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Shay Frailey
sfrailey@siu.edu

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FEMINIST AND HOLISTIC PEDAGOGIES

"[A] pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade" (5). Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Shay Frailey

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Abstract

In this Honors Thesis I combine holistic and feminist educational theory, what Paulo Freire refers to as “humanizing education,” with my own critical reflection on the empowering educational journey I have taken as an undergraduate (1 *Pedagogy*). This has been a journey to claiming my own voice, agency, empowerment, and critical understanding of my self-becoming and how this process works for others. These social justice pedagogies have helped me understand how identity is shaped by cultural contexts and institutions like education. Using the feminist research methodology of autoethnography, I show and describe the coming together of empowering pedagogy in my intellectual understanding, lived experience, and critical reflection. The potential for empowerment experienced through the practice of feminist, social justice, and holistic pedagogies, (what I will refer to interchangeably from here on) has carried with it many realizations and profound insights for me about the differences between empowering and oppressive educational structures. My holistic, feminist pedagogical commitments are based in the work of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Simone de Beauvoir, and other feminist theorists while simultaneously drawing on some key insights from other Western philosophers as a means of dismantling the master’s house with the master’s tools.

Methodology

Autoethnography combines autobiography and ethnography, allowing autoethnography to represent both the journey and the discovery. Autoethnography as a research method allows the researcher to take themselves as the subject of research. This narrative method combines the experience of looking out while looking in, by describing and analyzing one’s personal experience as a means of understanding the interaction between cultural and

personal experience. This methodology challenges traditional forms of research, with the aim of representing others/self in research in a way that is politically and socially just.

Introduction

“Within history, in concrete objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person ...” Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

It has been my experience within the University Honors Program (UHP) seminar courses that there is an entirely different kind of education possible than the one I grew up with in my public high school experience. Having now studied feminist theory, holistic pedagogy, and Western philosophy in my undergraduate degree, this thesis demonstrates my coming into empowered confidence in my own potential as a student, teacher, scholar, and citizen. Combining theory and praxis in this critically-reflexive autoethnographic study of self-discovery and empowering pedagogy, I share my personal insights on the learning community experienced in the UHP classroom. The use of autoethnography will allow me to take my own experience of self-discovery within my undergraduate experience as self-study and demonstration of emerging critical consciousness. As described by holistic, social justice educator, Paulo Friere, “Freedom would require them to eject this [oppressive] image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility . . .it is the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (5 Pedagogy). Through my journey, I have emerged with a new sense of self, empowerment, and completion that has replaced the experiences of oppression I had once internalized in more traditional educational settings.

Learning in these holistic pedagogical spaces first as an Honors Student and then as a Honors Teaching Assistant has shown me what works in the process of becoming an engaged and dynamic teacher committed to social justice work within and beyond the classroom. Within

these forms of empowering education, such processes help students to first recognize, and then to rewrite the oppressive narratives they may have received through more traditional, hierarchical models of education.

In these spaces I literally experienced in myself, and witnessed in my peers, moments of growth and transcendence. What I mean by transcendence in the classroom is the experience of leaving an old identity, or story of self, or stereotypically oppressive cultural ideology, and experiencing an expanded sense of Self, purpose, and/or possibility- through the depth of self-reflexivity and honesty, created in this learning community.

Feminist Pedagogy (and other holistic social justice pedagogies) place emphasis on finding your voice and speaking up for self and other. The educational status quo is very patriarchal, which was what I had come to believe was the normal structure of education. Feminist pedagogy as a form of holistic pedagogy disrupts this hierarchy, and is based on interconnection and equity. Feminist pedagogy affirms a sense of wholeness in self: mind, body, spirit, as well as affirming interconnectivity over individuality. Through this newfound pedagogy, I was able to uncover oppressive ideological norms that were holding me back from being my fully empowered self.

