

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This Autoethnography examines the following questions:

- Given that race is a social construct and the embodiment of race makes (has the potential to make) certain experiences more or less likely, how can I engage to rethink/ complicate identity, race, experiences, privilege, and voice?
- How does it feel to navigate this space as a young, white, female? What does it mean to negotiate this space?

In order to better understand my concept of personal space I use the hula-hoop as a metaphor to describe what the word "space" means to me. "I am like a hula-hoop suspended and spinning in air." I am not sure what is at the core of my thinking and what is outside. The ideas move in and out as they please and also as I let them. The format of this proposal takes on a thematic structure with autoethnographic work and reflection woven into each theme. The themes of this thesis are Foundation, Standards, Tensions, Negotiations, and Hauntings.

Some kind of other.

I am not THE other,

I am not AN other,

Some kind of other.

Maybe just another.

No home, I have no home.

I have labels, but labels do not provide a resting ground.

Nothing intimate nor private about labels.

No shelter or space to protect me, engage me, or ignite me.

I know which spaces are available to me, but none are home.

The mind has no home.

No Home

I am constantly told in life, through texts, by mentors, through media, that I am not THE other, I am not AN other. But I feel like some kind of other—when thinking and talking about race. So what kind of other am I? Does “other” exist? What allows the illusion of “otherness”? No home, I have no home. On the one hand I have labels, but labels do not provide a home. No shelter or space to protect me, engage me, or ignite me. The mind has no home. Before I understood privilege, I was told I was privileged; I felt it but had no name for it. I lived in a safe bubble where I was afforded the option to ignore racism. I say this, meaning I could ignore direct implications on my everyday life and didn't have to feel racism. But it was there. Shaping every thought and interaction I experienced, but I had the choice, or at least I felt that I had a choice. I could be an advocate when I wanted to. If a friend made a racist comment, I had a choice. I could laugh, dismiss the comment, or stand against it. While I often stood against it, I still

was situated in a space that allowed choice. So naturally for me, choice has always been present. As I previously didn't understand privilege, I didn't understand racism as well. I saw race. I came to a conclusion that there is good and bad in every race. Meaning, I was tricked into believing that good and bad are fixed and that they even should/could be applied to humans. Privilege refers to unearned benefits and advantages due to identity markers. I describe racism as the belief that one race is superior or inferior. This includes a wide variety of intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, prejudices. I embrace race as a social construct based on someone's physical characteristics. "Race" is an example of how we mark others and/or ourselves. I did not look at race as being a complex phenomenon that in some contexts has the potential to change everything and in other ways should be less about race and can be tied to economics and place. Culture is shaped because of everything under a race, not because of the race. Expanding my idea of race was a profound moment for me. So when I think about experiences that have shaped my thinking and my current struggle, I often find myself trying to negotiate my bias, my reflections, what I believe society's perception of me might be, and my perception on my interactions and what they might have to say about society and systems of power, such as race and privilege. Doing this, living this, has left me with no home. I am not a marginalized human fighting everyday implications of racism. That is, if I were to stick with "normal" definitions of marginalized. I am marked as a young, white, female. Do I feel that I belong in these groups? Sometimes, but most of the time I would not only say, "no," but argue the complexities of my identity. Is my denial of these labels a way to support privilege and racism? I ask this, knowing I am sometimes seen differently because of my light skin, knowing these incidents allow for different outcomes—mostly benefits. Fighting with perceptions of my self that I cannot control, yet wanting to expand ideas of labels. Not only wanting to expand what it means to be a young, white, female, but also trying to push against ideas of seeing race, seeing gender, etc. Trying my best, to which my present self allows, to work within systems of privilege and racism to combat the very systems I aim to rethink and fight against. And so I find myself

again with no home. I know which spaces are available to me, but none are home. How can I interact with and allow otherness to be and continue to be while struggling to interact and be productive in a larger context?

My feelings, sentiments, and experiences are not new. While they may be unique to my self, it is important to point out that they are in relation to a body of knowledge that originates not from me, but from marginalized people who have come before me and live today whom I graciously need to give credit to if readers of my stories are to gain any new knowledge/perspectives.

Foundation

I woke up to my body shaking and feeling as if I was lying on a bed of needles. Lying in the dark, confused and sweaty, I struggled between forcing myself to think logically, in an attempt to calm my body and mind, to not wanting to fully escape my dream. I was in a liminal space, disturbing and intriguing. Feeling haunted by a dream that invaded my sleep, and made me uncomfortable in my own bed. This haunting had crept in to a sacred place and screamed at me, leaving me shaking. Yet, in some ways I was reeling for more. The dream had my full attention, not because I wanted to give it time but it demanded my time. I have never experienced a time such as this when I wanted so badly to be out of it and at the same time wanted so badly to be in it. Maybe this struggle was partly because I knew it wasn't full reality. I knew that in a few hours I would be able to reflect on it, which provides comfort in protecting me from the physical reality I live. I was going to be okay because the perceived physical aspects of my dream were no longer going to be physical in the world I spend most of my physical being. Part of this is true, however I am not sure that this is fully true because I am sitting here, in the perceived physical world, writing down this memory in an attempt to reason with this haunting. The tension in my neck, my sitting on the edge of my seat, tells me and makes me feel the haunting. As "real" as ever.

My beautiful dream and body-shaking haunting started as a conversation between an old high school friend and me as we were sitting in her apartment. A foreign place but the context of an apartment helped familiarize the space. In seconds, our nostalgic conversation came to a stop. A scream that curdled and tensed our bodies became the conversation. As we realized the noise that we thought was a scream was in fact a scream, we jumped up from the floor. I proclaimed that it sounded like an unknown young white woman. I then went on to criticize myself for believing that "young", "white", and "woman" had a specific sound. My friend and I then talked about how it is so difficult at times to make observations without tying the observation to a judgment, whether that judgment is positive or negative. As my body's

equilibrium began to settle, I decided to walk up to the peephole in the door. As I stuck my eye up to the hole I saw a black woman standing outside of the door. Just as I whispered for my friend to come over, the woman screamed the most painful, ear-piercing cry and knocked the door down. A black woman, whom I had previously marked as sounding white, was now in my face and demanding my full attention. What can my perception of the faint scream being tied to a white woman and the earth-shattering scream of a black woman tell us? My friend and I stood there shaking, face to face with the woman. No longer screaming, we stood in an almost triangular formation in silence. My shaking had become physical, and this encompassing sensation woke me. I was no longer fully in my dream because my shaking had brought me into the physical reality, but I was too engulfed to fully leave my dream. The screams in my dream told me to pay attention, I am now paying attention....

I lay there for a couple minutes, trying to wrap my head around what had just happened. Why was the woman screaming? Why did I have this dream? Did my friend from high school have any importance? As I looked through the peephole, was I seeing a version of myself? If so, was this reflection hurting or mad? Or was she telling me to shut up and listen? Was the screaming woman in my dream someone different than myself? Someone embodied differently than I? And was she demanding attention as an other? Or as a reflection? Is it that simple? Do I get to say who is an other and who is a reflection? Am I over-thinking the meaning of this dream? What do my stories and dreams have to say? Or maybe more importantly, what do they demand and inspire?

