled to find access to reasonable break time and access to secure, locked spaces to pump. Their attempts to balance the incredible demands of lactation alongside time-bound schedules and inhospitable spaces not conducive to supporting new parents is an example of what Boyer (2014) terms "neoliberal motherhood", a mode of neoliberal citizenship in which individuals are made responsible for the maintenance of their own health and welfare:

Under [policies like] Reasonable Break Time, the responsibility for children's health is achieved through an almost wholly individuated socio-technical system of breast pumps, lactation rooms, refrigerators, and working mothers willing to discipline their bodies to the rigours of pumping at work. This costs organisations relatively little when compared with robust maternity leave, in terms of both maternity pay and lost labour. (p. 281)

In other words, the predominance of neoliberal values in U.S. schools as workplaces interpellates teachers into a subject position everything becomes an individual affair. At times, teachers did not even think to ask for help with lactation (like Jesse, who "snuck" to her car each day to feed her child in the school parking lot). When these teachers individualized their responses to "making it work", feeling forced by the predominance of neoliberalist ideologies to "figure it out" for themselves, it left structural obstacles to lactation intact for the next lactating teacher-parent to follow. The vicious cycle therefore continues, despite the presence of laws that should

be supporting the work of lactation in schools, hence the *de jure* letter of the law falls far short of its *de facto* implementation. Finally, Boyer (2014) points out that the type of disembodied approaches represented by policies like the PUMP Act (2022) and the PWFA (2023) is that they present the guise of a solution that makes calls for alternatives appear unnecessary. They can lead to a false sense of security where we celebrate the passage of a law and think: Mission accomplished! What these findings suggest is that the link between a supportive *discourse*—the legal changes represented by the PUMP Act—and the real, *material* changes needed for teachers to be able to successfully practice lactation—time to pump, space to pump, and a fridge for milk storage—is far from clear. Work remains to be done to understand the link(s) between discourse and material change, particularly when unpacking the many unintended consequences of policies like the PUMP Act (2022).

Conclusion

In short, the experiences of these educators highlight how we can and must think about and do things differently in schools. Policies like paid parental leave, flexible scheduling, and increased access to sick leave for new parents could all create space to ease the burden on lactating teacher-parents. In addition, this data points to the need for policies supporting parents to be standardized and routinized throughout districts, such that administrators in every school building across the country can make new parents aware of exactly what their rights are around securing leave and transitioning back to work following the birth of (a) child[ren]. However, these suggestions, like the Reasonable Break Time provisions mentioned above, are perhaps only hollow attempts to reform existing systems rife with neopatriarchal norms. Perhaps soon we may be able to imagine more radical changes, such as reenvisioning what school campuses look like to invite infants as well to be part of the school community alongside their parents. At a bare

minimum, it seems feasible to start planning school buildings to have dedicated, comfortable, secure, and sanitary locations for employees to pump that are equipped with a sink for washing pump parts and a fridge for milk storage. These latter two possibilities would accomplish what is currently perhaps unthinkable by inviting lactating teacher-parents in all their embodied humanity into the spaces of U.S. schools.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

It is fascinating to think about methodology and its vocabulary that is always becoming and never a finished project. From this perspective, qualitative researchers cannot rest their cases, finish their learning, or close their glossaries... In addition, we may be able to give up notions of finality of knowledge or findings and approach ending and “conclusions” as temporary and unstable. Instead of rigidly studying methodological techniques or worrying about right ways to carry out scholarship, we could try to *live* research.

- Koro-Llungeberg, 2016, p. 40-41, emphasis added

In my work as a teacher educator, I try to impress upon teacher candidates how important it is to have a compelling hook at the beginning of their lessons. As we begin the day’s learning, I explain, we have to give our students a reason to give a shit about what they’re about to learn. Therefore I will begin this farewell chapter to you, dear reader, by giving you a reason to give a shit: by telling what I hope will be a compelling story. For in teaching, as in life, no one can resist a good story.

A Storied Aside

Fair warning: this is not my story, nor am I the first to tell it. Instead, I am relaying second-hand (third-hand?) a story that was first told on an NPR podcast called *Invisibilia* on October 7th, 2022, in an episode entitled “Power Tools.”

Power Tools

Peter Belmi is an Associate Professor of Business Administration at the University of Virginia who studies power, diversity, and the reproduction of inequality. He first became interested in power as a graduate student at Stanford University, where he completed his doctoral

studies. As part of his graduate assistantship, he signed up to be a teaching assistant (TA) for a course called “Paths to Power,” taught by renowned organizational behavior researcher Jeffrey Pfeffer. Belmi didn’t know exactly what this course was about, though coming from a working class family in the Philippines, he had some ideas. Belmi thought that if he kept his head down and worked really hard in graduate school, he would get noticed on the basis of his work ethic and the quality of his papers alone. Having internalized this meritocratic, idealized vision of the American Dream (Gladwell, 2008), Belmi assumed that this course would be about energizing future business leaders of America to go out in the world and make a difference through a combination of hard work and talent.

Smash cut to the first day of class.

Instead of repeating the same old script about hard work and dedication, Dr. Pfeffer entered the classroom on the first day and proclaimed to an eager auditorium of Stanford undergraduates that everything they had ever been told about how to get ahead in the world was a lie: that hard work alone was insufficient. “If you do a great job and nobody notices, your job performance will be, of course, irrelevant to your success” (Invisibilia, NPR, October 7, 2022), he told the class. He went on to articulate the goals of the course: to teach students how to play what he called “the power game,” a series of strategic initiatives designed to help students achieve their objectives in business by treating others as resources, making alliances with people who are going to win, taking up space, putting yourself first, expressing anger to manipulate people, and “strategic misrepresentations” (i.e. lying). According to Belmi, one student raised a hand to ask if this kind of approach was unethical, to which Pfeffer reportedly responded that, “...if you want power, the only principle that you should follow is the principle of self-interest.¹²”

¹² As someone interested in how discourses of neoliberalism shape human subjectivities, can you see where I’m going with this?

Over the course of his semester as a TA for Dr. Pfeffer's "Paths to Power" course, Belmi and the students learned about how research shows that Machiavellian traits like narcissism are predictors of who gets power in the "real" world. Their culminating project for the semester was to put into practice the strategies they learned in the course for "doing" power in the "real" world, which resulted in the students proposing such egomaniacal tactics as trying to get their company co-founders fired. Most of their students felt empowered by these exercises in naked self-interest (Invisibilia, NPR, October 7, 2022). Belmi, in stark contrast, felt conflicted: grossed out even (Invisibilia, NPR, October 7, 2022). This was not how his mother had raised him. If this was the way to get power, he thought, then did he even want to occupy a position of power? He felt angry, sad, and hopeless. He even thought about quitting his doctoral program.

But he stuck with it. And after a few years, he had a dissertation to write.

Perhaps more importantly, he started noticing something. There were students in the class who did not seem to jump on board with the unabashedly self-interested approach to power Dr. Pfeffer advocated. Some students objected: students who tended to come from historically marginalized backgrounds like women, first-generation college students, and racial and ethnic minorities¹³. This left Belmi with a burning question: Could the traditional paths to power at elite organizations be turning people from marginalized backgrounds off from even wanting to play the power game? Was he, himself, an outlier¹⁴, or part of a larger pattern?

He dedicated his dissertation to resolving this question, concluding that people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, like himself, were less apt to pursue positions of power when they found that pursuit incommensurate with their values. As Belmi explains,

¹³ This word, minorities, is problematic. Though White people are, statistically, the majority *in the United States*, they are far from a majority racial group worldwide. Perhaps a better moniker might be *minoritized* peoples...?

¹⁴ All research is *mesearch*, after all.

In a working-class environment, where there's lots of threats, there's lots of uncertainty, everybody has to coordinate, because doing so helps us survive as a group. Right? And so people in those contexts learn that what it means to be a good person is to be sensitive to the needs of other people, to see yourself as connected to others. (Invisibilia, Power Tools, October 7, 2022)

His dissertation and subsequent research concluded first and foremost that people from wealthier backgrounds were more likely to be highly individualistic: to have been taught to value focusing on themselves. Therefore the narcissistic traits of single-minded self-interestedness that tended to be rewarded with positions of power posed no conflict with their deeply internalized values and sense of self. People from marginalized backgrounds, on the other hand, were reluctant to seek positions of power *unless* they could do it through what he has articulated as "prosocial means," when "they reconstrue power as serving a superordinate goal of helping others" (Belmi & Laurin, 2016, p. 505). Prosocial values include being authentic and truthful, being a team player, helping other people, and being detail-oriented and conscientious (Piff et al., 2010). Belmi's research opened up a new way of thinking beyond traditional drivers of inequality like sexism, racism, and classism by suggesting that "...inequality can also arise *when we structure our workplaces and schools* in a way that excludes the cultural values and norms of members of underrepresented groups" (Invisibilia, Power Tools, October 7, 2022, emphasis added). In other words, when selfish, manipulative behaviors are required for advancing one's way through the social world of the workplace, people from non-dominant gender, race, and class backgrounds tend to get turned off by this Machiavellian approach to human relationships and often opt out of playing the power game altogether.

This story has a happy ending, of course. Belmi is now a tenured professor and regularly challenges his students to unpack dominant narratives around power in the business world. In addition, his writing and teaching on prosocial values in the workplace stresses the importance of staying vigilant to the negative effects of power once attained, such that the next generation of American businesspeople can strive to make changes to an inequitable system from within.

Introduction

I want to begin by emphasizing that this chapter is not necessarily just about the plight of lactating teacher-parents in U.S. schools. It will not always be specifically about lactation, nor even about teaching as a profession. Rather, I began with Belmi's story as a launching point for a chapter that is about connecting the stories of my participants to a wider pattern of erasure and exclusion, stories that arise when we structure our workplaces at their core with patriarchal and neoliberal values. Otherwise put, much like the interviews Belmi conducted with his students, the stories of my participants highlight how inequality rises when our workplaces—schools included—are designed to value only the masculinized traits of single-minded self-interestedness and strategic manipulation of others' human capital to advance one's own career and financial goals. Historically feminized traits like empathy, solidarity, and building community become marginalized in workplaces where sexist and capitalist discourses, and the value and behaviors that they subsequently foster, are the norm. Belmi's observations on the (re)production of inequality as being tied to the normalization of aggressively Machiavellian characteristics, to the exclusion and devaluation of the values and norms of underrepresented groups, further explains how expectations in an overwhelmingly feminized workforce—teaching—remain male-dominated. In other words, the fact that the vast majority of teachers self-identify as women does little to change sexist and capitalist values systems undergirding U.S. schools as workplaces.

In this chapter, then, I explore the implications of the current study beyond the lives of lactating teacher-parents to examine how the mechanisms of oppression are (re)created by the invisibility of the material and discursive structures of our shared institutions. What is evident from the stories of these lactating teacher-parents is the extent to which domination continues to structure our experiences, despite the proliferation of popular post-racial, post-feminist, and meritocratic tropes to the contrary. I will also discuss the implications of this work for teacher education, specifically what happens when we make the work of teacher education to render the **invisible** visible such that our future educators are empowered to think about structures, how they do damage, and how to change them.

Finally, I conclude this dissertation with hesitation— methodologically preferring to eschew the drive to conclude anything from this research in the first place. Though this document is an artifact representing two or more years of my life’s work, the *real* work has been in what Ahmed (2017) calls living a feminist life: raising my child; building relationships in my teaching; reading feminist literature to learn and unlearn patriarchy and not-enoughness and how they work on/through me; following Koro-Llungeberg’s (2016) call to try and *live* research. I’m living research by bringing what haunts me to bear, giving voice to ghosts that haunt those forced to navigate emotionally and bureaucratically inhospitable workspaces. Writing their trauma alongside my own to insist that it matters. This is work that is never finished. For instance, as I followed up with participants subsequent to the original interviews, I was reminded that lactation is merely a snapshot in time. My research participants are dynamic humans, in stark contrast to the static permanence of the written word, whose children have continued to grow. Naturally of course, their challenges as working parents have shifted, with other structural issues like access to affordable, quality, reliable childcare moving to the forefront of some

participants' minds. Again, the issue of childcare sheds light on an overarching theme to this dissertation: the degree to which structures inform all our experiences, particularly in a country that refuses to redistribute its tremendous wealth to fund measures in the best interests of a democratic public, such as subsidized early childhood care.

Though I ultimately cannot resist drawing *some* conclusions, I intend for this final chapter to be more of a looking-forward: a way to reflect on the power of bringing oneself into our research and writing. For even if this research is not specifically about me (since I was a graduate student working from home during the pandemic during the majority of the time spent nursing my child, and thus do not have any personal experience with infant feeding while working full-time in the classroom), the same neoliberal values of entrepreneurialism, self-interestedness, and carelessness (Lynch, Grummell & Devine, 2012) structure a precarious work environment for me as a woman academic. Therefore I breathe life into this story as I breathe life into my child, my loved ones, my students, myself. I am here with *you*: literally, here, in these words.

Summary

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this qualitative interview study is to understand infant feeding practices among teachers who have recently returned to full-time work in the classroom following the birth of a child. Specifically, it aims to understand how teachers are constrained in their decision-making around lactation and how they conceptualize their responses and adaptations to structural, discursive, or temporal boundaries in the increasingly neoliberal context of public schooling in the United States.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the current inquiry are as follows:

1. *What are the material-discursive contexts in which public school teachers experience lactation?*
2. *How do these teachers navigate lactation in their existing school structures?*
3. *How are Georgia school districts taking up and enacting the 2020 Charlotte's Law?*

Literature Review

This study employs poststructural theoretical perspectives in order to shed light on the importance of both material and discursive structures informing/informed by teachers' experiences with lactation in the workplace. Because neoliberalism is a dominant discourse in U.S. workplaces—schools included— I think first and foremost with Foucauldian articulations of governmentality as a manner by which people are governed and govern themselves (Attick, 2017). Under neoliberal regimes, teachers are interpellated into subject positions that Foucault (2008) called modern *homo oeconomicus*: rationally interested self-entrepreneurs who are concerned primarily with their own productivity. Through the proliferation of pervasive “audit culture[s], where individuals find themselves needing to constantly prove that they are working effectively and efficiently” (Apple, 2007, p. 4), neoliberalism “requires the constant production of evidence that you are doing things ‘efficiently’ and in the ‘correct’ way” (p. 7). The ongoing neoliberal transformation of public schools

has led to teaching becoming a hyper-individualized, yet strictly administered activity that compels teachers to focus on the production of quantifiable outputs...over time, this increasingly renders the act and art of teaching into another human enterprise that is susceptible to the power and metrics of the free market. (Attick, 2017, p. 38)

This narrow-minded focus on the production of quantifiable outputs disadvantages lactating teacher-parents, whose bodies physically cannot embody this masculinized ideal of efficiency—what Apple (2014) calls the “self-sufficient, rational and competitive, economic *man*” (p. 918, emphasis in original) – while simultaneously reacting to the unpredictable, around-the-clock demands of feeding, diaper changes, and sleep for newborn babies.