In order to demonstrate how I have come into my own voice and critical consciousness, I retrace this profound undergraduate journey, in which I was able to observe the mechanism of how consciousness is first shaped by the status quo, and then I was able to reshape my consciousness through the critical reflection that I learned from Feminist writers, philosophers, and teachers. Feminist Pedagogy allows for self-reflection and critical consciousness of how these systems impact our social experiences, and allows for the potentiality of transformation and evolution. Through Feminist and Holistic Pedagogy, an intellectual community based upon trust

and compassion creates a safe space that allows for students to engage with one another in a way that connects the course material to their personal experiences- and thus, one another's. This holistic foundation deepens the course material's significance by instilling a critical self-reflexivity of one's relationship to the material, by allowing for an expanded perspective, in applying them to one's life in a transformative way.

With this holistic foundation, I was able to take other ideas and use them in an empowering manner. In this paper, I will also refer to de Beauvoir, Nietzsche and Plato's philosophic insights into self-knowledge as ways that I have claimed insights as empowering a sense of agency in myself, from the Western tradition.

My Educational Journey: An Autoethnographic Journey

Growing up in a very conservative town and school system, I subconsciously withheld oppressive ideologies as legitimate, and as a result had many internalized -isms (sexism, racism, etc..) that manifested as a barrier to embody ideologies and perspectives that I more deeply aligned with. Through courses taught in this lens, I was able to become more in touch with who I was, and feel more confident and empowered in how to utilize my strengths to my utmost potentiality.

The problem I will be deconstructing is that everyone relates to such hierarchies and institutionally oppressive systems in different ways. From a very young age, I have felt an awareness of these institutional structures that oppress people, and I have spent much of my time at SIU Carbondale trying to deconstruct the root of the cause of my and many other individuals' experience of embodying particular ideologies within these structures. I began to recognize that my subjective experience had certain facets that I could relate to others in, but other facets that were entirely *particular* to my individualized experience, and others could not relate to- as well

as others' experiences that I could not relate to. Feminist theory coins this term as Intersectionality. Race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity will all impact every individual in a unique way that is particular to their identity. Our identities intersect and interrelate in ways that will have an impact on our way of relating to the world. Philosophy begins to conceptualize that values and morality are redefined again and again over time, which allow us to consider that it is possible that there is not one particular set of ideals that are absolute across time and space, and up for interpretation and evolution. If this is the case, then we can understand that the structures that allow institutions of education to be hierarchal, are structures that are up for transgression towards another reconceptualization and redefinition. An awareness of subjectivity allows for an understanding of how individual experiences and even feelings are necessary to reevaluate such values, towards self-actualization. Feminist pedagogy allows for implementation of a reverence for individual experiences and even feelings as valid tools to reevaluate our values, and eventually transcend anything that may be holding us back, towards attaining self-actualization.

A holistic approach to education reveres that the personal is political. Feelings, intelligence, intuition, and multiple intelligences are included in aspects of knowing and knowledge acquisition. This understanding allowed for much clarity as to why certain aspects of my identity seemed to take much precedence over how I related to and lived through such structures. By interweaving scholarly theory that I have been introduced to during my undergraduate education, and applying it to my personal experience, I ground this theory of feminist pedagogy as praxis towards transcending oppressive ideologies within my personal account of my own personal journey of self-discovery. In understanding that one's personal relationship to institutions play a large role in their understanding of their experience, this intersectional subjectivity works as a lens to consider how the personal is political, and how

educational spaces founded in community and subjective experience allow for unity and connection, but also an expanded and transformed reconceptualization of one's ideologies.

The results of my research and synthesis will represent the idea that feminist pedagogy, as a lens of education, that has a respect and recognition of emotions and subjective experience, is effective in working to transcend the implications of hierarchal oppressive systems. It is not until we hold compassion and trust for our own selves and others, may we be able to respect each and every experience as relating to such institutions that make our perceptions as they are- and therefore, discovering new ways to help all people attain their infinite and full potentiality.

Philosophical theories of relativity and historicism imply that the ways in which we experience society and culture directly relates to the systems that have been put in place. This relates to education, because it allows us to consider that the "traditionally" hierarchal structure of education is one that has the potential to evolve and be transformed. Yet, this basic understanding alone does not directly offer hope towards transcending negative implications that manifest through societal oppression- and internal oppression (emotionally, psychologically).