If we seek to understand our own lives and our lives in relation to another and the larger society, how then can we do this without grounding our conversations in lived experiences? Lived experiences in comparison to the dominant perspective are possibly the only way to see inconsistencies of who and what we are. As I write this, I realize I am embodied in a very specific way. I must acknowledge that my embodiment has influenced me to the point of only being able to see a dominant perspective by stepping out of the dominant ideology. I suppose this is

not true for all people. Some might grow up and live in a space that is very aware of “otherness” and a sense of belonging that is always in contrast to a more common narrative. While I knew that “others” existed, I was not aware that other ways of living and being existed. I assumed that value and worth were in alignment with the ways I had come to know the world, leading to a disconnect between countless others and myself. This belief made it easy for me to discount the words and experiences of others, ironically, without even seeing the contradictions present. I remember sitting in my Foundations of Education class when Idealism and Realism were introduced. During that class I realized I had never previously investigated how I came to know. This idea of knowing, which continues to raise questions, has been instrumental in enabling me to see contradictions within my own beliefs, but even further to unmask these contradictions. It is not as though I believed in a way of knowing that was mindful of everyone, I believed in a way of knowing that privileged very few.

I have lived in a way and a system that privileges multiple aspects of my identity. It was not until I sat and listened, listened to the aspects of my identity that are marginalized—to the disagreements and tensions within my own identity—that I realized how privilege applied to my self. “Marginalization is enacted on multiple levels simultaneously”(Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 123) is something I was beginning to see and I think this can be complicated by looking at the ways marginalization and privilege are enacted on various levels, in different spaces, in different ways. Perhaps this is part of why I continue to come to the table to write. I realize that my embodiment, lived experiences, perspective, and perceived reality have something to say. If we have something to say, we must listen and investigate in ways that push the self and everything we know to be true.

Using autoethnography, I will address my research questions through personal stories and reflexive thought regarding identity, race, privilege, and voice. I will use the space autoethnography allows to negotiate back and forth, in and out, of my experiences with a critical lens. Autoethnography is similar in some ways to the liminal space in my dream. My

liminal space is a land of unknowns that transcends boundaries and has become a space of safety. I know the different worlds and sometimes fear the different worlds, so here is where I rest and acknowledge that I live in many different ways. In this space I can make it my own. Here, every thought and idea in me can run home. Using autoethnography I am able to move between my experiences—my dream—and into a more conscious place, knowing I have the comfort that the realization of a dream being only a dream offered. I sit in a safe space in my room to write; I sleep in a soft, white Queen-sized bed to dream. My reality is having experiences, and being able to reflect on them. However, some ideas, some dreams, demand of me.

Feelings of safety become rattled by the movement of ideas

in and out,

up and down,

through and through,

through my hula-hoop.

Constant movement.

Knowingly present.

Never fully captured.

A space, shaped and shapeless.

Ideas come home,

to and through,

my hula-hoop.

Autoethnography is my foundation for making sense of my experiences and how they relate to a bigger reality. Alexander (2014) metaphorically describes autoethnography as a dynamic picture.

Autoethnography is sometimes like capturing a picture of yourself in a glass borderless frame; a picture in which an image of you is represented and there are sightless borders of containment; containments called race, sex, gender, culture, and occasions of human social experience fixed in time and space, floating in a fixed liquidity of memory, giving shape to experience, structuring vision and engagement with the intent for others to see and know you differently as you story the meaningfulness of personal experience in a cultural context.(p.110)

Autoethnography is a method and methodology that allows me to write about all aspects of my identity; but also requires that I honor every aspect of my embodiment as I come to the table to write and reflect on my experiences. Through this I am able to question my connections to other people and the world. Autoethnography is the process and a product of being in and constantly returning to a space that is a privileged safe space and a raw lonely space. This space sometimes acts as a safe bubble for me to come to in order to write and deal with certain hauntings. The bubble almost acts as a masking device for me to talk about racism, privilege, and otherness, at the frequency I wish. Yet, both the product and process of autoethnography simultaneously shatter the cloak in some ways. My space now becomes readable to many audiences and the space seems less safe as I revisit emotions and reflect on the way I interact with the world.

I chose autoethnography as a methodology for my study because I have a similar belief to Boylorn and Orbe (2014) when they write, "I believe auto/ethnography is an important tool as self-researcher because it implicates me as a cultural member but also allows me to confront problematic cultural practices that I myself have engaged in"(Boylorn, & Orbe, 2014, p. 324).

My data are the journal entries I wrote, or memories from the past ten years. I have imposed a ten-year limit because I feel my memory is strongest up to that point. The system I use for choosing what journal entries/memories I include requires: (1) a racialized or "other" component, (2) are within the time frame of ten years, and (3) are relevant to the ideas in my

thesis. The frequency of journal entries I write depends on the impact of my experiences. All of the journal entries/memories included were a result of an experience that was so powerful, I felt it needed to be recorded in some way. My aim in including these stories is to situate the reader in my "hula-hoop". I return to the data as a researcher to complicate and push my reflections further using my theoretical background to inform my "thinking through"(Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Since I am using autoethnography, my identity as a self-researcher attends to the data from multiple perspectives. I have the opportunity to be active as a researcher, as a writer, as a reader, and as an experiencer, knowing all of these perspectives come together creating an additional lens. Using multiple perspectives also helps me think about my research question: what it means, how it looks, and how it feels, to engage in conversations for the purpose of rethinking.

In this work, I interpret personal experiences/stories that have a racialized or "other" component either to my self directly or within my "hula hoop." My process for selecting stories involves reading through emotionally inspired journal entries and memories. Reflecting on the emotional aspects of these stories is important because I feel that many times my emotion was a result of tension between myself and the space, people, or ideas from the memories. In selecting my memories of relevant experiences (or how I interpret the experience), I must also acknowledge that my memory provides a limited number of experiences. I will only include stories from the past ten years. I have imposed this limit because as I move past ten years my memories become less frequent. Selection is based on memory, relevance, and whether or not the story continues to evoke emotion for me, and I believe included stories have the potential to engage readers. My interpretation of stories or interactions becomes important because I am situated specifically in the given contexts but also in a broader sense given that the U.S. is a highly racialized country.

I have chosen autoethnography as the method and methodology for this study because "autoethnography can be beneficial because it legitimates first-person accounts of

discrimination and difference and can therefore aid in the critique of colonialism, racism, sexism, ... However, it can also simultaneously reveal commonality within human experience, something that encourages connection as a means toward greater appreciation of how all individuals have fundamental needs for respect, dignity, and self-expression" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p.237). Through my reflection and writing, I see autoethnography as a way to not only engage in rethinking identity, race, experience, privilege, and voice, but also as a means in potentially influencing small change.

The process of autoethnography, although more abstract than other research methods, may seem very calculated in some ways. How can I isolate stories and treat them as pockets of being or knowing with so many details left out? Due to the goals of autoethnography, treating each story as just a story—"nothing more, nothing less"(Ellis, Pg.66)— I depend on one version, the version present at the moment that I write, to examine the self and the culture beyond the self. Autoethnography is a methodology that acknowledges the changing present and multiple ways to view this present, which allows for deeper interrogation of moments that have much to say about the way I am. So I use autoethnography as a way to open up conversations. Conversations that are uncomfortable for many, sometimes too comfortable for some, and many times, these conversations have not yet started. As I come to conversations, it is very easy to speak from personal experience. My experience is what I know. In doing autoethnography, it becomes imperative to be mindful of experiences. Attention must be on what opens up, as a result of reflection on the self and the larger community. When I speak only from experience, I forget and reinforce the silence of my neighbors. I start to completely buy into silence as being bad or unwanted. But how do I live and talk about silence as being both good and bad, possibly at the same time? How can we be critical about unwanted silence and appreciative of welcomed silence? We cling to the ideas and comfort of our hula-hoop, while forgetting the world and forces around us; forces that allow our hula-hoop to move. If we do look out from our own spinning hula-hoop, I think it is easiest to see and think about others that have the same

color, or shape, or weighted hula-hoop. Though many of us, find it is easier to care about those in a different country, a different space. However, we often ignore the ones closest to us that have a hula-hoop, maybe differing in color or shape from our own. Sure, we negotiate with our conscious demanding that a wave outside the convenience store makes a difference, that a donation to the local shelter is doing our part; but our actions and our words, if any, speak a very specific language. One that extends out and releases the claw to drop the goods; not one that welcomes, sits, talks, and can see that it may not be our, or "my" job to save or give. Instead we might write and have conversations that aim to dismantle and rethink ideologies and ways of knowing that allow for systems such as privilege and oppression.