Because lactation is an intimately embodied experience, I think also think with poststructural feminist theories of embodiment, such as Butler’s (2007) argument for the performativity of gender, and Oyêwùmi’s (1997) case for the centrality of the body in Western constructions of difference, to illustrate the extent to which the marginalization of lactating teacher-parents in schools is not deterministically rooted in their physiology. Rather it is part and parcel to the ways in which gender is constructed under prevailing Western cultural binaries. Bringing these two frames—neoliberalism and feminist theories of embodiment—to bear in understanding the lives of lactating teacher-parents has the intended effect of shining light on potential hopeful futures for working parents. For although the portrait drawn by my participants is largely a bleak mirror of what the present holds for parents in U.S. workplaces, schools in particular, these gendered outcomes are *not* destiny. Dominant scripts for what it means to be a “good” teacher or parent in the U.S. are cultural constructions: perpetually written and performed. This means that the current gendered subjugation these findings suggest can be rewritten or *unwritten*.

Methodology

Informed by a poststructural feminist critique of conventional Humanist qualitative methods, this study thinks with haunting (Gordon, 1997; Rhee, 2021) as an insistence that,

despite the fact that women’s embodied experiences are rarely discussed¹⁵ and generally under-researched, and the fact that infant feeding practices are not even necessarily gender-specific (though all my participants did, at the time of the interviews, identify as cisgender, heteronormative women), their stories *matter*. Moreover, critical feminist scholars taking up haunting as a methodology do so as an insistence that the personal *is* political (Combahee River Collective, as cited in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), opening up space to refuse the dichotomy between our personal and our work lives— what we “can” and “cannot” study as legitimate research[ers] (Rhee, 2021). I therefore use two very different sets of methods for data analysis and representation—traditional thematic analysis in Chapter 5 and, as you will see in the Epilogue, speculative fiction— strategies that afforded different routes to transparently and ethically bringing *myself* into the narrative. Though these approaches—traditional thematic coding and speculative fiction—historically “do” different things in qualitative research (the former mostly intending to persuade, the latter preferring to eschew any hard and fast conclusions and instead create space for wonder), I prefer to think of them as opposing sides of the same coin. One points to a very real problem in the U.S. education system; the other leverages the infinite power of storying to imagine a better way we could be in the world. Without the power to imagine that better way, what good would it do to point out the problem anyways? Storying paves the way for the creation of new worlds that we *could* have—though first, we have to dream them.

¹⁵ This is changing rapidly in U.S. popular culture. For just a handful of fantastic examples from TV and film, see (1) The Netflix series *Bojack Horseman*, which features satirical commentary on the early days of parenthood (Season 6, Episode 2: “The New Client”) and abortion (Season 3, Episode 6: “Brrap Brrap Pew Pew”); (2) the complex depiction of miscarriage in the Norwegian independent film “The Worst Person in the World” (2021); (3) the haunting portrayal of queer love and loss in the French independent film “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” (2019); and (4) the alarming depiction of birth trauma in episode 7 of the Hulu mini-series *Fleischman is in Trouble*.

More specifically, in Chapter 5, I think with more conventional qualitative methods, theorizing the data in Campbell's (2014a; 2014b; 2014c) articulation of "neoliberal neopatriarchy" to structure a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to coding my way through transcripts of interviews conducted with five lactating teacher-parents in fall 2022. What came out of this approach is the frame of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*, a concept that helps me understand how the intersecting forces of global neoliberal capitalism and sexism converged in the bodies of my participants to render their experiences with pumping in schools emotionally and bureaucratically violent: capitalism because it (re)creates discursive contexts where "almost everything is commodified, that is, valued in monetary terms. [When] women's milk is perceived as a free product; that is, it is perceived as carrying no economic value, in that it is not part of the cash society and no money exchanges hands, [it leads to] a line of thinking that subtly devalues it" (Thorley, 2021, p. 11); and sexism because it devalues any care work or bodily practice traditionally associated with the feminine, normalizing a context wherein "...as all bodies are produced as expressions of value, compared against the model 'flexible' middle-class subject of acquisition and appropriation, some bodies are constituted as improper and variously excluded" (Pulsford, 2019, p. 353). The default subject of value, therefore, in neopatriarchal contexts, becomes the typically-abled, White male body, "a worker who is unencumbered by care responsibilities and is free to play the capitalist game in a global context" (Apple, 2014, p. 918): a game that lactating teacher-parents simply cannot win.

As you will see in the next chapter, the Epilogue, I think with speculative fiction, using the interview and focus group data collected from six classroom teachers as part of Benson and Sharma's 2021 pilot study to create a utopian short story of lactation in education that reimagines possibilities for lactating teacher-parents outside the oppressive strictures of the present. In this

story, I write myself—recollections of nursing my own child—alongside the imagined futures I create with my participants. Because writing fiction holds different truth claims than ‘objective’ Science (Richardson, 2000), fiction opens space for leaning into the inherent instability of meaning, the fickleness of language, and for the destabilization of the treasured relationship between the signifier and the signified (Graham, 2011) that feminist poststructural scholars have critiqued as the failure(s) of conventional Humanist qualitative methods (Childers, Rhee & Daza, 2013). In addition, reading fiction has made me laugh and cry, bringing tears of both joy and anguish—rarely have I ever felt such emotional highs and lows that so closely mirror the complexity of the human experience when reading scientific publications. In this way, I hold up fiction as an alternative pathway to ‘truth’ in education research, one that perhaps even more closely represents the lived realities we are trying to convey than traditional ‘scientific’ methods.

Findings

Across the two phases of this study, data comprising interviews and focus groups with eleven total educators, I found that teachers face overwhelming obstacles to merging the conflicting demands of their private lives as parents alongside the work demands of their public lives as teachers. The three primary impediments to successfully pumping in schools teachers in this study described—time to pump, a locked, private space in which to pump, and a refrigerator in which to store their milk—were consistent with findings from other studies related to classroom lactation practices (Phillips, 2020). Indeed, in the midst of this writing, on December 28th, 2022, the Biden administration passed the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (or, PUMP) Act, extending the right to reasonable break time and access to a locked space that is not a bathroom for pumping to classroom teachers nationwide (S. 1658/H.R. 3110). However, this analysis departs from prior studies on classroom teachers’ infant feeding practices in that it was

guided, at its inception, by poststructural theoretical commitments to highlight the importance of *both* the material conditions of teaching *as well as* the discursive fields in which educators navigate their decision-making around infant feeding practices. In other words, I looked beyond simply the physical presence or absence of things like a refrigerator for milk storage and/or a room for pumping, attempting also to discern what discourses teachers drew on in navigating infant feeding in the early days of working parenthood.

To make sense of my conversations with these teachers, I first turned to the frame of neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2014; Scharff, 2012) to understand how teachers in this study were interpellated into a subject position that demanded they internalize their struggles to blend formal waged work and parenting, *figuring it out* (a key inductive theme) for themselves with little to no help from administration through such creative measures as bringing portable lunchboxes to school for convenient milk storage; papering over classroom windows to try to afford a modicum of privacy when converting their classrooms to pumping spaces; and squeezing every possible nanosecond of time out of their rigidly overscheduled school days by pumping during planning periods and lunch breaks. Collaborative analysis of data from Benson and Sharma's (2023) pilot study further found that perhaps critical to the ability of schools as institutions to deny lactating teacher-parents access to such legal protections around parental leave and lactation as afforded in federal laws like the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides unpaid parental leave of up to twelve weeks following the birth of a child, and state laws like Charlotte's Law, which, since 2020 has protected the rights of Georgia teachers to reasonable break time and access to a locked space that is not a bathroom for pumping, is a carefully cultivated willful ignorance or silencing (Anderson & Bunnin, 2020; Tuana, 2006) around issues of women's health that strategically blocks marginalized (i.e. feminized)

discursive resources in order to maintain oppressive structures (i.e. patriarchy). In other words, with a single exception, the 11 participants in this study had little to no help from administrators at their local schools in securing parental leave, more often than not describing district leave procedures as opaque and confusing, and Human Resources representatives hostile or unhelpful, leaving them with limited understandings of what they could and could not do as pregnant and lactating workers.

The next step in making sense of the experiences of my participants came in thinking with Campbell's (2014a; 2014b; 2014c) articulation of neoliberal neopatriarchy to understand how oppressive discourses of capitalism and patriarchy— simultaneously *structuring* and *structured by* teachers' material environments— privilege and normalize a masculinized default body that contrasted sharply against the needs of the lactating bodies of these participants. As marketplace values come to dominate every aspect of identity in neoliberal times, "...requisite professional identities [...] are individualistic, competitive, and bureaucratic", while "...identities oriented around ideals such as collegiality, truthfulness, mutual respect, authenticity, courage and compassion are threatened" (Pulsford, 2019, p. 349). In other words, neoliberal regimes actively champion historically masculine traits in the workplace— such as the 24/7 flexible availability that new parents cannot possibly reconcile with the around the clock demands of infant care— while devaluing feminized traits like solidarity and cooperation. These ideal bodies cannot possibly be hampered by gendered care labor, lest it detract from their single-minded focus on maximizing efficiency and productivity. Evidence for neopatriarchal norms manifested in violent ways in the lives of my participants through such building norms as the way the school day is scheduled, with its notoriously short lunch periods and emphasis on bell-to-bell instruction. This rigid scheduling leaves no room for the unpredictability of let-down as it occurs, leaving my

participants in the uncomfortable position of having milk leak through their shirts when they couldn't get away from students to pump. In addition, the physical layout of the school as clearly intended for a typically-abled, male default body was evidenced by the absence of a dedicated lactation space in all but one of the schools where my participants were teaching at the time they practiced pumping. Instead, they pumped in dusty broom closets, laminating rooms at the back of the media center, and occasionally in their own classrooms, where they were frequently interrupted by students or custodians.

The experiences of my participants shed light on how neopatriarchal workplaces are driven by concepts of what Ivancheva et al. (2019) refer to as a “hidden gendered doxa of carelessness”, wherein “the material demands on women to be primary carers at home, while working under the masculine ‘academic ideal’, deepens and polarizes the types of precarity experienced by women” (p. 450). As Apple (2014) explains, the “assemblage of mechanisms of audit culture” (p. 917) structuring contemporary schools as workplaces requires particular kinds of identities, a model that privileges some to the exclusion of others: “The ideal type of neoliberal citizen is the cosmopolitan worker built around a calculating, entrepreneurial, detached self. It is a worker who is unencumbered by care responsibilities and is free to play the capitalist games in a global context” (p. 918). In other words, speaking generally, women far more than men are at risk of labor-led precarity— such as the risk of job loss due to a reduction in the amount of visible, quantifiable work they are able to “produce” – when workplaces only value career-oriented and productive individuals unencumbered by other care responsibilities (Lynch, Grummell & Devine, 2012). Cultural constructions of the ideal neoliberal subject intersect in important ways with gender, race, and class, “meaning that some bodies ‘fit’ neoliberal teacherhood better than others” (Pulsford, 2019, p. 359). Particularly in countries like

the U.S., that still lack universal healthcare, paid parental leave, and access to subsidized early childhood education, the predominance of neopatriarchal values in the workplace lead to a context where “both contractual and affective precarity operate coterminously for women, each posing significant limitations to a sense of security” (Ivancheva et al., 2019, p. 457). When neopatriarchy becomes an organizing principle in society, we are therefore left with material-discursive structures in schools that failed to support lactating teacher-parents in their efforts at infant feeding. The result was an emotionally and bureaucratically violent experience for these teachers, who, with a single exception (Madison), shared negative recollections of their “stressful”, “overwhelming”, and “shitty” efforts at infant feeding.

Discussion

In summary, data from this study paints a bleak portrait of how the early days of infant feeding look for parents who are working full-time as classroom teachers. In the aggregate, they tended to begin their parenting journeys by confronting a series of confusing bureaucratic hurdles to securing parental leave from their district Human Resources departments, a process which was rarely supported by individual building administrators (though it should be noted that most teachers described having incredibly supportive collaborative planning teams, fellow teachers with whom they felt comfortable doing things like pumping in the back of the room during planning meetings, or joining meetings over Zoom while pumping in their own rooms). In several cases, teachers were asked to prepare lesson plans for a long-term substitute to administer during their parental leave, despite this leave time being partially or entirely unpaid. Upon returning to work, they tended to have to find ways to navigate pumping entirely on their own, finding space in shared refrigerators for milk storage, and in shared offices or broom/electrical closets or occasionally their own classrooms for pumping. Rarely did they ever have enough

time in the school day to pump, opting to try to squeeze whatever available time they could from planning periods and lunch breaks, leaving them feeling perpetually rushed and stressed out, in addition to falling farther and farther behind the administrative tasks that usually get done during these times, like calling parents and grading papers. Despite the absence of available time and space for pumping, these participants persevered in their earnest attempts to make nursing work for their families, describing such clever solutions as wearing leak guard pads under their bras in case of unanticipated engorgement (Jesse and Leslie); bringing pump wipes from home as a way to quickly and easily sanitize pump parts in the absence of an easily accessible, sanitary sink for washing pump parts (Jamie); pumping in drive-thru windows while in the car on the way home from work (Casey); and even going so far as “sneaking out” to meet her partner and child in the school parking lot to nurse directly during her planning period each day (Jesse).

The problem for these teachers was not nursing itself, for they tended to describe those times when they were at home (as over the summer, on weekends, or during extended school holidays like Spring Break and Winter Break), physically with their children and therefore able to nurse directly, as no trouble at all. Rather, they tended to describe these times as enjoyable and coveted bonding moments with their children. Their time spent nursing when in physical proximity with their children contrasted sharply with time spent pumping while at school, where they felt full to the point of physical pain on days where the bell scheduled was altered due to testing and they missed one of their regular pumping breaks (Leslie), or spilled milk on their work keyboards while trying to multitask, checking emails in the middle of pumping sessions (Casey). Moreover, they tended to deeply internalize these feelings of “failure”, as though it was their own fault that their bodies were not physically capable of simultaneously meeting the impossible demands of their professional practice as teachers *and* their responsibilities as

primary caregivers to their children. Participants in this study almost invariably described feelings of overwhelm, being behind, or dropping balls at work because there were simply not enough hours in the day. Without appropriate supports from building administration, even the best efforts of these teachers were still largely not enough to *make it work* (another key inductive code). In several cases, the result was that teachers were forced to give up on lactation and switch to formula (Casey and Jamie). One participant wanted to leave the classroom entirely subsequent to this experience, preferring to try to find a job teaching virtually that would allow her to stay home with her child (Jesse).

