# “Let’s Destabilize this with a Feminist Narrative”: Mediating Feminisms in Educational Spaces Through Digital Storytelling

by
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## ABSTRACT

As feminist educators strive for new ways to engage students in sharing personal stories requiring vulnerability, the arts have emerged as vital to crafting "ethical, relational space[s] to hold such difficult knowledge" (Conrad & Leavy, 2018, p. 2). Anchored within a participatory arts-based inquiry paradigm, my study explored three main research questions: *1) What stories, whether visual, written, or lived, inform educators' perceptions/interpretations/ understandings of feminism? 2) How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms? 3) How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

At the heart of this study sat an acknowledgement that young people today are growing up in a media-dense world requiring educators to consider how their students are both consumers and creators of media. Informed by a desire to understand what happens if we consider feminism as a pedagogical orientation towards listening to or eliciting the stories of others, I utilized the method of digital storytelling to identify intersections of shared experience. Situated in the wake of the #MeToo movement in 2017, this study considered how the emergence of social media has engaged increasing numbers of girls and women in mediating identities through new forms of digital media. For educators, this is a meaningful conversation (for example, debates around girls' dress codes in schools) as younger generations' views on feminism(s) and *being feminist* are informed by how conversations have materialized in contemporary media spaces. Recognizing the importance of locating my experiences and perspectives, my dissertation details moments and interactions with feminism(s) that led me to my doctoral research.

My literature review explored perspectives and understandings of feminism, what it means to be, or become, a feminist, and the history of media production as a form of activism within Western feminist movements. This resulted in recognition of how, despite being critiqued, the frame of feminist *waves* provides a context for tracing how media and cultural production have been alternately utilized to drive moments of collective action in pursuit of women's rights or to inform more individualistic conceptions of feminism within specific movements.

My research questions were explored through a four-month-long online study with four emerging educators — three of whom were registered in formal teacher education programs and one who worked for a not-for-profit film collective as a facilitator. Data collection occurred through focus groups, individual in-depth interviews, a visual journaling process, and the creation of digital stories. Utilizing a participatory approach, I included my participant's perspectives and interpretations as I undertook visual and narrative analyses of the emerging educators' digital explorations of their feminist identities. This resulted in identifying three themes, including intersectionality, the body/how we (primarily women) embody and occupy spaces in the world and the potential for digital storytelling as an act of social imagination.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to understand social media's impact on youth as consumers and creators of visual stories, my research contributes to the growing body of literature highlighting the importance of media and visual literacy for educators and their students. A key conclusion of the study was the potential for digital storytelling as a feminist pedagogy. Such engaged pedagogy is needed amid the growing need for confronting difficult knowledge and cultivating empathy and an ethic of care through which students can navigate differing perspectives and understandings of the world.

## PREFACE

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Patricia Jagger. The research project, which this thesis is a part of, was approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Mediating Feminisms in Educational Spaces Through Participatory Visual Methods,” No Pro00099762_CLS1, approved on August 13. 2020.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the women who have come before me and who have walked alongside me, those who have taught me the importance of living life from a space of compassion and critical hope. And to those who continue to fight — for the right to tell stories, for those stories to have a place in this world, and to live life outside of the bounds of a system that continues to undermine equity.

And to my father, who shared his love for movies with me. Thank you for trusting that I would always land on my feet.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is hard to encompass all this journey has meant and even more so how much the support of so many has motivated and inspired me to complete it. The world has changed in palpable ways since I met my supervisor, Dr. Diane Conrad, for the first time in 2014 to discuss applying for doctoral studies. I'll never forget her words of wisdom, "don't do a Ph.D. if you are looking for a job, do it because you have a question you need to answer." Those words and so many others she has shared have been my guide for so much of the last seven years. Her steadiness, humour, and gentle nudges are matched only by her patience and amazing eye for detail — I won the lottery of doctoral supervisors. I can't imagine how I would have made it to the end without her. I also need to offer special recognition and thanks to Dr. David Lewkowich for nurturing and encouraging creative spaces of wonder through which I could study, learn, and grow. It was under his instruction that the potential of digital storytelling as a powerful and poetic way to share my knowledge and conduct my research emerged. For that, I am forever grateful. Finally, I am profoundly thankful to Dr. Michelle Meagher, who planted the seed of considering feminism as an ethic versus an identity to me. This opened new worlds of thinking, which has richly informed this dissertation, my work in education, and my understanding of what it means to live a feminist life.

So much of this research project evolved due to unforeseen circumstances. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, I had to rethink my research design for an online format. However, every challenge has a silver lining. For me, it was the opportunity to participate in workshops and training with the StoryCenter on the art and craft of digital storytelling. Without the talented, committed, and gracious people I met in these sessions, I don't know what this dissertation would look like. They modelled how to facilitate a digital storytelling process online and cultivated such an inspirational space for engaging in my own imaginative and creative processes. To Joe Lambert, Brooke Hessler, Rob Kershaw, Marie Lovejoy, and Janet Ferguson, thank you for sharing your wisdom and welcoming me into your beautiful and courageous community of storytellers with grace, humour, and generosity of spirit.

Little in my life has taken a linear trajectory, and the last seven years are no exception, with long and short forays back into the film world intertwined with my studies. These moments of reconnection have led me to work alongside some of the most generous filmmakers I have had the privilege to know. To Chris Fisher and Matthew Chipera, who were the first to re-open the door for me, I am forever grateful to you both for your faith in me. I also would like to thank Shannon Kohli, Moira Kirland, and Anna Culp for being strong women who support and uphold other women. You each embody so much creativity and grace, and I am blessed to have met and learned from each of you. My film community continues to be such a massive source of support, and for each of you who has kept in touch over the years, your words of encouragement from afar and the open the door to return should I choose to are a gift that I don't take for granted. Most of all, thank you to each of you for your commitment to and love for storytelling. You all sacrifice long hours and time with family to bring stories to the screen, stories that heal, make people laugh and cry, and help us share in the beauty of humanity. I am in awe of each of you.

Finally, I must include a special thank you to Michael Brandman. Michael, you believed in me before I believed in myself. You have championed me from afar for over twenty years and offered a light in the distance that I could turn to whenever I felt uncertain or not quite good enough. I can only hope that seeing me complete this journey fills you with so much pride.

To my mother, Marion Jagger and sister, Pam Jagger, you are two of the strongest women I know. You both have set such a high bar for living life with purpose, candour, and commitment to something larger than yourself. To my brother-in-law, Adam Lowe, for your humour, strength of character, and support. You have, in so many ways, been the source of calm and constancy for our family, and your contributions and care do not go unnoticed. Finally, to my niece and nephew, Maeve and Graeme, I don't see you often enough, but you are always in my heart and mind. I hope this work can contribute to fostering a more caring and inclusive world for you and your future families, whatever they may look like. My only sadness is that my dad isn't here to share in this accomplishment, but I know he would be proud to see what his daydreaming, head-in-the-clouds youngest daughter has achieved.

To my dearest friends, my found family, including David Miller, Elspeth Grafton, Jemison Jackson, Belinda Jordan, and many more who have listened to my stories, asked me hard questions and loved me through the good and the bad. I am fortunate to have so many kind, creative, and caring friends to journey alongside through this life.

And, of course, to my partner, Flavio. A lifetime ago, we sat down and talked about what doing my Ph.D. might look like. You have never wavered in your support since that day. Through the successes and struggles, you have stood by me, listened to my wonderings, given me space to learn and grow, held me up in the moments of doubt, and stood back to allow me to shine in the moments of reward. Somehow amid all of it, we brought our two beautiful puppies into our lives and made our little family. You, Lola, and Rocky are my home and greatest joy, where I know I am loved unconditionally, with grace, respect, and care. As this journey ends, I can't wait to see what adventures lie ahead for us all.

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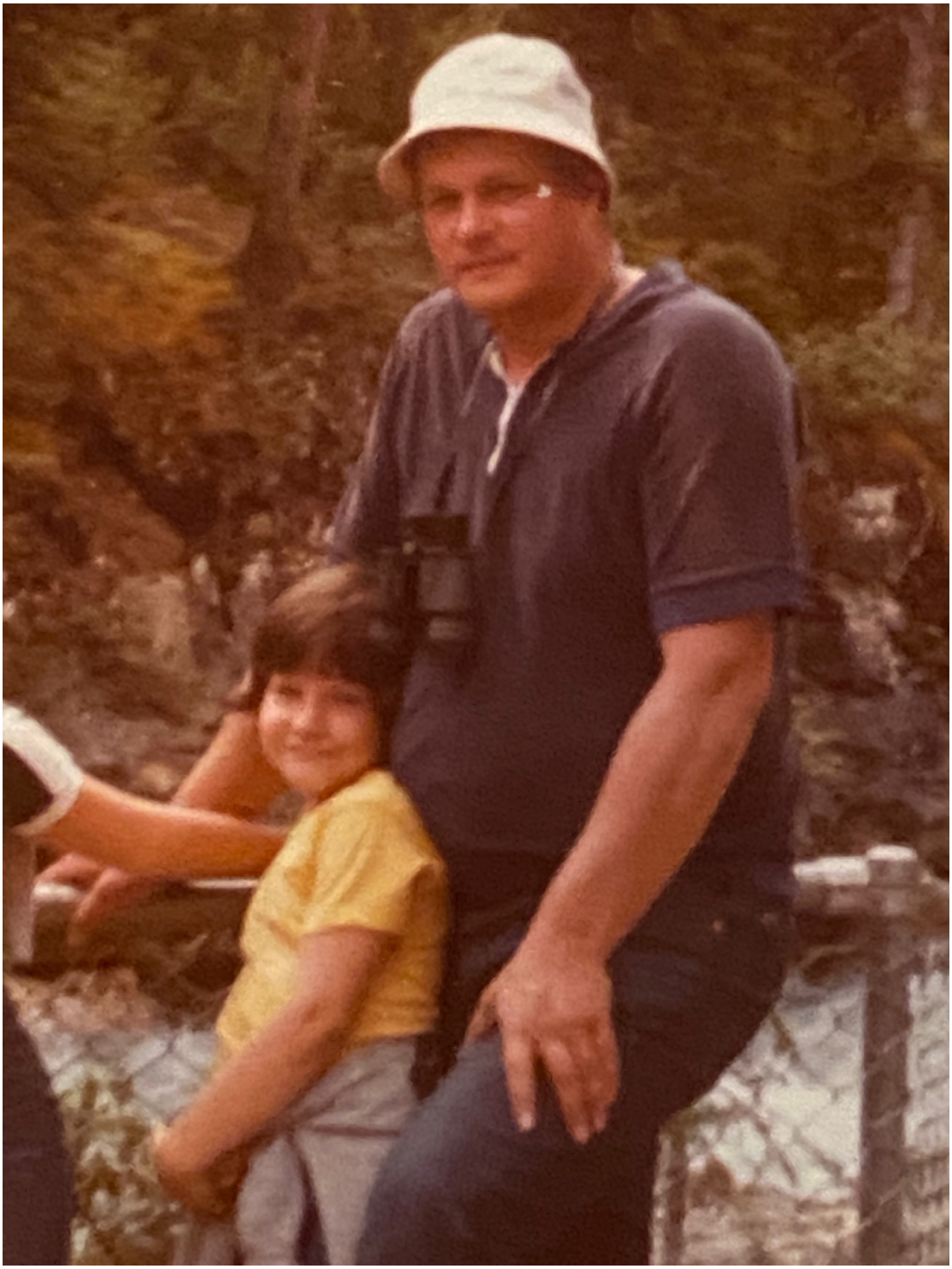

*Figure 1: A girl and her dad: Trish and Bob. Photo credit: Marion Jagger (n.d.).*

**Orienting My Body in the World**

> *Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (Seigworth, & Gregg, 2010, p. 1)*

During the fifth year of my doctoral program, I awoke from a disturbing dream with an upsetting childhood memory in my head. As I awoke, I remembered a moment from my youth when an adult I trusted violated me. I could remember his closeness and the feeling of discomfort as he ran his hand up the back of my leg in a way that I knew was wrong but didn't know how to stop. Standing in the small shack outside of the larger building where the weekly dance was held for the campers at the horse camp I attended. I was frozen to the spot until, luckily, a fellow camper entered the room. I think I have always remembered that this event happened, it is not a suppressed or forgotten moment, but I had allowed it to slip into the back of my memories. What I can't clearly remember, what gripped me with a sense of anxiety and uncertainty when I awoke from my dream, was the question of what happened afterward. Did I tell anyone? If so, why wasn't something said to protect me and others? If I didn't, did people know anyway? Had something about me changed, small but perceptible to those closest to me? As I lay awake in bed, my mind grasped for a more precise memory of the aftermath, but it remained elusive and vague, so much so that I began to doubt that it had ever happened at all. Ahmed (2017) stated:

> Feminism often begins with intensity: you are aroused by what you come up against. You register something in the sharpness of an impression…. Feminism can begin with a body, a body in touch with the world, a body that is not easy in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around. Things don't seem right. (p. 22)

While my memories of that event many years ago are fuzzy, like faded images flashing through my mind, I am left with the firm knowledge that it was a significant moment where things did not *seem right*, as suggested by Ahmed. If I think of that moment as a beginning, it represents an affective thread woven into and amid various relationships, events, and challenges; a sense of understanding emerges about how I have journeyed through life professionally and personally.

Since beginning my doctoral studies in the fall of 2016, my understanding of the knotty intersections between the personal, political, and social has evolved, leading me to focus my attention on the importance of acknowledging that "emotions 'matter' for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds" (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 12). With this knowledge, I understand that throughout my journey in graduate school, I have engaged in a recursive process of looking back, examining moments in my life where I have claimed a feminist identity and why such a claim has resulted in such strong emotions and reactions within my life in education. Re-encountering these moments is an act of anamnesis that "dramatizes and reactivates the past as a means to think it anew" (Lewkowich, 2019, p. 34). Through my doctoral study, I endeavour to add my voice to the growing list of educators and philosophers exploring what it means to "live a feminist life" (Ahmed, 2017) and the possibilities it presents. I also seek to explore the potential for visual narratives to "creat[e] alternatives for emotions' roles in educational practices" (Boler, 1999, p. xiv) in both school and community-based settings. Alongside this, through inquiring more deeply into the "notion that participation and getting your voice out there is inherently liberatory" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 2), my work speaks to the emergence of feminist media pedagogies as tools for examining the complexities of how media, both its creation and consumption, impacts how we experience, remember, and share the world in which we live. Critical to this journey has been a recognition

that emerged early in my doctoral program that my willingness to claim a feminist identity in school spaces was deemed problematic by administrators, parents, and students. This study is rooted in a need to better understand why my being a feminist educator was troublesome and what the collective conversation around feminism(s) emerging from the #MeToo movement means for teachers engaging in feminist pedagogy.

When I began my doctoral program, my research questions were far from fully formed, but as the #MeToo movement emerged into the cultural zeitgeist, I became attuned to my desire to focus on the intersections between my experiences of sexism in schools and the use of visual stories to act as powerful agents of social change. #MeToo was originally conceived by Tarana Burke in 2006 but was popularized in 2017 when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted it alongside an invitation for others who had experienced sexual assault or harassment to do the same. The intention of the hashtag was to encourage "empowerment through empathy" (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p. 96), promising the potential for women to come together in a movement of collective action. Undertaking my studies alongside the evolution of this movement, the Covid-19 pandemic, and a shifting cultural landscape resulting in increased use of social media as a form of activism, has led to critical questions about how educators engage students in conversations involving difficult knowledge.

Social media has complicated matters further by engaging increasing numbers of girls and women in mediating identities and combatting sexism through new forms of digital media (Kim & Ringrose, 2018). The ways in which girls and women mediate their representations in a moderated space under heavy surveillance have led to increased levels of objectification as well as conflicting discourses around women's bodies (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018). Adding to this, the rise of hate speech in online spaces alongside the evolution of the "manosphere... a detached

set of websites and social media groups united by the belief that men are oppressed victims of feminism" (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022, p. 1) calls for critical conversations around the ways in which systemic sexism and misogyny are enlivened today.

For educators, this is an important conversation as younger generations' views on feminism are informed by the ways in which it has materialized in contemporary media spaces. This dissertation emerged from the need to acquire a deeper understanding of why I found a sense of place through identifying as a feminist and how experiences have oriented me ontologically as a teacher/researcher/storyteller towards utilizing a feminist pedagogy in my classroom. Over the course of my studies, the importance of liberatory pedagogies has grown amid increasing awareness of the ways in which systems of oppression impact schooling as well as the effect of rapidly evolving media landscapes on how youth engage with and understand one another. The Covid-19 pandemic has played a significant role in this evolution, leading people of all ages to engage in new forms of social participatory media and digital activism through which a "democratic flow of information helps the audience to take active participation in shaping the follow of new ideas across different formats of media" (Ahlawat, 2022, p. 271). Reflecting on my own experiences in the classroom, where being feminist was often deemed controversial, the arrival of the #MeToo movement into our cultural consciousness amid this shifting mediascape was critical to identifying the questions at the root of my study: *1) What stories, whether visual, written, or lived, inform educators' perceptions/interpretations/understandings of feminism? 2) How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms? 3) How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

**Unravelling Experiences: From Film Sets to Classrooms**

> *I do not assume there is something called affect that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, or even that there is something called affect that can be shared as an object of study. Instead, I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 30)*

I am entangled in a process of becoming – teacher, woman, visual storyteller, scholar, and feminist. This process, which I have come to recognize as fluid, ongoing, and vital to my sense of self and place in the world, has been brought to the fore of my consciousness through a series of critical events, each serving to disrupt, incite, uncover, and invite me to the moment in which I now sit. Taking place in myriad places and times in my life, calling me to pay heed to a feeling that inhabits my body, telling me to sit up, be attentive, and be bold in acknowledging when something is not quite right. Ahmed (2004) framed emotions as an affective economy, "work[ing] as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity but is produced only as an effect of its circulation" (p. 120). She stated, "affective economies need to be seen as social and material, as well as psychic... the circulation of signs of affect shapes the materialization of collective bodies, for example, the 'body of the nation'" (p. 121) or within education, the teaching body. Cultivating a discourse of emotions that shifts away from what they are and toward what they do, Ahmed (2014a) tracked "how emotions circulate between bodies, examining, how they 'stick' as well as move" (p. 4).

Borrowing from this notion, I frame my experiences in the classroom as being fraught with *sticky moments* of imposed silencing and confrontation of my material, social and psychic body, provoking in me a sense of willfulness and an increased willingness to push against the assumptions imposed upon me. Over time, as my body was deemed increasingly problematic, whether it was due to my status as an unmarried, childless woman or my willingness to speak

about feminism with my students and colleagues, my teaching praxis began to reflect what I perceived as a feminist pedagogy in the classroom, where I would actively seek to bring in resources highlighting the experiences of girls and women. This emphasis on representation included selecting stories with female protagonists in my English Language Arts and media arts classrooms or highlighting the oppression of women in my social studies lessons. However, as I began to openly identify as a feminist, I was confronted with an awareness of this identification as precarious, attuned to moments in which I was silenced — by myself and others — or shied away from using it as I began to recognize the tension the use of the word feminist can often provoke.

Having entered doctoral studies later in life, I have come to recognize the questions I seek to answer in this dissertation are rooted in myriad moments of lived experience, such as the one from my dream. These moments, resonating, circulating, entangling, and embedding affective imprints on my memory, date back to my childhood. They include travelling, teaching, and creating and are woven into my professional experiences in both film production and education. My professional life began when I was in my early 20s with a career in the film and television industry, where I worked as a script supervisor. When I was 29, I chose to explore another career option due to a mix of the inconsistencies of a freelance lifestyle common in the film industry, alongside experiences that made me question if I wanted to rely on an industry which I had discovered was prone to a "culture of harassment" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 7) and abuse. Hennekam and Bennett (2017) acknowledged that conditions such as "precarity, competition and lack of regulation could increase both the prevalence of and tolerance for sexual harassment" (p. 417) in creative industries. Having entered the film industry at a young age, I was ill-prepared to understand and absorb the complex ways in which harassment was "both prevalent and

normalized" (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017, p. 418), whether it was through overt sexual harassment, undermining and competitive behaviours from other women, or through a pattern of working in an environment where my suggestions and contributions were often attributed to someone else. This marginalization of women's experience and contributions, which Hennekam and Bennett (2017) identified as a commonplace form of industry socialization, was something I often encountered.

Reflecting on my life on set, I can recall many moments of explicit and implicit sexism, some of which I can now recognize as being overt acts of power and manipulation by people in positions of authority, or from other colleagues, often under the guise of humour. When I acknowledged these acts, either through a purposeful complaint or an emotional reaction, I was often told that I needed to "toughen up" or "grow Teflon shoulders," as if the problem lay within my reaction versus the behaviours to which I was reacting. Ahmed (2021) noted,

> a complaint can be registered before anything is even said or without anything being said. A complaint can be expressed by how a body is not attuned to an environment or by how a person is 'out of kilter with everyone else.' (p. 123)

It felt as though if I was unwilling to adapt to the culture of harassment in film (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017), I would be limited in what jobs I would be considered for and how far I might advance in terms of career growth. This was one of the reasons I chose to return to university to pursue my Bachelor of Education degree.

Having limped through a Bachelor of Arts in my late teens and early 20s, I was surprised to discover how much I loved being in university as an older student. As an eager student, I was encouraged to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Teaching which I began right after completing my teacher education. After graduating in 2008 with my MA, uncertain as to

where a future in film production would take me professionally and personally, I was ready for a change. I now recognize that this decision was partially informed by the recognition of the lack of opportunity for women crew members to move into higher creative positions within the Canadian film industry. While not impossible, it was a rare thing to see a woman director on the sets I worked on. So, I made the decision to pursue a different path and took a teaching position with a large urban school board in Western Canada.

Possessing diverse lived experiences from my life in film as well as the critical thought I had put into considering the power of arts in education through my Master's thesis, teaching presented a new and often foreign world to me. I hoped that a switch in careers would introduce me to a professional world less mired with the complexities I had endured in film. When I first entered the classroom, I was too overwhelmed navigating the responsibilities of teaching and the system of schooling to fully absorb the culture among teachers. However, as time went on, Greene's (1978) call to *wide-awakeness* invoked me to confront difficult moments I had previously ignored or minimized — moments of bullying, othering, and alienation from other teachers. This awakening prompted me to acknowledge the importance of listening to my body, my intuition, and to the *power of feeling*. Boler (1999) described this as "a power largely untapped in Western cultures in which we learn to fear and control emotions" (p. 3).

At the heart of my experiences sat an increasing discomfort with my new career in teaching and how it shaped how I was perceived (and was expected) to live in the world. Upon entering the classroom, I was shocked when confronted by attitudes and behaviours from colleagues, administrators, students, and parents, which I recognize as having harmful implications on the formation of my teaching practice and identity. In my first teaching assignment within the Department of Career and Technology Studies in an urban high school, I

endured sexist comments and jokes often made at my expense. Teaching media studies courses primarily, my male colleagues repeatedly reminded me that I was not "one of the guys" through exclusionary language and behaviours. My approach to teaching photography was critiqued as being too creative for emphasizing the art of story through visual composition versus focusing on technology. After a department meeting where multiple overtly sexual comments were made about another female teacher's body, I was cornered by a male colleague who verbally threatened me if I dared raise a complaint. This exchange was particularly upsetting and when I raised it to my department head, I was cautioned to watch myself and not cause problems. It was events such as this that led me to begin to identify and question the ways in which sexism is reproduced in schools. Coming to terms with the affective implications of myriad complex encounters with students, parents, administrators, and colleagues, I became increasingly attuned to the ways patriarchal discourses are embedded throughout educational institutions shaping my experiences as both a student and teacher.