Autoethnography is both the product and process of my wrestling with ideas in my hula-hoop, my emotions, my lived experiences, and the connections between these and to the world. By using Autoethnography, I am in a funny place of emotions. As a researcher I experience a range of emotions surrounding the conversation between stories, the literature, theoretical frameworks, and myself. I find moments of being very uncomfortable as I return to the data to, in some ways, relive the experience that my younger self was a part of. I make judgments about myself, now and then. A part of autoethnography is making visible my judgments and emotions. Yes, this brings forth embarrassment, excitement, fear, anxiety, and many other emotions; but autoethnography also allows me to welcome all parts of me into the conversation.

Autoethnography is definitely concerned with rigor and guidelines. Contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, impact, and expression of reality (Richardson, 2000, p.254) are important criteria for evaluating autoethnography. These concepts are specific to Autoethnographic writing and the specific purposes of Autoethnographies. Arthur Bochner (2000) writes:

It is not that one side thinks judgments have to be made and the other side does not. Both agree that inevitably they make choices about what is good, what is useful, and

what is not. The difference is that one side believes that "objective" methods and procedures can be applied to determine the choices we make, whereas the other side believes these choices are ultimately and inextricably tied to our values and our subjectivities.

Instead of focusing blindly on guidelines, autoethnography notices and critiques the extent to which this type of research can possibly affect the reader and researcher. Mindfulness plays an important role in being attentive to the ramifications both inward and outward based on not only what is said, but also how the work is read. Of course this is very difficult because the possibilities of how my work is read are endless. For every sentence written, I must ask myself several questions: Am I being true to my interpretation of the experience? How might the experience change based on my embodiment? What other perspectives (such as another person, an object, an overview) need to be considered? What is the purpose of the story? How do notions of trace (Derrida, 1967), systemic practices, identity, and the self, affect the interpretation and re-telling of the story? When an idea floats in and maybe through my hula-hoop, what aspects of the hula-hoop have touched and altered the idea? Maybe the idea of a hula-hoop being present slightly alters the idea? Yet, when the idea moves out, have I represented it with respect and truth from my personal perspective?

For my Autoethnography, I judge quality according to a combination of criteria from both Carolyn Ellis and Laurel Richardson. I am mindful of the standards: reflexivity and impact from Richardson (2000). Reflexivity refers to the ways I come to my interpretations of my reality, interpretation of lived experiences, possibilities of connection or disjuncture throughout my interpretations, and into my writing. "How did the author come to write this? How was the information gathered? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view?" (Richardson, 2000, p.254) I do not aim or wish to speak for others in my stories. I aim to show the readers my interpretation represented in the fullest.

Richardson's notion of impact refers to the potential influence the work has on a reader. Questions such as, "does this affect me? emotionally? Intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?" (Richardson, 2000, p.254) are all ideas I use when imagining myself as a new reader of my work. My hope is that this autoethnography is impactful and appealing to multiple audiences. Similar to Richardson's notion of impact, Ellis (2000) asks, "will this story help others cope with or better understand their worlds? Is it useful, and if so, for whom?" As I write and read my work, I aim to write in a way that is true to myself and appeals to many audiences. I view my potential impact as having both positive and negative ramifications for the reader. It is important for me to consider this in every story I tell, in all of the writing I do.

Carolyn Ellis's notion of narrative truth (Ellis, 2004) has a huge impact on my work. When I remember and write stories, I must be honest with every detail of my remembrance because of what a narrative might do or open up. Narrative truth, in my opinion, is the most important standard of my work. The words I write, based on my interpretations, have the possibility to affect family members, friends, acquaintances, people in my stories, and readers in deep ways. Ellis (2004) writes, "Narrative is the ways we remember the past, turn life into language, and disclose to ourselves and others the truth of our experience" (p.126). In life and in writing, especially in such an intimate form such as Autoethnography, every word is ethical. The way I represent others and myself, intentional or unintentional, must be in the fairest way.

Together my standards for writing Autoethnography are (1) representing my interpretations of experience in the most honest way possible, (2) knowing every word matters, (3) but also knowing the meaning extracted based on the reader's interpretation is an equally important consideration. "Creative arts is one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified"(Richardson, 2000, pg.254). I choose Autoethnography as my lens and purpose in exploring both analytically and creatively.

Tensions

I use post-structuralism to frame my study by paying attention to moments of tension in a way that allows me, as the researcher and participant, to negotiate and wrestle with ideas. Negotiation of ideas includes complicating the ideas that permeate my "hula-hoop," knowing they may come, go, and return as the air moves through and around. A part of this negotiation has forced me to sometimes embrace an idea while simultaneously pushing against that same idea. Negotiating in my "hula-hoop" is similar to Derrida's notion of trace. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) write, "The trace is that which contributes to our being and doing in a tug-of-war with the competing meanings that we both resist and accept — both acknowledged and unacknowledged" (p.21).

I am not sure how much control I have over which air is let into my hula-hoop and which ideas move out. My hula-hoop is both acted on and acted through by expanding, contracting, partial, contingent, and hard-to-measure ideas and movements. This might be due to the constant change of air coming and going, very rarely staying. Just as the hula-hoop needs my body to push against it in order to keep moving, I too find times when I need to push against ideas in order to keep moving. To sustain the movement of my hula-hoop, I must work with the air present, and move with the ideas and labels currently existing to imagine something different. So far I have looked at a hula-hoop as being parallel to the ground. Once I change the vantage point I envision more air, more ideas and possibilities to let in or out. But still, I am not sure if I am the gatekeeper of thinking. A part of me recognizes the thoughts and ideas I let in, but I know my experiences bring different ideas that want in. Regardless of the air that moves in, out, or stays, my perception is that the air is present.

In order to rethink ideas, I have to be in a space that involves accepting not only my reality, but also the reality of others, which often leaves me acting and participating in a complicated way. The "way" I exist is important because it situates me in the tension I aim to

discuss. At any given moment, I am existing in the tension whether I choose to acknowledge this or not. The acknowledgement brings on constant negotiation of how I will be present. Negotiation in this sense is often a place for growth or being in a critical way.

Being human means I am an object in the physical world and a force outside of the physical realm. Both inhabit a space that is always changing and always being. I embrace Derrida's notion of deconstruction to explain my "hula-hoop" as a space, as well as my personal stories. The movement of air and ideas are always present, and my acknowledgement of ideas in my "hula-hoop" is what makes the space important because this is where I can attempt to catch a glimpse of representations that are free flowing. The ideas that surround and infiltrate my "hula-hoop" also support the tension I represent, the tension I become. My embodiment is represented frequently in ways that do not fully encompass who I am. Therefore I am much more and much less than expected.