By implementing a reflexivity of emotions and personal relation to the course material within feminist pedagogy, we begin to understand how we view the world, and we begin to view the world through others' eyes, thus allowing our lenses to be transformed. In this way we are truly educating ourselves, by intending to become global citizens whose values, intentionality, and morality lie in revering and empowering others.

Holistic Pedagogies, Historicism & My Experiences

Philosophy allows us to recognize that much of the ideals and values that have been implemented in societies are subject to change and evolution over the course of time and space. What we tend to accept as normal "habitus" has actually been strategically *forced* upon a culture

over many years. Education is the space in which we learn these norms from a very young age, and are taught to accept them as the way that things are, without being critically aware of what they mean or imply for us, and our way of living. For the most part, considering the time and place of our society, with white male supremacy as the preceding lens for institutional structures, this is reflected within education, and more often than not, means that what we are taught in mainstream education has been entirely white-washed and is to some degree or another “conservative,” and even “Christian” in its ideals. Of course there are alternative forms of education that challenge, rather than perpetuate these structures. But it is very often that we are taught ideologies about ourselves, as well as others due to these heteronormative, sexist, and racist institutions. I found myself at odds with this hierarchal educational system from a very young age, and felt as though I was in a subordinate position as a student in relationship to oppressive, authoritarian figures. As a result, I felt disengaged with the environment and peers, feeling as though I had not been recognized as someone deserving of respect, let alone recognition or appreciation. This was only emphasized by the fact that I passed as a woman that was also inquisitive about the origin of these ideologies, and therefore considered deviant from the “gender roles” that were instilled by the patriarchal institution. I did not want to be silent like I was being told to be, because I had ideas and questions that I wanted to ask and learn from. I was quickly taught that curiosity was looked down upon within a hierarchal institution, especially in a feminized body that was expected to be subordinate.

With this in mind, we can assume that we are being taught many things about ourselves and about others from a very young age, through hierarchal institutional structures that are working towards perpetuating and reinforcing said structures to their benefit. In the vein of feminist pedagogy, there is no denying that such hierarchal structures within education innately

oppress particular groups and identities more than others, and cause us to believe that certain ways of being are more or less normal. The way that we understand gender, race, (dis)ability, ethnicity, religion, etc in the United States has transformed greatly since our indigenous people were the inhabitants, and therefore varies from other cultures and societies over place and time. However, if we are being taught about these complex concepts through a single lens that withholds much oppressive and hierarchal bias, it is likely that we are being taught to perpetuate and reinforce these normative ideologies as a part of our own lives. Growing up in a very conservative town, I felt very skeptical of this patriarchal, hierarchal white-supremacist structure, and I felt an extreme discomfort and tension in coming to understanding that much of what was being taught through education was directly out of line with what I personally identified within my own subjective experience.

From a young age, I became intuitively aware that education was having a much deeper impact than I could understand at the time. The personal is political, and when my own identity was in contradiction and was directly oppressed by what was being taught through education, I began to realize that hierarchal education lacked a mutually reciprocal, receptive environment that respected and revered mine and other subjective experiences and lacked inclusivity of all experiences and bodies of life. Feminist, holistic, and other social justice pedagogies do exactly this- and my first encounter with this new structure was during my undergraduate education with the Honors program. It easily came to be the most transformative aspect of my pursuit of a bachelor's degree, because it allowed me to be reflexive of the ways in which past oppressive educational structures had impacted me, and allowed me to re-conceptualize much of my ideologies in more expansive and open-minded ways.

From a philosophical lens, we can understand that the way that gender and other values such as race, religion, ethnicity, and (dis)ability are taught in education has evolved in correspondence with specific, particular institutions and structures of time and space. In this time and place in society, hierarchal, patriarchal educational structures instill a value of “othering,” that view education as authoritarian and ordered in a way that creates an environment of passive students. On the contrary, within Feminist Pedagogy, a holistic intentionality towards each peer’s subjective relationship to the material, allows for transcendence of the negative effects and implications of our oppressive hierarchical structures to be possible, and to redefine one’s values in a way that allows for empowerment and confidence. The Honors Program was the first time in education that I was not ostracized or shamed for my unique perspectives that made me who I was. This was a gift that I never expected to encounter or to be impacted by, but I am now very grateful.