***Becoming Feminist Killjoy***

Ahmed (2021) reminded us, "you can be put in your place by being reminded of how easy it would be for you to lose your place" (p. 77). As a relatively new teacher struggling to find a sense of place, I could feel the precarity of my position. As time passed, I also became attuned to the ways my existence as an unmarried, childfree woman was deemed problematic within school spaces. This was not something I had anticipated when entering the teaching profession as I was naïve to the unconscious sexism that can exist in schools (Streitmatter & Tom, 1994). I found myself being told in subtle and non-subtle ways that to fully *become teacher* in the eyes of many, was contingent upon also fitting into other identities — specifically mother and wife — in which women are viewed as inherently caring. This belief was reinforced by an almost constant

inquiry by colleagues about my dating and/or marital status and overt questions about how I could relate to students if I didn't have children of my own. Over time, I began to respond to these encounters by pushing back, and openly claiming a feminist identity to those around me — I was becoming a feminist killjoy. Attributed to Sara Ahmed (2012), this title of *killjoy* is given to those who identify the social order imposed by the patriarchy and wilfully speak out against it.

As time passed and I transitioned through working in different school sites, I began to realize that the resistance I encountered to anything feminist was not limited to one building — it was embedded in the system of education. As I began to question and address this more openly — sinking into the space of killjoy — I was compelled towards a deeper inquiry into both my relationship with feminism and why I claimed a feminist identity in both my personal and professional life. As a teacher, this meant seeking to understand what being feminist meant to me both within and outside of my teaching praxis. Ahmed (2017) noted that "living a feminist life requires being willing to get in the way" (p. 66). This dissertation is rooted in my need to understand what has stood in my way as a woman, how I may have stood in the way of others, and what it means to *get in the way* within a patriarchal system of education. To this end, I seek to untangle some complex inner and outer moments that have held me static (even complicit), which add to my belief in the need to think critically about how women's stories are constructed, shared, and interpreted. This has required an acknowledgement of times in which my presence and voice have been deemed problematic and what I have come to refer to as my moments of failed pedagogy. I have come to think of these as instances when my emotions and lived experiences have unintentionally impeded successful teaching and learning or impacted relationships with students.

**Locating My Gaze: The Affective Turn Towards the Power of Story**

Film narratives have been a great source of wonder in my life. It was in a movie theatre that I first discovered many of the horrors of the world, as well as where I discovered much of the beauty and goodness of people, as stories depicting the power and wonder unfolded on the screen, evoking both the horrors of the world as well as encouraged imaginative spaces of possibility through the portrayal of human connection, hope, and care. As I have grown in my understanding of the complexity of history, an increasing awareness of the implications of hegemonic powers, such as colonization and patriarchy, has fostered a mindful attunement to the complex ways film narratives socially construct individual and collective identities. For girls and women, this is important given the ways in which mass media informs our epistemological foundations — largely guiding where we place ourselves in the picture of the world and the ways we engage, confront, or dismiss both our own, as well as other girls and women's stories and experiences (Bromley, 2012). Popular culture plays a pivotal role in this, recognized as a vehicle for commercial enterprises and a tool for shaping and reflecting the desires and dreams of the masses. Hall (2002) stated that "cultures are forever in transition… within this shifting terrain what matters most [is] what you do with culture, that is: the political uses to which culture, all culture is employed" (p. 185–186). When feminism, via the #MeToo movement, enjoyed a renaissance in 2017, there was an unprecedented push for women's stories to have increased exposure, leading to the production of content taking the issue of sexism and sexual violence head-on, such as in Apple TV's *The Morning Show* (Ellenberg et al., 2019), and the feature film, *Bombshell* (Roach, 2019). This also led to a push for increased opportunities for women to be hired in key creative positions as producers and directors, granting a larger voice in the creation of popular culture texts. Alongside this, social media has provided an outlet for feminist

activism, expression, self-representation and the "construction of sexualities and sexual identities" (Gill & Orgad, 2018, p. 1314) in creating and curating digital selves.

Over the course of the last 100 years, modes of communication have become increasingly visual due to a proliferation of photography, film and video, and digital media, leading to new understanding(s) of how visual texts shape our knowledge of self and other (Lister & Wells, 2001). As the power of media continues to grow and expand, with impacts ranging from global to individual, in personal, social, and political contexts, an ongoing investigation into the question of the gaze is called for – as Mitchell (2011) asked, "whose eye is looking and where does it focus" (p. 142). Rooted in Freudian and Lacanian theory, the emergence of the gaze was critical to the evolution of feminist film theory in the 1970s, largely because of Mulvey's (1975) essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.* Sparking a conversation continuing to today around the topic of feminist spectatorship and the role of pleasure in the gaze, Mulvey's theory has been debated, but "most respondents accept [her] argument that there is a 'gaze' at work in cultural and power relations" (Manlove, 2007, p. 85). Institutions of schooling cannot remove themselves from this conversation, with young people increasingly engaged in visual culture and in a cultural time when sexual harassment has been identified as a major concern for both students and teachers (Higham, 2018). Additionally, reflecting on my experiences in the film industry, feminist pedagogies carry the potential to disrupt patterns of behaviour and ways of knowing that start in schools, therefore carrying the potential to impact the ways in which young people entering the workforce will respond to the reinforcement of gendered power structures and other inequities.

Upon entering doctoral studies, I knew that I wanted to explore the potential of participatory visual methods in my research. As I engaged in my course work and then explored

my interpretations and understandings of feminism, I considered ways through which to connect my individual narratives through "an artistic practice with the potential to help transform knowledge production and enhance dialogue" (Wiebe, 2015, p. 244). Seeking to collectively explore the potential of the process of co-creating visual narratives, this study invited conversation around the possibilities for participatory visual methods to contribute to the growing proliferation of digital platforms "enable[ing] new kinds of intersectional conversations" (Baer, 2016, p. 18). As Foster (2007) noted "issues of dialogue and power relations between the researcher and researched have long been important for feminists" (p. 365). By engaging in a collective, or co-creative, process in my research my goal was to address these issues of power, cultivating a more dialogic space for sharing lived experiences. Thinking of becoming feminist as a life project, Ahmed (2017) invited us to ask:

> Ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world (in a not-feminist and antifeminist world); how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls. (p. 1)

Asking such questions calls for a shift away from thinking of feminism as an identity stance — of *being* a feminist — towards a more phenomenological one. This calls for an embodied and affective engagement with feminisms, orienting oneself towards the "importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2).

As I consider this reorientation, reflecting on my own journey and relationship with feminism, I am increasingly aware of how and where the circumstances into which I was born (white, Canadian, middle-class) immediately impacted and shaped the trajectory of my life, impressing upon me the importance of acknowledging how "social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 5). As I grow more familiar with the vital work conducted in the areas of feminist research and pedagogies, alongside the complex and divisive times in which we are living, the pressing need to act collaboratively and listen attentively to one another seems of increasing importance. I recognize at the heart of my research lies the desire to re-discover what Anzaldúa (2002) referred to as the "knowledge that we are in symbiotic relationship to all that exists and co-creators of ideologies – attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values" (p. 2), requiring the cultivation of "critical practices for accounting for our own situatedness in histories that have shaped the conditions of possibility for our actions" (Shotwell, 2016, p. 5). In the sections that follow, I delve further into my personal history, exploring what has led me to this place, and finding ways through which to bridge the complexities of empowering voice while at the same time acknowledging the critical need for listening.

**Orienting Experience: An Arts-Based Autoethnography**

Both participatory and feminist research methods require the researcher to engage in articulating what is called the researcher's social location. This entails positioning personal experiences within the context of the work being undertaken. Spry (2001) referred to this practice as one "defined as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (p. 710). Employing artistic forms in what Sinclair (2019) called "a mixture of memoir and research reflection" (p. 1), I seek to acknowledge pivotal moments in my life that have shaped who I am as a researcher. This process was critical to understanding my journey to

becoming feminist, as I strove to locate my lived experience and consciously understand what has led me to this study. To begin this process, I open the next section using the format of a film script, sharing a difficult conversation I had with an administrator during my time as a classroom teacher where I was deemed a problem for identifying as a feminist in the classroom. Acting as an affective moment when I bumped up against what Ahmed (2017) named an "institutional brick wall." This is described as:

> a structure that many are invested in not recognizing. It is not simply that many are not bruised by this structure. It is also that they are progressing through the reproduction of what is not made tangible. When we are talking of sexism as well as racism, we are talking about systems that support and ease the progression of some bodies (Ahmed, 2017, p. 158).

Through such autoethnographic vignettes and through incorporating photographs, I intend to honour the role of the visual in both individual and collective cultural memory, crafting a recursive méttisage, to "reformulate understandings of self and other in ways that are meaningful and appropriate" (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p. 3), as I locate my lived experience, both within and outside of schools.

The scenes below detail a moment of *thrownness,* defined as a vulnerable situation in which we are "faced with a world where we are precariously situated in a particular place, at a particular historical moment, and among a particular crowd with the inescapable task of tackling our world around us to make it meaningful" (Lagerkvist, 2017, p. 2). During this moment, I (named Ms. Jones in the vignette) was instructed by my administrator to avoid any conversation about women's rights or feminism in my classroom. I reflect on it now as the catalyst that led me to return to graduate school. It presented an opening through which I began to feel and recognize

many moments of tension held within my body — both since entering the classroom and throughout my life. This and the stories that follow align with what Gallop (2002) calls anecdotal theory, through which she claimed the importance of anecdotes for sharing the "uncanny detail of lived experience" (p. 9) as critical to the project of meaning-making. Through examining these seemingly disparate moments, I come to better understand why and when I started to align with the term feminist, what it has meant within my life as an educator and storyteller, and why it is important to understand the history of feminism — as social movement, theoretical lens, or identity, for any educator aiming to engage in feminist pedagogy.

***The Principal's Office: Storying a Moment of Thrownness***

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN SCHOOL ~ DAY
It's an early spring day in a Canadian prairie city. Clumps of snow melt to reveal the brown grass and mud below. We pan across the flat, windy landscape to reveal the empty school playground. SUV's line the street in front of the school as parents wait for their children to emerge at the end of the school day. The bell suddenly echoes over the sound of the whistling wind, the front door opens, and students start to filter out. The camera pushes past them entering the school foyer.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY ~ DAY ~ Continuous
Moving through the entrance way we see younger children struggling to pull on their winter boots as teachers and teachers' assistants work with them to get them out the door. A sign hangs on the wall that says: ALL VISITORS REPORT TO MAIN OFFICE. A teacher walks down the hall towards camera. This is MS. JONES; she is smiling at students but has a concerned look on her face. A student, Susan, chases after her:

Susan
(slightly out of breath)
Ms. Jones! Can I talk to you for a minute?

Ms. Jones glances up at the clock on the wall, then over towards the office. She is almost always available to her students after school but today she has been summoned somewhere else.

Ms. Jones
I'm sorry, Susan. I have a meeting I have to get to. Is everything okay? Can we talk tomorrow?

Susan
(a little dejected)
Yeah. It's okay. I just needed some advice about something… Will you be free tomorrow at lunch?

Ms. Jones
Of course. Come to my classroom with your lunch and you can fill me in then. Okay?

Susan
Okay! Hope you have a good night, Ms. Jones.

As Susan dashes the hallway, Ms. Jones watches her go, then turns back toward the office door. She mutters so no one can hear:

Ms. Jones
(quietly)
Me too…

Taking a deep breath, Jones walks towards the office and exits through the office door.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM – DAY – A few minutes later Ms. Jones sits in the principal's office by herself. The office is meticulous, with not a scrap of paper on the desk, books organized neatly in the small bookshelf and inspirational posters line the walls. She sits at a small round meeting table; the door to the hallway is open and she can hear the phones ringing in the outer office. She fidgets with the keys in her hand when suddenly the PRINCIPAL enters. She is a tall woman with an angular, serious face. She glances over at Ms. Jones as she closes the door behind her. Then sits at the table across from her.

Principal
(in a serious tone)
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I'm sorry to keep you waiting, I was dealing with a parent issue.

Ms. Jones
That's okay. Did everything get sorted out?

Principal
Yes. It's fine.
(attempts a rigid smile)
I needed to talk to you about something that has been shared with me by a student in your class.

Ms. Jones
Oh? What's that?

Principal
Well, we've had a complaint. From a boy in your grade 9 Social Studies class… Apparently… well, apparently, you've been talking a lot about women's rights in your classroom.

Ms. Jones
(a little confused)
Yes… We're learning about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms right now. It's a part of the curriculum, equality rights.

Principal
Yes. Well, that's true. However, this young man has told his parents, who I have spoken to, that you have told the class you are a feminist. Is that true?

Ms. Jones
(hesitantly)
Yes…

Principal
(a little more forcefully)
Do you feel this is appropriate? Aren't you concerned you are going to influence them? Apparently, some of the girls in his class are starting to also refer to themselves as feminists.

Ms. Jones suppresses a small smile. She's a little surprised to hear this as none of the students have confided this to her.

Ms. Jones
Well, we've spoken about what feminism is, and how it's rooted in the fight for women's rights. And yes, I have told them I believe that women, that all people deserve equality. But I don't feel that I've done anything to encourage them to use the word. I didn't know that any of the girls were saying that about themselves…

(there's an awkward pause as the two women look at each other across the table)

Ms. Jones
Can I ask which student and parent have voiced the complaint? I think it would help me add some context.

Principal
That's not really the point. Most importantly, we want to put an end to this.

Ms. Jones
To what exactly?

Principal
(a tinge of anger and frustration)
To the girls in your class calling themselves feminists. Plus, I don't want this young man to be further upset.

Tension fills the air, Ms. Jones looks down, her own frustration mounting, trying to fight the tears that are welling behind her eyes.

Ms. Jones
(in a restrained tone)
I am not sure I understand the problem. I am teaching the curriculum; I have not asked anyone to "become" a feminist. I regret if that has offended a boy in my class, but I have excellent relationships with my students, and many of the girls have told me how much they appreciate my teaching. They feel like they have a voice in my classroom… What exactly are you asking of me?

Principal
(sharply)
To be clear, I am not asking. You are no longer to discuss women's rights in your classroom. This young man has told me you have an agenda, and he doesn't believe you are being truthful when you speak about women not being considered people in our country's history.

Ms. Jones
So, you're directing me to stop teaching the curriculum…

Principal

From what I've heard you've covered that portion enough. Please avoid this topic in your class in the future, and I will ask you to no longer use the word feminist in this school. I don't want you influencing your students this way.

The principal stands from the table and moves to her desk where she turns on her computer, a clear non-verbal dismissal. With tears in her eyes, Ms. Jones gets up and leaves the office.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY – DAY – Continuous

She enters the hallway and immediately bumps into another TEACHER who sees the upset look on Ms. Jones' face.

Teacher
Are you okay?

Glancing back at the open door to the principal's office, knowing they can potentially be heard. Ms. Jones summons a small smile.

Ms. Jones
(with false enthusiasm)
Great! Yes, everything is great! Must go do some marking, see you later.

With that, she rushes past the TEACHER to find a quiet space where she can try to make sense of the exchange that has just occurred.

FADE OUT.

The scripted conversation above was one of many moments of overt sexism I experienced over the seven years I was in the classroom. This encounter sits as an example of what I have come to recognize as an intertwined series of "material situations, physically-felt struggles, and embodied encounters with others, especially women, [which have] wrested – sometimes catapulted – my precarious self-identification as a feminist" (Sinclair, 2019, p. 1). Revisiting this specific difficult conversation allowed me to interrogate a moment when I was "put in touch with the world through alienation with the world" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 43), as my role

as a teacher and my identity as a feminist were placed in opposition to one another. When thinking about other exchanges or confrontations that occurred in my journey to doctoral studies, it was this moment that brought me to my first place of awakening. Not only did it throw me into asking complex questions about why claiming a feminist identity was problematic, but I came to understand how this moment also set me on a path requiring me to interrogate my beliefs about what feminist and/or liberatory pedagogies should look and feel like for both the teacher and the student. Turner (2021) stated "the feminist journey is personal and feminist theory can frequently feel abstract, but both are needed to live a feminist life" (p. 39). However, if "no research is carried out in a vacuum… [and] the very questions we ask are always informed by the historical moments we inhabit" (McRobbie, 1982, p. 48), to acknowledge my journey towards feminism is to engage in remembering multiple moments recursively and critically. Smith (1999) called this a journeying toward a way of learning to be at home within myself, allowing me to live "in a more creative way, a good way, a healthy way, a way tuned to the deepest truth of things" (p. 2).

### *"Everything I Do is Judged and They Mostly Get It Wrong:" Tales of a Willful Girl*[1]

Born in 1972 in Winnipeg, Manitoba and then transplanted to the suburbs of Calgary, Alberta in 1979, my childhood was like that of many white, middle-class children growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. My parents were products of the post-World War II era. Born at the tail end of the so-called "silent generation," they were raised in the shadow of both world wars and the Great Depression by people of diverse backgrounds and humble means. Traditional and somewhat conservative in both their politics and values, it was through their hard work and choices that my older sister and I experienced the certainty of knowing that we had a roof over our heads and food in the fridge. We attended public schools in the southwest quadrant of

[1] This lyric is from Difranco (1996).

Calgary, receiving a respectable public education. From a young age, the academic trajectory was made clear, my sister and I were to attend school, including university, do our very best to achieve high grades, and then pursue something meaningful, something that would give back, with our lives. The words "career" or "profession" was not explicitly stated, after all my parents were products of an era during which the feminine mystique prevailed, when "only one out of three heroines in the women's magazines was a career woman" (Friedan, 1963, p. 42). However, perhaps unknown to even them, they instilled in both my sister and me a sense that we were to aim for a higher level of education and achieve more than previous generations of women in our family had been able to conceive.

The value of education was deeply emphasized in my upbringing, alongside the deeply held belief that knowledge equalled opportunity and choice. Given the belief that "children grow and develop amid society; the people, places, objects and ideas they encounter form the basis of their learning and development" (Hayes et al., 2017, p. 1), it was inevitable that we would be the first generation of Jaggers for whom the completion of a university education would be a necessary achievement. When I consider my childhood, the emphasis on academic achievement over an awareness or relationship with my body is evident, which I now understand as part of a patriarchal imperative perceiving the body as "something to be rejected in the pursuit of intellectual equality according to a masculinist standard" (Shildrick & Price, 1999, p. 3). Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, amid the cultural transformations brought on by the second wave of feminism, coming to terms with the knowledge that my body matters, is aligned with Rice's (2014) theory of becoming an embodied self as an "ongoing and open-ended, as historically and socially constructed, and as determined by many forces" (p. 27).

My mother was the first force to contribute meaningfully to my becoming. My childhood memories are vague and fuzzy; I recall growing up conscious of her struggles with her body – her survival of polio as a child, the abuse she encountered at the hands and words of her own mother, and the emotional devastation she encountered through the loss of her first child. I never had the chance to meet my brother, as his life ended long before mine began. However, his existence is imprinted on my body, the loss of the promise of his life irrevocably shaping our family, where emotions were often stifled due to the "stiff-upper-lip" Anglo-Saxon upbringing of both my mother and father. My experience was not unique with studies showing that children born into homes with unresolved grief can suffer from what is called replacement theory or vulnerable child syndrome (Cain & Cain, 1964; Powell, 1995). One symptom of this syndrome is the development of identity issues, which I can see in the ways I struggled to find a sense of self-growing up.

In my early twenties, having done my duty and gone (somewhat reluctantly) to university, I was eager to claim some sense of agency in my life. Unlike many young women, I had never been interested in marriage or children, rather my dreams involved living a creative life. Above all else, I wanted to travel and see the world. A dream which I put on hold until I realized that none of my girlfriends shared a similar desire of backpacking and exploring, so I decided to go on my own. For the next two years I planned and saved, working two part-time jobs while going to university, never once considering that venturing out into the world alone was not deemed appropriate or safe behaviour for a young woman. As I realized my trip was perceived as foolhardy, careless, and an invitation for harm, I also discovered the belief held by many that young women only travel to engage in sexual escapades away from the watchful eye and scrutiny of family and close friends. Looking back this was a pivotal time and experience in

my life, awakening me to what I have come to understand as the dualism of Western ways of knowing, embedded in a "correlation and association of the mind/body opposition with the opposition between male and female, where man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned" (Grosz, 1994, p. 4). The notion that, as a young woman, I would have the common sense, intellect, and ability to explore foreign countries safely, was unfathomable to many as I was repeatedly informed, *the world is not safe for a girl on her own*.

Regardless of the concerns of others, I landed in Paris on a rainy April morning where, despite my well-read guidebook on Western Europe, I soon discovered how little I knew about navigating my way in a foreign country. Arriving at the hostel I had booked for the first three nights, I was informed they (or I) had made a mistake, and I could only stay for one. Overwhelmed, alone, and jet-lagged, I could have turned around and gone home – nevertheless, I persevered. Over the following six weeks, I navigated my way through five countries, making friends with fellow travellers, and familiarizing myself with an emotion with which I have come to believe everyone should make a peaceful acquaintance, *loneliness*. Having been warned by my well-intentioned father, "not speak to anyone I don't know," I quickly learned to navigate the inner tensions of dining alone, wandering through unknown cities without companionship, and perhaps the most important, listening to my own inner and embodied tensions. While my experiences and memories of that journey are mostly filled with moments of great wonder and exploration, they are also intertwined with some uncertainty and fear, during which I felt the unease of being hissed at by men on the boardwalk in Lagos, Portugal, being cornered in a subway underpass by a strange man in Barcelona, Spain, and an internal foreboding ever present as a young woman walking down a foreign street at night on her own.

*Figure 2: Trish in Milan. Photo credit: Sara Ross-Smith, (1992).*

From a phenomenological perspective, through travelling on my own, I learned that my body is not "a subject separated from the world or from others," rather I "perceive and receive information of and from the world" (Grosz, 1994, p. 86) through my interactions within it. Resulting from this, my intuition brought me to meaningful encounters with the people I met along the way, but perhaps more so with myself. Like many women who view travelling on their own as an opportunity to "evaluate their own values, develop their identities and acquire knowledge" (Pereira & Silva, 2018, p. 135) my journey provided a meaningful step towards developing a sense of autonomy and agency. Returning from my trip, I was filled with a deeper sense of my own abilities to navigate the world, more confidence in who I was, and a desire to continue to explore and travel. Having accomplished what so many had told me was impossible,

to walk in this world alone as a woman, my sense of self had flourished through perseverance and a willingness to venture beyond what I was raised to believe possible for a girl.

***Becoming Artist: Lights! Camera! Action!***

At the age of 23, I embarked upon what seemed to many another futile and impossible dream, pursuing a career in the Canadian film and television industry. Having acted on stage throughout high school and for a brief time in university, I ultimately decided I was more at ease working behind the camera and pursued training in the position of script supervisor. Defined as the on-set liaison between the director and editor of a production, this position involves collaborating with key creative and technical personnel to ensure the visual continuity of a production while maintaining a running set of notes for the editors. Although traditionally held by women, it was the potential to learn what was required to write a great script, or at least, a good script that could be crafted into a great movie, which pulled me towards this job.