I am interested in the ways I can engage in conversations surrounding identity, race, experiences, privilege, and voice—knowing I come to the space embodied in a specific way. When I talk about embodiment of race I think it easy for white people to default to reflection of race. However, these are very different ideas I am talking about. Embodiment sometimes makes certain situations more or less likely; our bodies are in fact read in very biased ways. The sense of embodiment I speak about is the way a person identifies or is identified by. Reflection of race is something we all do, some more than others. When I see race, I reflect my own idea of race on to another. I reflect my thoughts onto and even into someone else's body. Knowingly and unknowingly, I reinforce racism every time I reflect the idea of race. But how can we talk about race, in order to un-see race and the detrimental effects seeing race has on each other, without reinforcing the concept of race? When I think about the concept of race, I must orient myself in a very specific way. The only way to see race is to live and believe in the physical world, which I often do. We live in a physical nation; a bias to the physical world. We must trek in the direction of love and spirituality to imagine all the other worlds.

My interest is concerned with possible becomings that might arise. I choose to look at deconstruction as being “on the lookout not for what deconstruction is, or what it means, but for what it produces, what it opens up” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.27). Another part of engaging in conversations is being mindful of what I am attending to, while knowing I may attend to certain things based on my experience. Mindfulness also involves an acknowledgement of knowing that the unseen or unheard can always be present even when I believe there is an absence.

Not realizing what was to open up or become of this experience, but knowing there was importance in my experience and the way I narrated my experience, is why I chose to include the following story:

I walked into Key high school excited, sweaty, and nervous. When the blue doors opened, I noticed white- white everywhere. I felt white. Painted on the walls, I was walking on white tiles, the ceiling was white, the backsplash was white, the lights were white, I was white. As I took a few more steps into the building, I saw black. Dark bodies moving quickly up and down the halls, some running, some standing, but all moving as I was moving. My eyes skimming the landscape, noticing the contrasting colors (or at least what I had been taught). Another graduate student, Andrea, and our advisor, Dr. W, accompanied me. Although the environment overwhelmed me, I was excited to meet the person whom I would potentially work with. I was hot because the day was in August, and heat cannot be separated from August in Texas. We walked into our meeting spot, a plain yet inviting classroom. Dr. W and Ms. S said hello to each other, they had met before. Andrea and I introduced ourselves and I commented that I was glad I finally got to meet her. Andrea made a similar comment and I sat down at the meeting table. Andrea sat next to me and across the table sat Ms. S and Dr. W; we became four points of a square.

One point,

Two point,

Three point,

Four.

Square.

Dr. W began facilitating the conversation by asking Ms. S what aspects of the program she enjoyed from last year, what improvements we can make, and where the partnership would hopefully go in the future. It was an easy, simple, routine, and beautiful conversation. Planning meetings have the tendency to follow a pattern, which is fine because there are certain points that need to be made. I thought the conversation was beautiful because the partnership is meaningful and is slowly making an impact for many students. Halfway through the meeting I was hit with emotion. I noticed that Ms. S was only looking at Dr. W and Andrea. I kept trying to make any little comment that would force Ms. S's eyes to meet mine, but it didn't happen.

One point,

Two point,

Three point,

Fou.... No more.

Triangle.

Emotion is definitely not what I expected to feel, especially during a planning meeting. I felt really sad and I sat in my blue chair focusing less on what was being said and more on trying not to cry. Ms. S's voice slowly trailed off and I was forced to feel goose bumps, convincing myself not to cry, and trying to make myself relevant to Ms. S. Changing shape, without my consent, from a square to a triangle is an isolating feeling.

An excluded point.

No depth,

Nor dimension.

No connection.

No voice.

One inner voice was so annoyed, "poor Katie I am experiencing not being relevant to a conversation, what a terrible and horrible thing." A part of me wanted to tell my self to get the fuck over it. Yet, it is terrible to feel that your voice is not relevant to the conversation much less ANY conversation. Looking back on this experience I am intrigued by the idea of voice. So many people feel as if they have no voice. Now I think this translates in many different ways, some people are told they have a voice and they should use it. So yes, personal voice may be heard but systemically there is no voice. No voice that aligns with the personal voice. Or maybe there is a voice but there is a lack of listening.

My experience became a rare moment that I do not feel on a daily basis because of the many privileges I carry. At that moment I did not fully understand, but I felt what I thought was racism. I knew I was the only light skinned person in the room. I knew Andrea was the same age as me, so I ruled out that aspect. I kept going back to the colors of the four beings in the room. I felt sad because for once my perception was "Ms. S is not looking at me because of the color of my skin". For me, this was sad, more than sad! People with dark skin experience this often, sometimes on a daily basis, and not being looked at in the eyes because of a socially constructed category is fucking devastating. The idea of race is just that, an idea originating from a human mind influencing actions and interactions. Yet, the realities of race are inescapable on a personal and systemic level. Privilege allows me to be too comfortable in describing race as JUST an idea. Words are powerful, we know this, but subliminal messages are just as powerful. They mold our norms and provide boundaries for what is not "normal", what is "normal", who we should be, and what we should think.

As I re-read my experience and think back to being in that space, I sometimes want to laugh, not at the situation, but at my interpretation of the experience. Is my privilege so engrained in my being that I cannot and will not ever escape it? I am now asking myself this question very often and I think the answer is yes. While I have become less concerned with

escaping, I have found it more important to focus on what privilege is, why privilege exists, and how privilege interacts with and through me. My laughter comes from feeling ashamed, ashamed that I felt pain from the experience, because I am not sure that I truly know pain in a racialized experience.

I have thought about this situation over and over again and then more. It is easy to sympathize with my experience for some people. It is easy to sympathize with prejudice. Yet I am sitting here, pissed at myself. I am not upset at the situation, I am upset at the way I interpreted the situation. I almost immediately made it about race. The lack of attention I felt might have been because of my light skin, I will probably never know, this is not the point. The point is that I am so caught up in socially constructed sightlines. It has been important for me to reflect on my initial thoughts about an experience. I have found that what I pay attention to is often what I am told to pay attention to. Did I feel like an other because of insecurities? Was I treated like an other? Was my "otherness" only a reflection of what the situation was supposed to be? If I removed myself and inserted a different twenty-something, white, female would the situation have been similar? Was I told to buy into the concept of otherness, so many times, that I felt it?

Along with Post-structuralism, Feminist Theory shapes much of my writing and thinking. I aim to be mindful of the ways oppressive systems have shaped, and continue to shape, our thinking and interactions with one another. I acknowledge certain "disparities are neither new nor randomly distributed throughout the population, but occur in patterns along such major social divisions as race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and physical ability" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p.176). As I engage to rethink social divisions, I pull from intersectionality, which aims to examine relationships "between multiple axes of identity and multiple dimensions of social organization—at the same time" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p.178). My moving between personal and systemic levels, and my tug-of-war with using labels to expand notions of identity, relies heavily on intersectionality and reflections on the implications of intersectionality. Weber (2001) describes intersectional analysis as operating on two levels: "at the individual level, it

reveals the way intermeshing of these systems creates a broad range of opportunities for the expression and performance of individual identities. At the societal/structural level, it reveals the ways systems of power are implicated in the development, organization, and maintenance of inequalities and social justice" (as cited in Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p.178). I use intersectionality to move away from the fixed notions of identity and to focus on human connections. I also use intersectionality as a tool to interrogate moments or places that are easily accepted as fixed truths in hopes of expanding what it means to be embodied and embodied in a certain space.