As the experiences of these participants suggest, balancing the demands of their private lives as parents alongside the demands of their public work as teachers leave lactating teacher-parents with few options. They can take unpaid leave in order to continue practicing lactation, or leave the teaching workforce entirely, findings consistent with an investigation by Lee and Morris (2019) of the practitioner website *Education Week*. Or they can try to *figure it out* themselves, internalizing a neoliberal drive to aggressively individualize (McRobbie, 2009) every problem (though it is important to note that the subject position of the aggressively individualistic neoliberal feminist ideal is sometimes the *only* viable option short of, as previously mentioned, leaving teaching entirely). However, exercising this latter option requires a certain amount of what some labor organizers have called “defection capital” (NPR, Invisibilia, October 7, 2022): the ability to leave a toxic work environment if you need to leverage that option. This option is severely limited for teacher-parents given (1) the average teacher salary relative to the rising costs of the educational qualifications necessary to become a classroom teacher, and (2) the exorbitant cost of unsubsidized early childhood education in the U.S. Even in the case of those teachers who do not end up leaving the teaching workforce, their options for

navigating workplaces dominated by neopatriarchal norms are few. And what few options they have are often terrible, laden with trauma that teacher-parents suffer at the hands of entrenched patriarchy. As a parent myself, I would not wish anyone into the impossible position of having to choose between earning a paycheck and missing the short window of bonding time that nursing a newborn baby represents.

In making sense of the experiences of my participants, I therefore offer *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*, a concept that brings Hausman's (2004) embodied mothering; Pulsford's (2019) neoliberal teacherhood (p. 348); and Boyer's (2014) neoliberal motherhood into conversation with a refusal of gender-specific language that essentializes the bodies of people read in society as women (Averett, 2021). I use this as a compound concept to both describe the conditions of contemporary working parenthood, as well as to point to some critical explanations for what renders working parenthood such a potentially violent space.

To begin, in emphasizing the extent to which schools as U.S. workplaces are dominated by neopatriarchal norms and discourses, it highlights how parenting becomes a disembodied experience. These teachers' attempts at rectifying the schism between "the reproductive, corporeal work of breastfeeding, while performing the disembodied corporate work of the ideal worker" (Thorley, 2021, p. 8) generally led to the dissociating feeling that their bodies did not fit or were not welcome in schools. In order to *make it work* in materially and discursively hostile contexts, my participants were forced to try to dissociate from their parenting identities while at work, a strategy that seemed, at times, the only available to them for embodying the carefree, autonomous neoliberal subject. Neoliberalism, as a dominant discourse in U.S. workplaces, fashions the individual subject as a rational, autonomous, self-actualizing actor. Lactation, in stark contrast, "...represents a radical, alternative form of embodied subjectivity when compared

to the idea of autonomous personhood held up as ideal in Western societies" (Hausman, 2004, p. 276). Using this lens, we can view lactation as a location of embodied conflict, one that thrusts into glaring relief the conflicting values of being a “good” worker, where efficiency is king, and a “good” parent, where the maxim of “breast is best” continues to dominate prevailing collective wisdom. Unfortunately, this masculinist ideal of the “rational utility maximizer” (Pulsford, 2019, p. 348) leaves lactating teacher-parents with few options. Pumping and refrigerating milk, for instance, is simply an alternative to the ability to be physically present in spaces with a nursing infant. Lactating parents need to be in physical proximity with their children, sometimes around the clock. Full embodiment would imply the necessity of having the parent and the infant physically present somewhere together, either in the workplace or the home. McCarter-Spaulding (2008) attributes this disembodiment to the medicalization of breastfeeding, which leads to a contrast between breast milk as a *product*, versus the relationship between parent and child in lactation as a *process*, “If breast milk is a product, the focus can be on providing breast milk to the infant, by expressing milk that will be given to the infant in a bottle and therefore does not require the mother to be present” (p. 208). A focus exclusively on milk disembodies lactating parents by valuing the *technology* above the *relationship*, implying that if ‘Science’ can find a way to create an equivalent product, i.e. formula, or pumped milk delivered via bottle, then messy questions about parental leave, onsite child care, and increased job flexibility are rendered irrelevant (McCarter-Spaulding, 2008). A disembodied approach allows employers the convenience of only needing to secure employees with space to pump and store their milk, thereby skirting more difficult quandaries around how to create workplaces inclusive to both lactating-parents *and* their infant children. Moreover, attention to lactation as a unique form of embodied subjectivity— one where the parent has a child that is both separate from, but

dependent on them— gives us a lens through which we can evaluate how wholly current political regimes exclude lactating bodies (Hausman, 2004), since this physiological relationship has no analogy in the male default body.

Second, the frame of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood* points to the necessity of creating space for a critique of capitalism and the attendant exclusivity of the hierarchical cultures its normalization engenders— a critique that post-feminist and neoliberal feminist discourses dismiss as irrelevant (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg, 2020). Understanding the struggles of these teacher-parents is only possible by first understanding the discourses they had available to draw on in making sense of their time spent pumping at work, particularly the ways in which neoliberal and patriarchal discourses created exclusionary environments by simultaneously failing to materially support *and* discursively devaluing their gendered care work. This is a critical first step in understanding how current legal attempts at creating workplace inclusivity, such as the 2022 PUMP Act, or the 2020 Charlotte’s Law, can be diluted under neopatriarchal regimes, and actually, paradoxically, end up excluding the bodies of lactating teacher-parents. For instance, using the example of the Reasonable Break Time provisions from the FLSA, Boyer (2014) argues that policies embedded in neoliberalist ideology fail mothers as they simply place more burdens on them to figure out solutions to lactation themselves. What she terms “neoliberal motherhood” (p. 270) is characteristic of a mode of neoliberal citizenship in which individuals are made responsible for the maintenance of their own health and welfare:

Under Reasonable Break Time, the responsibility for children’s health is achieved through an almost wholly individuated socio-technical system of breast pumps, lactation rooms, refrigerators, and working mothers willing to discipline their bodies to the rigours of pumping at work. This costs organisations relatively little

when compared with robust maternity leave, in terms of both maternity pay and lost labour. (Boyer, 2014, p. 281)

And since Reasonable Break Time provisions only leave space for pumping, it is far more convenient and less impactful on wage labor than bringing babies into spaces of wage work each time they need to be fed. Moreover, the danger to the type of disembodied approach represented by the Reasonable Break Time provision is that it presents the guise of a solution that makes calls for alternatives appear unnecessary (Boyer, 2014). Focusing on the neoliberal roots of collective discourse informing public policy calls into question the ways in which policies like the PUMP Act (2022) and Charlotte’s Law (2020) reverberate with unintended consequences in the bodies of teachers practicing (or attempting to practice) lactation in schools. Not only do they fail to truly help many teacher-parents, they eliminate conversations around other possible solutions— such as paid parental leave and universal subsidized early childhood education— leaving conditions of gendered in/equity that form the beating heart of the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2003) firmly intact.

In addition to (1) recentering the body in discussions of gender in/equity in U.S. workplaces, and (2) providing a critique of capitalism as a system and the neoliberal discourses that serve to naturalize and legitimize it, the frame of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood* creates space for acknowledging the power that language has in influencing what can be said and, by extension, how we think. Language itself is a structure, one that we need to make visible in order to understand how it functions in the (re)production of gendered in/equity. In using the gender neutral terminology of *parenthood*, rather than *motherhood*— in addition to referring throughout this dissertation to lactation or nursing, instead of *breastfeeding* — I aim to highlight how infant feeding is not necessarily a gender-specific practice. Though one of the findings from this study

is that issues of women's health are underresearched and understudied, I insist that there must be a way to talk about the very real (and insidiously invisibilized) subjugation of women without doing so in a way that simultaneously (though unintentionally) erases the parenting experiences of queer, trans, and non-binary peoples. For, as previously stated, there are people involved in every step of the infant feeding process who are not necessarily the biological mother, and/or who do not necessarily identify with their lactating body parts as "breasts." When we present our findings as steeped in exclusionary binaries— man/woman, mother/father— we may be unintentionally erasing the parenting contributions of fathers or non-gestational parents who feed their children pumped milk from a bottle; transmen who practice chestfeeding (MacDonald et al., 2016); and even cisgender, heteronormative mothers who choose not to breastfeed, opting instead to feed their children with formula. Do not these iterations of infant feeding practices nourish the child as well as *breastfeeding*? Do not these moments between parent and child also build invaluable bonds of love and trust? *Disembodied neoliberal parenthood* provides a roadmap for thinking about the exclusionary cultures of contemporary U.S. workplaces, though in a way that strives to not further exclude the experiences of any parents who do not happen to fit squarely inside the heteronormative matrix, or who, by virtue of their socioeconomic and thereby job-related needs, cannot exercise lactation as an option. In designing a gender-*full*¹⁶ frame for describing and explaining my data, therefore, I hope to point towards a reconceptualization of social change that is truly inclusive to *all* bodies.

Recommendations for Practice

This study highlights how we can and must do things differently in schools, as well as in teacher education. It is necessary here to first problematize the relationship between discourse

¹⁶ Credit to brilliant scholar Dylan Brody for helping me understand the distinction between gender-*neutral* parenting and gender-*full* parenting.

and matter. Clearly there is a discourse circulating in the U.S. that lactation is an issue for working parents, as evidenced by the passage of the PUMP Act (2022). However, what is also clear from the struggles of my participants is that the existence and circulation of these discourses is simply insufficient, in and of itself, to affect material change in the daily lives of teachers in schools around the country. Discourse can have material effects; sometimes, however, change does not automatically follow, and some work still needs to be done for the discourse to matter. In cases where discourse has led to material changes—such as the sweeping structural changes in U.S. political and cultural life accompanying the Civil Rights and feminist movements of the 20th centuries—there has also been massive collective organizing. Schools were/are established through patriarchal systems with masculinized norms, therefore in addition to updated legislation, we also need large swaths of people working collectively for change to happen. Real change will only come when the top-down changes are met by bottom-up, grassroots efforts coming from educators themselves to create spaces where their embodied experiences can be talked about. We need more critical conversations about embodied practices like lactation (and also pregnancy, miscarriage, menopause) to raise awareness of these structurally and discursively invisibilized issues of normal human health and reproduction. We also need action on the ground, with people collectively organizing to force schools to build schools with dedicated lactation rooms, refrigerators for milk storage, and flexible schedules for new parents practicing lactation upon return to work. In education, therefore, we might begin with more direct professional learning to inform school leaders of new federal legislation like the PUMP Act (2022) and the PWFA (2023).

As I recount in the next chapter with Madison’s story—the sole participant, of the 11 total educators I spoke with, who had a positive experience with workplace lactation— it is

possible to support teacher-parents in their efforts at infant feeding. Madison's principal created a humanizing experience for her to transition back to work after the birth of her child by reducing her instructional preps, providing her a parking spot adjacent to the school building, assigning her an instructional paraprofessional, and moving her to a classroom directly adjacent to a computer lab. Even given the inequitable limitations of our present institutions— before engaging in more difficult, long-term conversations about nationwide structural obstacles for parents like universal healthcare and paid parental leave – Madison's story demonstrates that we can do both: teach *and* parent. Though this will require standardized procedures in place to support the transitions back to work of new parents, such that the success or failure of their efforts at infant feeding do not hinge on the whims or awareness of individual building principals. Finally, though I fear that, for the present, these concluding musings must be confined to the realm of speculative fiction, in an ideal world we could also have conversations about implementing school-wide flexible scheduling policies, rethinking district-level sick leave policies for new parents, and designing school buildings to have clean, dedicated lactation spaces complete with sink, fridge, and locked doors. One can but dare¹⁷ to dream.

In teacher education spaces, this study highlights the need to explicitly teach future teachers how to read the coded, invisible narratives that structure and (re)create violent norms in U.S. education: ways to make the *invisible* visible. Hidden structures in U.S. institutions like sexism, patriarchy, racism, classism, misogyny, xenophobia, imperialism, and Ableism are all enabled to survive and thrive because they are aspects of our shared culture in the U.S. that are largely hidden. For instance, the hit 2015 dramedy *The Big Short* tells the story of how a reckless, deregulated Wall Street incentivized investment banks to make billions pushing

¹⁷ I dare to dream these freedom dreams in the Epilogue.

predatory, adjustable-rate NINJA (No Income No Job: Approved) mortgage loans, resulting in the mortgage crisis and subsequent Great Recession of 2008. The difficulty behind stories like these, and similarly exploitative practices of private equity firms (see the 2013 film, *The Wolf of Wall Street*), is that they are boring, hard to follow, and opaque. Few typical Americans can understand how these industries actually function, making it difficult to come together collectively and demand regulatory action from legislators. Or, in the words of comedian W.C. Fields: “If you can’t dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit”. Additionally problematic is the invisible norm that, of the two bodies responsible for (1) writing and passing legislation, and (2) once written, enforcing the law— Congress and the police— over 70% of the former and 85% of the latter self-identify as men. This means that the vast majority of people in the U.S. charged with writing and enforcing our laws are men who will, speaking generally, live their entire lives with the privilege of not seeing those challenges which predominantly (though not exclusively) impact women: embodied issues like pregnancy, lactation, childbirth, and the accompanying gendered care work involved in rearing children. The invisible, normalized male-dominance of our legal institutions further renders discourses like patriarchy opaque to the average person. Even as a woman and a mother myself, I, for instance, was unaware of federal protections around lactation for teachers prior to embarking on this very study. These inequitable systems and structures need our willful ignorance to survive.