Having spent most of my 20s working on sets, I often say that I grew up in the film industry. It could alternately be immensely fulfilling and incredibly challenging as I learned how to adapt to new personalities and expectations with each new project. The film industry functions with its own norms of behaviour and language. I loved being on set and often felt (then, as I do now) most at ease among the eclectic and creative people I worked alongside. However, to deny the ways in which gender impacted the culture on set that I experienced would be naïve. Film crews have historically been predominantly male with women occupying positions in what are derogatorily called the “pretty” departments (hair, make-up, wardrobe). I met some women who had fought (and were fighting) their way into the camera department, many of whom endured high degrees of sexism and abusive behaviour along the way.

My position of script supervisor is a rarity in the sense that it is considered a key position requiring proximity and relationships with the cast, producers, and director, while also demanding high attention to detail and a critical understanding of the visual language of filmmaking. Heavily relied on by all the other departments to help maintain visual and story continuity, script supervisors also possess an intricate knowledge of editing. This includes understanding screen direction, camera lenses and angles, story structure, and pacing. A highly feminized position, few people outside of film have heard the job title and few people within the business itself are aware of the complexity of the position. We are often referred to as "scriptee," "script girl" (even the men who take on the role can be called this) or by the most derogatory of them all — simply "book." Nameless, faceless, mindless.

Amid the myriad productions I worked on over the course of the first ten years of my career, when I was working full-time in the film industry, I encountered only two women directors, both of whom experienced greater scrutiny and distrust than their male counterparts. I saw very few women overcome the barriers to moving from a technical position on set, to a creative, "above-the-line" career. As much as I loved being a part of the film creation process, I knew, as I mentioned previously, there was an unspoken limit to where I could advance in my career. This was made more complex due to the scarcity of work in Western Canada which often cultivated more competition than camaraderie among women on set.

In my position, the competition was even more intense as there is usually only one script supervisor on a set, unless there are multiple units shooting, in which case there is a main unit script supervisor who participates in the hiring of someone to work on the additional unit(s). Working on "2nd Units" is considered an excellent way to gain experience, and like many, this is how my career began when, after a year of training and a couple of very short contracts, I was

hired to work on a television series produced by Disney filmed in Calgary and surrounding areas. Working two or three days a week on the unit in charge of visual effects shots and inserts, I infrequently worked with the main cast. However, through a few brief exchanges, the lead actor on the show decided he liked me, and before I knew it, I received a phone call that I was being bumped up to work on the main unit. Excited as I was, the downside to this was that for me to advance in my career, another script supervisor was going to lose her job. I voiced my discomfort with this revelation but was told the decision had been made and was final. Young, naïve, and unprepared for the fallout to come. I was devastated when the woman who lost her job took her hurt out on me by spreading a rumour that I was sexually involved with the actor. She claimed that our supposed relationship was the reason she had been fired. It was untrue, however, having never encountered something so salacious being said about me, I was unsure of how to react or respond. Reflecting on that experience, I have now come to recognize the ways in which I embodied the emotions felt – hurt, guilt, suspicion, betrayal, and vulnerability; these sensations were *imprinted upon* my body through what I have come to understand as a form of violence. Ahmed (2017) interpreted violence as a "mode of address" which:

> Does things. You begin to expect it. You learn to inhabit your body differently, it is your relation to your own body that changes: you become more cautious, timid; you might withdraw in anticipation that what happened before will happen again… You begin to learn about being careful, not having things like that happen to you, is a way of avoiding becoming damaged… You are learning, too, to accept that potential for violence as imminent, and to manage yourself as a way of managing the consequence." (p. 24)

The moment passed, nevertheless, the damage was done. Not to my career but to my sense of self, to my body and its willingness to take up space, to my understanding of how I was not only susceptible to being subjectified by men, but also by other women.

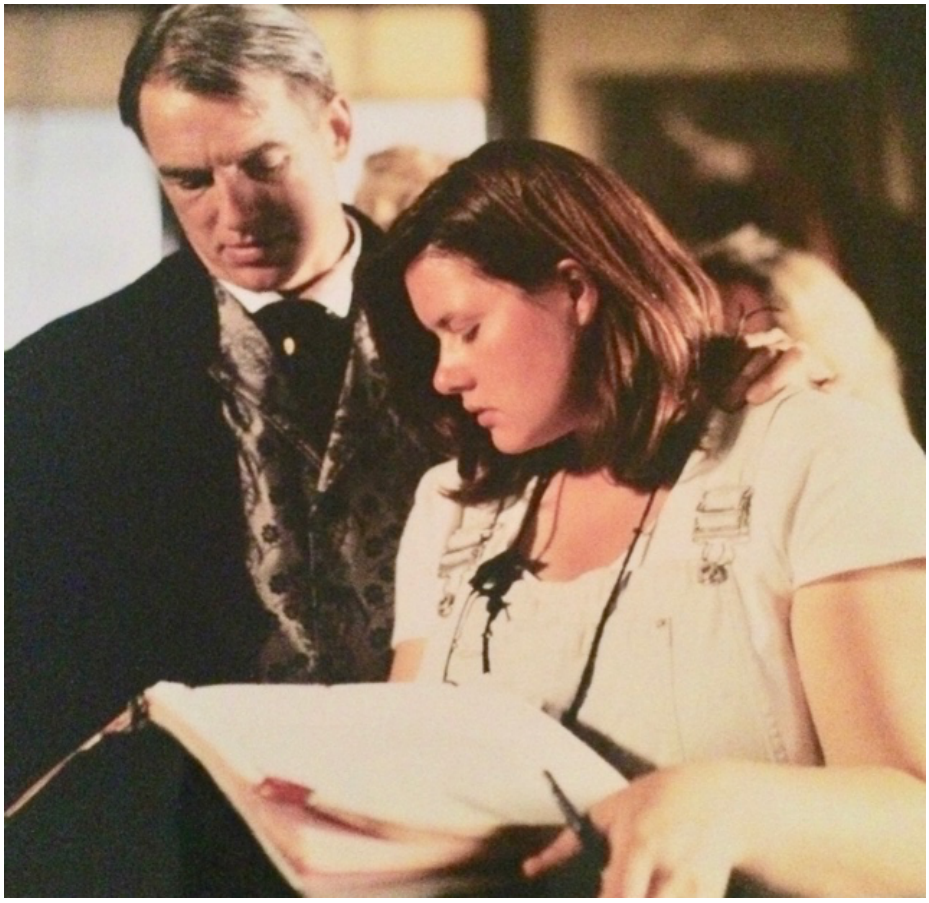

*Figure 3: On the set of "Crossfire Trail" with Mark Harmon. Photo credit: Brooke Palmer (1999).*

As I have navigated my career in education, the impact of my life in film on who I am as a woman, educator, and visual storyteller has become increasingly apparent. Through it I travelled extensively across Canada, working with wonderfully creative and collaborative artists and technicians, while developing knowledge and talents for visual storytelling. However, this upsetting moment at the beginning of my career does not stand alone. While there are stories of

harassment and inappropriate behaviour by men, it is the spaces of aggressive competition with other women, I find myself recursively exploring. Moments of humiliation and insult where other women have commented on my physical appearance and my age as reasons for being hired instead of my skill, ability, or kindness. Moments where competition with other women emerged, positioning me in an oppositional space, and resulting in emotions of betrayal, hurt, and distrust.

I am aware that I am not immune from also falling into the spaces of reproducing harmful actions toward other women. I now more able to recognize complexities within those relationships – women struggling for survival and space in the male-dominated world of film production, our gendered bodies unsure of how to orient themselves emotionally and physically in the "bodily habitation of space in relation to objects and others" (McMahon, 2016, p. 219). We were all more alike than we realized, women who shared similar desires, striving to build careers and an aspiration "to make a commitment to the world, not just to [our]selves and [our] families" (Levine, 2015, p. 43). These experiences with other women within this male-dominated environment greatly impacted who I was when I entered the teaching profession, and continue to shape the way I live, work, and create in my current endeavours.

**Becoming Teacher: Learning to Speak, Learning to Listen**

My decision to return to university to pursue my Bachelor of Education in 2001 surprised no one more than myself. Prompted by a multitude of reasons ranging from long stretches of unemployment which stood in stark contrast to long, unforgiving hours on set, and lingering implications of incidents like the one described above. I had, in many ways, lost my sense of purpose. I felt, as Ahmed (2017) suggested, "we might sense how a life has a shape when it loses

shape… maybe we realize: it would have been possible to live one's life another way" (p. 47). My teacher education program led to many such moments of realization.

While engaged in the journey of *becoming teacher*, I became cognizant of how my identity is framed by specific events in my life as a student, woman, and filmmaker, while also gaining the knowledge that no single one of these identities could fully encompass how I defined myself or am comfortable being defined by others. My decision to pursue teaching and education evolved partially out of many previous jobs and volunteer work with young people. I also believed that as a teacher I could reclaim my voice and a sense of agency over my life while contributing to society in what I had been encouraged to perceive by my family as a more meaningful and moral profession. What I could not recognize then, was the ways in which I was seeking to validate my own passion for visual storytelling and my deeply held belief that films "can prompt and sustain philosophical reflection on important aspects of human experience" (Kupfer, 2012, p. 1). Consequently, returning to school was an opportunity to rediscover my passion for learning, through which I would reclaim a sense of creative agency and possibility, striving to make a critical contribution using the knowledge I had gained through my experience in film.

**Neoliberalism in the Classroom: Pedagogies of Resistance**

Entering the classroom, I encountered many factors serving to inhibit teachers from engaging in their professional lives as an interconnection between the individual self and other, removing and replacing them/me "with policy, structures, and programmes, which diminish the role of teacher, and make her subject to checking" (Mercieca, 2011, p. 44). The Hollywood myth that I had grown up watching, in which "good teachers are projected on the screen as bright lights in schools of darkness" (Dalton, 1995, p. 24), was to be overshadowed by the reality of a

system entrenched in neo-liberal discourses. Neoliberalism is “the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic conditions... under [it], everything is either for sale or plundered for profit” (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 22). This has impacted education leading to attacks on public education by neoliberal movements which ideologically align with the belief in the need to minimize the impact of the state in favour of private enterprise. Leading to a reframing of democracy towards a focus on how and what we consume, while “demobiliz[ing] crucial progressive social movements that have been the driving force behind nearly all of the democratic changes in our societies and in our schools” (Apple, 2017, p. 149). One example of the encroaching neoliberal agenda in schools lies within what Biesta (2015) referred to as *learnification*, fostering “the influence of neo-liberal policies that seek to burden individuals with tasks that used to be the responsibility of governments and the state” (p. 76). Smith (2014) likened this to a “recipe for war” in which participants “find themselves faced with new forms of aggression in behaviourally defiant students, in self-interested client-service provider relationships, in the monetization of human values, in the hyper-competitiveness of a dualistic axiology” (p. 19). I experienced this within my own teaching experiences where the rhetoric on caring relationships with students often stood in stark contrast to the imposition of for-profit funding models and attempts to undermine confidence in public education in favour of privatization (Mullen et al., 2013).

Within the formation of teacher identities, this promotes an “I have to get you before you get me” (p. 19) mentality which Smith (2014) described as, requiring the need to “be tough, self-interested, competitive, and paranoid, while in my family, school, or classroom I must shed all this and become sweet, gentle, accommodating, forgiving, generous, and supportive of others” (Smith, 2014, p. 19). I contend that for women, living within this dichotomy is made even more

complex amid what Rottenberg (2017) called “the still-incomplete conversion of middle-class women into human capital due to the quandary reproduction continues to present” (p. 333). This has not only resulted in many women delaying motherhood, but increasingly for some, not experiencing it at all.

Functioning within “a social system that is male defined” (Turner, 1999, p. 188), I believe for many of my colleagues, I caused a disruption to the narrative of who and what a woman should be and how they should “act” in the world, specifically as teachers. Turner (1999) reminds us that thinking of “women as actors is nothing new. Women have always served as social actors, rehearsing (never really ready) the various roles defined and imprinted by man through his desire and fear” (p. 188–189).

Male colleagues, students, and parents also often struggled to make sense of me. Certain experiences reinforced this: having a male parent tell me that I should not be working with children because I am not a mother; confronting unwanted advances from a male administrator who, when rebuffed, abused his position to undermine my voice and position within the school; and even confronting challenges from male students when assigning novels with girls and women as protagonists for a class assignment. As Ahmed (2017) stated, “when you aim not to reproduce a world that directs attention to men, you are threatening. When your being threatens life, you have to wrap life around being” (p. 227). With each incident, I became more resolute in finding spaces for girl's and women’s stories and in finding my own voice as a teacher. Often willfully speaking out loud about the moments that have served to alienate me from feeling at home in my/the teaching body. Such experiences created a bricolage of interweaving narratives, and numerous “sticky” moments of affective engagement (Ahmed, 2014b), implicating people

from all genders and all ages in sexist acts, in which many of them, I believe, unconsciously engaged.

***What's Love Got to Do With It?***

Snowber (2016) reminded us that "this life is about connection" (p. 6), and as I entered the teaching profession, I discovered profound connections between my lived experiences alongside moments fraught with immense challenge as I struggled to connect with students, colleagues, and my evolving teacher identity. Throughout my seven years in the classroom, there were meaningful moments of connection with students. However, as an unmarried, childfree woman, I often felt excluded, judged, belittled, and marginalized by colleagues, administrators, and parents. Colleagues took it upon themselves to make statements to me such as: "You won't understand love until you give birth," "people are talking about the time you spend with him, you better watch out for your reputation," or the ever-present question, "are you engaged yet?" As the years progressed, I understood the scrutiny I lived under and the discomfort I caused many colleagues. It appears many considered motherhood a critical requirement to fully *becoming teacher* — by not fulfilling this obligation, my ability to care for my students was scrutinized and doubted, leading me to a hyper-awareness of the ways in which terms such as love, and care are employed within school spaces. Upon meeting with a mother of a student I was struggling with, I asked her to offer me some advice on how to overcome the conflict that had developed between her daughter and me. Her simple (yet very complicated response!) was, "you just have to love her!"

This meeting left me bewildered. While I possessed a deeply held belief that it was my responsibility to build meaningful and supportive relationships with my student, love seemed a vague yet highly charged word to use to describe my professional obligations. Her daughter was

rude, disengaged, and purposefully defiant towards me. As a relatively new teacher, unprepared, ill-equipped, and lacking support in how to navigate difficult students — the mother's answer provided little insight into how to bridge the divide that had grown between her daughter and me. This was another moment of awakening, planting a seed of wonder around a need to further understand my ethical responsibilities around caring for students, not just in an emotional sense, but in a pedagogical one.

### *Locating Care in Education*

Noddings (1988) identified care as a moral and ethical orientation in teaching, drawing comparisons between mothers and teachers as both invested in producing "acceptable humans" (p. 221). Positioning care as an ethical orientation or relational ethic, dependent on natural caring, Noddings (1988) saw this as a particularly feminine trait. This original conceptualization of care has since been largely critiqued for what Clement (1996) called a "false universalization" of women's experience highlighting a need to think more in terms of a liberatory ethic of care. Dutt and Kohfeldt (2018) spoke to this as ways of thinking through both self-care as well as care for the community where "seeds of liberation are planted through acknowledged interdependence that obligates collective care" (p. 584). As I have journeyed through my doctoral studies, my understanding of the complexity of planting these seeds within existing school systems has grown, specifically for those who struggle to find a sense of belonging or place.

As I retell my story, highlighting critical moments along the way, I have grown to recognize that my proudest moments as a teacher were those which often led to the most alienation. Interestingly, this sense of alienation continued in some ways when I began to teach pre-service teachers, and struggled with the question of where feminism or feminist pedagogies

are addressed in teacher education. Jones and Hughes (2016) referred to this "as *absent presence* in justice-oriented teacher education... naturalizing misogyny and positioning women in service of others." (p. 168). My doctoral research evolved amid a shift towards a more explicit acknowledgement of systemic racism that has occurred in school systems, the "readily available storyline of race and racism in teacher education" (Jones & Hughes, 2016, p. 170) has made me question the lack of similar conversations about misogyny and sexism in both K-12 and post-secondary educational systems.

**Care Within Feminist Pedagogies.** It has long been noted that schools play a role in "perpetuating unequal, cultural, political, and economic realities" (Scering, 1997, p. 62) that exist within societies. Feminist pedagogies offer a site of resistance, the possibility for flow and movement, to honour the "presence, contact, and relations that take place within the range of another's hearing" (Grumet, 1990, p. 278). Defining the potential of feminist pedagogy, Grosz (2010) stated:

> feminist theory has an auspicious future. It is a future bound up with change. It is no doubt linked in various ways to feminist struggles and feminist knowledges produced by previous struggles and knowledges; but it also involves a continual reassessment of what constitutes feminism and what effects feminism can hope to produce. (p. 48)

I add my voice and experiences to this continual reassessment, the urgency and importance of which, I think, are felt even more deeply now.

My research offers insights into the challenges and complexities around confronting sexism within personal encounters, popular culture, and educational spaces (including teacher education). Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) linked "an ethic of care to narrative practices... highlight[ing] the importance of understanding care as a practice" (p. 642). Beginning with the

belief that "an ethic of care [is] enacted in enduring relationships through discursive practice" (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012, p. 645), I offer digital storytelling as a method that holds the potential for engaging individuals in critical dialogues that can bridge differences, help recognize vulnerabilities in others, and offer the possibility of critical hope for a better future.

**Outlining the Dissertation: How the Story Unfolds**

In this chapter, I have laid out the journey that led me to doctoral studies, including both personal and professional moments of attunement and alienation. Through the process of autoethnography, I engaged in articulating my researcher's location, sharing personal experiences from my personal and professional life that led me to teaching, and subsequently to doctoral studies. The intent in sharing parts of my story was to provide context and structure to my study. Drawing critical connections to how I have come to understand the neoliberal forces that inform Western education systems, I outlined the need for feminist pedagogies rooted in an ethic of care. I also introduce my research questions: *1) What stories, whether visual, written, or lived, inform educators' perceptions/interpretations/understandings of feminism? 2) How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms? 3) How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

Chapter 2 builds on my personal experiences endeavouring to trace connections between the evolution of feminisms and the art of storytelling. There has long been a drive within feminist scholarship "to redefine culture from the perspective of women through the retrieval and inclusion of women's work, stories, and artifacts" (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p. 3). However, as the #MeToo movement has highlighted, "the social contract between the state and its female citizens

is broken" (Malik, 2021, p. 9). My research acknowledges that the breaking of this contract not only supports the need for new stories (Malik, 2021), but also demands the imagining of progressive ways through which to share them. Sparked by a realization of the need to understand and contextualize the relationship between feminism and cultural production, in Chapter 2, I explore the interconnections between the evolution of feminist thinking within a broader social and historical context. Then, tracing the path through which cultural production has been interwoven into feminist movements from the late 1800s up to the early 2000s, I outline the growth of feminist media pedagogies amid the era of #MeToo. Through this exploration, the potential for digital storytelling as a tool for supporting and informing a feminist pedagogy rooted in relationship and story emerges.

Hessler and Lambert (2017) argued that "digital storytelling is a pedagogical tool, yes, but it is also pedagogy not just a tool for pedagogy" (p. 22). Recognizing myriad modes and forms through which contemporary feminists communicate and engage in activism using digital media, I endeavour to build on this argument, proposing not only should digital storytelling be considered a pedagogy, but that it is inherently a feminist pedagogy for the ways in which it invites storytellers to generate "ideas about the world we encounter" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 20). With the resurgence of movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatters, the need for 21st century educators to critically examine interpretations of feminism and feminist pedagogy, how they engage in issues such as misogyny and systemic racism within their classrooms, and the need to confront the ways in which education systems reproduce patriarchal, colonial, and racist worldviews is at a critical juncture. While digital storytelling has often been acknowledged and utilized within community-based and academic educational settings as a powerful tool, it is not as well known in K-12 settings, where educators are increasingly called upon to develop both

technical proficiency and pedagogies for utilizing media in classrooms. My dissertation makes a case for encouraging the use of digital storytelling in K–12 settings for how they cultivate inclusive and equitable spaces through which to share lived experiences and cultivate a relational ethic of care amid a complex time of increasing divisions.

Chapter 3 details the emergence of participatory visual methods as both practice and research methodology within educational contexts, underscoring why I was drawn to digital storytelling as an arts-based participatory method in my research. I explore the evolution of participatory how visual methodologies have forged a space within social research, opening new dialogues around issues such as the power and positionality of both the researcher and the researched. Following this, I examine how the use of participatory visual methodologies is being taken up in educational contexts and offer ways for students, teachers, and other stakeholders to share their narratives and lived experiences of schooling. For the purposes of this study, participatory visual methodologies primarily include photovoice/photo elicitation, participatory video, and digital storytelling. Central to this research, is an understanding of the ethical implications and responsibilities of conducting research involving images and the critical questions that must be asked throughout. Low et al. (2017) frame this as an ethics of intersubjective listening that, amidst a time when technology is greatly impacting human connectivity, "fosters an ethics of attention, freedom, and play" (p. 5).

Through undertaking a review of the literature on participatory visual methods, I examine how participatory visual methodologies have woven their way into educational discourses and practices, as well as identified the challenges of the work. In Chapter 3, I discuss how visual methods have been used to explore the complexities of *becoming feminist*, the potential for digital storytelling (as a participatory visual practice) in school spaces, and the challenges of

learning to listen amidst an increasingly complex system and world. I then turn to a more specific examination of how digital storytelling emerged as the specific method I used in my research. Finally, I outline the details of my research design, including participant recruitment, how focus groups and in-depth one-on-one interviews were interwoven with the digital storytelling workshop format, and ethical concerns that needed to be considered throughout.

My research study results are analyzed in Chapter 4. Weaving together data gathered from focus groups, interviews and visual journals with an interpretive analysis of the individual stories created by the participants. Through examining statements made during focus groups and individual interviews around perceptions, understandings, and orientations towards feminism and feminist pedagogy, I identify key themes that emerged through the research process. These themes include intersectionality, the body/how women embody public spaces, and digital storytelling as a pedagogical practice. Following a closer look at these themes, I conclude this chapter with an exploration of the unexpected limitations and the possibilities of my study.

In Chapter 5, I revisit my research questions and identify key findings and understandings that emerged in relation to each throughout the study. I draw connections between my professional experiences in film production, my work as educator — most recently in the realm of anti-oppression work — and considerations for educators and future research in the areas of multimodal literacy and critical media pedagogies. Finally, I share one last story from an experience working on a film set in the fall of 2020, which richly informed my conclusions about the importance of the #MeToo movement, the impact it has had in both educational and other professional spaces, and what might it mean for future feminist movements and collective action.

**Untangling the Past to Look to the Future**

In Chapter 2, I examine "a" history of feminism, focusing on the ways in which media production has played an integral role in how Western feminist movements have evolved. Understanding "within Western media and popular culture that feminism is most consistently rendered as old-fashioned, and indeed stereotyped as unnecessarily aggressive or misguided" (Hemmings, 2011, p. 7), I seek to better understand how feminism has shifted from a women's rights movement, to a political identity discourse, to an entanglement of media representations which are "plural and various, the varieties not necessarily compatible with each other" (Sheridan et al., 2006, p. 25). Central to an untangling is the need to reflect upon the ways the history of feminism has been flattened to reflect a dominant narrative focused on a model of success that has primarily benefitted Western women (white, middle-class, and educated). Dykewomon (2002) offered the power of storytelling as critical to disrupting hierarchical power structures often reinforced through the claiming of identities (for both self and others). The power of story sits at the centre of my research, and, as I discuss in the pages that follow, has been a tool long associated with the fight for women's rights and the fight for a more equitable world.