"No one wants to be the girl at Capital at 12:44 A.M. sitting on the side of the stage refusing to dance because of a sexist song..." I wrote this in my phone as I was out with my friends at a popular bar in Fort Worth. I love being able to improv and make up moves on the dance floor, so I was definitely looking forward to this opportunity with some of my friends. However, this night was different. I vividly remember laughing, sweating, and dancing for what seemed like an hour and then a wall. A wall that immediately turned me into a slow-moving robot hit me and then my body came to a complete stop. There I was sitting on the side of the stage, watching my friends and the rest of the crowd dance, just as I was a few seconds before. To be honest, I do not remember what the name of the song was or who the artist was. However, I did know that the lyrics in the song were extremely degrading to women and made me feel physically numb and mentally sick. I took a moment to reflect on what I chose to do. I remember the dialogue in my head: "do I sit here as a personal resistance to sexism?" "Yes, of course" I told myself. But wait, another part of me chimed in " you are missing out on a opportunity to live in the moment with your friends." Another voice chimed in "Ok so am I willing to compromise my resistance for one song? "Almost cutting off the previous question, I responded by thinking " NO WAY this is no compromise! By stepping on the dance floor you are reinforcing sexism on a larger level and consenting to being called 'bitch, slut, hoe, etc.'" So I sat there for what seemed to be an eternity, feeling angry, sad, and ashamed at the situation. Not only was I ashamed with the situation, I was ashamed with myself. This example of shame is not

real shame when I begin to reflect on the experience, but it is an echo of shame that has the tendency to follow me, and probably many females, wherever I go. Shame that I am the one sitting as an outsider. Partly upset with myself that I made the choice to not dance because of lyrics. As one of my friends reminded me she was just dancing to the beat. Why couldn't I JUST hear the beat, or JUST give in to one song, or JUST be ignorant in ways that I sometimes miss? Because, the truth is sometimes, it is exhausting and depressing to be in a space where I feel that I need to think and act critically: costing me moments with my friends or family. How can I sometimes be okay with choosing to do or not do something based on critical reflective thoughts, over the real, living, breathing, human beings I am surrounded with?

I use this story to illustrate the complexities of not only my identity, but also the extra complications that follow when a part of my identity feels as though action needs to be taken; all while other aspects of my identity leave me talking myself out of the action. Can I, can we, ever just be? Will I have to literally negotiate parts of my being depending on the situation? With each complex identity we carry, negotiations become more frequent, more intense. The society we live in, the beliefs we embrace, the narratives told, the power structures created, shape when, how, and why negotiations of our identity are needed. The rules of negotiation are very clear- some are in constant negotiation, while others are not. If a way of life is created for you, then there is no pressing reason to examine the circumstances in which you live –or at least privilege tells us this.

As I lived and reflected on this experience, I felt and wrote as if my marginalized identity—being female—was the only part of me in negotiation. I am wondering if and how this experience would change if other parts of my identity were not in the “dominant” group. I say this, disgusted by the terminology used but at a standstill to find words that illustrate my positionality in a larger context recognized by most. Another aspect of this experience that grabs my attention is feeling and writing as if my marginalized identity, being female, was the only part of me in negotiation. My immediate reaction thinks this can't be true. I don't think I live

as sometimes choosing a combination of my identities. I think I live in whole and in connection to others. I don't act onto the identity markers; they act onto me. This is not to say, that I don't pick and choose how I am in a certain space, or that some of my identities are more apparent in given situations. However, if we buy into these markers from the start and others do as well, they are always representative of the whole and I just know, whole is how I want to be. Will we ever make it to a place of wholeness? To a place where identity is described by the whole and not marked by the parts. I wonder, can identities be isolated from the whole? Perhaps for conversation they can, but in reflections regarding the person, you are always you, nothing more, nothing less, not in part, but in whole.

I live in whole.

You are always you.

Nothing more,

Nothing less,

Not in part,

But in whole.

I just know,

Whole is how I want to be.

Negotiations

Spaces that allow personal stories and reflections of our experiences need to be embraced. The context of our experiences and our thoughts are relevant in the ways we live and perceive reality. All voices need to be heard and they need to be heard amongst each other to live in our connections in an attempt to inspire change.

Which identities are important and at what times, during what contexts are parts of my identity relevant? Am I a young, white, straight, educated, female or am I a twenty-three year

old, cisgender female with a relatively young body, both mature and immature, questioning mind, complex soul that is constantly evolving? So how do I mark myself? In some situations I represent labels, in other situations my identity becomes too complex to separate into labels. Other times I mark myself by the questions I ask and the answers (or lack of) I give.

Identities and the spaces they move in to create places of tension. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) write, "deconstruction does not dismiss identity categories, but it unsettles how these categories seek to stabilize identity and arrest meaning in ways that are limiting" (p.27). However, when do I get to choose? And when I'm not choosing, who is choosing for me? Tim Wise writes, "I had not been in control of my own narrative. It wasn't just race that was a social construct. So was I" (Loc. 72, Intro.). Through my questioning and engagements, I aim to disturb the way I am in a space by complicating the belief that I am ever just one type of identity.

In order to think through how I can engage in conversations about identity, race, privilege, and voice, I must reflect on how I am situated in the space and the conversations. I think this involves careful reflection because some times I am situated in a specific way before I even engage in conversations. Yet, often times I am able to be present in the way(s) that I choose through my voice. I use the word "often" to speak from my experience.

For example, I was fourteen years old when I learned my grandmother, whom I call Memaw, wasn't biologically related to me. Even at twelve I knew I lived in a world that noticed different skin colors. I was aware of what Mexican meant and I also noticed that many people who are Mexican typically had darker skin than I did (this isn't true for all Mexicans, but for my geographic location it is more typical). I also knew that my Memaw had darker skin than I did. Perhaps looking back, the difference in skin color could have signaled something, but it didn't. Actually, my biological grandpa, whom is married to Memaw, has just as dark skin as she does; yet others mark them, very differently. It wasn't until an outside agent, (that is outside of my direct relationship with my Memaw) told me I wasn't biologically related to the person I call Memaw, that any slight difference (or perceived difference) was noticed. The noticing of a non-

biological relationship was named but never changed the dynamic of my relationship with the woman I always knew as my grandmother. So is it the act of naming something, naming a difference, which has the possibility to change our interactions? There was never an absence of physical diversity; there was an absence of the naming of the difference. What happens when the way we believe we are situated, gets flipped? My relationship with my grandma, as I had always known and felt it to be, remained the same even with the acknowledgement of difference. So what is it about the act of naming a difference in skin color to a biological difference that affects change? The labels changed but the relationship remained the same. The ways we situate our self and are situated by others are not solely dependent on markers of physical identity. The way I was positioned in the space, or relationship, between my grandmother never changed even though the labels that were now associated with us had. To the outside world my grandmother was always Mexican and I was always white. However to me, the naming of this difference or perceived difference did not change the way I chose to situate myself in the space our relationship provides. We bring so much more to the space other than bodies. So how can we read (and be read by) each other? How does the "reading" change when ideas/identities that have always been present are now present in ways that cling to social constructions? Does the slight change in named presence have the ability to alter the way we occupy a space? If we resist the naming of a presence do we create opportunities for growth or for hindrance of difference?

Am I afforded to choose more often than others? If so, what parts of my being allow this choice? After all of these questions I must ask myself, "do I care which parts of my identity are chosen?" Probably, but I think I care more about what it means to negotiate the aspects of my identity in connection with the identity of others. In some ways I feel that I am left in juxtaposition with ideas. In trying to fight racism and white supremacy I acknowledge that race has the ability, to affect our interactions in the world. As a white person, I feel that I often walk a thin line. When I challenge the idea of racism I feel that this is a dangerous space. I can easily be mis-read as

discounting interactions and experiences where color has in fact had meaning. To see something other than color having meaning also makes me question my privilege.