Particularly in U.S. schools, where the vast majority of curricular materials continue to be White-washed and Eurocentric; where funding continues to be tied to local property taxes; and where private testing corporations make billions of dollars off local school districts each year, it is necessary to understand how sexist, racist, classist, and especially neoliberal governing rationalities “have fostered a discourse of school failure that reduces education to its economic

frames, purposes, and functions, in effect, diluting or gutting the very possibility of education as growth” (Stengel, 2016, p. 253-254). Given the present climate, now, more than ever, teacher candidates need to be empowered to understand the systems and discourses in which they are circulating so they will not “drown in testing and fail the critical test of purpose” (p. 254). If we can walk, then we have the privilege of not noticing when entrances to buildings are only accessible by stairs. If we are White, then we have the privilege of not noticing that the vast majority of the lawmakers, authors, scientists, scholars, and inventors we learn about in school are also White [men]. If we speak English, then we have the privilege of not noticing that all of the signs, instructions, directions, menus, and job applications are printed in English. And if we have never had a baby, then we have the privilege of not noticing when our institutions lack changing tables, ramps for a stroller, and safe, private, sanitary spaces to feed a hungry baby. This is why I insist that we have to keep telling our stories, bringing the ghosts that haunt us from inhabiting inequitable systems and structures to bear in education research. Because, particularly in classroom spaces, when oppressive structures are normalized, it is difficult to see how they function, how they are maintained, and how exclusionary they can be. By bringing light to the ways these hidden structures are maintained and (re)produced, we can bring to the forefront of our collective discourse critical conversations about how to change them. Therefore extending an invitation to preservice teachers to think about structures and how they do damage must become the critical focus of justice-oriented teacher education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, though this study focuses on lactation, it’s not necessarily just about lactation per se. Lactation simply provides an instance of a more violent phenomenon where exclusion happens because of entrenched patriarchy and dominant discourses of neoliberalism.

Bringing oppressive structures to light creates space to start thinking through ways to change them. In this study, I have endeavored to do so by articulating the frame of *disembodied neoliberal parenthood*, a concept which provides room for (re)centering the body, what McWilliam (1996) calls “insisting on the embodied nature of pedagogical work” as a way to draw attention to the “specificities of class, gender, body shape, sexuality, and ethnicity as well as by illness, aging, scars, makeup, facial hair, and so on, [that make] the teachers’ body the *site* and *sight* of authoritative pedagogical display” (p. 3 - 4, emphasis in original); moves beyond violent, categorically exclusive binaries like man/woman, or mother/father; and provides a critique of discourses of neoliberal neo-patriarchy (Campbell, 2013; 2014) that continue to dominate U.S. workplaces. I will conclude by emphasizing the wider significance of this project, and others like it, as understanding how dominance continues to structure our experiences. There are material-discursive structures at work in how racism, sexism, ableism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, and countless other oppressive norms are maintained and (re)produced. In bringing myself into this research— breathing life back into the ghosts that haunt me— I have tried to speak back against discursive spaces where, “..those who cannot produce, invest, or consume are not citizens, not clearly human” (Stengel, 2016, p. 245). I am human, and the stories of my participants matter. My story matters. Thank you for being part of it with me.

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE

Introduction

For within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. They surface in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom.

– Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 1984, p. 39

Prior to embarking on this dissertation study, I conducted a pilot study in fall 2021 where I interviewed six current and former classroom teachers about their experiences practicing lactation¹⁸—or pumping—upon returning to full-time work in U.S. schools following the birth of a child. With a single exception, participants recounted stories of trauma and heartache. One was harangued by coworkers openly disgusted with the presence of human milk in their communal fridge. Another was shamed by administrators for not attending after-school meetings. Workplace stress impeded her milk production, forcing her to switch to formula. Another was [incorrectly] informed by a district Human Resources representative that she would have to return to work 21 days after she gave birth, while she was still bleeding lochia. A sample of the themes generated from my first round of inductive coding (Bendasolli, 2013) for this pilot

¹⁸ As a reminder to readers, throughout this dissertation, I only refer to infant feeding practices using the colloquial, gender binary term “breastfeeding” when paraphrasing or quoting directly. This binary is reflective of gender essentialism (Averett, 2021) in our language practices around infant feeding, which perpetuate the erasure of queer and nonbinary parenting structures (Smith & Bamberger, 2021). Where possible, I instead opt to leverage the more inclusive terminology of “lactation” or “nursing” or “infant feeding” as a discursive tool for recognition and building awareness that not everyone who practices infant feeding identifies as a cis woman or with having breasts (MacDonald et al., 2016).

included: *failure; negativity; lack of support; and bureaucratic violence*. There was, however, one participant—Madison¹⁹—who had a fantastic experience with pumping while teaching. For her, the process was *humanizing*. Her principal and co-workers took every conceivable measure to make sure that she was supported in her transition back to teaching after giving birth. They assigned her a paraprofessional and moved her classroom adjacent to a computer lab so students could seamlessly transition to online modules whenever she felt a let-down and needed to leave class to pump. They reduced her instructional preps to free up more planning time for pumping. They made sure she had a refrigerator in which to store her milk and assigned her a parking spot adjacent to the school building so she didn't have to walk an inordinate distance with her pumping supplies in tow. While the rest of my participants described overwhelming and stressful struggles to manage lactation largely in isolation upon returning to work in schools following the births of their children, the support and affirmation Madison received from administration and co-workers made her feel *valued*.

This is where traditional qualitative methods, such as transcribing and thematically coding my way through the data failed me. I was left wondering how to attend faithfully to narratives of heartache alongside a single story²⁰ of celebration. How would I tell the story of my data—the entire story—without leaving something out? Beginning with my own embodied knowledge of lactation, I knew that focusing exclusively on the trauma recounted in these retroactive (re)tellings would be incomplete, as it would erase the beauty and joy (and yes, sometimes fatigue, and pain, and, and...) of raising children. I combine this embodied knowing with a critical perspective, one that follows Tuck and Yang's (2014) prescription for an analytic

¹⁹ Madison is a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were selected by participants themselves during an initial round of member checking while writing through analysis of this data set.

²⁰ Celebrated fiction author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has warned us of the potential [dangers of a single story](#).

practice of refusal as “an active resistance to trading in pain and humiliation” (p. 812) that resists coveting stories of human suffering. Instead, the story that follows delights in the dynamism and wondrous potential of qualitative writing by taking a different direction: one intended as an explicit refusal to covet stories of “damage-centered research” (Tuck, 2009, p. 413). Damage-centered research finds as its *raison d’être* the documentation of “pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe” (p. 413) and is rooted—though sometimes with the most benevolent of intentions—in deficit frameworks. When misery is the currency we trade to justify the continued neoliberal machinery of academic production, it leaves us with an insufficient and unreliable theory of change from which to counter forces of oppression (Tuck, 2009). Simply describing conditions of oppression is not enough, for as McKittrick (2021) warns us, “Description is not liberation” (p. 44). If our methodologies are invested in reproducing the present, we are left with little to imagine new futures (McKittrick, 2021). I am endeavoring therefore, as a researcher, to be cognizant of the role we play in (re)telling the stories of our participants to avoid writing as a practice of human misery tourism. However, I want to be extremely careful here to avoid erasing or invalidating what my participants went through, which was (at times) undeniably difficult—impossible, even. Rather, I am leaning into a different way of viewing the data, a lens through which I try to avoid the complacency of voyeurism, leveraging refusal as a methodology for objecting to processes of objectification in academic writing (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Thinking with Madison’s story in particular, then, creates space to imagine complex possibilities for lactating teacher-parents that are neither beholden to nor singularly defined by narratives of suffering and struggle.

Engaging in this kind of methodological refusal led me to genres I was not expecting to encounter. Specifically, it led me to speculative fiction as a way to (re)imagine what becomes

possible when we attempt to think outside of the oppressive structures in which we all circulate. The feminist potential of fiction is perfectly retrofitted to such a task, as its intimacy refuses the dichotomy between our personal and our work lives— what we “can” and “cannot” study as legitimate research[ers]— instead, honoring the foundational feminist commitment that the personal *is* political (Combahee River Collective, as cited in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Because writing fiction holds different truth claims than ‘objective’ science (Richardson, 2000), fiction opens space for leaning into the destabilization of the treasured relationship between the signifier and the signified (Graham, 2011) as I write myself—recollections of nursing my own child—alongside the imagined futures I create with my participants. Fiction thus affords multiple sites of refusal necessary to think beyond/through traditional thematic analysis: refusal to chase aims of objectivity; a refusal to search for the subjectivity of the Other; and a refusal of the omniscient, all-knowing, god-like gaze of the knower (Childers, Rhee & Daza, 2013). Moreover, thinking with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), fiction challenges the notion that themes must be summarizing and totalizing: that they must encompass all. Thinking with an analytic of refusal thus created space for me to *not* follow themes around, allowing the overwhelming presence of *failure, negativity, lack of support, and bureaucratic violence* that arose in multiple rounds of traditional thematic coding to produce something else—not a scientific account of what *had* happened but instead, what *could be possible*.

This chapter documents the beginnings of a journey that has led me to speculative fiction as a form of representation in feminist qualitative research, culminating in a utopian short story of lactation in education that I present for readers— not as a mechanism by which I attempt to form any grand conclusions about the lived experiences of lactating teacher-parents, but rather as a tool with which I hope we can begin to (re)imagine possibilities for inviting nursing parents in

all their embodied humanity into public school classrooms. I begin with a brief discussion of the poststructural critiques of conventional qualitative research methods that have driven the narrative turn in social science research, as recent decades have seen the emergence of myriad forms of experimental arts-based methods. I then briefly review the strengths of fiction as both a form of writing *and* analysis, most importantly the feminist potential in narrative to challenge hegemonic norms of what and who historically comprise legitimate research(ers). Finally, I discuss the ethics of reflexive embodiment (Inckle, 2010) required by education research into spaces as intimate as lactation amongst classroom teachers, and how fictionalization has enabled me to attend carefully to forms of representation.

Context

There is plenty of reason to hope for the futures of lactating teacher-parents in the United States. For starters, in December 2022 President Biden passed the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections Act (PUMP), a federal law that, for the first time in U.S. history protects the rights of teachers to reasonable break time and access to a locked space that is not a bathroom to support their efforts with pumping following the birth of a child (U.S. Breastfeeding Committee, n.d.). In addition, on June 27, 2023, the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) officially took effect, requiring employers with 15 or more employees provide “reasonable accommodations” to pregnant workers, such as frequent or longer breaks, modified food and drink policies, seating if their jobs require standing, and a modified work schedule (U.S. EEOC, n.d.). Data for this pilot study was collected in fall 2021, therefore the teachers I interviewed at the time were protected by neither federal law. Their teaching did, however, span several states – North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, and New York– which, at the time of their children’s arrivals, had passed *state* laws to fill the gaps in *federal* law protecting the rights of teachers to practice

lactation upon return to work in schools following the birth of a child. And based on their retroactive (re)tellings, the *de jure* letter of these laws was falling far short of their *de facto* implementation (Benson & Sharma, 2023). Lactating teacher-parents in this study described being forced to resort to pumping in broom closets, supply closets, and/or their own classrooms, where they were frequently interrupted in the middle of pumping sessions by co-workers, custodians, and even the occasional student. They were also forced to squeeze whatever available time they could out of the day to pump, often skipping their lunch and planning periods, or opting to miss out on after-school meetings and other activities in lieu of leaving their students to take pumping breaks during class times. Several had difficulty securing fridge space to store their milk and had to come up with their own creative solutions to milk storage, like bringing portable lunch boxes full of ice to school with them. There is a time and place for bringing light to systemic forms of oppression; I have told these stories elsewhere (Benson & Sharma, 2023). For the purposes of this analysis, however, I am making a conscious effort to resist centering the damage inflicted by neopatriarchal (Campbell, 2013; 2014) systems and structures on the bodies and lives of my participants. Though I have disavowed myself of any naive faith that these laws will represent a panacea for lactating teacher-parents, for this chapter, I try to bring complexity and nuance to the plights of parents navigating bureaucratically and materially hostile structures by thinking with the glimmer of hope provided by recent legislation, a narrative that I find no less faithful to the data set given the endless possibilities created when following around the themes of *positivity* and *support* that Madison's uniquely humanizing experience with lactation as a classroom teacher represents.

Methodological Refusal

Once I decided to think with an analytic practice of refusal to allow this research to become just another voyeuristic tale of heartache (though, as readers saw in Chapter 5, it was also this. The messiness and complexity of qualitative stories is such), however, I was initially uncertain of how to proceed *representing* my data. The next step came in bringing this desire into conversation with the long history of poststructural critique of the crisis of representation in conventional qualitative methods. This chapter thus represents a point of methodological departure. In it, I lean into conventional qualitative methods, such as interviewing and coding, as partial and incomplete, as the retroactive retellings that participants offer us are already filtered, processed, and interpreted (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). According to poststructural critiques, language itself represents a system already contaminated with meaning infinitely deferred (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). We use one word to define another, and another to define the first, and on and on. Or as they say, it's turtles all the way down²¹. Language cannot stand in for Truth (with a capital 'T', implying that the Truths found in scientific research are universal and totalizing) since meaning always escapes capture (St. Pierre, 2017). Seeking meaning from language is therefore an illusory concept, as meaning is inherently fickle and unstable, with 'truth' always contingent upon the subjectivity of the reader (Graham, 2011).

Because poststructuralism arose in response to the totalizing discourses of the Enlightenment (History, Reason, Man, etc.), those operating within poststructural frameworks become reticent to prescribe methods that make claims to Truth through scientific, objective methodologies (Graham, 2011; St. Pierre, 2011). The question for researchers operating in the postpositivist era in social sciences then becomes how to function in the unredeemable ruins of

²¹ "It's turtles all the way down" is a quote often attributed to American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, however its provenance may also have origins in Hindu mythology. The history of early Anthropology as being inextricably intertwined with 20th century colonial endeavors being what it is, I'm personally willing to bet that Geertz stole it from somewhere.

our always, already failed and violent systems of language and methods “after the theoretical move that authorizes its foundations has been interrogated and its limits breached so profoundly that its center no longer holds” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613). Commonplace practices in qualitative research, such as writing a subjectivity statement intended to eliminate bias, or even the impetus to produce ‘findings’, represent practices that have re-territorialized the positivist center of conventional humanist qualitative research (St. Pierre, 2016). When qualitative methods become reductionist and hegemonic, they lose their radical potential to “produce different knowledge, and to produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 176). St. Pierre (1997) and other post-positivist researchers have called for new approaches to empirical research, which, as she reminds us, is just as much a social construction as the positivist paradigms to which it was intended to respond: “We invented this methodology in the 1980s– we made it up– it’s not sacred” (p. 86). These limitations of conventional humanist qualitative methodology, however, have limitless productive potential in a promiscuous feminism that “works the ruins” (Lather, 2000) of these shaky grounds “in the face of the death of science, ruins of feminism, and violence of research already declared” (Childers, Rhee & Daza, 2013, p. 512). Critical theories like Western feminism, poststructuralism, Black feminism, and de/colonial research have arisen to challenge and expand upon positivist notions of what counts as legitimate research, and who counts as legitimate researchers (Rhee, 2021). Thinking with feminism(s) therefore opens up space to refuse the Cartesian split between subject and object, between knower and known, between researcher and participant, that forces methods into prescribed orders of thought that are reliant on and discursively reify violent binaries (St. Pierre, 2015).