## Chapter Two: When Waves Converge: The Ebb and Flow of Feminist Movements

*Figure 4: When Waves Converge. Photo credit: Patricia Jagger (2019).*

During the first year of my doctoral program, I began teaching an English Language Arts curriculum course to pre-service teachers. An invigorating and daunting experience, it was during this time that the seeds of my study were planted after an encounter with an undergraduate student forced me to evaluate the impact of claiming a feminist identity in educational spaces. At the time of this exchange, Beyoncé (2016) had just released her *Lemonade* album which was a hot topic among feminist communities. At the time some women saw "Beyoncé as an empowering presence and in every way celebrating the 'independent women' she praises in her music, [while] others view[ed] her as detrimental to women's rights,

feminism, and as a negative portrayal of women of colour" (Trier-Bieniek, 2016, p. 1). My stance was one of uncertainty rooted in uncertainty about whether I perceived Beyoncé as a great feminist or a great capitalist — or both, which raised even more complex questions for me to consider. In contrast to this, my student's perspective was rooted in the belief that Beyoncé's use of sexuality in her music and videos made her stand out as a strong woman and role model for future generations. As we bantered back and forth, both enjoying the exchange of ideas and opinions, the most challenging moment for me was when my student ended the conversation with the comment, "you're really just another second-wave feminist." I was uncertain how to respond and wasn't naïve to the mildly derogatory and dismissive undertone I could hear in her voice. There was a deep discomfort with being spoken to in this way, rooted in a dislike for seemingly being labelled as well as uncertainty about why this one was being assigned to me. From this emerged both an awareness that I needed to better understand what I was arguing for and against when discussing feminism and a desire for clarity around the framing of feminist waves and how my beliefs were positioned among them.

**Framing a History of Western Feminism through Cultural Production**

What does it mean to *be feminist*? What does it mean to tell feminist stories or engage in feminist pedagogy? What is the impact or affect for teachers and students when identifying as a feminist in the classroom? How might it both inspire and alienate those in the room? While these questions might seem "deceptively simple" (Acker, 1987, p. 419) they are highly challenging to answer. Sitting at the heart of this project, they are situated amid the growing public discourse around equality, sexism, and women's rights currently prevalent in popular cultural spaces as much as within my lived experiences. Ahmed (2000) stated, feminist theory "is not simply about any kind of theoretical work, or only a certain kind of theoretical work: it is produced in

particular ways, in different times and places" (p. 97), suggesting a philosophical shift from asking *what* feminism is, to *where* it is located: "In other words, asking where feminist theory is produced, means a recognition of the complexity of the 'where,' and of how texts and knowledges are consumed, or not consumed, in different places" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 98). This is the theoretical frame that informs my study: An understanding of feminism as a set of complex discourses and experiences produced in and through encounters with the world — people, places, and ideas — that produces both an affective and intellectual orientation to relationships with self and others.

My understanding includes that what has been commonly deemed the "mainstream" narrative, or story, of feminist movements is incomplete. Western feminism, which is often now known as "white feminism," has been critiqued for how it negates the experiences of women of colour. Zakaria (2021) stated:

> a white feminist is someone who refuses to consider the role that whiteness and the racial privilege attached to it have played and continue to play in universalizing white feminist concerns, agendas, and beliefs as being those of all of feminism and all of feminists. (p. 1)

She also points out that you do not need to be white-bodied to be a white feminist. Western feminism is also critiqued for its failure to recognize the ongoing lack of equality in domestic spaces and the weaponization of beauty ideals to cultivate competition and limitations for women in professional spaces (Faludi, 1991; hooks, 2015; Rottenberg, 2018; Wolf, 2013). Deemed an "uncritical progressive narrative" (Rottenberg, 2018, p. 9), this Western story of feminism remains a powerful framework through which new feminisms have sprung, including post-feminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism, all of which sit in relationship with

one another and require examination for their potential impact on emerging and evolving feminist movements, media spaces, and feminist pedagogies.

Western feminism is often discussed as occurring in waves. While still commonly utilized, the metaphor of waves has been widely critiqued by contemporary feminist scholars (Bromley, 2012; Hemmings, 2011; Laughlin et al., 2010; Roth, 2004) as reinforcing and supporting "the perception of a 'singular' feminism" (Laughlin et al., 2010, p. 77). Bromley (2012) stated "the wave metaphor tends to emphasize mainstream feminist movements while eclipsing groups of feminists that don't fit comfortably into the imagined mainstream of white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied women's movement" (p. 133). Pruchniewska (2016) noted "discarding the wave metaphor allows us to focus on the continuation of feminist practices, rather than generational differences in feminist identities" (p. 738). However, as indicated through my interaction with my student, the wave construct is used within everyday conversations as a way through which feminism is understood and discussed; therefore, it cannot be fully dismissed. What is critical to highlight, is that "the wave metaphor can be reductive... suggest[ing] that each wave of feminism is a monolith with a single unified agenda, when in fact the history of feminism is a history of different ideas in wild conflict" (Grady, 2018, para. 11). Recognizing feminism "is not a singular discourse to be easily defined or pinned down" (Jones, 2003, p. 2), this chapter traces the ways in which media production has been employed throughout the history of women's rights movement, particularly within a Western context.

Leavy and Harris (2019) reminded us that feminist discourses are interconnected, existing in a "web-like way, more than a linear-one" (p. 27), supporting the argument that today, feminisms are both multiple and intersectional. Throughout this chapter, I utilize the concept of feminist waves, but with an understanding that rather than sitting neatly within clearly defined

timeframes, they overlap and inform each other in myriad ways. Acknowledging that no history of feminism is complete and not all stories can be represented within a linear timeframe or from one set of lived experiences, this literature review focuses on the importance of media production in Western feminist movements. Critical to this examination, sits an acknowledgement of the interconnections between cultural production, the importance and value of telling diverse feminist stories, and the need to discuss the impact of place, power, and privilege on how we mediate identities and relationships.

Hemmings (2011) called for the need to create a "different vision of feminist past, present, and future," challenging the notion of "feminism as a radical knowledge project firmly in the Western past" (p. 1). This requires feminist theorists to "pay attention to the amenability of our own stories, narrative constructs, and grammatical forms to discursive uses of gender and feminism we might otherwise wish to disentangle ourselves from if history is not simply to repeat itself" (Hemmings, 2011, p. 2). Identifying the stories told about past feminisms' as "a series of interlocking narratives of progress, loss, and return that oversimplify this complex history" (p. 3), Hemmings (2009) stated:

> When the story is a celebration of difference, we are invited to (re)return to affection as a source of individual and collective knowledge. When the story is marked by grief, the appeal is to the material contexts of women's lives. However, whatever its inflection, the chronology remains the same, the decades overloaded but curiously stereotyped, and poststructuralism playing the leading role in questioning "woman" as a point of departure for feminist politics and production of knowledge. (p. 1)

Reflecting on my own story of feminism, I acknowledge the need to examine where my beliefs sit and to disentangle the political and cultural forces which have played a critical role in shaping

it. Rottenberg (2018) stated "it is vital to understand at least some of [Western feminisms] historical underpinnings, or more precisely, the way feminism has been perceived, narrated, and depicted in the popular imagination" (p. 8). Considering this within the context of the friendly debate I had with my student, I see how I was pulled into a space of contemplating what informs this popular imagination, how women's stories have evolved over time, how these competing narratives undermine one another, and finally, what it means to engage in a feminist pedagogy amid these narratives.

Central to the history I present in this chapter sits an emerging understanding of the complexity and impossibility of telling a complete history of feminism. Therefore, for the purpose of my study, I focus on the role of cultural production in Western feminist movements. Klaus (2012) defined cultural production as "an intervention in the process of producing meaning" (p. 2). Within Western feminist movements, this has included the creation of media texts as modes of communication, inquiry, education, and activism, ranging from novels and essays to zines to the rise of online feminist expression in today's social media-saturated world (Pruchniewska, 2018). Embedded in this is the understanding of stories, both collective and individual, as narrative accounts, whereas discourse is the analysis of how meaning is located and interpreted from these accounts.

This chapter turns to my first research question as its anchor: *What are the stories that inform contemporary perceptions/interpretations/understandings of feminism?* I endeavour to explore myriad ways in which storytelling, specifically through popular forms of cultural and media production, has been utilized within feminist movements to challenge oppressive, patriarchal structures. Beginning with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 1792), I trace through to today when "girls as young as five-years old make media" (Kearney,

2006, p. 5). Feminist media and cultural production are tied to pedagogy within historical and contemporary contexts, including current affective flows of social media, hashtag activism, and the resurgence of feminism resulting from the #MeToo movement as they "[entail] all of the different possible sites of knowledge production" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 6). I explore the ways in which Western feminist movements have utilized forms of media-making. I conclude that digital storytelling offers potential as a feminist pedagogy through which students can approach lived experience and difficult knowledge.

Intending to add to emerging literature exploring media-making as feminist pedagogy, I draw from the work of Creasap (2014), who advocated for zine-making as a feminist pedagogy. Zines are defined as "DIY magazines that are created, and that circulate, within DIY subcultural contexts" (Kempson, 2015, p. 460). Engaging in a similar DIY process, digital storytelling also utilizes "three principles of feminist pedagogy: participatory learning, validation of personal experience, and the development of critical thinking skills" (Creasap, 2014, p. 156). Piepmeier (2009) extended the understanding of feminist pedagogy further, contending that zine-making in small spaces operate as a pedagogy of hope, "functioning as small-scale acts of resistance [by] modeling process, active criticism, and imagination" (p. 252). In their own work utilizing digital storytelling, Rice et al. (2018) stated "art can be pedagogical without being didactic or teleologically oriented... [imagine] these artworks to promote 'becoming pedagogies' that change the way we understand embodied difference" (p. 664). Therefore, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, I employ digital stories for the potential they offer as a feminist media pedagogy, a pedagogy of discomfort, and a pedagogy of hope, offering ways of engaging with self as well as to work "within and across multiple communities" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 7). Central to this potential is the increasing need for ways to challenge dominant narratives at a time when

educators are confronted with the reality of how systemic sexism and racism require new tools for building relationships with students, curricular content, and each other (Hess & Macomber; Rice et al., 2018 2021).

**The Prologue: The Roots of Western Feminism**

The story of Western feminist movements dates back at least two centuries and has been told and retold from myriad perspectives, some of which would differ from what I have presented here. My intention is to focus on the role of cultural production in Western feminism, underscoring why cultural production and media literacy is critical to feminist ways of knowing. Evans (2013) stated the "ideological origins of feminism" (p. 13) are in the Enlightenment era of the 18th Century when thinkers "rejected the view that revelation from God was the source of all knowledge" (p. 13). Western feminism has also been identified as originating "where capitalism, industrial growth, democratic theory, and socialist critiques converged, as they did in Europe and North America after 1800" (Freedman, 2003, p. 2). Laughlin et al. (2010) identified this early iteration of Western feminism as a:

> movement for civil and political rights, such as property ownership and suffrage, dating from the first women's rights convention in the United States (the 1848 meeting in Seneca Falls, New York), to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 granting women the right to vote. (p. 76)

Rooted in the "assertion that women have a history worth telling" (Westkaemper, 2017, p. 1), this first wave has been identified as a rights-based movement focused on activism at a time when women had few legal rights, such as the right to own property or access to education. Coming into focus in 1792 with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, an argument was waged for "women's rights, equality, and education, as well

as debunking the myths of women's dependence, female helplessness, and feminine frailties" (Bromley, 2012, p. 67). Wollstonecraft (1792) expressed a belief in the rights of women to have access to education and independence, stating that such a societal evolution would benefit both women and men. Her work reinforced the ideas of the Enlightenment, arguing that women were "endowed with reason: therefore, man's predominance was arbitrary" (Evans, 2013, p. 16). Setting the stage for political activism and the notion that "changing the social status of a woman will lead to a change in the whole society" (Larisa, 2018, p. 18). This change was slow to come as it faced myriad obstacles.

In 1848, the world's first women's rights convention took place in Seneca Falls, New York. Here, Elizabeth Cady Stanton proclaimed, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That men and women are created equal" (McMillan, 2008). Organized in the wake of the World Anti-Slavery Convention held eight years earlier in London, UK, Seneca Falls led to the creation of the Declaration of Rights and Sentients. This Declaration "serv[ed] as the basic text for the women's rights movement" (McMillan, 2008, p. 72), laying out an action plan for the years ahead. Bromley (2012) noted:

> Nineteenth-century women were also deeply engaged with the problems of the slave trade, slavery, and racial inequality… [and] many first wavers were women and men of colour who drew their understandings of women's rights from their participation in the anti-slavery and abolitionist movements. (p. 136)

Advancement in the women's rights movement was halted with the arrival of the American Civil War, which lasted from 1861–1865. At the end of the war, the 14th Amendment was passed. This granted the vote to freed male slaves, but not to women of any standing or racial identity. During this time a fissure between the anti-slavery and the women's rights movements in the

United States emerged. This break was reinforced when the prominent Black abolitionist Frederick Douglas withdrew his previous support for women to get the vote believing "it was more important to give freedmen the vote" (Evans, 2013, p. 48). This setback highlighted the need for women's rights movements to better organize (Evans, 2013).

During the 19th Century, other parts of the world also began to see increased attention and mobilization in the fight for women's right to vote through what is known as the Suffragette movement. In England, women turned to the trade unions for support, led by Emma Patterson (Evans, 2013). In Canada, during "the early years of Confederation, women faced severe discrimination under the law and were systematically excluded from the judicial system" (Falardeau-Ramsay, 1999, p. 52). Through the efforts of women such as Susan B. Anthony in the United States, Christabel Pankhurst in the United Kingdom, and a group of women called the Famous Five in Canada, strides were made toward women winning the right to vote around the Western world (Bromley, 2012; Leavy & Harris, 2019). Leavy and Harris acknowledged the suffragette movement as a:

> crucial step in giving women a public voice, power, and role that was then advanced even further during the two world wars when women were needed for work in the factories because all able-bodied men were sent away to war. (p. 22)

The fight for access to education, particularly access to education at the post-secondary level (Wallin & Wallace, 2018), is identified as a key element of this time. Wollstonecraft's (1792) writing was integral to this conversation, proposing that girls should be educated from a young age and that they should have equal access to schooling as boys, allowing them "to obtain professions and have careers just the same as men" (Larisa, 2018, p. 19). Within the suffragette movement, writing and other forms of cultural production were viewed as forms of feminist

agitation due to the potential to disrupt the political and cultural status quo (Heilmann, 2000). Becoming a critical way to garner support for the suffragette movement, many scholars of suffrage culture "would agree that feminist activists on both sides of the Atlantic exploited and helped to create the new forms of commercial (and visual) culture that dominated the first part of the twentieth century" (Green, 2008, p. 67).

Alongside the written word, images were utilized in a variety of forms, ranging from postcards to periodicals to pamphlets, to circulate feminist messages into the public sphere as the idea of a strong female archetype became increasingly common. One example of this was the evolution of the term "New Woman." Introduced in Sarah Grand's 1894 essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," the term began as an invocation to women to become more independent, as well as stating "the man of the future will be better, while the woman will be stronger and wiser" (p. 272). The New Woman expressed herself through fashion, adopting more practical and liberating clothing styles that deviated from the Victorian era's restrictive corsets and voluminous skirts. She also participated in sports and physical activities that were previously considered inappropriate for women, embracing a more active and healthier lifestyle.

Within the era in which it was born and in historical research the "New Woman" was identified as a contested term. Predominantly believed to have represented the struggle of middle-class, white women, it is often seen as excluding immigrant and working-class women. The New Woman figure has been linked to an imperialist feminist ideal (Wånggren, 2017), highlighting how women of privilege were able to gain escalating exposure through increased representations in art and literature (Enstad, 1995).

***Women and Mass Media: Flapper Girls & Rosie the Riveter***

When the first wave of feminism began to fade out is murky. Within Western contexts, it is commonly stated that it ended in the 1920s with the passing of the 19th Amendment in the United States as a concrete marker of time (Wallin & Wallace, 2018). Impacts of the suffrage and suffragette movements were felt from the early 1920s through to the end of the Second World War. While women in Canada had achieved the right to vote at the federal level in 1918, the fight for personhood was launched with the Persons Case in 1928. The Famous Five successfully challenged the "provision in the British North America Act that made women '*non-persons'* in the matter of rights and privileges" (Falardeau-Ramsay, 1999, p. 52). The five women leading this fight were Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise Crummy McKinney, and Irene Parlby. They were all from Western Canada, and while not all were actively engaged in the Suffragette movement in Canada, as active social reformers, they "fought to improve the lives of women under Canadian law and to better Canadian society more generally" (Sharpe & McMahon, 2007, p. 8). Sharpe and McMahon (2007) described this group as material feminists who believed that "the distinctive biological qualities of women made them well-suited to play a role in public life" (p. 9). While they fought for legal equality, they did not argue against the more traditional role of women in society.

The suffragette movement enjoyed varied success as women around the world began to win the right to vote, although often only white women of privilege gained this right. The timeline of this victory varied around the world, adding to the contemporary disputes about the validity of the use of the waves paradigm to describe the history of feminist movements. In Canada, the 1920s saw increased numbers of women moving to urban centres, most single (Strong-Boag, 1979). This led to a gradual shift in traditional gender roles and expectations for

women as they became increasingly visible in various public spheres, participating in politics, education, and professional careers. Strong-Boag (1979) stated that those who wanted to believe in a "whig view of history" — that society is progressing in a linear trajectory over time — "congratulated themselves that there was in modern Canada a wide range of jobs *suitable* for girls" (p. 134). Suitable was defined as jobs and professions such as teaching, nursing, social work, and journalism.

In American contexts, Faupel and Werum (2011) note how "immediately following the suffrage victory in 1920, mainstream feminists witnessed a shrinking of the political gains they had made during the suffrage struggle, accompanied by a widespread cultural backlash against their movement" (p. 181), leading to a new emphasis on individualism among many women. Rooted in a newfound optimism, collective action was no longer deemed necessary and "instead, they increasingly highlighted themes of self-reliance, autonomy, and individual achievement in the absence of mass mobilization and collective goals" (Faupel & Werum, 2011, p. 181). While their influence in political spheres declined, it was at this time that women began to play an important role in "the expanding consumer culture of America" (Brady, 2019, p. 49) claiming new authority and agency through openly displaying their sexuality and femininity, giving rise to the "flapper" girl. The flapper girl phenomenon extended to Europe as well, as American jazz "intoxicated" the Western world (Calverton, 1928).

Notably, apolitical flapper girls represented what might be considered the first iteration of post-feminism. They engaged in such "hedonistic" behaviours as "smoking in public, driving in cars, dancing the Charleston or the Shimmy, excessive consumption of alcohol in times of prohibition, nightly celebrations in jazz clubs and at petting parties, where men and women had premarital sexual experiences" (Reinsch, 2013, p. 32). In the newly growing film industry,

representations of flapper girls found a place on camera, where they were invoked to provide "a moral lesson by showing the tragic fate or redemption of girls who wrong-headedly succumbed to the rhetoric of free love or feminism or the lure of the jazz" (Ross, 2001, p. 409). The co-evolution of the flapper girl alongside the growth of mass media is critical to the origins of visual stereotypes of women in popular culture, which continue to reverberate today (Kitch, 2001), informing how women present themselves in media spaces.

In the 1930s and 40s and the emergence of World War II, women were called on to emerge from "the domestic sphere for the public sphere and take control of their lives and livelihood" (Wright, 2017, p. 5). While the flapper girl represented a type of "New Woman," one who broke social norms and embraced her sexuality and consumer culture, other representations of strong women in mass media began to emerge when World War II erupted. One such iconic image is that of Rosie the Riveter, an image popularized on propaganda posters endeavouring to promote women entering the workforce during war time. This image is still well known today and often reproduced to encourage solidarity among more contemporary struggles within feminist movements. Despite its longevity as a symbol of women's rights, the image of Rosie the Riveter has also been seen as controversial for the "predominant media portrayal of women war workers [as] young, white, and middle class" (Honey, 1985, p. 19) who only joined the workforce to support the war effort.

Honey (1985) noted that most women who worked during World War II had former experience in the labour market and that only one-third identified "housewife" as a previous occupation. She proposed the poster was created with a purpose: propaganda, highlighting the power of visual representation to be used at both grassroots levels — as it was in feminist activism — and a way to shape women's perceptions of themselves as more empowered.

Companies purposefully aligning worker's sentiments with those of their employers, the Rosie the Riveter poster encouraged "employees to meet production goals and align themselves with corporate values, while discouraging them from discussing unionizing or organizing to improve working conditions or wages" (Sharp & Wade, 2011, p. 83). This image of the empowered woman next to the slogan, "We Can Do It," is now recognized as having been created to serve corporate and capitalistic agendas. Like many media images of women produced for mass consumption, the motive behind was far from promoting equality.

**The Personal Is Political: From Housewives to Ms. Magazine**

> *The woman of sorrows, the woman of transcendent joys, who would rather be elsewhere, who has consented to perform simple and essential foolish tasks, to examine tomatoes, to sit under a hair dryer, because it is her art and her duty. Because the war is over, the world has survived, and we are here, all of us, making homes, having and raising children, creating not just books or paintings but a whole world – a world of order and harmony where children are safe (if not happy), where men who have seen horrors beyond imagining, who have acted bravely and will come to lighted windows, to perfume, to plates and napkins. (Cunningham, 1998, p. 42)*

With the end of World War II, men returned home. Largely relegating women back to domestic space, which Friedan and O'Farrell (1997) referred to as the "golden cage," confining women once again into more individualistic spaces. This image of a "trapped" woman is poignantly embodied in Michael Cunningham's (1998) novel *The Hours* through the character Laura Brown – a woman married to her war hero husband and whose dreams and sense of self were set aside as she conformed to the post-war obligations of domestic life. During the 1950s, common representations of women showed them was at ease in the kitchen and finding satisfaction in raising children. Women's magazines "urged that courses on marriage and marriage counselors be installed in high schools" (Friedan, 1963, p. 16). Designed to demonstrate that "truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights" (Friedan, 1963, p. 16) this time saw the average age of women getting married lower as fewer

and fewer young women attended universities. Women who didn't conform to this image were to be pitied, and as the influence of mass media continued to grow, representations of women worked to reinforce stereotypes of domestic bliss. This marked the beginning of a very complex conversation around the role of the housewife and feminist subjectivity, sparked when Simone de Beauvoir declared that women were "doomed" when relegated to the role of a housewife (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004). Cunningham's (1998) Laura Brown represented this doom, eventually committing the ultimate sin of abandoning her husband and children to pursue something different, something of her own, yet always carrying with her feelings of unworthiness, pain, and guilt. Affective imprints of such portrayals continue to echo through the ways contemporary women reject or align with the image of becoming a housewife and mother today.

***The Swinging 60s, Youth Culture, and the New Imaginary***

As the 1960s began and what is commonly referred to as the second wave of feminism emerged, new challenges arose when "the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was being reported" (Friedan, 1963, p. 22). An increasing awareness "that the legal rights achieved in the first wave failed to redress the everyday inequalities in women's lives" (Bromley, 2012, p. 39) was fomented. This next "wave" was to be rooted in equal rights, to embrace liberal beliefs, and focus on challenging the ways "gendered conventions of femininity dictated that women were exclusively responsible for their homes and children" (Bromley, 2012, p. 139). In addition to the fight for equality in the home, feminists in the 1960s and 1970s fought for reproductive rights, against the sexual division of labour, and segregating women into "pink collar jobs," where "sexual harassment became commonplace and women had to either put up or shut up" (Bromley, 2012, p. 141).