Being in a world that is saturated by white privilege, I find moments of reflection that lead me to wonder about the way I am able to think through these ideas. Am I afforded a certain platform to think through these ideas in a private space? Does white skin shield me and allow me to be present in a public sphere that isn't automatically tied to race? Systemically, labels affect the way we read the world. Labels allow reading with a lack of thinking and listening. So I believe, because of the way the world situates me, I can separate public and private spaces. Due to white privilege and the history of racism, I am not expected to be concerned with race outside of a diversity class. It is not until my voice relays that I am concerned with race and privilege that I am no longer read by the color of my skin but as a combination of both white and an ally. However, I have a choice to step forward as a color, as a voice, or both. I am acknowledged in public spaces in many different ways, and unfortunately since we still live in a racialized society, as I step forward I am given many different choices of how my being occupies this public space. I say this, wondering how my questions and ideas are in alignment or challenging white privilege? I do not want to discount instances when skin color has affected experiences. However, I want to rethink race so that color is not tied to specific meanings.

Hauntings

My sixteen-year old self was a stubborn, privileged, sympathetic brat. I loved to challenge my teachers, more often than not; this was an act to resist the "teachers know all" mantra that filled my schooling experience. U.S. History was a class that I disliked, almost as much as having to learn another language. Let me rephrase "almost as much as having to learn a different language" because, you know, my sixteen-year old self couldn't see that English was not THE language, but one language of many.

Back to History, I never saw the potential history had/ still has to shape our thinking. I was turned off by the means in which history was always taught to me. I could not and eventually refused to memorize dates and events that I felt weren't of importance to my life. While this is embarrassing to write because the privilege and ignorance are so apparent, I now enjoy historical texts and see their relevance in all aspects of my life. At sixteen I didn't see relevance, but I wanted to. I remember very clearly a conversation with my History teacher. Coach T. began, "The war in... (my inattention to "facts" becomes clear as I can not remember the opening statement)." "Coach T., history can not change," I said. "Yes it can", Coach T. replied. I quickly re-stated my point, "no it can't." I was now probing for an argument, but in front of the whole class was very uncharacteristic of me. Coach T.'s energy was rising and I could feel it. "Katie what do you mean, I can give you an example of history changing." At this point I do not remember my thinking but I remember what I said, "History can not change. The actual event, which we may never know exact truth for, will always be as it was. Our interpretations and thinking of the event can change." Blushing, my teacher agreed.

As I think back to that memory I am left wondering what this conversation means to my present self. My sixteen-year old self was curious about things I had no idea would lead me towards a life of never ending questions. Reflecting on my conversation with Coach T., I am left thinking: How can this conversation serve as a foundation for my experiences? What parts of my experiences as a researcher have been "real"? I think the context of my experiences are important—the embodiment as a white female.... But the social construct of race, in conversation with realities of feeling, seeing, hearing, and touching race is one I am often haunted by. I write this, unsure if my aim to push race into a category of something ghost-like is hypocritical. I wonder if comparing race to a ghost—an un-tangible haunting, believed in by some, seen by some, but talked about by many—is dangerous. In our society, if race is too often attributed to both internal and external characteristics; and the aftermath of this attribution has the possibility to change lives, make lives, break lives, how can I infer that race is anything similar

to a ghost? Experiences due to embodiment, race, racism, prejudice, and privilege have been “real”. History tells us this, PEOPLE TELL US THIS; but can we change our ideas? Not to discredit history and experiences, but to change and re-imagine constructs. And at the same time, acknowledge constructs that have made us feel the “realness” of race.

In order to re-imagine race, do we have to refute the realities of race?

Certainly we do not.

If we re-imagine war, re-imagine beauty, re-imagine a relationship,

We aren't required to turn our backs to...

bodies lying in streets,

girls still struggling with eating disorders,

pain from an experience.

We take all that the experience is,

all that the idea is,

and work.

Work really hard to give attention to all areas of need.

We take everything race and racism are,

to inform our fight.

Out of the box, and through the ceiling.

While race is a social construction, the embodiment of race has the ability to make certain situations more or less likely. This is important when thinking about autoethnography because my identity changes the way others perceive me, the way I perceive others, and the way I perceive myself. I argue that my interpretations of experiences or experiences themselves are highly biased and unique.

Through personal stories and reflections of the stories, I often engage in an uncomfortable space with the self as I aim to complicate my reflections by looking at my multiple identities; along with the connections these stories have with a larger social context. I borrow Denzin's (2014) notion of stories when he writes, "Lives and their experiences, the telling and the told, are represented in stories which are performances. Stories are like pictures that have been painted over, and when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible" (p. 1).

Due to the reflective nature of autoethnography, I have decided to attend to the tensions present. This involves complicating my original memories and negotiating through reflections how to engage in conversations about race, as a privileged woman, in a highly racialized society. I find this process to be very complex, uncomfortable at times, but most importantly necessary in order to examine white privilege and racism.

I often find myself in a space that never fully clings to one idea. At moments I am the hula-hoop, never clinging to one idea. I think we can do more, imagine more, when we choose more than one term or idea to situate our thinking. This negotiation is especially present when I think about race. For example, as West (1993) states, "DuBois's prescient pronouncement- 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line'- haunted me. In a mysterious way, this classic twosome posed the most fundamental challenges to my basic aim and life: to speak the truth to power with love so that the quality of everyday life for ordinary people is enhanced and white supremacy is stripped of its authority and legitimacy" (p.XXIV). Similar to DuBois and West, Guterl (2013) echoes these thoughts by writing, "In the moment the sightlines emerge, what is built and constructed is generally durable and powerful, and aims to be prescriptive and constraining. A sightline is, then, a persistent and prescribed reading of an image, or of images related to each other, sustained by the history of racism and race relations. As such, sightlines haunt the eyes" (p.5). This idea of a persistent and prescribed reading, I believe, in some ways has made it easy to live in connections with certain physical realities,

ignoring other aspects of humans: emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. Sightlines acknowledge and can potentially reinforce race when tying in Derrida's notion of trace. Race cannot be present without our belief in the physical world and our belief in physical aspects being more than an avenue for ideas, believing race is seen and felt.

I believe the problem of the color line has spilled over to the twenty-first century and finds ways to complicate our idea of racism. We live in sightlines. Yet, how can we challenge sightlines to imagine being in a world where race isn't seen? I feel that in some ways I have to acknowledge race in order to move past race. However, as Guterl (2013) writes, "seeing race is making race" (p.4), leaving me in a messy space. Guterl goes on to say:

But the persistence of racism in American culture and society gives sightlines some longevity as well-circulated images acquire- by virtue of their usefulness- something close to a permanent meaning. Sightlines thus seem more durable because racism is longer-lived. Seeing race is making race, an act of mutual construction that makes common sight possible, and that ensures that sightlines last longer than they should. (p.4)

The messy space I talk about encompasses a moving back and forth, never fully satisfied with either, between my experiences, the experiences of other people, and theories. On top of this messiness and thinking through these ideas, my reality is that I have to continue to live and interact in this world even when I am not sure what ideas to engage. With every moment, the world changes, I change, ideas change, and these never fully remain the same.