Arts-Based Research

One of the results of these multiple, converging -post critiques has been a narrative turn in social science research (Watson, 2011), a proliferation in recent decades of methods that are experimental and emergent: for instance, in arts-based research, what Maclure (2013) describes as an “...alternative logic of qualitative inquiry that allows for both the discernment of order and pattern and is attuned to the lively excess that always exceeds capture by structure and representation, leaving openings where something new, or something else, might issue” (p. 229). Arts-based researchers argue that using creative media is simply an extension of what research has been doing for a long time. As Haywood Rolling Jr. (2017) explains, if the purpose of scientific exploration is to revisit our deepest questions or beliefs, to document and model what we know about our world and experiences, then the dichotomy between art and research begins to dissolve:

Arts practices are no less dynamic, experimental, and deeply observed; they are organizing systems for the most human information of all—data impressed with social imperatives and emotional meaning. In other words, both science and art are comprised of manmade models for comprehending our natural and relational systems. (p. 495)

Arts-based research hails the audience in different ways than traditional scientific research. The key difference is the claim to truth the text makes. Richardson (2000) argues that “...claiming to write ‘fiction’ is different from claiming to write ‘science’ in terms of the audience one seeks, the impact one might have on different publics, and how one expects ‘truth claims’ to be evaluated” (p. 926). In this way, art-based researchers have argued that fiction can be a supremely ethical position from which to conduct social science research. Instead of grounding its claims in some correspondent theory of truth, “Fiction confronts its craftedness or

writtenness, announcing itself as textual, stylistic, strategic...the reader engages fiction as an active inquirer, sensitive to the duplicity of its meaning” (de Freitas, 2007, p. 341). The ‘truths’ discovered through narrative are no less meaningful or valid than other purportedly ‘accurate’ descriptions of events than researchers in established social science methods like ethnography. As Leavy (2017) writes, “it is not as if fiction writers create fantasies and researchers record facts” (p. 191). Rather, fiction writers also use material from real life and genuine experiences to build believable representations of existing or possible worlds. Fiction simply creates space for the reader to take up the text differently. As method, fiction creates a more troubling authority of truth claims, thereby opening space to problematize notions of researcher status and voice (de Freitas, 2007).

Some of the strengths of different forms of representation in arts-based research include, first and foremost, their accessibility. Proponents of using fiction, for instance, insist that stories have functioned as the backbone of inquiry for a long time in qualitative research. As Sinner, Hasebete-Ludt, and Leggo (2017) point out, “Stories are the most accessible, the most readily understood, and the most flexible vernacular method of conducting and circulating research” (p. 167). When people read fiction, their defenses are down because they view it as a pleasurable endeavor (Leavy, 2017), in stark contrast to the arduous doldrums of reading scholarly publications. Academic journals, as Leavy (2017) explains, are expensive and only housed in academic libraries, and therefore inaccessible to the public. In addition, they have poor readership, are laden with jargon, and just generally lack the qualities of good, engaging writing (Leavy, 2019). This makes forms of arts-based research more useful and adaptable than other forms of scholarly presentation, as they can be accessible to broader audiences beyond the

Academy (Sinner, Hasebe-Ludt & Leggo, 2017). Or, as the saying goes, no one can resist a good story.

Speculative Fiction as a Form of Representation in Arts-Based Research

Thinking with fiction also provides access to imaginary or possible worlds. Instead of the testable hypotheses that define traditional scientific methods, arts-based theories are better understood as comprehensible representations (Haywood-Rolling Jr., 2017). Therefore writers in genres like speculative fiction are not limited by the structures of the present in dreaming up what may be/come possible. Speculative fiction stories hold a magnifying glass up to reality, allowing the reader to explore and challenge race, class, and gender-based prejudices in our society by envisioning a world without them (Dow et al., 2023). Fiction therefore has the power to disrupt the status quo because it prioritizes the creation of possibilities over the proving of certainties, undermining our taken-for-granted assumptions (de Freitas, 2007). Research in this vein becomes more about “meaning-making processes than outcomes, more about questions than answers, more about connecting and living than arriving, and more about exploration than delivery” (Koro-Llungeberg, 2016, p. 19). In claiming fiction-as-research, therefore, we span the blurry borders between literature and social science, “naming a location that thereby troubles or breaches the legitimacy of research texts as transparent realist tales” (de Freitas, 2007, p. 341). In addition, fictionalization leaves room for tapping into the emotional aspects of existence more than conventional forms of representation in social science research (Watson, 2011; Willis, 2019). Fiction promotes empathetic engagement and compassion when we are free to immerse ourselves in fictional worlds, putting ourselves in the shoes of characters that we come to care about and allowing us to see the world from their perspectives (Leavy, 2019). As Haywood-Rolling Jr. (2017) explains, “This pliability allows for questions to be pursued down rabbit holes

into which science is too unwieldy to wedge itself, and for gaps in knowledge to be filled by perspectives or approaches that scientific methods are not adept at undertaking” (p. 496-497). By simultaneously legitimizing a kind of knowledge that allows us to access affective realities, as well as openly declaring the constructedness of the text, fiction-as-method becomes a subversive position to adopt (Watson, 2011).

Using Fiction for Analysis in Education Research

Thinking with fiction as a form of analysis has taken shape in education research in a variety of ways. Clough (2002), for instance, provided an early response to St. Pierre’s (1997) call to “produce different knowledge, and to produce knowledge differently” (p. 176), working to legitimize the narrative turn in social science research by demonstrating how educational issues had been/could be revealed using fictional devices. His book, *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research* (2002), includes five example narratives in studies of educational settings, as well as detailed discussions of how they were crafted from actual events. Maclure (2003) takes this work a step further in insisting that *all* research texts are fabrications, calling for researchers to critically disrupt the ways in which different forms of qualitative writing purport to represent lived experiences. Fiction writing thus provides a way to respond to the murky ethical implications implied through the guise of objectivity in education research. Watson (2011) echoes this claim, insisting that fiction can in no way be a panacea for issues of representation in educational research, but that it at least “gives us access to another set of tools which enable exploration of some issues of social and educational interest in—slightly—different ways” (p. 405-406). Fiction has been used in educational research to critique institutional practices that document schooling (McCarthy & Stice, 2023); to describe the embodied struggles of an academic at a university that is permeated by an audit culture (Sparkes, 2007); as a change

agent, a way to identify and promote new practices for teaching and learning (Sinner et al., 2017); as counter-realities that challenge dominant narratives about Black women and girls (Toliver, 2020); and as a means of challenging the gold standard of research as quantifiable, measurable, and objective (Barone, 2007). This body of research leverages fiction as an alternative means of representing ‘Truth’ in educational research: a way to simultaneously hold the inequitable structures of the present moment in U.S. schooling alongside the unassailable hope for potential just futures in the American education system.

Speculative Fiction. In the context of the present study, it became important to use fictionalization as a way to think beyond the confines of current patriarchal, neoliberal, and other oppressive structures and discourses currently impacting teachers and education spaces. My conversations with these teachers showed how sexist discourses impacted their lives while trying to nurse in schools by devaluing any gendered care work historically associated with the feminine. According to Ferguson (2017), this is part of a male/female, man/woman duality, an “effort that divide[s] the complex world into two dichotomous, opposing variables (such as reason and emotion, mind and body, or male and female) [that] inevitably simplifies a complex field and posits clear-cut boundaries” (p. 271). These socially constructed boundaries also create hierarchies of value, thereby naturalizing prevailing power relations in patriarchal societies (Ferguson, 2017). My conversations with participants also demonstrated how the dominant values of global neoliberal capitalism in U.S. workplaces failed to welcome their lactating bodies in school by prioritizing values of productivity and efficiency, an ideal disembodied corporate worker that does not need to worry about such trifles as caring for infant children in their single-minded drives to increase student performance. These two very different, yet intricately intertwined discourses— patriarchy and neoliberalism— intersected in the bodies of lactating

teacher-parents in emotionally and bureaucratically violent ways by devaluing the unpaid/underpaid domestic work (Ferguson, 2020) involved in caring for infant children, without which capitalism would ironically collapse: what Fraser (2017) refers to as the “social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism” (p. 22). And this is exactly why my imagined future for education is, by necessity, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and fundamentally feminist. All of these interlocking systems of oppression, what hooks (2003) describes as the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 38), are systemic and institutionalized in the United States. Our structures are designed to “support and ease the progression of some bodies” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 158), largely to the exclusion and/or erasure of others. Dominant narratives of sexism and capitalism, but also homophobia, racism, and Ableism, are all different sides of the same insidious coin: one will never disappear for one without disappearing for the others. It would be a futile endeavor to attempt changing the mechanisms of sexism without also addressing homophobia, *and* capitalism, *and* Ableism, *and* racism, all of which have been shaped by colonial histories of exploitation that are inextricably linked. Therefore if the work of feminism is about making connections (Ahmed, 2017; Rhee, 2021), then intersectionality is a necessary starting point. Using speculative fiction, I am free to create a feminist utopia in education that is not only about parenting, or lactation, or even teaching. A retreat to the imagined, unbounded fiction of a speculative, hopeful future provides space to imagine what it would take to create contexts where people are free to just be as they are, in all their full and embodied humanity, in the space of U.S. schools.

In this chapter, I therefore think specifically with the emancipatory potential of imagining just futures in popular fiction works like the afro-futuristic utopia portrayed by akwaeke emezi in *Pet* (2019); the feminist utopian novel *Herland* (1915), by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; the

scathing indictment of contemporary capitalism represented by Ursula LeGuin’s short story, *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* (1973), in addition to the insightful response/counterpart short story written more recently by N.K. Jemisen, *The Ones Who Stay and Fight* (2020); and the visionary fiction novel *Kindred* (1979), by Octavia Butler. The short story produced here could in no way emulate the tremendous work done in/for the world by these authors, nor does it claim to represent an inroad to any kind of transcendent facts. Rather, following McCarthy and Stice (2023), I think with speculative fiction here as *another* access point to truth. Thinking with refusal as an analytic practice, I took some of the uniquely hopeful themes generated from Madison’s story—*support* and *positivity*—and thought through what it would have taken for the rest of my participants to have had a similar experience nursing their infant children. What follows here is a curious blend of my own experiences as an educator and a nursing parent alongside the voices of my participants as I listened for not just the stories of their trials and tribulations attempting to nurse their infants alongside full-time work in schools, but the unsung whispers of possibility barely audible through the echoes of painful memories. The result is a dream: a utopian short story of lactation spaces in education, wherein I dare to follow around themes of joy and possibility, [a] future(s) outside of the interlocking structures of capitalism, sexism and racism (hooks, 2003; Pharr, 1997). This story was/is my attempt to connect a series of disparate experiences across time and space in a speculative fictitious (re)imagining; not of what *was*, but of what *could be*.

Planting The Seeds

“Shit,” I thought to myself as I approached the community compound on my bicycle, “This frost is going to wreak havoc on our transplants.”

As we rode through the wooden entry gate, I took a brief inventory of the state of our raised beds. It was a chilly morning in late March, though the sun and cloudless sky assured that it would warm quickly. Soon it would be time to plant our carrots and peas. The students had

done a fantastic job of sprouting our pepper and eggplant seedlings in the community greenhouse, which they had just transplanted to our outdoor garden. Perhaps next week would remain warm enough to plant our summer crops. Including Nolan's favorite, of course: tomatoes.

Making a mental note to cross my fingers for the rapid arrival of spring, I stopped to dismount and park my bike in our communal lot. I took off my helmet and bent down to free Nolan from inside his tag-along trailer. He had just turned three, so soon he would be big enough to ride his own bicycle to the community compound alongside me.

"We're here, habibi!" I cooed, unzipping the waterproof netting of his trailer and unbuckling his safety belt, "Are you ready to go play with friends?"

Nolan set down his book—*And Tango Makes Three*, the same book he had insisted we bring on the ride to school for three consecutive days now— and stuffed one final bite of apple into his mouth before replying, "Yeah mama! And then can you play Cache-cache with me?"

I smiled, giving him a kiss on both cheeks before starting down the pebble-lined path that ran the length of the compound, leading directly to the Littles' outdoor nature playscape. "Sure baby, how about we play at lunchtime?" I replied.

As I squinted through the glowing sun to look down at him, feeling the warmth of his fingers press into mine as he grasped for my hand, I suddenly felt full. So full that I felt my body was an insufficient container, never enough to hold the love and gratitude I had to be able to share a life with this little person, in this beautiful place. Abruptly, my mother's face floated to mind. She had helped build this place, alongside all the founding members of our compound when I was scarcely older than Nolan myself.

That was a time of incredible change. My mother tells me that being a parent was different in the before-times. Back then, she tells us, it wasn't typical for parents to have time and space to watch their children grow: for families to grow together. Back then, it was typical for parents to leave their children in centers so they could go to "work". There the children would stay for 9, 10, 11 hours a day while their families worked: work that was too important to be interrupted by something as trivial as bringing a human life into the world.

The work my mother describes seems like it never ended: seeping like an invisible, toxic gas into the space of her nights, weekends, early mornings. She would catch up on emails while stopped at traffic lights on the drive to work, and open her computer to work more after I went to bed. Though this work never ended, it was also somehow never enough. The salary she was paid in exchange for her time— the time she now spent resting and enjoying life with our family— would always somehow run out by the end of the month as she anxiously awaited her next paycheck.

I don't remember much about those early days with Mom, in the before-times; I was too young. That was back when we still drove gasoline powered vehicles; killed each other in endless international wars fueled by lucrative private military contracts; and locked people up in for-profit prisons. We don't do that anymore. Maybe it was easier to see the forest for the trees when the oil fields finally ran dry, who knows. Mom still shudders when we talk about the

before-times, when she would have to say goodbye to me and go to work. Back then mom was a teacher too. Though probably not in the way we think about teachers today.

To hear her tell it, back then education was more about standardized testing than about the budding humanity of the students she shared classroom space with. She fondly recalls the beginnings of her teaching career, time spent getting to know her students and all their infinite human complexity. These were joyful times. After a while, however, the pressure mounted to quantify this joy. Each student was a number, her school's principal would tell her, a number that needed to be improved. The most important thing at the end of every school year became the numbers: scores on long, opaque tests that were dreaded by students and teachers alike. She began to feel like her classroom was a little cell—closed off and far from everyone else in her school. A cell where she and she alone would be held accountable for whatever numbers it produced by the end of the school year. A prison where the value of her students—where her own value—were determined not by the joy they created in community with one another, but by bodiless creatures with neither name nor face, grading robots that determined the futures of her students by means of an invisible, unknowable process.