Within the academy, the rebirth of feminism also led to the emergence of the field of feminist research as "over the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, feminist researchers reacted against the pervasive 'androcentric, or male bias' that was characteristic of published research findings" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 4). Leading to the creation of women's studies departments in post-secondary institutions, feminist scholars began to centre research around women's lives, experiences, and ways of knowing (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Leavy & Harris, 2019). Coontz (2011) reminds us it is hard for women of today to "realize how few role models were available to women who came of age in the 1950s and the first half of the 60s" (p. 17). It was with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963), alongside the emergence of other civil rights movements both in the United States and around the world, that women of this generation were able to recognize and name their discontent with what society had put forth for them. as well as begin to understand that there existed a discrepancy between the lives women were living and the ways they were portrayed in media. As their discontent grew, and more women began to realize that their lives had become idealized, if not empty fantasies, a new shift began to take place from individual crisis to collective action (Baxandall & Gordon, 2021).

### *Through the Lens of Change: Rediscovering Collective Action*

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, mainstream cultural production was informed by a post-World War II society alongside an enduring use of media as a vital way for feminist politics and ethical stances to be expressed (Jones, 2003). Writing continued to be a powerful medium for feminists, leading to an evolution of feminist print cultures. Seizing the written word as a "potential portal to power" (Forster, 2016, p. 812), women continued the work of their predecessors, taking on the male world of publishing which had fostered an "intellectual hegemony… [where] the woman writer [had to] remain attentive to the needs and wishes of

others – a polite and interested auditor at a discussion in which she play[s] no active part" (Murray, 2000, p. 198). Adding to this, an increasingly young population led to a palpable shift in who was being targeted in popular culture. In the 1970s, a rise in feminist collectives emerged across the United States and Britain, alongside the rise of more mainstream feminist magazines, such as Gloria Steinem's *Ms. Magazine* (Valk, 2002; Zobl & Drüeke, 2012). Within this development existed conflicting beliefs about the relationship and role mainstream, male-dominated media should play: "feminists [either] rejected the male press industry totally or saw it as a training ground, at the very least, there was suspicion caused by gender-hostility and a desire to claim the printed word for the feminist cause" (Forster, 2016, p. 817). Some mainstream women's magazines acted as "commercial sites of intensified femininity" (McRobbie, 1997, p. 190). They denoted "the relationship between women's magazines, capitalism, the construction of femininity and the messages that women's magazines promote[d]" (Sedgwick, 2020, p. 4). In contrast, more overtly feminist publications, such as *Spare Rib* and *Off Our Backs* were created to discuss vital issues for women (Groves, 2005). Publications like these utilized a participatory approach by inviting readers to contribute content. In Canada, Chatelaine magazine — which was first published in 1928, coinciding with the Persons Case — was recognized for creating "a 'community of discourse' or 'imagined community' [where] there were opportunities for personal connections to be made" (Korinek, 2000, p. 9). Most relevant to this study is the emphasis on the inclusion of a participatory approach to exploring the complex and diverse feminist ideas these publications represented, which continued with the growth of zines and zine culture in feminist cultural spheres.

**Framing the Third Wave: At the Intersections of Individualism and Collective Action**

When looking at what emerged after the second wave of feminism and its foundations of collective action, Henry (2004) identified this period as a time when feminism rejected the vein of "sisterhood" that ran throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1970, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* challenged women to reject accepted notions of womanhood, becoming a defining voice in Western feminism. Taking on traditional women's roles and expectations, Greer (1970) counselled her readers to understand that "status ought not to be measured for women in terms of attracting and ensnaring men" (p. 22). Lilburn et al. (2000) referred to Greer as the first "celebrity feminist" as her "presence challenged media representations of women and thus disrupted cultural meanings normally associated with 'woman.' In effect, the synthesis opened up a public space in which feminist ideas could be discussed" (p. 335–336). While defined by some (including herself) as a "second-waver," Greer's ideas in *The Female Eunuch* (1970) carried forward to emerging conversations about sexuality and women's empowerment (Henry, 2004).

Emerging in the late 1980s and 1990s was what is commonly referred to as the third wave of feminism, considered a response of a new generation of young women calling for a new feminism recognizing that they are "entitled to equality and self-fulfillment" (Snyder, 2008, p. 178). When considering this desire for a new feminism, Schuster (2017) stated, "the second wave was about women's liberation through confronting systemic and structural disadvantages limiting opportunities for women, while the third wave focuse[d] on diverse experiences of gendered oppression and the relativity of privileges" (p. 648). Efforts to address this included a revising of how the words "the personal is political" were interpreted and brought to action. Initially conceived by Hanisch (1970), this concept brought to the fore the ways in which

women's problems are often the result of the political conditions under which they live. In other words, "women are messed over, not messed up!" (Hanisch, 1970, p. 113). Identifying a key ideological difference, Schuster (2017) stated, where "second wavers" saw Hanisch as supporting collective action, "third wavers" re-interpreted the power of her words as:

> Drawing attention to sexism in everyday encounters, making feminist statements with fashion and consumer choices, using social media to raise awareness for feminist issues, reclaiming/learning traditional feminized skills (e.g. handcrafts) and incorporating feminist values into romantic relationships, friendships and family life. (p. 649)

This shift brought to the fore the complexity of intergenerational differences as well as the need for a more critical way through which to explore the lived experiences of women from different racial, cultural, and gender identities.

Defining a concrete beginning and end to a third wave of feminism is complex as it is "seen as rooted in and overlaps with the development of intersectional questions originally raised by feminists of colour about the essentialism of white Western feminism" (Schuster, 2013, p. 11). Additionally, Schuster (2013) argued that while there is a clear temporal delineation between the first two waves of feminist activism, the emergence of a third wave is muddied by its proximity in time to the second wave. As a result, new generations of feminists found themselves having to "defend their values against a mainstream society that proclaim[ed] the emergence of post-feminism and negate[d] the necessity for feminist activism at all... [while also negotiating] with the previous generation the direction that feminism should take" (Schuster, 2013, p. 12).

Described as "eclectic, humourous, non-mainstream, accessible, empowering, dynamic, hip and happening, and undefinable... third wavers ma[d]e feminism their own while at the same

time using theories, methods, and activist strategies developed by second-wave feminists" (Bromley, 2012, p. 144). However, one tenet of third wave feminism that is critical to recognize is the emphasis on inclusivity, largely influenced by the introduction intersectionality, which "complicated the terrain of 'feminist studies'... [helping] us understand the interrelated nature of subjugated knowledge as being multiple and threaded" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 45). This led to a surge of literature from feminist educators and scholars of colour being recognized as producing a "distinctive form of consciousness that simultaneously occupied, moved between, and produced new spaces and sites of thought and practice" (Fernandes, 2010, p. 105). However, while rooted in the second-wave sensibility calling for radical spaces of solidarity among women, the paradigm shift towards intersectionality also opened the floodgates for complex conversations around collective memory, power, privilege, and the need for more participatory practices through which to explore them.

***Intersectionality: Popular Culture and an Epistemological Break***

In the early 1990s, the theory of *intersectionality* emerged as pivotal to feminist thinking. The concept was originally attributed to Audre Lorde from her speech *Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,* presented at the National Women's Studies Association Conference in 1979, and then published in 1984. She explored the interconnections between identity and power, stating that "unacknowledged class differences rob women of each other's creativity and insight" (Lorde, 1984, p. 116). However, the concept of intersectionality was popularized when it was posed by Crenshaw (1991) to understand how Black women in the United States experienced two intersecting layers of oppression — race and gender — within the American legal system. Crenshaw stated, "feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and anti-racist efforts to politicize experiences of people of colour have frequently proceeded as

though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrain" (p. 1242). Intersectionality pointed to the ways "white feminists excluded black women from the feminist movement by setting a white, middle-class agenda and how, at the same time, black women were not fully recognized within the anti-racist movement because of a male bias" (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 235).

Since its inception, the question of what intersectionality is and how it can most effectively move from theory to action has led to many complex and differing interpretations, with it alternately being viewed as a theory, a politic, or a framework for understanding lived experience (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). The emergence and popularity of intersectionality led to a recognition of the need to acknowledge "the experiences of women of colour and race-informed feminist inequalities" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 25) as attention was drawn toward the inclusion of race, class, sexual orientation and gender studies into both feminist activism and scholarship. This signalled "an 'epistemological break' with other forms of feminism, so that it [was now] aligned with postmodernism or poststructuralism" (Ringrose, 2012, p. 5). This concept, which Genz and Brabon (2009) described as "fraught with contradictions" (p. 1) has become pivotal to the development of 21st-century feminism, intertwining education, media literacy, and popular culture in ways critical to my proposed research.

***Popular Feminism, Post-feminism & Popular Culture***

In the 1990s, the emergence of the world wide web provided a new forum for sharing information about oneself and the world. McRobbie (2007) aligned this technological innovation with a rise of a new flexible global capitalism, that ultimately promoted new understandings of feminist success and "re-shape[d] notions of womanhood to fit with new or emerging (neo-liberalised) social and economic arrangements" (p. 721). Leading to feminist activities being

"cast into the shadows … viewed more ambivalently by young women who … in more public venues, stake[d] a distance from it, for the sake of social and sexual recognition" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 11), post-feminism operated under the assumption of equality having been reached, and therefore the struggles of the previous generations of women were no longer relevant as a social movement. Gill and Scharff (2011) referred to this interpretation of post-feminism as a "backlash to feminism," recognizing it as a key concept in feminist cultural critique in which "taken-for-granted status belie[d] very real disputes and contestations over its meaning" (p. 3). Much like feminism, which "can be said to have a number of working definitions that are always relative to particular contexts, specific issues and personal practices" (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 4), "postfeminism" has led to fractures in interpretation.

Three broad understandings of post-feminism have been identified. The first, linked to the historical shift from second to third-wave feminism, focused on what Tasker and Negra (2007) referenced as the "pastness of feminism," signalling the end of a particular kind of feminism and the emergence of one that "depend[ed] upon the selective incorporation of feminism for its efficacy" (Budgeon, 2011, p. 281). Secondly, focusing on the use of the word "post," another perspective connects it with postmodernism, poststructuralism, and post-colonialism, all of which are recognized for their anti-Western hegemonic cultural stance, thus establishing post-feminism as part of an epistemological fissure and analytical perspective (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 3). Finally, acknowledging the contested nature of the term post-feminism, addresses it as a theory or sensibility versus as an agreed-upon wave or movement drawing women into a shared understanding of their collective experience (Gill, 2007b).

Emerging alongside other forms of feminism, notably popular feminism and neoliberal feminism, Gill (2007b) described post-feminism as a "sensibility," which encourages a closer

analysis of media culture (films, tv shows, and in contemporary contexts, social media) claiming to be postfeminist. The postfeminist sensibility is marked by preoccupation with women's bodies, an increase in sexuality and the sexualization (or coding) of women's bodies in media spaces – including increased discourse about sex and the construction of the "sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever 'up for it'" (Gill, 2007b, p. 151). McRobbie (2009) also argued that post-feminism is a tool for critical analysis, acknowledging the complex "entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 4) existing within current media discourses. McRobbie openly addressed the ways in which new technologies have engaged young women in a movement of coming forward: while "feminism fades away… young women are endowed with capacity and are as a result expected to pursue specific life pathways which require participation in the workforce, which in turn permits full immersion in consumer culture" (p. 9).

**Social Media & The Question of a Fourth Wave**

Focusing specifically on the evolution of social media technologies, Cohn (2013) addressed the gendered practice of self-management as "intertwined not just with the current cultures of post-feminism and neoliberalism but also with our current technological imagination and the longer history of femininity in the West" (p. 154). This includes positioning post-feminism as a new sexual contract, imbuing a recolonizing effect where "gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom and (putative) equality. Young women are able to come forward on the condition that feminism fades away" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 720). Media has played a vital role in the formation of this new contract, playing into the notion of the "successful girl" as "poised to change the world, economically, politically, and socially, as a new hybrid that embodies the best traits of

masculinity and femininity" (Ringrose, 2013, p. 12). Complicating this further are the intergenerational divides that are "overemphasized in defining insurmountable differences between feminists, when in fact the key differences are based on other intersecting forms of oppression" (Winch et al., 2016, p. 560) such as race and class.

Karlyn (2011) argued that feminism situated along generational lines is at risk of fostering ambivalence as it renews and distances "itself from the generations that preceded it, thereby replicating the very misogyny that it wished to eradicate" (p. 4). Gill et al. (2016) stated "the [current] era of niche marketing and niche life-styling is a significant factor in this. Arguably social media reinforces niche modes of identity and community" (p. 727). Echoing the historical pattern of moving in-between calls for collective and individual action, the complicated entanglement of post-feminism and neoliberal ideologies has resulted in a current moment of ongoing de-collectivism which is often enforced in contemporary media spaces.

Ringrose (2013) discussed the need to understand the connections between the postfeminist mediascape and what she calls the neoliberal educational policy-scape. She argued both produce policies focused on girls' empowerment and educational equality, encouraging a narrative recognizing the "discourse of feminine success [as] co-constructed through and with educational research on girls" (p. 12). Keller and Ringrose (2015) connected the discourse of feminine success to popular culture through their examination of what they refer to as celebrity feminism, "a form of popular feminism made visible recently by young celebrity women eager to publicly claim a feminist identity" (p. 132). Presenting contemporary popular cultural examples such as Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, and Emma Watson, all of whom have begun to identify as feminists within performative and social spaces, Keller and Ringrose confronted the complexities presented when feminism becomes a part of celebrity culture, as a type of "fashion."

With the rise of social media, intersectionality has also been tied to what Zimmerman (2017) referred to as a digital turn and the potential emergence of a fourth wave of feminism "defined by its use of technology, so much so that it depends specifically on social media like Twitter for its existence" (p. 64). Colliding with the emergence of the #MeToo movement, the fourth wave has been linked to Hillary Clinton's run for president in 2016 when "online representation and digital technology as the organizing and consciousness raising tool of the fourth wave feminist movement replaced 9-11-centric discussions" (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 55). Blevins (2018) argued, as younger generations turn to online platforms, "what distinguishes the fourth wave from the third is the reincorporation of consciousness-raising groups through social media" (p. 101). The influence of intersectionality in online spaces has re-ignited a sense of collective action and hope for a renewed focus on activism.

***"Young Feminism," Digital Media & The Affective Turn***

Critical to the most recent evolutions of feminist activism has been the growth of social media and online spaces where "'online DIY cultures'... operate as spaces for expression and dialogue about political and social issues" (Harris, 2008, p. 482). The accessibility to act as both consumer and creator has been important for women, but in many ways even greater for young girls, who "are using virtually every medium currently available, including film, music, periodicals, and the Internet, to express themselves, explore their identities, and connect with others" (Kearney, 2006, p. 3), often subverting traditional ideas of what is deemed acceptable feminine behaviour for young women. Images of empowered women and girls are everywhere these days and take a variety of forms. The word "feminist" has found its way onto clothing items, into rock concerts, on the cover of magazines, into politics, and into contemporary popular culture through a variety of digital media platforms. Digital media platforms, including social

media, streaming services, devices, and apps, allow for multiple representations of the here and now, playing a critical role in how girls and women engage in relationships with self, others, and the world. This evolution within media culture highlights an emerging sense of individualism and consumer culture prompting "the 'deterritorialisation' of patriarchal power and its 'reterritorialisation' in women's bodies and the beauty-industrial complex" (Gill, 2016, p. 613). Through exploring the emergence of post-feminism and the ongoing conversations around how to define or situate it within the larger narrative of Western feminism, intergenerational tensions are apparent as women from different lived experiences can be positioned in oppositional ways to one another, in both online and offline spaces.

Jackson (2018) referred to the emergence of a new "young feminism," as a complicated "murky brew of feminism, anti-feminism and post-feminism that creates a significant social moment in which to examine a seemingly unrivalled identification with feminism amongst girls who have grown up with a saturated postfeminist culture" (p. 33). Ringrose (2013) examined the implications of a media-charged landscape as creating a dynamic positioning of the "issues facing girls and women [as] either invisible/neglected *or* they become sensationalized" (p. 137). This has resulted in the emergence of affective spaces for girls to navigate as they are confronted with conflicting narratives about what it means to be a successful woman – the negative framing of feminists as "killjoys," for example, and their own complex relationships with media representations of girls, their bodies, and identities as women. I contend that these competing engagements or orientations towards feminism have contributed to the tensions existing today between and among women and girls.

### *The Possibilities and Limitations of Hashtag Activism/Feminism*

As an example of the power of social media, #MeToo in many ways also exemplifies the problems identified with second-wave feminism. Conceived by African-American social activist Tarana Burke in 2006 "to support girls and women of color who had experienced sexual violence" (Russell et al., 2018, p. 273), as a vehicle for unifying women to develop agency and voice through the sharing of personal stories involving sexual violence (Rümmelein, 2018), #MeToo only gained mass recognition when Alyssa Milano, a white and famous actress used it in a Twitter post in October 2017. As a result, the #MeToo movement, while effective in starting conversations, has been critiqued for leaving those who have traditionally lived in the margins to continue to struggle for representation and voice. One example of this is seen in the 2017 Person of the Year issue of *Time Magazine*, where Banet-Weiser (2018) noted that while Burke was discussed, she was left off the cover. Acknowledging that while "the mainstream media covered the #MeToo story expansively… the stories [were] often about the powerful men who [were] accused, or the celebrity women who accused them" (p. 17). Now often aligned with accusations against movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, #MeToo evolved into a widespread battle cry for those seeking to show that sexual harassment is not an isolated incident, nor is sexual assault rare. At the time, the results seemed swift and far-reaching – with dozens of powerful men accused, many of them toppled, and a handful criminally charged (Pflum, 2018). Berliner and Krabill (2019) attributed some of this viral response to an era of increased social media platforms.

Since the #MeToo movement surged into the public sphere in 2017, heightened attention has been directed towards systemic sexism, misogyny, and the reality that we have yet to reach gender parity – socially, economically, and culturally. New organizations such as the Times Up Legal Defense Fund, also referred to in social media spaces as #TimesUp, emerged to support

the demand for diversity and equity or inclusion riders being written into the contracts of influential Hollywood stars grew in the months after #MeToo (Fortado, 2018). Seeking to employ a restorative justice model, the Times Up movement was significant for its inclusion of women of colour in what was deemed a mainstream feminist "club." Largely dominated by white women, both #MeToo and #TimesUp have struggled to reach their intended goals. Aiming to "end the silence and shame of victim-survivorship and promote equal pay across industries" (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p. 99), emerging feminist movements such as #MeToo have been identified as holding potential for moving the conversation around sexual harassment from a framework of passive resistance to one offering hope for transformative empathy and action. However, digital media platforms have been recognized for offering "great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge" (Baer, 2016, p. 18). They have also arisen alongside the growth of neoliberalism and popular feminism focused on the needs of the individual (Banet-Weiser, 2018.) As Rottenberg noted (2014), "the neoliberal feminist subject is thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair" (p. 420).

As a result, feminism has emerged from the shadows, alongside a need to acknowledge the "profoundly toxic character of neoliberalism's recuperation of feminism" (Tinknell, 2011, p. 83), through which "there was soon a market for #MeToo, ranging from cookies to jewelry to clothing, as well as the emergence of new apps and other media technologies that attempt to document workplace sexual harassment" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 17). Leading to a reigniting of interest from new generations in claiming a feminist identity amid a media dense world shaping young girls' perceptions of self and others.

**Emotion, Hope, and Affect: Moving Beyond the Hashtag.** Amid perceived failings of #MeToo, the power of this moment must not be dismissed or trivialized; rather, such movements must be critically examined for the pedagogical possibilities and challenges they present. While "participation with these explicitly feminist movements does not necessarily require people to define their actions as feminist" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 3), it presents possibility for the emergence of a form of empathy with the power to transform and empower, promoting "listening rather than distancing or looking at speakers as 'others'" (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p. 97). Within educational contexts, empathy has been linked to affect and emotion – how it is connected to the perception of and need for feminist pedagogies.

Boler and Davis (2021) identified an *affective turn* in feminist discourse, resulting from what they refer to as "robust politics of emotion that have developed in the humanities [that] encourage more collaboration and conversation across disciplines" (p. 25). Calling for a clear understanding of the difference between affect, emotion, and feeling, they offered the following definitions:

> Emotion tends to refer to a nameable quality of experience... Feeling is a term that confounds the distinction between bodily, cognitive, or emotional experiences as it may refer to the physical sense of touch, subjective experience, or both. Affect is used to describe something akin to feeling and emotion, yet an aspect which is not adequately captured by either term. (Boler & Davis, 2021, p. 25).

Speaking to the subjective and intersubjective nature of all three, they stated affect can be interpreted either as a verb, whereby an emotion or feeling results in an intensity which can move between people or things, or as a noun, where a feeling or intensity emerges but is less "fully formed than nameable or specific emotions" (Boler & Davis, 2021, p. 25). Referencing

Ahmed's work on affective economies, they addressed the emergence of affect theory in media studies, saying that the "study of emotion and affect promise to give scholars better accounts of how emotionality is shaping politics in today's mediated landscapes" (Boler & Davis, 2021, p. 27). Adding to this, in recent years, social media has engaged increasing numbers of girls and women in mediating identities and combatting sexism through new forms of digital media (Kim & Ringrose, 2018). How girls and women mediate their own representations in a moderated space under heavy surveillance has led to increased levels of objectification as well as conflicting discourses around women's bodies (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018).

Echoing Mulvey's (1975) work, "several studies have demonstrated that anticipation of the male gaze" (Feltman & Szymanski, 2018, p. 312), troubling the claim of sexualized representation of women's bodies as empowering. For educators, this is an important conversation (for example: debates around girls' dress codes in schools) as younger generations' views on feminism, women's rights, and intersectionality are informed by conversations and representations materializing in contemporary media spaces. For example, as we move into what is now being framed as a post-#MeToo world, we are witnessing a rise of hate speech in online spaces and the evolution of the "manosphere" (Dickel & Evolvi, 2022), This, alongside other complex conversations, all of which have become intertwined and entangled, call for critical conversations around the emotion and affect cultivated in online spaces and the subsequent impact on how students engage with complex understandings of self and other, both in person and in media spaces.

Within feminist media studies, affect theory "has long been concerned with women's 'emotional labour.' Moreover, feminist scholars have always been attentive to the affectivity of their own knowledge production and their research practices" (Tyler et al., 2008, p. 88). While

there is a growing body of work connecting affect theory and feminist media practices, the negative connotations and emotions often affiliated with becoming a woman or being feminist are prevalent and embedded in our cultural consciousness today and impacted by both mass-produced and social media. Rice (2014) noted in her research that "women are continually negotiating with a media culture that attempts to objectify their bodies and render them abject… these [encounters] convey a sense of becoming that is constrained, but not determined, by images" (p. 26). In my research, I sought to better understand the ways in which digital storytelling can act as a feminist pedagogy through which young people can negotiate identity, and the forces at play that impact whom they perceive themselves to be and how they locate themselves in the world.