While Tim Wise and Matthew Guterl both write about race in order to combat racism, Wise (2011) comes at race from a different angle stating, "To not see color is, as Julian Bond has noted, to not see the consequences of color. And if color has consequences, yet you've resolved not to notice the thing that brings about those consequences, the odds are pretty good that you'll fail to serve the needs of the students in question" (p.67). Thinking about these ideas that have similarities and differences are difficult because I question my past (and future) interactions in a way that wants to remain mindful of race relations. I wonder if the differences in

opinions on seeing race can speak to the ways we are situated in the world. While, Wise and Guterl are both light skinned males they seem to read the world through a slightly different lens. Tim Wise focuses on white privilege and Matthew Guterl focuses on race. Both race and white privilege are complimentary to each other but not exactly the same. This is especially important to my study because I look at experiences that have a racialized component, knowing that I am affected by white privilege because my body occupies white skin.

Race is an extremely complicated concept because it can, and often does, affect the way we think and act. "The shortest cut to make something that looks scientific is to make a statistical study of existing practices and desires, with the supposition that their accurate determination will settle the subject-matter to be taught, thus taking curriculum-forming out of the air, putting it on a solid factual basis"(Dewey, 1929, pgs.72-73). Paralleled to race, we live in a context that describes/frames race in a way that teaches us and thrives off the idea that race can be seen. Believing race can be seen reinforces this idea constantly given our bias to be in the physical world and to also read the physical world through our eyes. Making it easy to not only define what is "real", but to see "real" as fixed and nothing less than the meaning "real" entails. However, this idea of "real" is broken once we realize we are told what to see. We are told to see race. In reality we see humans, and we sometimes see color; but color is meaningless when social constructs aren't attached. I use meaningless to imagine the possibilities, not to discredit the times when color has had meaning, because I acknowledge and know it has and continues to have meaning. For most people, our bodies are labeled and read. However, white privilege has dictated not only how we are read, but has also decided who gets to create their own reading and who is spoken for.

As I continue to think about race and the literature, I have to frame race as a social construct that does indeed have the potential to shape others, even my own, thinking. Yet, when I see race, I acknowledge the creation of sightlines. Sightlines that are so hard to escape sometimes because they play on my bias of attention to physical aspects. Making it very easy to

trick millions into believing what we see is "real". I use the word "real" not to say that race is "real" but that a person's experience has a subjective and an intimate aspect that may seem concrete at times. It becomes crucial to think about the systems and ways of being that make certain experiences more or less likely to happen. For example, Guterl (2013) makes an important point when he talks about the disciplining on the American eye.

This disciplining of the American eye happens slowly, as the builders of racial difference are also within it, as the rich symbolic surround related to race becomes a part of the nation's cultural education. Racism and racial thinking are enduring aspects of the modern experience, and have been consistently featured in U.S. history. Situated within national popular culture, Americans learn to see the details of race overtime, and are obligated, by their commitment to the national consensus, to agree, generally, that race can be seen, can be tracked, can be verified, in most cases, on the body. (p.4)

Often times we see colors before we see humans. This disciplining of the eye, married with the belief that colors have meaning, sets up of our everyday interactions to live in and often reinforce a racialized reality. Tim Wise writes, "Although white Americans often think we've had few first-hand experiences with race, because most of us are so isolated from people of color in our day-to-day lives, the reality is that this isolation is our experience with race. We are all experiencing race, because from the beginning of our lives we have been living in a racialized society, in which the color of our skin means something socially" (Loc. 106 Preface). Historically, and in the present, legitimate arguments state that color does in fact have meaning but my voice keeps echoing: Does this mean color needs to have meaning? In order to look deeper into my question I think it is important to note that race interactions differ from race.

My notion of race adopts the realization that, "While humans have come to live our lives through racial categories, these categories simply are not useful for classifying human genetic diversity. At this point, differences in wealth, health, or educational attainment between groups we call "races" are the products of history and social life, not biologically determined"

(Goodman, 2008, p.4). I understand that the current narrative of race in the United States believes race is tied to color and genetics, and since we, as a nation, have been tricked into believing this ideology our everyday race-relations reflect this false notion of race. Since some of the U.S. population can see that race is a social construct supported by color and falsely tied to genetics, when looking at this narrative through a different lens we see that race, a social construct, has nothing to do with genetics but is the product of context.

Privilege refers to the ways, intentional and unintentional, systems have shaped the oppression of marginalized groups and advantaged people from the dominant or "normalized" group. This advantage or privilege shows up constantly in simple every day interactions and permeates to the deepest layers of being and existing in this world. Tim Wise (2011) talks about this advantage in terms of white privilege when he writes, "despite the fact that white privilege plays out different for different people, depending on these other identities, the fact remains that whiteness matters and carries great advantage" (Loc.141). The following journal entry shows my wrestling with a saying we hear all the time, one that I argue is deeply rooted in privilege.

"I remember overhearing a conversation between a classmate and my professor. One voice said "we should treat others the way we want to be treated". The golden rule, I've heard this so many damn times I have learned to tune it out, not this time. Another voice said "we can move further and treat others the way they want to be treated". Okay, okay now we are getting somewhere I thought. This sounds nice and I would probably agree with some the foundational principles but there has to be more. All I could think about when I heard this conversation was the privilege at play. Privilege in the words, privilege in the tone, privilege in the ideas! When and how did we get to a point where our society, our country feels like we have the power to dictate treatment? Not to mention the dynamics of power in words such as they, others, and we. The idea of "we" being capable, or holding some power, that has the ability to affect "others" is very troubling in my opinion. However, I am drawn to this conversation for a different reason. The word *treat* is really messing with my mind. Why are we (as in you and I) stuck in a mind frame of

“treat”? Our default has become a place of noise, a place of doing, and a place of treatment. How do we get back to a place that appreciates silence and all it has to offer? How do we get back to a place that doesn't automatically assume someone needs to be saved or treated? I am not saying that we can not help others when help is asked for. I am questioning the power of assuming we can treat, assuming help is wanted, and assuming we know someone else needs. We have made ourselves the center, get me out of the middle.”

I say this because I know historically the word *treat*, and even in certain ways today, carries such violent implications. Historically the treatment of colored people by white people was detrimental. I know that this has influences on how I negotiate racialized spaces. In my life and through these writings I am in a process of learning to not “treat”. My navigation and negotiation of spaces is interested in notions of listening instead of treating; or maybe presence instead of action. I am still a stranger to this land but I am looking for places to be present. All while knowing my body is being read because of my multiple identities, in so many different ways, and before I engage in a space I am already spoken for. Unfortunately, I think this is true for most humans in many spaces. The difference I sometimes see and want to focus on is that while my body is spoken for in some instances, my voice has the last word. I think there are many instances to say that for people with dark skin, while their voice may sometimes be heard(or this is what we are told), their bodies have the last word. Being spoken for and against, almost always focusing on race rather than the human, which is the only race. The reason for this is because in so many ways we are in racialized spaces, spaces created by and for white privilege.

I frame voice as our ability to interject notions of difference. Voice looks different depending on the way it is used. Personal voice, systemic voice and subliminal voice all affect the way we interact with the world. Ugena Whitlock writes, “How then, shall we be heard? And hear one another? And ‘others’ as well? And be conscious always, that this is daily work, given the constantly shifting and changing nature of ‘voice’”(2013,p.xxxvii). Through my struggle to

make meaning of my hula-hoop and my struggle to engage in spaces for conversation, I recognize that voice is a tricky representation of my ideas and interactions with the world. Maggie MacLure writes, "But the insufficiency of voice- its abject propensity to be too much and never enough-is unavoidable....These insufficiencies, I will suggest, are productive; they allow people to mean more than one thing at a time: to fashion mobile and nuanced readings of situations: to connect with others despite not knowing exactly "who" they themselves are" (as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012,p.31).