In keeping a lens of critical reflexivity and philosophical consciousness, I will string several philosophical concepts and ideologies with how these particular concepts have allowed me to progress and evolve in my understanding of education and to have an expanded perception of Self. Growing up in a very conservative, white school, I often found myself at odds with ideologies that were being instilled. I was told that questioning these ideologies was wrong, and was not normal. What was normal and right was to accept what we were being fed as reality and fact. It was praised to remain silence and assimilate into the structures of the institution. This meant being white, conservative, upper-middle class, and particularly male, which was essentially synonymous with normality. There were feminine ideals, but at the same time, none of the ideas were considered enough to allow young women to be viewed as equal and acceptable as they were. Young women were expected to continue to strive for an impossible

standard of perfection that highlighted the male gaze, and shrinking oneself to allow more space for the men.

But what I did not understand until my college education was that this instillation and assimilation was not normal at all. In fact this blind following was much less normal than diverse beliefs and perspectives. There is ultimately no such thing as an absolute ideal. Society tries to do everything that it can to convince us that there is a better and worse way to exist in society. Many people are not critically reflexive of their own ideals. Rather what they know to be their ideals are actually directly adopted from an institution in power with hegemonic ideals. These ideologies are not consistent across all time and place, and therefore we must be critically reflexive of what we are assuming as natural and expected of us. In the Honors Program, my experience with holistic and feminist pedagogy has allowed for me to grow in my openness to new perspectives, ideologies, and modes of existence, by deeply listening to others' relationship to the material.

Existential philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche coined the understanding of subjective particularity through evolving ideologies, norms, and structures in what he considered as nihilism, or a lack of meaning. Although this first seems to be a dark lens, what Nietzsche means by this lack of meaning is that when a society's set of values and morality is solely based upon a particular institution's rules, then no one is defining their own meaning. If no one is defining or applying their own meaning, then they lack autonomy, and there is no meaning- because what people are identifying with as their own is not their own, but is based upon a particular group's ideas of morality-- that may not apply to, or be possible for all peoples. In the oppressive education system that I grew up in, I felt very confined and restricted, lacking choice in how to define my values and way of being. What I was expected to adopt as my own felt entirely untrue

to who I was. This was the beginning of my deep appreciation of a critical political consciousness that opened my mind and allowed for my new appreciation for the potentiality of growth within holistic pedagogy.

As students, we are taught that our authoritarian figures hold the “Truth,” but what we are not told is that these “truths” are someone else’s, and inherently hold bias. In his work *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche says that such symbols and values are “reinterpreted by those in power” (Nietzsche, 209). This reinterpretation of power can be understood through our ideals of normality and its deviance. Within an education setting as a young child, these ideals of normality and deviance are direct reflections of an interpretation that had been applied by those in power. It is critical to recognize that there are still oppressive ideologies that are being instilled through educational systems that impact students, and thus citizens in society for the rest of their lives. If we are not reflexive of the ways in which we embody the things that we are taught from society and from institutional structures, then we are not fully educating ourselves at all, but are instead merely uplifting, perpetuating, and reinforcing these same structures as our own. It was not until courses about how to revere and trust my own subjective values and perspectives, was I able to feel empowered in who I was, and transcend oppressive ideologies.

In the same vein, if we are not learning about other ways of experiences, other values and modes of being, then we are denying ourselves the reality that there are many diverse experiences. Without having a more expanded relationship to values of morality and ethics, we may not even be aware that we are denying others’ realities as being completely valid, normal, and complete as they innately are. No one needs to change to assimilate to a certain ideal, if there are ideals that encompass many unique lived experiences. For example, in a course that I took on Disability Theory, we learned that there was once an island that was called Martha’s Vineyard

that challenges our ideas of what it means to have a disability. Martha's Vineyard was an island in which there were so many deaf people, that the whole entirety of the population had their own form of sign language, and everyone used it—hearing or deaf. Although the culture is now extinct, at one point this language was particular to this island, but was very much one that thrived at the time. In such a way in which everyone on the island used sign language, being deaf was not considered to be a disability or deviant. Rather, it was the norm (Romm). However in a culture that is not used to having more inclusive communication for people hard of hearing, it is considered an accommodation or a matter of accessibility to receive the resources that they need to survive.