**Critical Theory & Feminist Pedagogy: Ripples from the Second Wave**

In the latter half of the 20th century, critical and liberatory pedagogies began to emerge alongside postmodernist and postcolonial theories, resulting in the acknowledgement of the "shattering of Western meta-narratives" (Weiler, 1991, p. 449), as the need to confront and honour different voices and lived experiences permeated classrooms. Works such as Freire's (1971) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as several social movements erupted influencing educators to explore pedagogies rooted in "visions of social transformation" (Weiler, 1991, p. 450). In Canada, the release of The Royal Commission of the Status of Women report, commissioned in 1967 and made public in 1970, is acknowledged as a critical moment when education was identified as a vital factor influencing women's lives, opportunities, and identities (Wallin & Wallace, 2018).

As feminism grew as a scholarly practice in higher education, it was apparent that classrooms were "saturated with phallocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled

epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers" (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 2). Moving into the 1970s, amid second-wave feminism, referring "mainly to a social movement led predominantly by White feminists" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 23), feminist pedagogy began to visibly emerge. Crabtree et al. (2009) defined this as a "philosophy of and set of practices for classroom-based teaching that is informed by feminist theory and grounded in the principles of feminism" (p. 1), tracing the emergence of feminist pedagogies as far back as 1916.

Referencing the writings of Dewey (1916) and his desire for an emphasis on experiential learning, social responsibility, and the reclaiming of a civic mission of education, Crabtree et al. (2009) stated "feminist pedagogy is not simply about learning the theory and applying it in the classroom, but it is also, more important, a way of living both professionally and personally" (p. 6). Often seen as tied to critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy supported a belief in the power of education to act as a transformative force for positive social change. However, traditional Freirian critical pedagogy has been critiqued for how it can reproduce the systems of oppression it is meant to overcome, specifically within educational contexts. Ellsworth (1989) identified the key motivations of critical pedagogy as empowerment, promoting student voice, and encouraging dialogue; she also claims that these are "repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" (p. 298), and encourages differentiation between critical and feminist pedagogies. While both strive to foster spaces of equity and empowerment for students, Ellsworth (1989) highlighted the lack of intersectionality within critical pedagogy which failed "to examine the implications of the gendered, raced, and classed teacher and student" (p. 310).

Feminist pedagogy was first defined by Shrewsbury (1987) as "a theory about the teaching/learning process that guides our choice of classroom practices by providing criteria to evaluate specific educational strategies and techniques in terms of the desired course goals or

outcomes" (p. 166). Central to these strategies and techniques is a desire to transform academic spaces towards equity, through steps that can be followed in classrooms, and which are entangled in the concepts of empowerment, community, and leadership. Alongside thinking of feminist pedagogy as a set of tools or instructional strategies, there is a need to see it as a theoretical and ethical approach rooted in creating a classroom community. Cultivating spaces where participants are "connected in a net of relationships with people who *care* [emphasis added] about each other's learning as well as their own is very different from a classroom that is seen as comprised of teacher and students" (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 6). Noddings (1988) framed caring as an ethical orientation, highlighting the importance of fostering a relational ethic, stating "one who is concerned with behaving ethically strives always to preserve or convert a given relation into a caring relation" (p. 219). This notion of a relational ethic in the classroom, or situating relationship at the heart of pedagogy, is an "innately feminist framework" (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p. 393) and calls for critical inquiry at both the individual and collective level. Within that ethic lies the challenge of cultivating a safe space for learning alongside the often emotional and challenging act of engaging students in confronting difficult knowledge.

Boler (1999) discussed the complexity of confronting difficult knowledge in her conception of a pedagogy of discomfort which is defined as "an inquiry as well as a call to action" (p. 176) when learning about emotionally charged topics such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism or misogyny that invite both teacher and students to step into spaces requiring both emotional and cognitive challenge. As Boler (2015) stated, "developed as a political arm of the women's movement, feminist pedagogies emphasize how processes of learning, social change, and education are intimately bound up with feeling" (p. 1491). For feminist educators, who "have a passion for teaching, and are driven by a vision of 'a world

which is not yet'" (Manicom, 1992, p. 3), there is a desire to open spaces for "bringing the whole person into the classroom" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 8), endeavouring to "challenge, deconstruct, and pry open the 'already known' of fixed and static identity categories and ways of knowing" (Miller, 2005, p. 4). This act of prying open is often met with resistance and feelings of discomfort; however, as Boler (1999) stated, the "challenge within education is to provide creative spaces to develop flexible and creative modes of resistance involving emotional breadth and exploration that are not prescriptive" (p. 4).

**Framing Intersectionality in Educational Contexts**

With the widespread integration of the concept of intersectionality in the 1990s, educators committed to social justice were confronted with the reality that:

> Valid pedagogies must stop pretending, for example, that White women possess no race, Latino men are genderless, or Black and Asian women embody mutually exclusive gendered and racial social locations... intersectional theory demands attention to the mutually constitutive nature of these interacting and intra-connected systems. (Case, 2017, p. 2)

In learning spaces, "intersectional feminism compels us to meet young people where they are through a kaleidoscope of racial, ethnic, economic, social equity, and developmental lenses in their learning environments" (Chang & Rattner, 2019, p. 28). Ultimately, a feminist intersectional pedagogy holds the potential to transform the nature of the relationships within the classroom, allowing students to share power, work collaboratively, and occupy leadership spaces. Such spaces are encouraged when teachers "increase interactions through dialogue, [to] establish a norm of inquiring curiosity, and act as intermediary between student and topic rather than as fountainhead of truth" (Scering, 1997, p. 68). Through this research, I endeavour to show

how digital storytelling aligns with this principle for how it invites personal narrative into teaching spaces.

**Digital Storytelling as Feminist Media Pedagogy**

Manicom (1992) identified the themes of experience, collaboration, and authority as sitting at the heart of feminist pedagogy. Addressing the complex relationship between the personal and political, she reminds us:

> feminist pedagogy is teaching with a political intent and with visions of social change and liberation... to learn to act in and on the world in order to transform oppressive relations of class, race, and gender. It is teaching not to change women to fit the world, but to change the world. (p. 366)

Tracing through the narrative history of Western feminism and the ways in which cultural production has been employed to both cultivate common messages and restructure or redirect collective action, feminist educators have developed new modes of communication and inquiry encouraging critical thinking in their classrooms. Recognizing the ways in which popular feminism reimagines what "empowerment means for girls and women, and thus is restructuring feminist politics within neoliberal culture" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 17), education in Western countries also sits at a critical juncture where "current educational policy terrain is distinctly 'postfeminist', [and] specific forms of liberal feminism are recuperated to sustain a neoliberal climate of educational reform" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 472). Borrowing from Benmayor's (2008) experience utilizing digital storytelling "to illustrate the transformative nature of creative authoring and 'theorizing from the flesh'" (p. 190), this participatory media practice holds potential as a feminist pedagogy which can counter contemporary "media platforms that easily

lend themselves to commodification and simplification" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 17) by neoliberal influences.

Stack and Kelly (2006) suggested, "educational researchers and educators should attend closely to popular media and democratizing media production... media are a primary, if not central, pedagogue" (p. 6). My study utilized a participatory, arts-based research methodology, particularly employing the method of digital storytelling, which has been aligned with popular education, utilizing a transformative praxis in the pursuit of engaging people in dialogue and action (Stack & Kelly, 2006). Greene (1995) connected "the arts to discovering cultural diversity, to making community, to becoming wide-awake to the world," (p. 4), and identified film art as holding potential to challenge viewers with "huge and provocative questions" (p. 102). Through her conceptualization of social imagination, she posited that we can always renew the terms of our own lives; in this time of disparate social and political disarray, I believe media arts can support the possibility that "we can begin anew with the world and with each other" (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 8).

I contend that digital storytelling can be a critical tool through which teachers and students are invited to think relationally, understanding that there is no singular experience of the world and the importance of intersubjective listening. Low et al. (2017) framed "listening as a relational project, [where] intersubjective listening further suggests the interdependency of teller and listener, and understands listening as a form of collaboration, a mediation of self and other" (p. 4). This mediation allows for the emergence of a feminist ethical ontology, which Borgerson (2001) argued "offer[s] feminist ethics tools to articulate the transition from oppression towards humanization" (p. 175).

For emerging educators, understanding the role of critical listening is an important but challenging concept with which to grapple. As Greene (1978) acknowledged, those who pursue a teaching life do so for a variety of reasons, including passion for a subject, a desire to contribute to a socially just and civil society, and the search for some sort of biographical situation which cultivates an identity of caregiver. Teachers are tasked with developing concrete skills such as lesson planning and assessment while also developing an awareness of the social dimensions of teaching, which in today's world, requires an understanding of the role media plays in young people's lives. Flores-Koulish (2006) stated pre-service teachers "must know how to engage in critical conversation, specifically on media and popular culture, for it can help to expand their emerging understandings of critical pedagogy" (p. 240). By engaging in the digital storytelling process, emerging educators can engage in a process of self-actualization. Weber and Mitchell (1996) stated, "images are both the building blocks of our thinking schemata, and the filters through which we unconsciously assess our pedagogical knowledge" (p. 305). As emerging educators confront their own beliefs about teaching and their individual teaching identities, engaging in a storytelling process invites participation in the act of critical listening, fostering compassion, and critical hope as they engage in the stories and experiences of others.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has engaged in a literature review exploring how media production has been utilized to share feminist stories throughout the history of Western feminist movements. Recognising the importance of understanding the history of feminism and the dominant narrative enveloping it, I have drawn from Hemmings's (2011) belief "we are in fact partly constructed as Western feminist subjects in and through our participation in the narratives" (p. 133), whether we align with those of progress, loss, or return. Through tracing "a" history of Western feminism, I

focus primarily on how media and cultural production have been consistently utilized to drive moments of collective action in pursuit of social change or to inform more individualistic conceptions of feminism within specific timeframes. I outlined the current moment of feminist entanglement where post-feminism, neoliberalism, and social media have resulted in the "various and often conflicting manifestations of feminism currently circulating in mainstream and popular culture" (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020, p. 21). Finally, through unpacking conceptions of feminist pedagogy — theories and practices in which it is rooted and how it is defined — I have sought to demonstrate it is more than "a handy set of instructional techniques" (Manicom, 1992, p. 365). Rather feminist pedagogy is an orientation towards teaching and learning rooted in social justice and the desire to cultivate transformative learning spaces. Highlighting the ways in which social media and movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp are being utilized to shape contemporary feminism(s) and the lines of division being fostered, I return to the power of media and cultural production through the participatory practice of digital storytelling. In the next chapter, I will outline the history of participatory visual methodologies and how digital storytelling emerged as the research method for my study. This is followed by a detailed outline of my research study and information about the research process in which I engaged with my participants.

# Chapter Three: Digital Storytelling as Participatory Arts-Based Research Methodology & Method

This chapter introduces the traditions of arts-based and participatory visual methods and why I have chosen them for my study. This includes a detailed outline of the digital storytelling process, how it evolved as the chosen method for this study, my study's structure, and key considerations that impacted and shaped the research process.

I begin by outlining the participatory art-based inquiry paradigm undergirding this study which is informed by a foundational belief in the act of storytelling as a feminist way of knowing. Drawing connections between arts-based research and participatory methodologies, I detail the history and cultural turn to the visual in social science research, followed by a subsequent turn to the evolution of participatory visual methods as an approach for arts-based research. Through unpacking the history and evolution of participatory visual methods as vital practices for working within communities, I argue for the potential they hold in educational spaces. I also acknowledge participatory visual methods as still emerging approaches for qualitative research, which, within the context of my study, offer the potential to cultivate spaces for self-reflexive dialogue within and between feminists/feminism(s).

Linking to Chapter 2 and the connections between the history of Western feminism and cultural production, I outline how participatory arts-based practices connect to feminism through their focus on equity and a shared experiential process of cultivating knowledge. After laying the philosophical foundations, I discuss why I chose to use digital storytelling with my participants and the unexpected challenges and possibilities in research design presented by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. This leads to a more comprehensive examination of digital storytelling as both an arts-based and media-based participatory method, building on the earlier discussion of

how digital stories might operate as a form of feminist pedagogy. Next, I outline my research process, originating with my own desire to better understand what it means to be a feminist educator while also seeking to cultivate a participatory space that remained open and generative to the knowledge and experience my participants brought to the process. Finally, I outline my research process including the digital storytelling process, participant recruitment, and the structure I created for the study. This entailed weaving together elements of a traditional digital storytelling workshop into a four-month process including focus groups and individual in-depth interviews, collecting visual artefacts, creating digital stories and a screening. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the data collection and analysis processes before discussing the ethical challenges and concerns that needed to be considered throughout the research process as well as the limitations of my study. I begin with a story.

**A Story of Being Teacher**

FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM – END OF SCHOOL DAY
The hallways are emptying with the last few students grabbing their belongings from their lockers and heading home. Ms. Jones sits at her desk, grading the stack of assignments on her desk and inputting grades into her computer. There's a knock at the door; she looks up. The principal stands in the doorway. This can't be good.

Ms. Jones
(nervously)
Can I help you?

Her unease is palpable. The tension between them has been increasing with every interaction over the last few months.

Principal
I have a concern I need to discuss with you about the unit plan you submitted for your Visual Communication class.

Ms. Jones
Oh, ok. Let me pull it up on my computer.

Now she is even more confused, Visual Communications is an option class, the kind to which administration rarely pay attention. Plus, it is her area of expertise, what could be the problem?

The principal stays standing in the doorway.

Ms. Jones
Would you like to come in and sit down while we talk?

Principal
(tersely)
No. This won't take very long. I've noticed that you have a film studies portion built into your plans.

Ms. Jones
Well, yes. Film is a powerful form of visual communication.

Principal
Well, you will have to change that… I won't allow the film study portion of your plan.

Ms. Jones
I don't understand… I scaffold the course to move from still images to moving ones, finishing with a film study. We do photography, then animation, then film. I've taught the class like this for a few years.

Principal
Well, perhaps you could get away with showing movies in your previous schools, but here, we take teaching and learning more seriously. You are forbidden from showing films in your class.

Ms. Jones
(her face flushed)
Forbidden?

Principal
Ms. Jones, students don't learn when they watch movies. You are forbidden.

With that she walks away, leaving Ms. Jones frustrated and on the verge of tears.

**Circling Back to the Beginning**

The story detailed above was a critical moment in my decision to return to graduate school. The way my principal both demeaned and diminished the pedagogical power of film narratives was just one of many frustrating and demoralizing moments I encountered while working in the school system. Reflecting on my teaching career, I marvel at the most how, despite the fascination expressed when colleagues or administrators heard about my previous career in film, I was rarely allowed to put my skills and knowledge to use. The principal's unease with the use of visual texts in my classroom was not the first time I had encountered a dismissive attitude towards film and other forms of visual media since entering the classroom. This conversation happened in a school where teachers and students were engaged in a pilot project exploring project-based learning and focusing on teaching competencies such as creativity and technology. Regardless, this was one example of barriers that were put in place that reflected the trivial way media culture/production is often treated in schools.

In Chapter 2, I outlined the ways in which women involved in feminist movements have engaged in their own acts of cultural production as a form of activism and empowerment. Ranging from the use of the written word in the late 1800s to more contemporary uses of digital mediascapes, from film production to hashtag activism on social media, the arts and artistic production have long provided opportunity to cultivate what Arendt (1958) referred to as the "web of relations," which exist "when human beings, people experiencing a common interest, come together in 'agent-revealing' ways, presenting themselves as 'who' not 'what' they are" (cited in Greene & Griffiths, 2008, p. 74). I described how this study is temporally located within a cultural moment when feminism is entangled in and informed by the resurgence of feminism via the #MeToo movement, the implications #MeToo has (and has not) had in the ways in which

issues of sexism and sexual violence are addressed in cultures of abuse and the need for educators to acknowledge that "sexism is in the room" (Rohrer, 2018, p. 577), alongside the increase of social media and video-based forms of communication as modes of activism, communication, and expression.

As Greene and Griffiths (2003) stated: "feminist theories, or clusters of theories, are not limited by some overarching principle of 'essense,' still less by any single set of beliefs, but rather by the way they generate or infuse actions into the world" (p. 73). Echoing Greene's (1993) belief that "encounters with the arts can awaken us to alternative possibilities of existing, of being human, of relating to – others, of being other" (p. 214), in the pages that follow, I explore the ways in which arts-based research opens spaces for these possibilities. This includes how participatory visual methodologies offer critical and creative spaces for bridging personal experiences and stories. Having reviewed literature relevant to my first research question in Chapter 2, this chapter lays the foundation for my other questions: *How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms? How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

**A Participatory Arts-based Inquiry Paradigm**

Throughout my life, as both a consumer and creator of visual stories, the arts have provided me with windows to unknown worlds and stories through which to envision new possibilities. Storytelling has also long been acknowledged as a "popular education tool, utilised to pass knowledge from one generation to another" (Smeda et al., 2014, p. 1); storytelling is a creative art form supporting the transmission of knowledge and culture. As highlighted in my

introductory chapter, stories — both written and visual — are also a keyway through which I have always learned about and engaged with the world. As noted in my exploration of the history of Western feminism and media production, storytelling is also critical to feminist movements. Acknowledging that my worldview is guided by a belief that visual stories play a critical role in how feminists, both individually and collaboratively, have engaged in media production in the fight for equality, I have come to understand the ways in which my study intertwines both arts-based and participatory paradigms resulting in what I am calling a participatory arts-based inquiry paradigm.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) described a paradigm as a "set of basic beliefs... represent[ing] a *worldview* that defines for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (p. 107). Since discovering participatory visual methods as a form of research and pedagogy, I have recognized how they align with my worldview rooted in a belief that visual stories are powerful modes of communication and inquiry through which to explore and share lived experience. Alongside this, my commitment as an educator is to engage in a relational ethic of care, grounded in the notion that education should be an empowering and transformative process through which students and teachers work collaboratively to generate knowledge and build community within their classrooms (Webb et al., 2002). Linking these two facets of my worldview together, my research is framed as using a participatory arts-based inquiry paradigm.

Borgerson (2001) "emphasize[d] the role of interpretation" (p. 177) in cultivating a non-essentialist ontology that rejects the Western patriarchal tendency to sink into dualistic thinking. She stated that dualism leads to a form of epistemic closure that limits our ability to know each other completely, "that is, an essentializing of being that brings about a closure of possibility and

on an existential level creates an oppression that blocks the human project" (p. 183). In contrast to this blockage, a feminist ethical ontology operates from the standpoint that "to be human is to be connected" and leans on semiotics "as a tool for describing the condition of human agency" (Borgerson, 2001, p. 173). This aligns with the participatory arts-based paradigm I am claiming for its emphasis on and ability to support "people's capacity to be creative actors on the world" (Maguire, 1987, p. 31). This belief in human connection is critical to my study, as is the need for new modes of communication through which to confront difficult knowledge amid disparate lived experiences and worldviews.

Chilton and Leavy (2020) supported the emergence of arts-based research as a "novel" paradigm where, epistemologically, "art can access inner life through stories, metaphors, and symbols," (p. 602) allowing exposure to one another's lived experiences. I believe the power of story is critical to bridging differences and confronting difficult knowledge about the world and ourselves. It is through this bridgebuilding that we might discover the "power to awaken resistance to the dehumanization of the status quo while envisioning new landscapes of ways of thinking, acting, and being together by seeing the familiar with new eyes and ears" (Spector et al., 2017, p. 2). Inherent to a participatory inquiry paradigm is an "extended epistemology" through which "a knower participates in the known, articulates a world, in at least four interdependent ways: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 280). Engaging a participatory approach to research challenges both positivistic and constructivist approaches, allowing for an experiential way of knowing which seeks to place "us back in relation with the living world" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 276). As Finley (2014) noted:

> *good* critical arts-based research grasps our imaginations, grabs ahold of our souls, and unabashedly strives to affect our very ways of living, being, and co-being, as researchers, as social scientists, as people. It transforms our identities and gives new ways of expressing our differently evolving identities. (p. 531)

Situating myself within a participatory, arts-based paradigm focuses my study with the intent to cultivate equitable spaces where my participants are active co-researchers versus passive objects to be studied, where spaces of wonder and imagination can be cultivated to support transformation and connection (Ferreira, 2013).

Through the course of my doctoral studies, I have come to understand the critical ways in which I understand the arts as supporting a relational ethic of care with my life as an educator and a scholar. Participatory visual methods such as digital storytelling exemplify a participatory ethic through the ways in which they engage participants in experiential and relational ways in a collaborative process of artistic creation. Tied to participatory action research, participatory visual methods are also rooted in a desire to shift from extractive forms of research towards a more community-centred focus on "'co-generative inquiry,' in which local and professional knowledge interact [to] produce valid, context-centred knowledge" (Gubrium & Harper, 2016, p. 30). The principles or tenets that frame participatory visual methods include embedding social responsibility within the research process, accessing participant knowledge, and an emphasis on social change "based on co-learning and capacity building" (Ferreira, 2013, p. 1). Heron and Reason (1997) recognized the potential for social change created through engaging in research from a participatory paradigm, placing importance on the axiological question: "what is intrinsically worthwhile, what it is about the human condition that is valuable as an end in itself?" (p. 287). This axiological question which "is about values of being, about what human

states are to be valued simply by virtue of what they are" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 286), is inherently linked to the feminist struggle for equity. Both arts-based and participatory research respond to this question by relocating participants from being the subjects of research to the position of co-creating knowledge through collaboration and inquiry.

***Participatory Arts-Based Research & Multimodal Media Production***

> *People use multimodal media production as a way to engage with their everyday life experiences. These technologies are no longer separate from us; they are ubiquitous to the ways we now live our lives. For any social research project, it is necessary to understand how people are learning and making meaning in their lives. (Gubrium & Turner, 2011, p. 469)*

For as long as I can remember, the arts have been critical to the way I have connected with the world. My own enthusiasm for creating visual art was somewhat tempered after what I recall as a rather shameful and embarrassing moment in my Grade 4 art class when I was told by my teacher that my drawing of an apple was not very good. As a teenager, I was captivated by literature and film, and while at school, if you wanted to find me you had to look no further than the Drama room. I fell in love with acting in junior and senior high school years only to become dissuaded from a life in the theatre in my early years in university. That was until I found film and I was able to see a way to live in the world while being a part of a creative process. Discovering arts-based research as I journeyed through my master's and (now) doctoral programs, offered an invitation to weave together my love of film and visual storytelling – my deeply held belief in the power of what Greene (1995) refers to as the "social imagination."

Described as a type of "utopian thinking," Greene's (1995) "social imagination" is an invitation to "invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficit society, in the streets where we live and our schools. Social imagination not only suggests but also requires that one take action to repair or renew" (p. 5) — it is rooted in a belief in an educator's responsibility to "provide openings, to create more possibilities, to move us to a more empowered stance in the

world" (p. 188). Greene saw the arts as the most provocative way to produce these openings. When I entered the classroom as a teacher in my mid-30s, after years of working in a creative and collaborative profession, this concept sat at the centre of my pedagogy and how I endeavoured to lead my students in their learning.

### *Participatory Arts-based Methodology as Feminist Research*

Arts-based research has been defined as "a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation" (Leavy, 2015, pp. 2–3). Arts-based research engages participants in an inquiry process through a belief in "art-making as a way of knowing" (Leavy, 2017, p. 4). This can include a multitude of creative processes including visual, literary, performative, audiovisual, and multimedia formats, inviting participants to engage in knowledge creation through artistic expression. Understanding:

> the appeal of the arts is broad because these forms can promote autonomy, raise awareness, activate the senses, express the complex feeling-based aspects of social life, illuminate the complexity and sometimes paradox of lived experience, jar us into seeing and thinking differently, and transform consciousness through evoking empathy and resonance (Chilton & Leavy, 2020, p. 601).