I would define experience as moments of possible becomings. We are constantly experiencing; and reflecting on experience becomes a way to reason with or describe our interactions with our perceived reality. This opens up space for multiple experiences of varied nature. The way we interact with experiences, depending on what is in the space of experience, is read in certain ways but also marks and changes the way we are. Jackson & Mazzei (2012) write, "The performative I puts experience under erasure, showing how experience itself produces the construction of the subject"(cited in Denzin, 2014,p.38).

An Uber driver.

Winding roads, in an unfamiliar space.

Occasional headlights blaring in my eyes, shifting my attention.

The smell of smoke.

Five drunk women longing for a bed.

In town for my friend's wedding.

An Uber driver.

North Carolina.

We waited on the street corner for more than thirty minutes; bars were closed, trying to find a ride home. As my buzz wore off and the minutes passed, my sleepiness grew. "We have

an Uber” my friend shouted. “Halle-freakin-lujiah” I thought, “Its about damn time”. The silver Lincoln pulled up and we excitedly hopped in, ready to go home. An older black man sat in front and surprised me with his peppy attitude. We gave him our address and we were on our way.

An Uber driver

Winding roads, in an unfamiliar space.

Occasional headlights blaring in my eyes, shifting my attention.

The smell of smoke.

Five drunk women longing for a bed.

In town for my friend's wedding.

An Uber driver.

North Carolina.

The driver began to talk about his life. How long he had lived in the area- you know since I asked “ How long have you lived in the area?” I was assuming a black (was this important?) Uber driver “lived in the area” and not “in the city” because I knew the city was outrageously expensive to live in and because I had heard this reply too many times before. In a way I was trying to avoid a feeling of guilt and discomfort. My attempt to be courteous, since I anticipated a reply explaining that he lived just outside the city, was radiating with absurd assumptions. Assumptions dependent on the subliminal messages, beliefs, and language that tells our society older people should have “9:00-5:00 salary jobs”, that driving to provide a service to others is a “low-class” job that someone couldn't possibly enjoy, and that any narrative outside of these two would be ridiculous. As I reflect back, I'm not sure why I feel guilt in these situations. It is not as though personally I would be able to afford living in a prime area. However, a part of me knows my whiteness is indebted to situations of marginalization. Small talk shifted to one of the

few people, well no there are plenty of people, that make me cringe: Joel Osteen. "Why the hell are we talking about him? Just my luck" I thought. Occasional whispers amongst my friends about the night broke my attempted attention. Blaring headlights, winding roads. More distractions. Why the hell was I even trying to pay attention to a conversation about Joel Osteen?! I needed to talk to the driver, not for his sake, for my own. I needed to feel as though I had tried to show him five drunk, mostly white, mostly privileged girls cared about the conversation. "Sure", "right", and "interesting" are words I used to show the driver that his voice was heard and valued. I remember thinking this very clearly. I was basing my responses on the assumption that because this driver was black and a "driver", he must've experienced many moments of silencing or feeling as though his voice didn't have a space. But how can I remain mindful of oppression without defaulting to privilege? So, there I was, sitting in the back seat, a young, white, female, trying to save a black, older, man. Who was I helping? Why did I feel the need to help? Of course I had moments of genuine interest, masking my need to save. Who needed to be saved? Not the driver. Maybe the passengers? I remember thinking, "this is good". If my friends can hear me talk to him and more importantly, see him for more than the service he provided, see his beautiful mind, then maybe they can grow. His mind was truly beautiful; he was intelligent and very charismatic. There I was again, trying to save. But what about being an Uber driver screams, "I need to be saved"? White privilege shadowed over my being. Shadowing provides some comfort as a white person; comfort in knowing the shadow is not me. I know the shadow follows me, but the workings of a shadow provides some space; space in between my body and the shadowy figure. Some room to trick myself into thinking I can sometimes escape white privilege. Laughing, I remember my shadow was present, even on the dark ride home, in the silver Lincoln.

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Identity, race, experiences, privilege, and voice all influence the way we are situated and interact in the world. They have all contributed to the history and design of the United States, making them hard ideas to escape. These concepts are also hard to work with because they have been present, and in a way become presence, or at least the way it is marked.

The driver of the Uber car I was riding in provides an interesting moment for me, for us, to stop and reflect. During the time this story happened I think my thoughts would have been in alignment with looking at the context of the male, black body. It is not that for every black male I see I have assumptions about their life. However, in certain situations I do. Reflecting back on my story, I felt that because the man driving was black and was an Uber driver, the combination of the two, allowed myself as a white woman, to in some ways feel the need to not only "save" by showing interest, but to break assumed biases that the driver would/should have of my friends and I. In the process of trying to break perceived barriers, I allowed myself to reinforce tendencies of colonization through my thoughts and reflections of the situation. Through this I wonder if in some ways my reasoning for my thoughts regarding why the driver needed to be saved, i.e. Being black AND presumably poor, have allowed comfort for me personally and at the same time supported white privilege. The comfort I feel comes from a defense against racism because my reaction seemed more appropriate given that I was looking at intersections of the man's identity, making it easy to cover up the racist assumptions. Because you know,

since I looked at the context of the black man beyond race, and considered something like economic status (my assumptions about this are ridiculous), or age (since older people must have 9-5 salary-type jobs) then I was beginning to buy into and justify my reasoning as acceptable and even "critical".

Conclusion

My writing is indicative of the countless connections between the world and myself. I build upon a foundation of knowledge from many others and their experiences. I also build upon literature and multiple ways of thinking and being. My experiences are connected to the lives and experiences of the people in my stories and beyond. Because of these people, the literature, and knowledge before me and around me I am able to investigate and better understand my life – the ways I am connected, what these connections mean, and resistance to these ideas.

Autoethnography is both the product and process of my wrestling with ideas in my hula-hoop, my emotions, and my lived experiences. By using autoethnography I am in a funny place of emotions. As a researcher I experience a range of emotions surrounding the conversation between stories, the literature, theoretical frameworks, and myself. I find moments of being very uncomfortable as I return to the data to, in some ways, relive the experience that my younger self was a part of. I make judgments about myself, now and then. A part of autoethnography is making visible my judgments and emotions. Yes, this brings forth embarrassment, excitement, fear, anxiety, and many other emotions; but autoethnography also allows me to welcome all parts of me into the conversation.

My standards for writing Autoethnography are (1) representing my interpretations of experience in the most honest way possible, (2) knowing every word matters, (3) but also knowing the meaning extracted based on the reader's interpretation is an equally important consideration.

This Autoethnography provided a space for me to better understand the ideas and experiences surrounding otherness that have haunted for me for many years. I became tired of hauntings following my every move. Therefore, I have attempted to acknowledge the hauntings and to give them space and time to talk. As a result, I have become a part of the haunting just as the haunting has always been a part of me. I have examined the following questions: Given that race is a social construct and the embodiment of race makes (has the potential to make) certain experiences more or less likely, how can I engage to rethink/ complicate identity, race, experiences, privilege, and voice? What does it look like to navigate this space as a young, white, female? What does it mean to negotiate this space?

I aim to use my experience to bring forth and explore the messy, multi-knowing, multi-being world we live in. Spaces that allow personal stories and reflections of our experiences need to be embraced. The context of our experiences and our thoughts are relevant in the ways we live and perceive reality. All voices need to be heard and they need to be heard amongst each other to live in our connections in an attempt to inspire change.

Dear assumptions,

I stand here.

I stand here on you.

You crumble beneath me.

The earth fades,

I see clearer.

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