“When I sew pants for your father, I know they’ll only fit if they’re 34 inches wide and 36 inches long,” she would explain. “And I’ve never understood why it takes *two* numbers to measure his ass²², but only *one* number to tell how much my students learned after a year in my classroom”.

Things are different now. Now we teach in open spaces, make connections. And we still “work”, though only as much as we need to in order to provide for one another as a community.

Now, Mom and I are both educators in the same community compound. “Speak of the breeze!” I exclaimed as Mom walked over to Nolan and me. “I was just thinking about you.”

“Only good things, I hope” she smiled at me, as she stretched out her arms to greet her grandbaby. As usual, she quickly turned her dotting attention to Nolan: “Günaydın, nene-jim! Gel, gel!”

“Nene!” Nolan shrieked, as he ran over to her, impatient for his morning dose of kisses and hugs.

“I’ll walk him to class today if you want, baby,” she said, taking Nolan’s hand and continuing in the direction of the Littles’ playscape. Their morning would be busy with outdoor play, investigating the natural landscape of the compound, digging up worms and sorting leaves. Stuffing their pockets with rocks and acorns. Important work.

“Sure thing Mom,” I replied, “I want to check on the veggies anyways. See you both for lunch in a bit!”

After stopping briefly to inspect our raised bed for signs of freeze damage, I glanced over at Nolan and his Nene walking together, hand in hand. They were ambling along in no particular

²² Mom may have stolen this quip from one of her favorite movies, *Interstellar* (2013).

hurry, past the community water pump, alongside a tiny trickling stream, working their way towards the patch of oak trees that formed the Littles' playscape. I turned to walk through the garden to my teaching area: the Middles' playscape. Ours was located in the center of the compound, just past the grazing field where our chickens roamed freely and underneath a beautiful canopy of fruit trees—peach and avocado and cherry. Nolan loved the peaches.

My team was already assembled there, squinting through the sunshine to watch as our students meandered over to join us. This first part of the morning was always my favorite. There was nothing urgent to our mornings; this was a time for gathering. I got to greet parents and other caregivers as they walked or biked their children to the compound, exchanging updates about the various goings-on in their families, occasionally pausing to share a cup of tea. Some would stay and help tend to the gardens or collect eggs from the chicken coop. Some would leave for other important activities in the community but return to eat lunch with us. Families were always welcome here. I took a seat on an overturned stump next to Djeng, another team member who was busy insistently feeding their four-month-old baby next to a wooden table where one of our lovely students had already assembled a tray with a tea kettle, some honey from the compound's hives, and lemon slices.

“Good morning, Djeng,” I chirruped, helping myself to a mug and pouring a cup of steaming tea. “The little one is getting big!”

“On jaaraama, koto-jo!” they greeted me and smiled in reply, “Every minute of every day it seems, which is also about as often as my little seedling eats! Though we're about done now—would you mind burping her for me while I run to the toilet?”

“Of course!” I eagerly responded, setting down my mug and leaning over to cradle their precious bundle in my arms. We would often trade off watching the infants for one another. I looked across the compound to the Littles' playscape, where I could see Nolan hard at work digging a hole with his friends. I missed those early days of nursing him under these same trees, of passing him back and forth to my students as we engaged in reading or planting. I missed the faint smell of dried milk and the feel of his soft, wispy hair. I missed feeling his little hand absently scratch my back as he fell asleep at my breast. There was nothing like it; though sharing Djeng's little one was certainly a close alternative.

Again, my mother's face abruptly floated to mind. Nursing wasn't always so simple for educators. In the before-times when I was a baby, I wasn't permitted to share space with Mom at work. Instead, I stayed in a child center for ten hours each day. Because we were so far removed, her best option for feeding me with her own milk was to use a mechanical pump. These pumps would pull the milk from her body and into a plastic bottle, which she would store in a refrigerator to feed me later. Just as there was no space for *me* at Mom's school, there was no safe, private space for her to pump milk either: neither her baby nor her body were welcome. Instead, Mom hid away to pump in a broom closet, celebrating the beauty of her body's ability to gestate and nurture life surrounded by dusty shelves and spiderwebs.

And she had no time to pump during her work day either. Instead, she squeezed seconds from her day by skipping lunch. By that time, her aching breasts were already full and leaking:

the pain of separation from me manifested palpably in blouses stained with milk and tears. At the end of the school day, she would run to her car exhausted, juggling a portable lunch box full of milk bottles and an accordion folder full of student papers. Sometimes she would strap herself to the machine once more to pump in the car while sitting in traffic on the way to pick me up.

We don't do that to people anymore. Time and space are both different now. Perhaps back then, people didn't understand that neither is a scarce resource: both are abundant when they are shared.

"Podemos começar?" asked Rogerio, the third member of our Middles' team. Between the three of us—Djeng, Rogerio, and myself—we were tasked with guiding the educational activities of our Middles, those members of the community around ages 10 to 15. There were about 20 of them at any given time, as they transitioned from being with the Littles to the Middles to the Bigs, all of which were housed on this very same compound. We had known many of them for their entire lives.

"Why not," I replied, "And perhaps we can begin with a discussion on frost and what it does to our plants?"

"Muito bom," Rogerio replied, "I was actually thinking the same thing. It certainly fits, given the weather we've had this week. I'll signal the students."

He lumbered over to the center of the Middles' playscape, where we kept a bucket of water adjacent to two large metal basins: the children's handwashing station. Atop the first basin was a small bell that he rang twice. At the sound, our students ran happily in our direction to take turns washing their hands so we could have snack. Learning was never productive on empty bellies. That morning, it was Danny's turn to make the soap, which he and his family had infused with lavender they grew in indoor pots at their home, and Ulker's turn to bring the snack: a canned medley of garbanzos and black beans, topped with a tomato and pepper chutney. We would be back to eating fresh vegetables soon, but these jarred creations were certainly delicious in the meantime.

As Djeng returned, they scooped some snack into a wooden bowl for me, which I eagerly exchanged for their now peacefully sleeping baby. Soon the students would want a turn holding her as well; Djeng's arms never grew weary during our lessons. We all sat on the ground together and ate peacefully, the students chatting with one another. I glanced across the compound once more at Nolan. As usual, he was too busy with the important work of reading the world with friends to notice me dotting on him from afar. This time they were gathering watering cans to bring to the pump so the Littles could feed our transplants: peppers and eggplant. Nourishing our plants so that they could grow and in time, nourish us.

"Actually," I leaned over to whisper to Djeng, "You lot go ahead and get started without me. I'll be back in a minute."

Djeng followed my gaze over to Nolan, who was tromping towards the well with two handcrafted watering cans in tow, and returned a knowing smile. "Of course," was all they

replied, and in that moment I knew they understood. Some moments more than others just pull us to those we love.

I got up to place my wooden bowl and spoon in the bottom of our metal washbasin so I could set off in Nolan's direction, intent on securing one final snuggle before joining our morning lesson. As I felt the crunch of pebbles under my feet and the touch of sun on my face, allowing my mother's presence to settle once more to the back of my mind, I thought to myself:

"I really love teaching".

Looking Forward

One of the strengths of speculative fiction as a form of representation is that it resists the urge to draw conclusions, thereby democratizing the process of academic writing by leaving the reader with infinite space to create their own meaning. Traditional academic writing is intended to persuade. We want to make reasoned arguments that leave the reader with no doubt as to the soundness of our arguments, to convince them of the logic in our reasoning. Speculative fiction, on the other hand, does not [necessarily] want to persuade. It wants you to wonder. Concurrently, other scholars who have used fiction for analysis in education research, such as Sparkes (2007) and Inckle (2010), decline to offer any interpretation of their stories in the form of a conclusion. Instead, they merely present their stories for the readers' consideration and subsequently relinquish control over their reception to readers. In this way, fiction opens up a route by which qualitative research(ers) can counter the drive for closure in their writing, resisting "the expectation that the fictional narrative will be swaddled within a researcherly paratext which provides authority and validates it, particularly in relation to citation" (Watson, 2011, p. 403). Conclusions can suggest finality, which are part and parcel to the re-territorialized center of those qualitative methods dominated by linear logic and invariability. With fictional and other fluid methodological spaces, learning is never a finished project; the researcher must give up any notions of finality or findings (Koro-Llungeberg, 2016). Even though the stability of conclusions can be a comfortable space, this relinquishing of control over the data and analysis leads to

spaces of infinite potential, for “...not knowing what data wants is both the dilemma and the possibility at the same time” (p. 45-46). Therefore I am going to resist concluding in a traditional manner by discussing things like the implications of this study and recommendations for future research, and simply leave my story of a utopia for lactating-teacher parents in education here for the reader.

It is perhaps ironic, then, that I cannot resist in closing by at least emphasizing a few points in favor of leveraging speculative fiction in the analysis and/or representation of qualitative data. First, it allows researchers to attend to the ethical implications of conducting educational research in spaces as intimate as teachers’ infant feeding practices. For example, in her article, “Telling Tales? Using Ethnographic Fiction to Speak Embodied ‘Truth,’” Inckle (2010) shares an ethnography of body marking practices to articulate what she calls an “ethics of reflexive embodiment” (p. 34) around research and representation practices that emerge specifically from the lived bodies of participants. Because of how intimately connected this research was to her participants’ bodies, and therefore *being* in the world, Inckle (2010) argues for the use of embodied methodologies, “...ways of conducting and representing research which reflects the embodied nature of the subject matter” (p. 7). Otherwise stated, when researchers are speaking truth to and around peoples’ bodies, we are speaking directly to and about who they are. This requires a supremely ethical commitment to the ways we collect, analyze, and share the findings of our research. In the context of the current study, lactation functions similarly. Lactation, alongside childbirth and pregnancy, represent medicalized processes wherein “corporeal functions—particularly those pertaining to women’s reproductive capacity—come to be strictly defined and monitored by medical professionals” (Young, 2020, p. 687). Lactating teacher-parents are subjected to a medicalizing gaze that delegitimizes the embodied knowledge

gleaned through the unique bonds created between a lactating parent and their child(ren), valuing instead the opinions of doctors and other medical professionals. In addition, this medicalizing gaze obscures the role of social and material boundaries on the process of lactation— such as the lack of federal paid parental leave, or universal health insurance coverage in the United States— instead returning the onus of responsibility for success in lactation practices onto individual parents themselves (Young, 2020). Disrupting a medicalizing framework that privileges “hyper-rational, exclusively cognitive, and disembodied ways of knowing- i.e. objectivity” (Inckle, 2010, p. 30) requires an ethic of transformation in theory and method, one equal to the task of resolving ethical issues in representation of fundamentally embodied practices such as lactation. Fiction as method provides just such a transformational ethos, creating space for scholars to imagine more just and equitable futures in education spaces. A parent’s fundamental ability to feed their child can be foundational to their identities as a caregiver, and early experiences with lactation can be the most rewarding bonding experience between parent and child; alternatively, nursing can be an incredibly traumatic experience for parents. It is therefore a space that researchers must attend to with the utmost delicacy and care, with the well-being of participants at the forefront of every concern. Speculative fiction enables me to pursue the ethical imperative demanded of lactation and similar embodied subject matters.

Finally, speculative fiction creates space to bring the theoretical concept of haunting (Gordon, 1997; Rhee, 2021; Yoon & Chen, 2022) to life. Writing the trauma of my participants did not feel like enough, in the context of the current study. To heed my hauntings as a research imperative meant that I could not stop at witnessing injustice to affirm that the people in our studies, their ghosts, and what has been erased matters (Yoon & Chen, 2022), as I wrote about using traditional thematic coding in Chapter 5. I also felt pulled to seek out an equitable world—

a hopeful world I scarcely have the words to describe because I haven't seen it yet. The unbounded possibilities of speculative fiction enable this imperative. As Toliver (2020) writes, "We tell our stories to envision worlds beyond the one we currently inhabit and to imagine more just futures" (p. 526). Speculative fiction provides the means by which researchers can build new, just, and possible futures for our ghosts, allowing them to let go...

...so they are not trapped here with us. Maybe they are able to go because we've done the something-to-be-done. Or maybe they can stay to support and affirm and guide. What matters is that they can come and go as they wish rather than haunting out of desperation. (Yoon & Chen, 2022, p. 87)

I also felt pulled to the transformative nature of haunting through my own shared experiences with abortion and loss, with childbirth and lactation. As Yoon and Chen (2022) write, "Hauntology reflects not just the topic of research or inquiry...[but] how the research is undertaken, how the researcher is transformed, and how different, multiple ways of knowing and mattering are part of making the past and future" (p. 76). Dreaming emancipatory futures for lactating teacher-parents has enabled me to work through my wounds and losses, an "onto-epistemological and methodological mixing and crossing which supported ways in which I could claim/do this writing as research, my feminist work/life" (Rhee, 2021, p. 10). Far from the detached, objective, logical, and rational tenets of positivism, hauntology allows researchers a methodological tool for blurring the traditional boundaries "between I, you, and we, individual and collective self, and self and other" (Rhee, 2021, p. 3) in a Western scientific epistemology, since transformation is key to the process. Particularly in the case of those scores of untold stories about abortion, miscarriage, pregnancy, lactation, and other perspectives historically silenced and erased, the ghosts need their stories told—my ghosts needed their stories told—in

their quest(s) for justice (Yoon & Chen, 2022). Leveraging speculative fiction to write through my own utopia in lactation—a space where I felt that I, my participants, and all the parents and children and families I know and love could be free to grow together— is my work of remembering; my response/ability as a researcher; my first step to healing. I use it as an invitation to wonder with me. Not about what is, but what could be.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.
- Alvey, E. (n.d.). Privatization. In *Neoliberalism: Guide for educators* (Online open access resource [Sharma, A., Ed.]). Available at <http://neolib.uga.edu/privatization.php>
- Anderson, P.S. & Bunnin, N. (2020). Silencing and speaker vulnerability. *Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 25(1-2), 36-45.
- Allen, S. (2022, April 28). Oconee high schools among the top in the nation, according to U.S. News and World Report. *Athens Banner-Herald*. Accessed on July 18, 2023, at <https://www.onlineathens.com/story/news/education/2022/04/28/oconee-county-high-schools-among-top-nation-per-u-s-news-world-report/9568464002/>
- Apple, M.W. (2007). Education, markets, and audit culture. *International Journal of Educational Policies*, 1(1), 4-19.
- Apple, M.W. (2014). The gendered realities of managerialism in education: An essay review of Kathleen Lynch, Bernie Grummell, and Dympna Devine's *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialization, Carelessness, and Gender* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. ISBN 978-0-230-27511-9). *Educational Policy*, 28(6), 916-924.
- Apple, M. (2017). What is present and absent in critical analyses of neoliberalism in education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 92(1), 148-153.
- Attick, D. (2017). Homo economicus at school: Neoliberal education and teacher as economic being. *Educational Studies*, 53(1), 37-48.
- Au, W. (2008). *Unequal by design: High-stakes testing and the standardization of inequality*. Routledge.
- Au, W. (2016). Meritocracy 2.0: High-stakes, standardized testing as a racial project of neoliberal multiculturalism. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 39-62.
- Averett, K.H. (2021). Queer parents, gendered embodiment and the de-essentialization of motherhood. *Feminist Theory*, 22(2), 284-304.
- Ball, S.J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18, 215-228.
- Ball, S.J. (2004, June 17). *Education for sale! The commodification of everything?* King's Annual Education Lecture, University of London.