Leavy and Harris (2019) located the emergence of arts-based research as primarily occurring over the last three decades, claiming that they offer feminist researchers' possibility for "harnessing the unique capabilities of the arts to tap into issues in new ways, jar people into seeing and thinking differently, promote self and social reflection, and open multiplicity of meanings" (p. 208).

Keifer-Boyd (2011) cautioned that merely utilizing an arts-based approach does not make a research project inherently feminist. She noted a "social justice approach to arts-based research involves continual critical reflexivity in response to injustice" (p. 3) and a close examination of inequalities, including the ways in which gender entangles with race and class within our social lives. The acknowledgement of this entanglement echoes the need for "consistent attention to questions of difference, equity, and intersectionality" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 10) identified when engaging in feminist media pedagogies and practice. Feminist research requires a critical, inquiring, and experiential approach to foster dialogue to challenge "gender-based inequities that are still pervasive around the globe" (Leavy & Harris, 2019, p. 5). Manning and Denker (2015) recommended feminist participatory research practices, consistent with the participatory arts-based paradigm I described above, because they encourage interpersonal communication and allow "participants to share their multiple perspectives and [seek] to use those perspectives to both foster a sense of inclusion and to encourage productive social change" (p. 136). Sometimes critiqued for their small scale, participatory practices are unique in their requirement for careful facilitation to ensure different voices are honoured and the effective transfer of skills (Mayoux, 2006). Mayoux stated, "here the main aim is not so much knowledge *per se*, but social change and empowerment – and this wherever possible as a direct result of the research process itself" (p. 118). Within educational contexts, participatory research supports capacity-building models linking theory to practice and supporting inclusion of all members of the school community (Apple & Beane, 2007).

Participatory research methodologies have been identified as allowing "us as humans to know that we are part of the whole rather than separated as mind over and against matter" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 25). Attempting to "address power imbalances and oppressive social

structures… [asserting] that new is knowledge is gained through mutual understanding and collaboration" (Grant et al., 2008, pp. 589-590), they offer possibilities for empowering voices and experiences from the margins (de Oliveira Jayme & Tremblay, 2016). In relation to feminist issues, participatory methods have been identified as ideal for their capacity to embody "the values of critical, critical race, and feminist theories of knowledge production" (Nygreen, 2009, p. 16). Through utilizing a participatory arts-based, visual method such as digital storytelling, which aligns with feminist research methods, I philosophically consider how feminist educators engage with visual narratives (as consumers and creators), while also exploring a method for all educators to take into their teaching spaces.

**The Emergence of the Visual in Social Research**

Over the past decade, participatory and collaborative methods employing visual and digital media have experienced a proliferation of interest across multiple disciplines such as the social sciences, health, and education (Switzer, 2018). This is "reflected in an increasing number of publications and project websites each year" (Gubrium & Harper, 2016, p. 27). Inclusive of a variety of approaches and a diverse range of techniques including drawing, photography, mixed media collage, digital storytelling, and collaborative film and/or video creation, participatory visual methodologies can cut across genres, allowing them to overlap and intertwine within a project (Mitchell, 2011). Rose (2001) addressed the emergent ways in which "the visual" had impacted the direction of social research over the preceding twenty to thirty years. Referring to what is thought of as a cultural turn in social thinking, Rose saw this shift as centred around a growing interest "in the ways in which social life is constructed through the ideas that people have about it, and the practices that flow from those ideas" (p. 5). Now, twenty years later, the proliferation of images with which we are inundated has grown immensely, largely due to

advances in technology which have led to the increased spread of all things visual through the Internet and increased access to digital media. Resulting from this, the study of visual images and the impact they have on how critical understandings of our world are formed, has spanned across a variety of disciplines (Metcalfe, 2016).

In his important text, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (1994), Martin Jay identified the way "visual metaphors" arise in a multitude of disciplinary contexts, noting that due to the "remarkable range and variability of visual practices, many commentators have been tempted to claim certain cultures or ages have been 'ocularcentric,' or dominated by vision" (p. 3). Rose (2001) referred to Jay's notion of "ocularcentrism [in order] to describe the apparent centrality of the visual to contemporary Western life" (p. 7). Pink (2001) stated that "images are 'everywhere'… they permeate our academic work, everyday lives, conversations, and dreams. They are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures, and societies" (p. 17) and have resulted in the emergence of new possibilities for the visual within qualitative research.

In her more recent work, *Advances in Visual Methodology*, Pink (2013) referred to "visual methodologies as a set of approaches to working with the visual in research and representation that are constantly in progress and development" (p. 4). Acknowledging the rapid pace at which these methodologies have taken up residence in contemporary discourses, she calls on researchers to embark upon the challenge of both "understanding and engaging not only with the newest and latest theoretical developments in our fields, but also with the ways that these are co-implicated with technological developments and media practices" (p. 3).

The process of defining visual methodologies in research has largely been impacted by the broad range of disciplines in which they have been employed (Pink, 2013). Initially taking

root in fields of social research such as sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, visual methods have also begun to forge an important place within educational arenas. Resulting largely from what Mitchell (2011) identified as their ability to "serve recursively as a mode of inquiry, as a mode of representation and as a mode of dissemination" (p. 378). This emphasis on the increasing power of the visual plays an important role in education as it has been noted that "images can themselves provide critical entry points for meaning making… help[ing] us to deconstruct…the ways in which meanings are used to shape a particular vision of the world" (Nguyen & Mitchell, 2012, p. 490).

### *The Increasing Impact of the Visual on Education: Considerations & Concerns*

Within educational research, visual methodologies are viewed as newly emerging and not well examined (Metcalfe, 2016; Moss & Pini, 2016), calling upon researchers to "ensure that the term 'visual methodologies' is not simply reduced to one practice or to one set of tools … [and] at the same time … [to] ensure that this set of methodologies and practices are appreciated within its full complexity" (Mitchell, 2008, p. 365). In the years since I first discovered participatory visual methodologies as a community engagement practice, their use and potential within social research has grown immensely. This evolution is outlined in the next section which focuses more closely on the turn towards the participatory, as well as the challenges and possibilities it presents within both feminist and educational research.

### *Visual Methods and the "Participatory Turn"*

Building on the concept of a cultural turn, Gubrium et al. (2015) spoke of a "participatory turn," linked to the growth and interest in participatory action research (PAR). PAR has been identified as a method which:

> offers a well-developed framework for breaking down barriers between researchers and "subjects," and between analysis and praxis. PAR attempts to forge collaborative research relationships in which community partners take an active role in studying problems alongside a traditional researcher to develop strategies for change. (Gubrium & Harper, 2016, pp. 29-30)

Flourishing out of the increased accessibility of digital media technologies, the turn towards the participatory in visual research has presented "us with new ways to work alongside communities to produce and communicate our research collaboratively" (Gubrium et al., 2015, p. 15). For visual methods, this has led to new spaces of imagination where "people seek to investigate social conditions, lived experience, subjective viewpoints, and in some cases, interventions for social action" (Chalfen, 2011, p. 186). Further to this, new sites of knowledge production have been created, allowing for collaboration between participants and researcher(s) in the co-construction of images to share experiences, empower communities, and potentially lead to social transformation (Chalfen, 2011; Ferreira, 2013; Walsh, 2012; van Laren et al., 2013).

Within educational research, this "turn" to participatory visual methods has resulted in exciting possibilities by allowing researchers to "take the hands of teachers and other community stakeholders in generating knowledge that may bring about social change" (Ferreira, 2013, p. 3). Recognized as a set of evocative tools that have "the power to transform the society in which we live and the communities in which we work," (Walsh, 2012, p. 406), researchers in the field have noticed "an explosion of interest in participatory media as a tool for individual and community education and development across the globe" (Low et al., 2017, p. 1). Although commonly utilized by organizations around the world to work with diverse communities in informal

education settings, visual methods are not commonly used in formal educational settings, which I will speak to further below.

**Exploring Participatory Visual Methods.** An examination of existing literature showed that visual research methods have been used to tackle many social issues, including "resilience, sexuality, gender, gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, and so on. These studies have involved learners, students, educators, parents, community-health workers, department officials, academics" (de Lange, 2012, p. 1). The inclusion of various stakeholders in the research process is at the centre of why visual researchers choose a participatory approach, seeking to replace an objectifying lens with a subjective one, and necessitating that we actively question "the right of the researcher to represent 'other' people, [requiring we] recognize the impossibility of 'knowing other minds'" (Pink, 2001, p. 18). However, it must be noted that challenges have emerged out of this work which requires careful consideration, including requiring researchers to be mindful of emancipatory agendas which carry with them assumptions and views which may influence the outcomes of the research (Meager, 2017; Milne et al., 2012).

Addressing the perils of emancipatory agendas, Kindon (2016) emphasized the importance of acknowledging Western structures of power and privilege inherent in the role of researcher and highlighted the need to acknowledge the potential for reproducing hegemonic modes of cultural production. As a researcher engaging with my participants, I needed to think of ways to cultivate an inclusive space where power dynamics were as diminished as possible. Within my study, it has been important to recognize the ways film and video production, as both technology and social practice, are subject to the influence of existing power structures. This is demonstrated through such practices as white balancing the camera, which impacts how non-white people appear on screen (technology) and the ways in which footage is filmed and then

edited together. Both are influenced by *who* is looking through the lens. For example, many directors of photography and camera operators in mainstream film production are men, therefore more susceptible to reproducing the male gaze. This can potentially lead to a constraint of "alternative ways of looking and the production of different forms of knowledge" (Kindon, 2016, p. 6). Critical to all participatory work is the responsibility of the researcher to recursively revisit their own actions, remaining self-reflexive around the ways in which they utilize these methods, as well as in how the data collected throughout the process is disseminated and discussed (Mitchell, 2011).

Technology has played an important role in creating more diverse and generative spaces for the participatory visual model to be utilized, and it is important to note the very wide scope that the term(s) *visual methods* and/or *participatory visual methods* can encompass, each offering their own unique set of possibilities and challenges. Participatory visual research studies have been conducted utilizing one or more of the following: drawings, storyboards, digital photography, film and video, digital archives, and exhibitions (utilizing found images), paintings and mapping software (Chalfen, 2011; Gubrium & Harper, 2016). Mannay (2016) observed the freedom that comes with this broad range of modes of representation, offering that "this movement between frames, disciplines, visual and narrative modes, techniques and approaches is…very much what makes working with creative methods an exciting undertaking" (p. 24).

**Participatory Visual Methods: A Feminist DIY Tool.** As feminist educators strive for new ways to engage students in sharing personal stories requiring vulnerability, the arts have emerged as vital to crafting "ethical, relational space[s] to hold such difficult knowledge" (Conrad & Leavy, 2018, p. 2). Visual methodologies have been embraced by feminists who view "methodology as central to the production of knowledge" (Allan & Tinkler, 2015, p. 792).

Dahya and King (2019) noted that "while the stories girls and women tell matter immensely, so too does teaching young people how to use the tools available to them to enable them to participate in the public domain" (p. 40). Participatory visual methodologies facilitate new ways of communicating, fostering dialogic spaces for the sharing of lived experience, and through which to enter "women's life worlds" (Waite & Conn, 2012, p. 85). Young women today are growing up in a media-dense world. Participatory video or collaborative filmmaking has been identified as inherently feminist for the potential it presents for contesting "the centrality of androcentric, institutionalized knowledge as being the way of knowing ourselves and the world" (Gustafson, 2000, p. 725). Harris (2018) highlighted research practices utilizing video as holding "the potential to be uniquely methodologically, aesthetically, and/or politically distinct from other research approaches" (p. 437). This distinction is particularly evident in research that centres on video creation as a tool for knowledge production.

**"Doing" Participatory Visual Methods.** As still emerging methods, Moss and Pini (2016) made note that "there is very little academic literature" (p. 1) examining the impact of participatory visual methods. This view is supported by Low et al. (2017) who called for a more "theoretically informed analyses of what participatory media projects allow people to express, understand, and do" (p. 2) pointing to the problem arising out of the lack of any critical examination of completed projects in close relation to one another. Metcalfe (2016) claimed "this methodological focus entails a commitment to theory, particularly visual theory, and researcher positionality" (p. 79). As literature in the field of visual methods emerges, it more closely examining the challenges and potentials participatory visual methods present or make possible through addressing social responsibility, accessing participant knowledge, and emphasizing the potential for social change (Moss & Pini, 2016). As part of the emerging conversation around the

role they can play in educational spaces sits a need to consider visual methods' potential for understanding how “the relation between students and teacher is imagined as a partnership as the class works together to co-construct knowledge and meaning” (Low et al., 2017, p. 107). To my study, employing digital storytelling as a pedagogy calls for a need to understand the ways in which both the creation process and the sharing of stories can cultivate “transitional space(s) between self and other, imagination and external reality” (Low et al., 2017, p. 98). Questioning the over-emphasis on empowering *voice* often heard in discussions around fostering liberatory spaces for learning, Low et al., (2017) suggested digital stories cultivate the potential for intersubjective listening. They offered that digital stories can uncover obstacles, such as different lived experiences, identities, and perspectives, encountered when engaging in conversations around power structures and how they inform our world(s).

Acknowledging the complexity of adding the dimension of visual methods to the already existing challenges of engaging in participatory research is a daunting but necessary task, particularly for “attend[ing] to the challenges of interpretation across class, cultural, racial, and generational differences” (Low et al., 2017, p. 12). Given the increasingly complex nature of digital communications and technologies, it seems more urgent now than ever that we must re-learn to listen to each other’s stories in truly engaged ways, particularly in educative spaces, if we are to continue to foster imagination, care, and hope in future generations.

**Digital Stories as Multimodal Media Production**

Near the end of my candidacy exam, one of my committee members asked me why I believed so much in the power of story. It was a moment of pause, that stayed with me long after the exam had passed and has guided much of my thinking as I have moved through my research – both where the importance of stories sits within my study, as well as how I engage others as an

educator and now researcher. As a visual storyteller and media arts teacher, I had always sought creative ways to weave digital ways of knowing into my lessons and experimented with participatory video projects, photography, and digital storytelling with my students. In the first year of my doctoral program, I discovered the power, not only in creating digital stories, but also in sharing them through the creation of a digital story for a curriculum studies class. Titled *Spring Comes Slowly,* this story allowed me to explore facilitating the crossing of landscapes "between language and the impossibility of representation" (Ibrahim et al., 2016, p. xvii). What stood out for me in this experience was the emotion I felt while crafting the digital story, but even more so, the power of sharing it and the positive responses from my peers. Their feedback highlighted the ability for digital stories to evoke an emotional reaction. Weaving together personal narratives with the idea of *curriculum-as-listener* encouraged me to explore the intersections between digital storytelling and affect theory.

Benmayor (2008) described digital storytelling as a form of "creative theorizing... involv[ing] the skills of conceptualizing, writing, performing, selecting, imaging, integrating, and signifying" (p. 194). Gubrium and Turner (2011) included digital storytelling in their exploration of multimodal media productions, suggesting they weave together the "myriad of modalities people use to understand the world they live in, express themselves, be entertained, and defend themselves" (p. 469). My own experimenting with digital storytelling opened a space through which to straddle "that which is realistic and that which is yet to come" (Ibrahim et al., 2016, p. xvii), in my own *becoming/being* teacher-researcher, as well as to delve into the conundrum of listening as an intersubjective and intentional act. It was then that I began to connect more intentionally with the ways in which stories and storytelling have been such an integral part of who I am and how I view the world, and this discovery has guided much of my doctoral journey.

### *Ethical Considerations in Digital Storytelling*

The question of ethics is critical in any participatory research process, and academic researchers accept a social responsibility when utilizing a participatory model to cultivate voice, transformation, and agency (Mitchell, 2008). Low et al. (2017) also stressed the importance of intersubjective listening, describing this as an act which "requires a shared space governed by an ethics of attention, to self and other, and an ethics of freedom or play… in relation to projects which bring together people (often strangers) in creative collaboration" (p. 4). Digital stories are referred to by Radford and Aitken (2016) as a form of "digital dreamwork" (p. 159) and by Alexandra (2016) as a tool for "political listening" (p. 41). In both, what emerges as central to the discussion around digital stories is the potential they offer for "identity performances… which allow participants, themselves, to construct and represent their own experiences" (Gubrium & Harper, 2016, p. 129).

In her exploration of digital stories, Alexandra (2016) recognized the act of listening is embedded and ongoing in the site of media production, encouraging deeper engagement with the complex conversation around whose voices are privileged and whose are silenced, even within forums where democratization has been emphasized. With the topic of ethics in mind, she brings to light key considerations stating, "revelation and concealing are central to the act of storytelling. What should be shared? What cannot be told or shown? How should the author position her or himself in relation to the audience" (p. 48). I contend that through the shared space of digital storytelling, assumptions about both feminism and teaching can be interrogated and confronted through constructive dialogue prompted by the act of sharing both personal perspectives as well as stories of experience. This will be explored further in my analysis and conclusion of my study.

**Crafting an Online Research Design Using Digital Storytelling**

This section details the history of digital storytelling. These are traditionally defined as short videos ranging in length from 2–5 minutes and exploring a personal narrative as constructed by the storyteller (Gubrium & Turner, 2011; Lambert & Hessler, 2018). Gubrium (2009) stated digital storytelling is based on a Freirian model where "participants construct stories as they construct change, the goal is to listen to the generative themes or collective issues of community members to create a dialogue" (p. 186). As a research method, this form of multimodal media production is recognized for its ability to "bolster community building and community members' abilities to address local issues of concern" (Gubrium & Turner, 2011, p. 470). Lambert and Hessler (2018) identified digital storytelling as a collaborative and participatory process which is facilitated, allowing participants to understand "they are making the story with support, not completely do[ing] it [themselves], but as close as is possible" (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 42). Joe Lambert and Dana Atchley founded the StoryCenter (https://www.storycenter.org/), originally known as the Center for Digital Storytelling, in the early 1990s, emphasizing developing and popularizing digital storytelling workshops to support social change. Lambert and Atchley are recognized for having "codified" the digital storytelling method to be both flexible for the community by which they are being created, as well as weaving together personal lived experiences in various contexts, including public health, youth services, Indigenous communities, and international development (Gubrium & Turner, 2011). Originally rooted in what Lambert referred to as a form of revisiting the "family photo album," and primarily used in community-based work (J. Lambert, personal communication, July 14, 2020), digital storytelling utilizes advances in technology and the now prevalent use and availability of video creation. The potential and possibility for this short film format has

increased monumentally in the last decade. Digital storytelling has been recognized for supporting the "creative aspects of the Freirian approach [to] emphasize the transformation of generative themes and shar[ing] understandings into physical form" (Gubrium, 2009, p. 186). With this the social and artistic potential for digital storytelling has evolved, such that it is now being discussed as a form of social movement media, research, mediation, critical literacy, and pedagogy (Canella, 2017; Hessler & Lambert, 2017). Critical to the StoryCenter's approach are the seven steps detailed below.

***The Seven Steps of Digital Storytelling***

As conceived by the StoryCenter, there are seven identified steps to the digital storytelling process. These are:

1. Owning your insights – Clarifying the root of the story. It is important to note that while digital storytelling can be therapeutic in nature, it is not therapy (J. Lambert, personal communication, June 29, 2020). In this first stage, the emphasis is on posing questions that invite the storyteller to discover the uniqueness of their perspective and experience. Most participants enter the workshop space with an idea of the story they want to tell; this step is intended to clarify their story's insight, allowing the writing process to become self-reflective as they move from "an awareness of 'I am' to a deeper awareness of 'I have been... I am becoming...I am... I will be..." (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 55). As discussed in earlier chapters – "feminist work is often memory work" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 22). Kidd (2019) spoke to the ways in which digital storytelling conjures and invites performative memories with an "emphasis on both personal memory and artefacts (photographic, video, objects and the teller's voice) and thus often a sense of the past translates into stories that are affectively intense" (p. 171). This intensity can lead to the next step.

2. Owning your emotions – This is summarized as finding the emotional resonance of the story through a process of self-reflection. Lambert and Hessler (2018) reminded us "when we reflect on the emotions within our stories, we realize that they can be complex, and with this realization we oftentimes discover deeper layers of a story's meaning" (p. 58). This step offers challenges, as acknowledging emotion and being vulnerable when exploring difficult conversations requires openness and trust in both the process and the other participants. However, as Ahmed (2017) stated "the histories that leave us fragile are often those that bring us to a feminist room" (p. 59). She continued, stating "it matters how we think about feeling. Feelings are how structures become affective; how we are 'impressed upon' in our encounters with others; how we are impressed differently, affected differently, by what we come up against" (p. 62). This is where the power of listening with depth and asking questions that are process-oriented can be useful for helping a storyteller gain awareness of the emotional connections to their story and how they would like to perform them.
3. Finding the moment – Lambert and Hessler (2018) framed this step of finding the moment to focus the story on the significance of change – "at some point in your life, change came to you, or you went towards change" (p. 59). Inherent to this are the ways in which autobiographical memory is at play in how we construct and "see" our stories. Returning to the acknowledgement of digital storytelling as therapeutic, in my experience, this process of finding a moment, can become quite emotional for participants. As a facilitator (and as a teacher) I have learned the importance of "listening for the storyteller's conscious and unconscious vulnerabilities" (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 74). Allowing them to share what they are comfortable with and pass when desired.

4. Seeing your story – This step is about how to design a story. It includes selecting/creating images and thinking about how to piece them together, writing the words (order, how long they stay on the screen, effects that may be added, transitions) and picking sounds to accompany them. The intention is to bring the story to life for an audience who will engage in an act of narrative witnessing (Kidd, 2019). This may include using a traditional "family album" format, with images that are explicitly related to the text created. Lambert and Hessler (2018) also spoke to the power of images with a more implied or poetic representation, which can add additional layers of meaning through metaphor and open opportunity for participants who may not have access to images directly related to the story they are piecing together.
5. Hearing your story – This step involves the storyteller narrating and recording their story. Lambert identified this as one of the most difficult moments for many storytellers (J. Lambert, personal communication, August 4, 2020). Participants can experience embodied discomfort and disconnect when hearing their own voices. When writing the narration, Lambert and Hessler (2018) encouraged storytellers to consider a minimalistic approach, as when voice, image, and sound effects are woven together, what looks sparse on the page may have to be edited to fit alongside the images. After adding the voiceover, sound effects and music can be added.
6. Assembling your story – As a filmmaker, I have come to a deep awareness of the importance and complexity of editing and establishing a pace for a film. This holds true whether creating a one-minute digital story or a full-length feature film; these are integral facets for setting the tone, tension, and emotion in the digital story. This might require determining the essential

elements for a story, rearranging various layers of sound and image, and yes, even leaving some things on the cutting room floor!

7. Sharing your story – This is the dissemination process in which the author is invited to consider an audience and location for the story. Sharing can either stay within the group or lead to a larger showcase of created stories (Lambert, 2010). This act of sharing requires "a teller and a listener for narrative of this kind to be successfully created. The opportunities afforded by the digital archive indicate a potential for global witnessing" (Kidd, 2019, p. 171).