Of course, this could be applied to race, gender, sexuality, and class as well. These ideologies are taught as being normal or abnormal. When there is a “preferred,” subjective set of ideals, education means persuading us to be a certain way. In this way, education is oppressive when the population that does not adhere will be objectified and ostracized. Oppressive ideologies being taught in hierarchal education hold much weight and impact, without any thought. Values of education should instead be of empowerment rather than oppression. This is precisely the distinction between a philosophically critical reflexivity, versus authoritarian and hierarchal education.

Through a critical political consciousness allowed through holistic and feminist pedagogy, I was able to analyze ideals of gender and gender norms, as another example of ideals that we assume and embody as our own- despite the fact that many cultures relate to gender in much different ways. For example, what were once the indigenous people of the United States, Native Americans, actually consider themselves to have a third gender that is called Two Spirit. If we take the time to reexamine what we assume to be a naturally hierarchical, binaried system,

we find that these are not universal truths, but have rather been actively implemented. In an article titled “Buddhism Beyond Gender,” the author Wawrytko explains that Buddhism as an Eastern tradition has a much less binaried view of gender, and rather, views it more as a spectrum, or energies that are meant to be balanced in order to have a more equal society and culture (Wawrytko). We can learn a lot from considering the fact that other cultures relate to norms and values in much different ways, and that these ideals are constantly evolving over time.

Holistic and feminist pedagogy holds an intention to revere and focus on how particular, subjective experiences can allow us to learn about our biased ideologies as a whole. By implementing a holistic pedagogy, we can allow students a space to transcend any negative implications that may result from a society that portrays a particular set of oppressive ideals as the universal truth. It is necessary to allow ourselves to define our own ideals and values as a means to ensure that we are not limiting ourselves in any way, in order to attain our utmost fulfillment and potentiality.

In the beginning of my undergraduate pursuit, when I began to come into this revelation that this spatial dissonance was due to hierarchal ideologies that I did not align with, I felt confused, betrayed, and even resistant to accept that there was a reality that I was not being taught from the very beginning of time. I did not understand how it could be possible that I had gone to school my whole life to learn, and still had yet to learn that these ideologies were uncomfortable because they were oppressive and hierarchically reflected by institutions. One of the first philosophical texts that confused me as a freshman, but ended up summing up much of my undergraduate journey was that of Plato’s writing, “The Allegory of the Cave,” Plato introduces us to a metaphor to understand the transcendence of such morality that the philosopher undergoes when they are introduced with “reality” or the Truth. The analogy that he

uses is that of a group of prisoners who are chained in a row, and watching figures onto a wall. The prisoners come to find that what is being projected onto the wall is actually the shadow of figures above. This symbolism is what Plato understands to be what it is like when one recognizes that the world as they know it is in fact merely a projection of higher powers or forces implementing hierarchical systems or figures, as natural and universal. Initially, there is a sense of denial and confusion, but the philosopher is eventually more expanded and grateful that they have regained a sense of freedom over their will to define their own values and meaning.

Nietzsche would refer to this will as the “will to power.” Whereas Nietzsche understands this transcendence as “the *Übermensch*,” both existential philosophers understand it as a necessary foundation to consider where one’s source of knowledge is derived from, and to make a commitment towards defining one’s own values, morality, and meaning. Again, I came to appreciate the potential for this transformation through education, due to my experience within the Honors Program. In being committed to defining our own values, we allow ourselves a newfound freedom to be more empowered in our own experience. Despite my initial confusion and rejection, because this longing for Truth was ever-present, I felt more whole and expanded with an accurate understanding of the reality of such ideologies and institutions in place. In this way, education should allow us all to become philosophers of our own experiences through this political critical consciousness.