- Banet-Weiser, S. (2017). 'I'm beautiful the way I am': Empowerment, beauty, and aesthetic labor. In Elias, A.S, Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (Eds.), *Aesthetic labor: Rethinking beauty politics in neoliberalism* (pp. 265-282). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Banet-Weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). Postfeminism, popular feminism and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3-24.
- Barone, T. (2007). A return to the gold standard? Questioning the future of narrative construction as educational research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 454-470.
- Bartky, S.L. (1997). Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power. In *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (Conboy, K., Medina, N., & Stanbury, S., Eds.). Columbia University Press.
- Belmi, P., & Laurin, K. (2016). Who wants to get to the top? Class and lay theories about power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(4), 505–529.
- Bendasolli, P.F. (2013). Theory building in qualitative research: Reconsidering the problem of induction [50 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 14(1), Art. 25, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1301258>
- Benson, K. (n.d.). Datafication of education. In *Neoliberalism: Guide for educators* (Online open access resource [Sharma, A., Ed.]). Available at <http://neolib.uga.edu/datafication.php>
- Benson, K. & Sharma, A. (2023). Manifestations of neoliberal feminism in teacher lactation behaviors. *Gender & Education*, 36(1), 9-36.
- Bereola, A. (2018, December 3). A true utopia: An interview with N.K. Jemisin. *The Paris Review*. Accessed on May 5, 2023 at <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/12/03/a-true-utopia-an-interview-with-n-k-jemisin/>
- Bordo, S. (1997). The body and the reproduction of femininity. In *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (Conboy, K., Medina, N., & Stanbury, S., Eds.). Columbia University Press.
- Bordo, S. (2003). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. University of California Press.
- Boyer, K. (2014). 'Neoliberal motherhood': Workplace lactation and changing conceptions of working motherhood in the contemporary US. *Feminist Theory*, 15(3), 269-288.
- Brathwaite, J. (2017). Neoliberal education reform and the perpetuation of inequality. *Critical Sociology*, 43(3), 429-448.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.

- Brenner, N., Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2010). Variegated neoliberalization: Geographies, modalities, pathways. *Global Networks*, 10(2), 182-222.
- Brown, E. (2015, August 2). *Teachers learn a lesson in loopholes when it comes to pumping breast milk*. The Washington Post.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/breast-may-be-best-but-teachers-dont-have-the-right-to-pump-at-work-in-many-states/2015/08/02/9f6daa64-36d0-11e5-9d0f-7865a67390ee_story.html
- Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. Zone Books.
- Benhabib, S., Butler, J., Cornell, D., & Fraser, N. (1995). *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1995). Contingent foundations. In Benhabib, S., Butler, J., Cornell, D., & Fraser, N. (Eds.), *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (Conboy, K., Medina, N., & Stanbury, S., Eds.). Columbia University Press.
- Butler, J. (2007). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2019). What threat? The campaign against 'gender ideology.'. *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics, and Innovation*, (3), p. 1-12.
- Campbell, B. (2013). *End of equality: The only way is women's liberation*. Seagull Books.
- Campbell, B. (2014). After neoliberalism: The need for a gender revolution. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal (Project Muse)*, 56(1), 10-26.
- Campbell, B. (2014, January 6). Neoliberal neopatriarchy: The case for gender revolution. *Open Democracy*. Accessed December 14, 2022 at
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/neoliberal-neopatriarchy-case-for-gender-revolution/>
- Campbell, B. (2014, May 25). Why we need a new women's revolution. *The Guardian*. Accessed on December 14, 2022 at
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/25/we-need-new-womens-revolution>
- Childers, S.M., Rhee, J. & Daza, S.L. (2013). Promiscuous (use of) feminist methodologies: The dirty theory and messy practice of educational research beyond gender. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(5), 507-523.

- Clandinin, D.J. & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (Clandinin, D.J., Ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Clough, P. (2002). *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Open University Press.
- Combahee River Collective (1981). The Combahee River Collective statement. In *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*, Moraga, C. & Anzaldúa, G., Eds. Persephone Press.
- Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 8(1), 139-167.
- Davies, B., Browne, J., Gannon, S., Honan, E., & Somerville, M. (2005). Embodied women at work in neoliberal times and places. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 12(4), 343-364.
- Davis, A. (1971). *If they come in the morning: Voices of resistance*. The Third Press.
- De Freitas, E. (2007). Research fictions: Arts-informed narratives that disrupt the authority of the text. *Interchange*, 38(4), 335-350.
- Dennis, A. (2023, July 10). Unifying metro Atlanta school districts to navigate the divisive concepts law. *Saporta Report*. Accessed on July 17, 2023 at <https://saportareport.com/unifying-metro-atlanta-school-districts-to-navigate-the-divisive-concepts-law/thought-leadership/securing-atlantas-future/learn4life/>
- Denny. (2023, August 7). From transition to parenthood: Inside the lives of trans dads who chestfeed their babies. *Reckon*. Accessed on February 2, 2024 at <https://www.reckon.news/lgbtq/2023/08/from-transition-to-parenthood-inside-the-lives-of-trans-dads-who-chestfeed-their-babies.html>
- Dinour, L.M., Pope, G.A., Bai, Y.K., (2015). Breast milk pumping beliefs, supports, and barriers on a university campus. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 31(1), 156-165.
- Donovan, S. (2019, April 1). Documentary ‘Below Baldwin’ digs deeper into UGA, Athens’ history with slavery. *The Red & Black*. Accessed on July 18, 2023 at https://www.redandblack.com/uganews/documentary-below-baldwin-digs-deeper-into-uga-athens-history-with-slavery/article_492588ca-5431-11e9-b55f-5f83963291bb.html
- Dow, A., Sass, A., Toliver, S.R., & Zhao, X.J. (2023). Widening our worlds: Speculative fiction as disruption (A collaborative conversation). *The Alan Review*, Winter, 6-8.
- Duggan, L. (2003). *The twilight of equality?: Neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy*. Beacon Press.

- Elting, L. (2023, January 27). New year, new glass heights: Women now comprise 10% of top U.S. corporation CEOs. *Forbes*. Accessed on February 7, 2024 at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lizelting/2023/01/27/new-year-new-glass-heights-for-the-first-time-in-history-over-10-of-fortune-500-ceos-are-women/?sh=2154408ee77f>
- Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. The University of Chicago Press.
- emezi, a. (2019). *Pet* (1st ed.). Make Me a World.
- Engel, J. (2020). Still here: Miscarriage and the ontology of the silent cradle. *Cultural Studies* \Leftrightarrow *Critical Methodologies*, 20(1), 16-25.
- Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 213, Public Law 101-583, 104 Stat. 2871 (2004). <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/subtitle-B/chapter-V/subchapter-A/part-541>
- Favaro, L. (2017). ‘Just be confident girls!’: Confidence chic as neoliberal governmentality. In Elias, A.S, Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (Eds.), *Aesthetic labor: Rethinking beauty politics in neoliberalism* (pp. 382-300). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Ferguson, K.E. (2017). Feminist theory today. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20(1), 269-286.
- Ferguson, S. J. (2020). *Women and work: Feminism, labour, and social reproduction*. Pluto Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish*. Random House.
- Foucault, M. (1997). On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of a work in progress. In Rabinow, P. (Ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth* (pp. 253-280). The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fraser, N. (2009). Feminism, capitalism and the cunning of history. *New Left Review*, 56, 97-117.
- Fraser, N. (2017). Crisis of care? On the social-reproductive contradictions of contemporary capitalism. In *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentering oppression*. Bhattacharya, T. & Vogel, L., Eds. Pluto Press.
- Freeman, M. (2017). *Modes of thinking for qualitative data analysis*. Routledge.
- Gale de Saxe, J., Bucknovitz, S., Mahoney-Mosedale, F. (2020). The deprofessionalization of education: An intersectional analysis of neoliberalism and education ‘reform’. *Education and Urban Society*, 52(1), 51-69.
- Galtry, J. (1997). Suckling and silence in the USA: The costs and benefits of breastfeeding. *Feminist Economics*, 3(3), 1-24.

- Gilman, C. P. (1915). *Herland*. The Floating Press.
- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success (1st edition.)*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Gordon, A. (1997). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Graham, L.J. (2011). The product of text and ‘other’ statements: Discourse analysis and the critical use of Foucault. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(6), 663-674.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Hausman, B. L. (2004). The feminist politics of breastfeeding. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 19(45), 273-285.
- Haywood Rolling Jr., J. (2017). Arts-based research in education. In *Handbook of arts-based research*, Leavy, P. (Ed.). Guilford Publications.
- Hentges, M. & Pilot, E. (2021). Making it “work”: Mothers’ perceptions of workplace breastfeeding and pumping at Dutch universities. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 16(87), 1-13.
- Herrnstein, R. & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. Simon & Schuster.
- Hook, D. (2007). *Foucault, psychology and the analytics of power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. Routledge.
- Hughes, H. (2014). Unexpected manifestations of (dis)orientation: Learning from 12-year-old girls how to talk back in order to be enough. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(3), 362-375.
- Inckle, K. (2010). Telling tales? Using ethnographic fiction to speak embodied ‘truth’. *Qualitative Research*, 10(1), 27-47.
- Invisibilia. (2022, October 7). Power tools. *National Public Radio (NPR)* Podcast, Accessed on January 22, 2024 at <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1127484176>
- Ivancheva, M., Lynch, K., & Keating, K. (2019). Precarity, gender and care in the neoliberal academy. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26, 448-462.
- Jackson, A.Y. & Mazzei, L.A. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. Routledge.
- Jemisin, N.K. (2018). The ones who stay and fight. In *How long ‘til black future month?* Orbit.
- Jones, S. & Kurtz, M. (2023, July 13). Opinion: Politics, not policy, spurred Cobb’s ouster of teacher. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Accessed on July 17, 2023 at

<https://www.ajc.com/education/get-schooled-blog/opinion-politics-not-policy-spurred-cobbs-ouster-of-teacher/RT2ROQERAZHBLNKUCTLJNZC25I/>

- Kim, J.H., Shin, J.C., & Donovan, S.M. (2019). Effectiveness of workplace lactation interventions on breastfeeding outcomes in the United States: An updated systemic review. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(1), 100-113.
- Koro-Llungeberg, M. (2016). *Reconceptualizing qualitative research: Methodologies without methodology*. SAGE Publications.
- Koro-Llungeberg, M. & Maclure, M. (2013). Provocations, re-un-visions, death, and other possibilities of 'data'. *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies*, 13(4), 219-222.
- Larner, W. (2000). Neo-liberalism: Policy, ideology, governmentality. *Studies in Political Economy*, 63, 5-25.
- Leavy, P. (2017). Fiction-based research. In *Handbook of arts-based research*, Leavy, P. (Ed.). Guilford Publications.
- Leavy, P. (2019). Fiction, feminism and qualitative research: An interview with Dr. Patricia Leavy. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(11), How To Article 4, 2929-2933.
- Lee, J. & Morris, L. (2019, March 20). *Stop breastfeeding or quit teaching? The terrible choice facing many teacher moms*. Education Week.
<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-stop-breastfeeding-or-quit-teaching-the-terrible-choice-facing-many-teacher-moms/2019/03>
- LeGuin, U. (1973). The ones who walk away from Omelas. In *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*. Harpers.
- Lemke, T. (2001). "The birth of bio-politics": Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy & Society*, 30(2), 190-207.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140120042271>
- Leppert, R. & Desilver, D. (2023, January 3). 118th Congress has record number of women. *Pew Research Center*. Accessed on February 7, 2024 at <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/03/118th-congress-has-a-record-number-of-women/>
- Linneberg, M.S. & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding qualitative data: A synthesis guiding the novice. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(3), 259-270.
- Lorde, A. (1984/2007). *Sister outsider*. Crossing Press.
- Love, B.L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.
- Lynch, K., Grummell, B., and Devine, D. (2012). *New managerialism in education: Commercialization, carelessness, and gender*. Palgrave MacMillan.

- MacDonald, T., Noel-Weiss, J., West, D., Walks, M., Beginner, M., Kibbe, A., & Myler, E. (2016). Transmasculine individuals' experiences with lactation, chestfeeding, and gender identity: A qualitative study. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, *10*(106), 1-17
- MacLure, M. (2003). *Discourse in educational and social research*. Open University.
- MacLure, M. (2013). The wonder of data. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *13*(4), 228-232.
- Macrine, S. (2016). Pedagogies of neoliberalism. In *The handbook of neoliberalism* (Springer, S., Birch, K., & MacLeavy, J., Eds.). Routledge.
- Mawn, A. (2023, July 15). Athens transgender activists reflect on legislation restricting gender-affirming care. *The Red & Black*. Accessed on July 17, 2023 at https://www.redandblack.com/athensnews/athens-transgender-activists-reflect-on-legislation-restricting-gender-affirming-care/article_1a5df9ea-22b9-11ee-a9ee-27432fe17b52.html?mc_cid=e78a2a2f5d&mc_eid=297a720d64
- McCarter-Spaulding, D. (2008). Is breastfeeding fair? Tensions in feminist perspectives on breastfeeding and the family. *Journal of Human Lactation*, *24*(2), 206-212.
- McCarthy, M.D. & Stice, S.K. (2023). Speculative futures and 'found' artifacts: Using fiction for defamiliarization and analysis. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, *23*(3), 246-261.
- McCarthy, R. (2023, February 15). Board of Education renames Alps Road and Chase Street Elementary Schools. *Flagpole Magazine*. Accessed on December 19, 2023 at <https://flagpole.com/news/city-dope/2023/02/15/board-of-education-renames-alps-road-and-chase-street-elementary-schools/>
- McKittrick, K. (2021). *Dear science and other stories*. Duke University Press.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. London: SAGE.
- McRobbie, A. (2015). Notes on the perfect: Competitive femininity in neoliberal times. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *30*(83), 3-20.
- McWilliam, E. (1996). Seductress or schoolmarm? On the improbability of the great female teacher. *Interchange*, *27*(1), 1-11.
- Mertler, C.A., & Charles, C.M. (2005). *Introduction to educational research* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Moraga, C. & Anzaldúa, G. (1981). *The bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (4th ed.). State University of New York Press.