Public education (especially in America) is one of the first settings in which peers interact with one another. Education must have a basic foundation towards examining morality, values, and transcendence as a necessary avenue to live rich and meaningful lives. These values must be open-minded and respect many other diverse ways of life, because a single biased set of values will perpetuate oppressive ideologies. We often hear of modern education being equated to

regurgitation of knowledge that has been instilled, without any further reflexivity or relationship to such knowledge. Students memorize, repeat, move on, and forget what they were taught. It is hardly effective for one to utilize this information in their own lives, if there is no application to the peers' personal experiences. With this in mind, it almost seems like this implementation of a sort of meaningful practice/praxis that is considered more holistic, is a form of forbidden knowledge. Much of the way that we relate to Western education through this detached relaying of knowledge is through what the existential philosopher, Martin Buber would consider to be the I-It relationship in his book, "I-Thou". Paulo Freire uses Buber's work as the crux of his dialogue-based education, in which we move student and teacher into the experience of an educational community through the I-Thou: a recognition of learning together, with each other, through mutual respect.

Freire would say that in such situations of "otherness" that this type of I-It educational system where the Teacher is an all-knowing expert bestowing "knowledge" onto students creates them into "objects" receiving this knowledge without a link to it through his or her own experience. This split becomes a foundation for separation, in which the information is relayed as though it is merely a transaction with a "means to an end." Without much engagement among peers and instructors, other than to transmit information onto a subject, we are certainly doing a disservice to our students, when what they are supposedly learning does not include the subject's perception in the slightest.

This lack of attention and reflexivity of the student's relation to the material in of itself represents an ideal that our society deems important to adopt. The value that we adopt through this quick, seemingly meaningless transaction is simply that others' experiences and perspectives do not need to be revered as a foundation towards mutual respect, knowledge, or understanding.

In an authoritarian hierarchy, that did not view my perspectives as valid and deserving of respect, this caused me to have a misconstrued discouragement with education. Being told that my perspectives were wrong, and that they were to be altered to fit a particular set of ideologies frustrated and even depressed me. I felt bored and let down because I did not have any relationship to the material. To put it simply, as students we were treated as objects. We were nothing but a transaction to commodify as representative of the school's success.

This idea of the I-It relationship does not exist solely in the classroom, but has direct implications within society as well. That being said, rather than perpetuating this oppression, education should be a space to discuss the many realms of objectification and exploitation of members of a society that are more marginalized, or generally any members of our society who are not white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied males. Our society idolizes this I-It relationship towards marginalized people-- more often than not, by considering their "contribution" (or lack of) towards society. Failing to regard subjective personal experience as inherently valid is reflective of oppressive and discriminative ideologies that we are likely to perpetuate. By deducing someone to only what they are able to "produce," they are undeniably being treated by an object. We can see the results of this denial of existence through the continuous violence and even deaths of marginalized people. Many marginalized individuals experience a lack of rights, access, and freedom of autonomy. We have an unfortunate amount of homeless people on the streets, simply because we see these individuals only in what they can offer us.

Simone de Beauvoir understands this concept to be considered "othering." She uses this concept to explain the dehumanization of women, that appears as objectification, gender roles, inequality, and men's violence among women. Beauvoir understood womanhood was something

that one “became” due to the hierarchical structures and norms that society had implemented. In this way, the personal is political. What is implied in “becoming a woman,” is that it is not innate, but is the result of social construction. That being said, it should be expected for education to be critically reflexive of how we relate to such societal structures. Because we have the opportunity to define our own values when we are not simply taking on someone else’s structures, we must reevaluate the biases we have adopted as our own. Yet, due to this neglect of recognition that the personal is political, this form of education is one that is considered to be an alternative form.

Rather than perpetuating this same form of othering through an I-It relationship in education, holistic pedagogy works to examine this sense of othering in how it relates to our own lives, as a means of transcending the implications of institutions and societal structure. The ways in which individuals subjectively relate to such structures, ultimately influences how they would relate to course material. Without this foundation, it is impossible to be critically reflexive of oppressive institutions. It is necessary for education to have a foundational basis towards transcending otherness. Focusing on values of inclusivity and empathy within education, to bring about a community, has a very empowering and safe impact on student’s comfortability to engage with and grow with the material.

Feminist and Holistic Pedagogy is transformational in that it transcends towards a more united community, and as a result, a more educated and more united society. Feminist Pedagogy instills the opposite of the I-It interaction, and would be what Buber refers to as the I-Thou relationship. If we were to meet every single individual with an inherent reverence for their nature, we would all be more likely to appreciate everyone, and consider that we could learn from their subjective experience and perspective. Martin Buber explains that there is a divine

sense of the Eternal Self to be acknowledged within our relations. This means that all encounters, and therefore all people are a reflection of ourselves, and withhold a knowledge that we will then be able to identify within our own nature. The idea of there being potential for a creation of life or growth in all encounters is one that is recognized as a value that many practitioners of feminist and other holistic pedagogies find to be a basic foundation for successful education. My experience within the Honors Program has been one that has viewed every student's insight, as a unique facet of what we will gain through the entirety of the course. Similar to a web, we were taught that without a single one of our inputs, the course would not be the same. Therefore, all input was significant and crucial.

Feminist pedagogy focuses on intersectionality as an important foundation to analyze how we relate to others: what makes us different, but also what we can share. In *Teaching Community* by bell hooks, she makes it clear why this value is so essential to education. Hooks says that education is about "healing and wholeness." It is about "empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life" (hooks, 43). Education is not intended to be about merely "getting information" or "getting a job." It is necessary, hooks says, to be present in the now, rather than being stuck in the past, which can "diminish our capacity to learn." This is very profound, to understand why it is so powerful and transformative to be vulnerable in the present moment.

The intentionality of a critical political consciousness within Holistic Education, is upon empathy and compassion for ourselves and others to allow ourselves to let go of, and transcend our traumas. It is possible to drop one's story, prejudices, and expectations by being fully aware of the meaning of the present moment. By being reflexive of how we are impacted by society, we allow ourselves to grow past these traumatic experiences. An intention towards

empowerment would mean considering what would allow students to reach their greatest potentiality, by means of considering where they have come from, who they are, and their unique perspective. Hooks explains that when we are guided by love and compassion, “we live in community with all life” (hooks, 163). She then says that in our othering “culture of domination,” we do not value living in community. The idea of teaching community may seem radical at first. But, it should not be a surprise that a supportive, uplifting, and empowering environment is one that allows for transcendence and transformation, whereas a hierarchal structure instead “dominates” and perpetuates oppression.

What really allows hooks point to hit home and deeply relate to this transcendence of otherness is a point that she makes by asking what we consider to be community, challenging the idea that that would mean people that are in our “own” community: those that are the same race, same class, and same ethnicity. Community should instead be about bringing people unlike ourselves to the conversation. Hooks calls this the “intimate other,” which I found to be profound in relation to both Simone de Beauvoir and Buber’s ideas of otherness and its transcendence towards unity and equality. An “intimate other” would suggest one that is deeply revered and cherished, despite its being “apart” from us. Feminist pedagogy is a praxis towards global citizenry, in that it allows us to become conscious of our impact on the world, and invites us to have a more expanded perspective as a means to be allies to uplift all people.

Therefore, this community must be present in education, and in fact allows us to experience “spirituality in education.” Again, this may seem like another radical way to view education. However, it is intuitive that education will be more effective when there is a holistic focus on the mind, body, and spirit. There may be levels of our consciousness that we hardly even scratch the surface of within a less holistically engaged form of education. Prior to my

experience with holistic pedagogy, I did not have any clue as to how to utilize what I was learning in a way that I could give back, and align myself with having a more positive impact on the world. Holistic pedagogy has given me a much broader and more objectively practical, but also a very deeply spiritual perspective of how to relate the course material to every day life.

Vanderbilt's university has a very insightful page titled, "The Role of Experience & Emotions" as a guide to Feminist Pedagogy. The first page explains the intention of Feminist Pedagogy. Within this form of pedagogy, personal experience is "recognized as a valid and valued form of knowing" (Vanderbilt). Whereas traditional Western education often views subjective experience or feelings as not coinciding with rationality and logic, feminist pedagogy offers the idea that feelings and emotions actually "inform perspectives and actions." This is a revolutionary idea in comparison to ideas of logic and rationality. Audre Lorde touches on this idea in her piece "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Lorde dismantles the stigmas that institutions instill about emotion. She challenges these stigmas by suggesting that when feelings become known, they become "sanctuaries" and "spawning grounds" for radical ideas and means to implement change and "conceptualize meaningful action" (Lorde).