- Nakajima, K. & Hanzhang, J. (2022, November 28). Bills targeting trans youth are growing more common— and radically reshaping lives. *NPR*. Accessed on July 17, 2023 at <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/28/1138396067/transgender-youth-bills-trans-sports>
- National Conference of State Legislatures. (2021, August 26). *Breastfeeding state laws*. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/breastfeeding-state-laws.aspx>
- Oster, E. (2019). *Cribsheet: A data-driven guide to better, more relaxed parenting from birth to preschool*. Penguin Press.
- Oyéwùmi, O. (1997). *Invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. Palgrave.
- Oyéwùmi, O. (2005). *African gender studies: A reader*. Palgrave.
- Palmer, D. (1998). On refusing who we are: Foucault's critique of the epistemic subject. *Philosophy Today*, 42(4), 402-410.
- Pendharkar, E. (2022, November 11). Georgia educators plan to sue over the state's 'divisive concepts' law. *Education Week*. Accessed on July 17, 2023 at <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/georgia-educators-plan-to-sue-over-the-states-divisive-concepts-law/2022/11>
- Persohn, L. (2022, April 12). A conversation with Stephanie Toliver. *Teaching and Learning Faculty Publications*. 716. Accessed on May 5, 2023 at https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/tal_facpub/716
- Pharr, S. (1997). *Homophobia: A weapon of sexism*. Chardon Press.
- Phillips, M.M. (2020). *K-12 teachers' experiences "with or without" breastfeeding/pumping policy in the school workplace* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida]. USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
- Piff, P. K., Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., Cheng, B. H., & Keltner, D. (2010). Having less, giving more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(5), 771–784.
- Pittard, E. A. (2015). *Becoming good enough: The working lives of women teachers in neoliberal times*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia]. UGA Theses and Dissertations.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5-23.
- Pulsford, M. (2019). Go into school, get a cushy job, move to a better area: Male primary school teachers and neoliberal regimes of value. *Power and Education*, 11(3), 346-363.

- PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act: S.1658 - 117th Congress (2021, May 27).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1658>
- Queen, H. (2022, August 9). The story behind Linnentown: Why Athens residents are speaking out decades after their community's removal. *The Red & Black*. Accessed on July 18, 2023 at https://www.redandblack.com/athensnews/the-story-behind-linnentown-why-athens-residents-are-speaking-out-decades-after-their-community-s/article_a899c21c-3aa3-11eb-9b2f-13b4471b0a88.html
- Ranschaert, R. (2023). When shutting the door won't do: Teaching with the specter of community backlash and the implications for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 74(4), 371-382.
- Rapport, N. (2020). The Interview as a form of talking-partnership: Dialectical, focussed, ambiguous, Special. In *The interview: An ethnographic approach*. (pp. 53-68). Routledge.
- Rhee, J. (2021). *Decolonial feminist research: Haunting, rememory, and mothers*. Routledge.
- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (Denzin, N. & Lincoln, K., Eds.). SAGE Publications.
- Rodgers, D. (2018). The uses and abuses of 'neoliberalism'. *Dissent*. Winter, 78-87.
- Rose, N.S. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rottenberg, C. (2014). The rise of neoliberal feminism. *Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 418-437.
- Rummler, O. (2023, December 7). What it's like to be a pregnant trans man in America. *Them*. Accessed on February 2, 2024 at https://www.them.us/story/pregnancy-transmasculine-men-reproductive-health-care-support?utm_source=instagram&utm_medium=social&utm_content=instagram-bio-link&client_service_id=31178&client_service_name=them.&service_user_id=1.78e%2B16&supported_service_name=instagram_publishing&utm_brand=them&utm_social_type=owned
- Russom, G. (2012). Obama's neoliberal agenda for education. In Bale, J. & Knopp, S. (Eds.). *Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation*. Haymarket Books.
- Sandberg, S. & Scovell, N. (2013). *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Scharff, C. (2012). *Repudiating feminism: Young women in a neoliberal world*. Ashgate Pub.
- Schmeichel, M., Sharma, A., Pittard, E. (2017). Contours of neoliberalism in US empirical research. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47(2), 194-216.

- Schroeder, S., Currin, E., & McCardle, T. (2018). Mother tongues: The Opt Out movement's vocal response to patriarchal, neoliberal education reform. *Gender & Education, 30*(8), 1001-1018.
- Sharma, A. (2021). Neoliberal etiology and educational failure: A critical exploration. *Curriculum Inquiry, 51*(5), 542-561.
- Sinner, A., Hasebe-Ludt, E., & Leggo, C. (2017). Long story short: Encounters with creative nonfiction as methodological provocation. In *Handbook of arts-based research*, Leavy, P. (Ed.). Guilford Publications.
- Sloan, K. (2008) The expanding educational services sector: Neoliberalism and the corporatization of curriculum at the local level in the US. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 40*(5), 555-578, DOI: 10.1080/00220270701784673
- Smith, L.T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books.
- Smith, P.H. & Bamberger, E.T. (2021). Gender inclusivity is not gender neutrality. *Journal of Human Lactation, 37*(3), 441-443.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2007). Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture: a story seeking consideration. *Qualitative Research, 7*(4), 521–550.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107082306>
- Stengel, B.S. (2016). Educating homo oeconomicus? “The disadvantages of a commercial spirit” for the realization of *Democracy and Education*. *Educational Theory, 66*(1-2), 245-261.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (1997). Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 10*(2), 175–189.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(5), 477-515.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (2011). Post-qualitative research: The critique and the coming after. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). SAGE.
- St. Pierre, E.A. & Jackson, A.Y. (2014). Qualitative data analysis after coding. *Qualitative Inquiry, 20*(6), 715-719.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (2015). Practices for the “new” in the new empiricisms, the new materialisms, and post qualitative inquiry. In *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of research*, Denzin, N.K. & Giandina, M.D., Eds. Left Coast Press.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (2016). Curriculum for the new material, new empirical inquiry. In *Pedagogical matters: New materialisms and curriculum studies* (p. 1-12), N. Snaza, D. Sonu, S.F. Truman & Z. Zaliwska (Eds.). Peter Lang.
- St. Pierre, E.A. (2017). Post-qualitative inquiry: The next generation. In *Qualitative inquiry in neoliberal times*, Denzin, N.K. & Giandina, M.A. (Eds.). Routledge.

- Taylor, E. (2020, August 24). *New Georgia law protects breastfeeding moms in the workplace*. <https://www.taylorenglish.com/newsroom-alerts-new-georgia-law-protects-breastfeeding-moms-in-the-workplace.html>
- Thorley, V. (2021). Embodied mothering: Valuing breastfeeding in a neoliberal age. *Breastfeeding Review*, 29(1), 7-13.
- Toliver, S. (2020). Can I get a witness? Speculative fiction as testimony and counterstory. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 52(4), 507-529.
- Tuana, N. (2006). The speculum of ignorance: The women's health movement and epistemologies of ignorance. *Hypatia*, 21(3), 1-22.
- Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-427.
- Tuck, E. & Yang, K.W. (2014). Unbecoming claims: Pedagogies of refusal in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 811-818.
- U.S. Breastfeeding Committee (n.d.). The Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (PUMP) for Nursing Mothers Act. Retrieved February 27, 2023, from <https://www.usbreastfeeding.org/pump-act.html>
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.). What you should know about the pregnant workers fairness act. Accessed June 15, 2023 at <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-pregnant-workers-fairness-act>
- Vilar-Compte, M., Hernandez-Cordero, S., Ancira-Morena, M., Burrola-Mendez, S., Ferre-Eguiluz, I., Omana, I., & Perez Navarro, C. (2021). Breastfeeding at the workplace: A systematic review of interventions to improve workplace environments to facilitate breastfeeding among working women. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(110), 1-21.
- Wage and Hour Division (revised January, 2023). *Fact Sheet #73: FLSA Protections for Employees to Pump Breast Milk at Work*. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved February 27, 2023, from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/73-flsa-break-time-nursing-mothers>
- Wallenborn, J.T., Perera, R.A., Wheeler, D.C., Lu, J., & Masho, S.W. (2018). Workplace support and breastfeeding duration: The mediating effect of breastfeeding intention and self-efficacy. *Birth*, 46, 121-128.
- Watson, C. (2011). Staking a claim for fictional narratives in social and educational research. *Qualitative Research*, 11(4), 395-408.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell.

- Whitley, M.D., Ro, A., & Choi, B. (2019). Workplace breastfeeding support and job satisfaction among working mothers in the United States. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 62, 716-726.
- Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus groups in feminist research: Power, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21(1), 111-125.
- Williams, Z. (2012). *The backlash against breastfeeding*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/may/25/breastfeeding-backlash-zoe-williams>
- Wittig, M. (1997). One is not born a woman. In *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (Conboy, K., Medina, N., & Stanbury, S., Eds.). Columbia University Press.
- Wood, R. (2017). Look good, feel good: Sexiness and sexual pleasure in neoliberalism. In *Aesthetic Labour* (Elias, A.S. et al., Eds.). DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47765-1_18.
- World Health Organization. (2009). *Infant and young child feeding: Model chapter for textbooks for medical students and allied health professionals*. WHO Press.
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK148965/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK148965.pdf
- Yoon, I.H. & Chen, G.A. (2022). Heeding hauntings in research for mattering. In Tachine, A.R. & Nicolazzo, Z., Eds., *Weaving an otherwise: In-relations methodological practice*. Stylus Publishing.
- Young, C. (2020). Theorizing 'deviant' embodiment and the act of breastfeeding. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(6), 685–693.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Seeking participants

We are conducting a research study to learn about educators' experiences with lactation upon returning to school following the birth of a child.

Who is eligible?

People who:

- Are/were middle school teachers (grades 6-8), academic coaches, and administrators
- Returned to work and practiced lactation (pumping) sometime during the 2021-22 or the current school year
- Reside and teach (or taught) in Georgia

Study Procedures

The research study will consist of two phases:

- Phase 1: Zoom interview
 - Will take approximately 30 minutes to complete
 - Participants will receive a \$20 gift card
- Phase 2 (OPTIONAL): Focus group
 - All interested participants will be invited to a focus group (approximately 30 minutes) with one another
 - Participants will receive another \$20 gift card

Questions?

Contact:

Kelsey Benson
University of Georgia
Doctoral Candidate
Khanks2@uga.edu

Principal investigator:
Dr. Hilary Hughes
University of Georgia
Associate Professor
Hilary.hughes@uga.edu

Interested in participating?

Fill out this brief survey (approximately 1-2 minutes).

tinyurl.com/ycyhvtc3

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Reminder: Ask permission to record Zoom; also record on phone for backup!

Begin with asking how people are feeling, how is it going (set a more informal, open tone).

- 1) Teaching context:
 - a. School:
 - b. Grade level(s):
 - c. Subject area(s):
 - d. Years of experience:
- 2) Lactation context:
 - a. When was your child born?
 - b. Was this your first child?
 - c. When did you return from parental leave?
 - d. If different from what you're currently teaching, what were you teaching at the time?
- 3) Please describe your experience with lactation while you were a classroom teacher.
 - a. How did you manage?
 - b. Where did you store your milk?
 - c. When did you have/find time to pump?
 - d. How did you navigate this process? Were there people in the building who supported you?
- 4) How did you feel about your experiences with infant feeding as a classroom teacher?
- 5) Reminder to get information for gift card!
 - a. Address:
 - b. Starbucks or Target or Visa

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction:

Hello everyone! Thank you all so much for coming, and for giving of your time and sharing your experiences and wisdom. I really appreciate you being here; your voices were all so powerful in the 1:1 interviews, and I can't wait to hear how they sound together! Out of respect for your time, I'm also going to try to keep this interview to 30 minutes or less so if you don't mind, I'll just jump right in!

Purpose:

The purpose of this focus group is to follow up on and clarify some of the incredible insights that came from your individual interviews. Each one of you is here because you're educators who have recently had a child and transitioned back to full time work in public schools while practicing or attempting to practice lactation. I'm going to pose some questions to guide the conversation, but if at any point you feel compelled to explore other avenues, by all means! You can share out loud, and also feel free to use the chat function if you're more comfortable writing out your thoughts. I just want to go wherever the conversation takes us. Does anyone have any questions or concerns before we get started?

Interview questions:

- 1) To begin, could we go around and everyone introduce themselves—just share your preferred name, and whatever other information you feel pulled to share with everyone else in the space. And we can go in whatever order, feel free to just jump in!
- 2) The body
 - a. One of the things that kept coming up over and over again in your individual interviews was these unstated norms around the body that show up in the workplace. When you're practicing lactation in schools, for example, a lot of you talked about trying to create a

schedule for lactation, which is part of what makes it such a difficult practice because the body is unpredictable, it doesn't always do exactly what we want it to do when we want it to, so I'd like to hear a bit more about that if you could share. Basically, how do you feel, how does your body feel when you're practicing lactation in schools?

- b. I'd like to hear from everyone on this question, though feel free to skip or pass if you prefer! If you could come up with one word or phrase that summarizes how you feel in your body practicing lactation in school, what would it be and why?
- 3) The perfect
- a. Another thing that came up several times was this tension teachers experience when practicing lactation in schools because you're constantly wearing so many hats at once: you're educators, and parents, and partners in relationships, and students, all at the same time. And in the early days of parenthood, particularly when you are serving as your child's primary or exclusive food source, you don't have a lot of time to be juggling other things! And yet you're all striving to be able to wear all those hats at once, each and every day.
 - b. Again, I would like to hear from everyone a bit on this question but you can always skip or pass if you prefer not to share. How do you feel about wearing all these hats at once, educator and parent? And why do you think this particular time period in your parenting journey produces these feelings?
- 4) Before we leave, is there anything else you'd like to add that we didn't quite cover with the scripted questions?

Concluding remarks:

Thank you all again so much for your time—it is truly invaluable to me, and I am so humbled that you've shared of your experiences and yourselves. Expect a card from me in the mail and I'll be in touch with updates and member checking about writing up the data! And if we don't talk again soon, I wish you all the best of luck this spring semester!