In courses with the Honors Program and other courses utilizing a feminist and holistic pedagogy, my classmates and I have felt safe to disclose our personal relationship with the material, and oftentimes this means confronting feelings and experiences that we have withheld from our past. In this way, it is revolutionary and transformative to allow education to hold a space for a reverence for feelings as valid modes of experiencing the course material. Subjects of Western Education would benefit greatly from adopting this understanding that feelings are a valid window into how everyone relates to the world around them. Feelings must not be denied in educational spaces, otherwise we are denying a crucial part of the human experience. Feelings

should be revered as meaningful to be discussed, shared, and felt both universally and communally to consider how our thoughts, ideas, and perceptions influence the way that we experience life.

Buber and Simone de Beauvoir share the understanding that the principle towards transcending otherness is one of “reciprocity.” Buber simply says, “relation is reciprocity” (Buber, 67). Buber says that “students teach us,” and that “our works form us.” This receptive energy allows a classroom to transition from the I-It transaction, towards one that is intended upon growing, and learning from one another, together in the I-Thou relationship. In the Honors Program, I did not feel as though my teachers were expecting me to adopt ideas that were not my own or did not fit for my experience. All of the teachers that I had in the Honors Program, viewed our perspectives as not only valid, but insightful perspectives for the teacher to consider and potentially learn from as well. Within this holistic pedagogy, there is much less of an authoritarian superiority, and more of an equally respectful appreciation of both the students’ knowledge as well as the teacher’s.

Simone de Beauvoir identifies with a very similar conception of this transcendence through reciprocity as Buber does, when she says that an equality among the sexes would not mean a denial of men. She explains that instead of wanting to flip the scale of oppression, this transgression past othering towards a mutual receptivity would mean “continuing to exist for him *as well*, recognizing each other as subject, each will remain an *other* for the other: reciprocity” (de Beauvoir). Considering that typically students are those considered the only subject in education, this word choice of recognizing “one another as subject” represents a transition towards a more equal ground. This relates to ideals and values in education, in that such values are constantly transforming and are open for interpretation and evolution in our ideals of

normalcy as we know them to mean. This mutual reciprocity within holistic and feminist pedagogy has allowed me to have a very profound relationship with education and with the course material. For the first time in education, I did not feel a judgment to be vulnerable in reflecting or expressing my perspectives, but felt supported and respected to do so.

Existential philosophy allows us to understand the ways in which we may transcend many of the ideologies that societies and hierarchies tell us are those that we must assimilate as our own. From an existentialist lens, holistic education entails re-conceptualizing these ideologies and values that may influence how we relate to gender, and other intersectional identities. By transcending our own subjective ideals of structures that have potentially caused oppression or trauma, we are able to heal ourselves and transform into the most empowered versions of ourselves.

Furthermore, feminist and holistic pedagogy can be utilized as a praxis towards transcendence of the implications of an oppressive and othering society that tells us to live in separation from others. Within my experience with feminist and holistic pedagogies during my undergraduate education, this structure has allowed for myself and my classmates a space to learn from others' direct experiences, feelings, and perspectives, by regarding all views, values, and truths as valid to gain more understanding from. In these inclusive seminars, an intention upon finding a shared common ground with others, has allowed my peers and I to grow further than we could imagine on our own.

I will always be grateful that my appreciation and gratitude for education has been restored due to my experience with the Honors program. I can honestly say that I would probably be in a much different place in my education and in my goals, had it not been for this program expanding my perception of education, and allowing me to instead view education through a new

lens of possibilities. In this this form of pedagogy, both students and educators have the opportunity to become global citizens that utilize values of compassion and empathy as a means of transcending otherness, towards unity. I will be sure to implement this intentionality as long as I am in academia, and when I become an educator myself.

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