These Seven Steps have been adapted over time to better reflect that they live as a framework versus a "prescribed 'catechism'" which could be perceived as privileging the written word over the visual (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 53). This process has resulted in the potential for digital storytelling to occupy new spaces and evolve in different iterations. They can be adapted as required by the participants of any given workshop, allowing for new entry points for stories to be told. Lambert and Hessler (2018) posited this evolution of the digital storytelling process has resulted in an increased focus for story circles to invite participants into a more recursive and less linear process "where they can more fully visualize the script and imagine how it sounds before they even begin to write their script" (p. 51). From the lens of feminist pedagogy, this evolved process also invites more opportunities for engagement, imagination, and success for learners with diverse learning needs.

**Story-Circles: Cultivating Brave Spaces for Connection.** I was first introduced to circle practices in my position as a consultant with Edmonton Public Schools when I was trained in a method called The Circle Way — an informal yet facilitated conversational structure that invites people to an equitable space for sharing experiences (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010). This

model focuses on creating a democratic space for voices to be heard and allowing for more equitable decision-making in an organizational or learning environment. The use of story circles is acknowledged as a creative adaptation of storytelling traditions from various ancient cultures around the world (Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Deardorff, 2020). In Maslin-Ostrowski et al.'s (2018) study examining "the complexities of using story as a catalyst for transformative learning" (p. 130), the following four principles are central to the story circle process:

1. People naturally tell stories and seek meaning.
2. Talking together enables people to connect and collectively build meaning, seek solutions and take action.
3. People willingly participate when they feel safe, welcomed, honoured, and respected; and
4. Wide inclusion and diversity strengthen our ability to make wise decisions for action. (p. 140)

Within the digital storytelling workshop structure, story circles are cultivated as safe and supportive spaces to bravely share stories that inform and lead to the writing of the emerging digital stories and showcasing the completed videos. Story circles are always facilitated and have established guidelines, including: 1) Story circles are limited to participants and facilitator(s), and 2) A tone of mutual respect is established alongside the ground rules: "maintain confidentiality; do not interrupt each other; keep feedback positive and constructive; stay on topic; couch feedback in the conditional not the declarative or use questions rather than statements" (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, pp. 78-79). They also demand a level of self-awareness and reflexivity about one's own behaviours amid complex group dynamics.

Within educational settings, the use of circles has become increasingly recognized for facilitating dialogue and fostering more democratic learning spaces (Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2018). Within digital storytelling, they foster a collaborative and brave space for the writing process, including sharing written pieces with one another as well as offering feedback, suggestions, and advice from a reading/listening perspective. Lambert and Hessler (2018) spoke about circles "to create the space, the context, the encouragement, and the support with a firm resolve that you believe the person is capable of the miracle of writing and producing a transformative story" (p. 73). Central to this, as in all other facets of digital storytelling, the emphasis is on the process not the product. Through the digital storytelling facilitator training I took during the summer of 2020, I learned how circles are critical to the digital storytelling workshop with Lambert and Hessler (2018) identifying them as "the heart of the entire process" (p. 78).

**The Workshop Outline**

Traditionally, digital storytelling workshops are structured over the course of a three-day period and are often informal, creative opportunities for participants to explore a particular topic. Often organized into phases informed by the seven steps, the workshops often entail working with participants who range in comfort levels with sharing personal stories and varying degrees of technical knowledge. Lambert and Hessler (2018) described the beginning of the workshop, or introductory lecture, as an opportunity to introduce the seven steps and emphasize the power of keeping participants' personal introductions short, believing that "delaying their opportunity to expand on their ideas until after the lecture, and within the story circle, allows them to drop into their emotions and reshape their workshop goals and story ideas" (p. 77).

The introductory lecture includes sharing samples of digital stories, an introduction to the aesthetic framework of digital storytelling, and the establishment of trust and familiarity with the facilitator in what they intend to be a hopeful and inspiring interaction (Lambert & Hessler, 2018). The emphasis here is cultivating a space that creates a welcoming and relational climate and a learning space where questions about the process, technology, and experience can be asked. Having spent many years in the classroom, I was aware that while there are often assumptions made that people from younger generations are more at ease with technology, this is not always the case. As a result, it was integral in my study to ensure I asked my participants about their comfort levels with creating and finding images as well as using editing software to weave the images and words together.

***An Adapted Design for Pandemic Times***

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself in need of having to reconceptualize my study to an online format. What I was to discover was that this posed new limitations as well as unimagined possibilities. This re-envisioning was largely aided by taking the online facilitator course with the StoryCenter, which coincided with my ethics approval process and the initial stages of my participant recruitment. Having always held their workshops in person, the pandemic required modifications to their face-to-face workshops and courses in response to the new circumstances we were all experiencing. This involved re-conceptualizing the facilitator's role and transitioning from an intensive five-day in-person workshop to a ten-week online one, where rather than meeting for full days, participants would meet for two hours a week.

Led by the StoryCenter's founder Joe Lambert and several other facilitators including Rob Kershaw, Janet Ferguson, and Maria Lovejoy, I was able to work, learn, collaborate, and

share stories with many seasoned storytellers from various parts of the world. This experience provided me with both wisdom on how to adapt the workshop, as well as insight into a realistic number of participants for me to recruit. For example, when we were broken into story circles, each breakout room had a ratio of four to five participants to one facilitator, which I modeled in my own study.

The shift online required me to reconsider my recruitment process given the challenges of the pandemic, the inability to meet in person, and the need for greater consideration of the ways in which everyone was having to adapt. Initially hoping to have 6–8 participants, the training helped me rethink how large my group should be to facilitate online gatherings more effectively and with the proper care. This, and the realization that the world was experiencing a moment of collective pause as priorities regarding where our day-to-day energies needed to be focused, forced me to adjust my expectations regarding how the research project might evolve. The online format also allowed me to broaden the geographic area from which I could recruit participants.

Another facet of my initial research design that had to be reconsidered was my hope to potentially utilize one or both methods of digital storytelling and participatory video with my participants. As I journeyed through the workshop with the StoryCenter, and I began to learn more about digital storytelling, I realized that, like participatory video, the digital storytelling process can result in "a strong collective response that includes both producers and viewers" (Mitchell et al., 2018, p. 111) as participants share their digital stories with one another. However, unlike participatory video, which Mitchell et al. (2018) stated can overshadow individual experience, the narrative approach of digital storytelling carves space for personal lived experiences to be heard and seen alongside those of others. This emergent understanding, and the uncertainty of how participatory video creation would be possible given the limitations

on in-person interactions caused by the pandemic, led me to focus more intentionally on digital storytelling as the main method I would employ.

With all this in mind, I re-designed my study for an online environment and began to reimagine the potential of digital storytelling for exploring my research questions alongside my participants. Additionally, as my study structure evolved and adapted amid the early days of the pandemic, as people were becoming increasingly isolated, I realized the emotional need for spaces where participants could share their stories and experiences. Stories can function in many ways:

> As a learning modality through memory, as a way to address our connection to the changing world around us, as a form of reflection against the flood of ubiquitous access to infinite information, as the vehicle to encourage our social agency, and, finally, as a process by which we best make sense of our lives and our identity. (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 13)

As people around the globe struggled to adapt and make sense of their new reality, finding creative ways for connection and community seemed vital to consider as lived curriculum.

***Participant Recruitment***

I began recruiting participants in mid-July 2020, sending out emails including a poster (APPENDIX A) to contacts working within teacher education programs in Alberta, and to select former students from the undergraduate courses I have frequently taught since 2016. I also posted the information about the study on my personal Facebook page, the University of Alberta's Secondary Education Graduate Students Association Facebook page and sent it to various digital media organizations in Alberta and British Columbia. Critical to this process was finding individuals who had an interest in weaving digital technologies and storytelling into their

teaching praxis and an interest in exploring feminism and the implications of employing a feminist pedagogy in their future teaching. Understanding that learning happens not only in formal school settings led my search to expand beyond formal teacher education programs to include community-based settings where there was a focus on teaching about digital media and filmmaking.

Initially, five people contacted me in response to the call for participants, including four pre-service teachers and one community-based educator who worked for an independent film not-for-profit in southern Alberta. I met with each of them one-on-one, which allowed them to ask questions about the study as well as for me to explain how the subsequent few months would be laid out. This included a discussion about informed consent, how data would be collected, any ethical concerns, and the principles of participatory research. After these initial meetings, one person decided not to continue. Despite inquiring as to her reasons, no answer was given, leaving me with three pre-service teachers and one community-based educator. Profiles of these four participants are included in Chapter 4.

***Research Study Timeline and Format***

For the purposes of my study, I made modifications to the timeline of the workshop, as modeled by the StoryCenter; the online format provided an extended (vs. intensive) timeline to accommodate the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as allow for more time to work with my participants to build relationships and gather data. I was also mindful, as I wanted to offer the method to my participants as something they might use in their future classrooms, of the need to explore a model for digital storytelling that may be better suited to a classroom environment where time limitations are likely. This demanded a process chunked into smaller/shorter sessions spread over a longer period. I designed my study to unfold over a period

of four months beginning in late August 2020 until late December 2020. This was broken down as follows:

1. Late–August – early September 2020 – Introductory individual interviews
2. September – Three focus groups (weekly for three weeks)
3. October 2020 – Individual data gathering (visual journaling) and individual in-depth interviews
4. November 2020 – Fourth focus group and discussion about creating digital stories
5. December 2020 – Final focus group, screening of digital stories, follow up individual interviews

Each of these stages is outlined in greater detail below.

***Data Collection***

This study gathered perspectives and experiences through focus group discussions around specific questions and activities, individual interviews, visual journaling involving the creation and gathering of visual and written data, and the completed digital stories. Over the course of the four months study, a mix of data collection methods was employed including 1) Five focus groups with pre-determined research questions and a working through of the seven steps of the digital storytelling process. During the focus group meetings, I employed a circle format for sharing, which is a key part of the digital storytelling process. 2) Along with an initial individual interview, one or two individual in-depth interviews which were less structured, more open-ended and where the participant being interviewed could impact the direction of the conversation. The focus group discussions and the in-depth individual interviews were recorded and transcribed; 3) A process of data collection through visual journaling, during which participants were invited to gather images and reflect on their experiences; and finally, 4) The

completed digital stories and scripts, which were, in a fifth and final focus group, collectively viewed and discussed through an intersectional lens for both a textual/narrative and visual analysis.

**Initial Individual Interviews.** Hesse-Biber (2007) described interviewing as "a particularly valuable research method feminist researchers can use to gain insight into the world of their respondents" (p. 114). To begin the research process, I met with each participant via Zoom individually to introduce myself, provide details about the study, answer questions and ask for more information about their motives and interests for being involved in this project. Discussing the participants' lived experiences and perspectives was critical to inviting them into a process of deepening their own thinking around how their perspectives had been shaped and constructed through various interactions and influences in their lives. There were two key ideas I wanted to start exploring in these interviews. The first was each participant's personal relationship or ontological orientation to feminism and/or the notion of being feminist, and the second was any knowledge, skills, or experiences each had with digital content creation or storytelling, including perspectives on digital literacy in the classroom.

The first question I posed in the initial interview was: *Do you identify as a feminist? If so, why?* In a world where the term "feminist" is being increasingly commodified and politicized, I felt it important to acknowledge that this word might hold different meanings to different people. This was also rooted in my interest in how the act of "being," or claiming feminism as an identity, might inform the act of "doing" within learning spaces. Given the affective implications of the word, it was easy to surmise that a study with "feminist" in its title would draw people with some level of comfort using it; however, assuming this would automatically mean a shared definition would evolve would have been naïve. Ultimately, understanding what feminism meant

to each of them individually was necessary to better know how to proceed with the focus groups. The next questions I posed in our initial interviews centred on participants' experiences with digital media. This was important for planning the focus groups and ascertaining how in-depth I would need to go into teaching how to use digital technology to gather and create images and the editing process.

**Focus Groups.** Focus groups are defined as "group discussions in which participants focus collectively upon a topic selected by the researcher" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 112). Gaining prevalence within feminist research in recent years, focus groups provoke what Leavy (2007) referred to as a *happening*, defined as "a conversation that, while prearranged and 'focused' by the researcher remains a dynamic narrative process. Within the context, group members communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences on their own terms" (p. 173). Like digital storytelling workshops, focus groups bring together groups of participants into a process of research collaboration, that "treat lived experiences central to knowledge building" (Leavy, 2007, p. 175), cultivating a dialogic space which "places us back in relation with the living world" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 276).

Following the initial individual interviews, we met for weekly focus group sessions for three weeks during which I sought to foster a truly participatory space, where the digital storytelling process was interwoven with conversation focused on my research questions. This process was made more complex by the need to move the meetings online. Approximately two hours long, these sessions were semi-structured, and allowed for discussion around the pre-constructed research questions centred on feminism and feminist identities. This cultivated space for more generative discussions informed by responses from the participants, and integrated learning about and completing elements of the seven steps of digital storytelling into our time

and conversations. After these three meetings, participants were given a month to work individually on gathering visual artefacts during which I held individual interview sessions with each of them. After this month, there were two more focus group meetings. One is to discuss what was gathered and to have a chance to receive another round of feedback on the story creation process. Then, the completed stories were shared and discussed during the final meeting.

***First Focus Group.*** We held our first group meeting in early September 2020, beginning with brief introductions, including why each participant had joined the study. In this first focus group, I posed the question: *How do you interpret, or what does it mean to live a feminist life?* Utilizing the StoryCenter's model, I began with a "Seven steps" lecture designed to provide space and time for participants to "arrive" in the meeting, to share information about my experience with digital storytelling and education to establish my knowledge and foundations as a facilitator, to share something of the aesthetic of the work, and hopefully to inspire through demonstrating my "enthusiasm, emotional connection, [and] sense of wonder and excitement about helping people make stories" (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 77). It was also important to discuss the participatory nature of the study, and how, while I would be leading the sessions as a facilitator, there would also be moments where my position would transition to that of a co-researcher alongside them, openly muddling through and participating in the conversations with them. This also meant that while I would come into every meeting with a specific question or focus for the conversation, it would be generative and largely guided by what was shared by the participants. The one area where I knew I would most have to step into a "teacher-researcher" role was to inform the group about the digital storytelling process and answer specific questions about media creation.

***Second Focus Group.*** The study's next steps were to dig deeper into participants' knowledge of and responses to digital storytelling and how they perceived it as a storytelling method, art form, and pedagogical tool. The second focus group was framed around introducing participants to some examples of stories I had created, engaging in conversations around them, and answering questions about creative choices. For this, I mirrored the framework and practices I learned during my facilitator course with the StoryCenter. Revisiting the foundations of the method and the notion of my "family album," I began with an example of a single image story, followed by a second using video footage to demonstrate how matching the same words with different images can evoke different emotions and reactions. While not a traditional type of digital story, using a single image offers the opportunity to demonstrate how the process could be simplified, therefore offering potential differentiation for teachers.

Next, I shared a longer digital story which integrated more elements and followed a more narrative style. This story, called *Coffee and Cigarettes*, (APPENDIX B) helped demonstrate a more traditional example of mining the family album as well as creating images to be woven together with sound and music through the editing process. It was also a more complex example of approaching digital storytelling by beginning with a writing process, workshopped through a sharing circle, following the Seven Step process created by the StoryCenter. It felt important for me to share this story–as a moment of personal vulnerability, anticipating that my participants would find themselves in similar vulnerable spaces when writing and creating their own stories.

When first engaging in the digital storytelling process, participants are often given a prompt or writing template to get them started and to aid them in overcoming deeply embedded negative beliefs about writing and ontological hesitations towards claiming a writer identity. Having introduced my participants to a few possibilities of digital stories, we then engaged in a

writing activity on the theme of "where I am from." Using a poem written by George Ella Lyon (1999), this activity has been utilized by various digital storytelling facilitators, including the StoryCenter. I first heard and saw this poem used in educator and scholar Emily Bailin Wells's (2014) TedX talk *The Power of Digital Storytelling*. Both the StoryCenter and Bailin Wells have borrowed from Lyon to expand the concept of place and belonging through digital storytelling. Utilizing this same practice, I invited my participants into a story circle using a fill-in-the-blank template modified with permission from the StoryCenter. The use of a template can help create a non-threatening space while also giving an entry point for writing on a shared topic. The intention is that such templates can be used as simple fill-in-the-blank exercises, or the storyteller can adapt the template as needed to fit their writing style.

***Third Focus Group.*** Alongside exploring affective and creative challenges of writing, participants needed to begin exploring the process of creating a visual narrative combining still images, video, narration, and sound. This involved engaging in both a creative and technical process to edit together various elements to tell a story. Critical to this was also experiencing the impact of hearing one's own voice, which Lambert (personal communication, June 12, 2020) identifies as one of the most challenging parts of telling your own story. Using the draft pieces of writing from the previous session, participants were invited to engage in an abbreviated storytelling process where they could play with creating a short digital story. This timed exercise was adapted from the StoryCenter workshop. Its primary goals were to invite participants to begin to experiment with weaving images and words together, to practice recording and listening to their own voices, and to highlight the emphasis on process over product in digital storytelling. The following instructions were provided, and participants were given half an hour to complete this task:

1. Take photos of three items in your home. Some suggestions to follow are to pick one item that's been with you for more than ten years, one that's been with you for between five and ten years, and one that has been with you less than one year.
2. Choose two locations to shoot video:
    a. One that shows contrast of light and dark.
    b. One using colour.
3. Narrate and record your story.
4. Edit images and narration together using the WeVideo phone app.

After the half an hour, participants returned to the main Zoom meeting to discuss the experience of creating images using the guidelines provided and the challenges they encountered, which ranged from difficulty deciding on what to photograph to using the technology.

This first foray into digital storytelling, much like the act of showing single image stories, was to highlight the ways in which this mode of "filmmaking" can be simplified, allowing for both teachers and students who may have limited access to and comfort with technology, to find an entry point into the process. I also wanted my participants to begin to let go of any negative beliefs or anxieties about their creative identities. Miller and Rief (2010) spoke to the process of creating a digital story as a "writing process," where "audience, context-specific details, beginnings, and endings" (p. 5) are all intertwined. Recognizing that writing is a recursive process, this introductory activity created space for participants to begin to think more visually about what they would like to include in their digital stories, before revisiting their writing for further development/revision.

Having worked together to engage in collective conversations around understandings of feminism and having developed a beginning understanding of how to approach creating a digital

story, the focus groups ended at this point so that participants could engage in a process of visual journaling. Over the four weeks that followed, participants worked individually to gather images and text and I met with them one-on-one for in-depth informal interviews as outlined below.

***Visual Journaling.*** Following the first three focus groups participants worked independently through a process of visual journaling. Partially borrowing from the visual method called cellphilm, using cell phones to create participatory videos (MacEntee et al., 2016), participants were invited to spend four weeks, using their phones to take photos, videos, make notes, and even edit together content. This data was uploaded to Google folders which I created for and shared with each participant to house their images and artefacts they gathered for their visual journal.

This part of my research was also inspired by a desire to explore digital storytelling as a form of "mixed media" through which appropriated and created images are layered and constructed into new understandings. Scotti and Chilton (2018) drew connections between collage and other related terms such as méttisage and bricolage both of which "refer to the underlying technique of piecing disparate elements together... however, [they] refer not just to artistic techniques but to larger philosophical issues in qualitative research and ABR [arts-based research]" (p. 358). Identified alongside méttisage and bricolage as a philosophical position, collage has been recognized for its ability to mix and remix media forms while "disrupt[ing] conceptual and physical debris... as a postmodern tactic of inquiry" (Scotti & Chilton, 2018, p. 359). Eldridge (2012) stated "collage, derived from the French for glued work, is built upon the juxtaposition of fragments from multiple sources whose piecing together creates resonances and connections which can form the basis for discussion and learning" (p. 72). Through the visual

journaling process, participants were invited to engage in a reflective process, promoted by the themes uncovered through the focus group sessions.

Much as Radford and Aitken (2014) explored the power of the digital storytelling process to invite pre-service teachers into a personal inquiry on the cultural myths and narratives which have shaped their *becoming teacher*, the intention of this process was for participants to begin to "attend to unconscious knowledge" (p. 643). As an extension of this work, I hoped the process of visual journaling would invite my participants to consider the myths and narratives impacting their formation as feminists and feminist teachers/educators.

Finke (1993) stated "pedagogy must [be] characterized by some form of intervention in the 'unconscious,' by a dynamic interchange between the unconscious of both teacher and learner" (p. 14). Ahmed (2004) refers to the unconscious as "not the unconscious of a subject, but the failure of presence–or the failure to be present–that constitutes the relationality of subjects and objects" (p. 121). My intention was to encourage participants to consider that which has been present and that which has failed to be present in their understandings of feminism, what might emerge from their consciousness and unconscious in relation to thinking about feminism, as an identity, an ethic, or a pedagogy, and how they could envision or capture that which emerged in the writing of their stories. Inviting participants into a process of visual journaling was meant to create a space to dwell with the conversations from the focus groups and the themes that emerged while refining the stories they were beginning to craft, offering space to "respond mindfully... with feeling and a kind of raptness" (Greene, 1984, p. 125) with the world and their experiences.

***Individual In-Depth Interviews.*** During the visual journaling process, I met with each participant once or twice for anywhere from half an hour to an hour, depending on their

schedules and availability. For these in-depth interviews, I chose to use an informal interview structure, which can be "used to build a relationship with your respondent, to explore what might be the relevant topics of interest to them and uncover topics that might be overlooked by the researcher" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 115). During the interviews I asked participants to share any visual artefacts they had gathered – this included photos and videos they had created as well as images gathered from the Internet.

Traditional digital storytelling utilizes family photos or the creation of images by the storyteller, therefore the use of images from the Internet was an unexpected evolution. These in-depth individual interviews also included conversations about how our discussions from the focus group interviews were impacting their thinking around feminism, whether it was resulting in new understandings, conversations, or interactions in their day-to-day lives. Finally, we discussed any changes to the stories they had begun to write during the story circle process.

***Fourth Focus Group.*** Following the period of visual journaling, I met with participants for another focus group meeting to share images and scripts that had been gathered/revised during the journaling experience with the entire group. At this meeting, each participant shared the artefacts they had gathered in their Google folder the processes they had engaged in to gather them. Participants were also given the opportunity to share their written story through a story circle for feedback. During this meeting, we also discussed how participants would like to proceed with the editing process. The option of coming together for a full day on Zoom during which we could sit alongside each other and collaborate in the editing process was discussed, but given the complexity of people's schedules, the participants chose to complete the editing themselves, knowing I was available should they need help with any of the technical elements. It was also decided in this meeting that participants would use the editing platform of their choice

with some choosing WeVideo and others iMovie, depending on what they had access to on their home computers. We agreed on a two-week window during which to complete their stories before we met for the screening.

***Fifth Focus Group & Digital Story Screening.*** The final focus group meeting was designed for screening participants' digital stories. This included a chance to respond to each other's work and undertake some participatory analysis. The screening process or sharing of work is an important part of the participatory visual process (Gubrium & Harper, 2016; Mitchell, 2011). Screenings can be comprised solely of the creators/storytellers or can include targeted audiences, with separate focus groups to participate in the analysis of the visuals created. For the purposes of my study, the initial screening was designed to just include participants. After viewing and discussing the stories, the decision was made, by participants, not to show their digital stories to an outside audience. This was partially due to their unease with sharing what they had created as well as the complexity of organizing and holding a screening online during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this final meeting, we also discussed the option to expand the study to create a collaborative film or documentary, however, it was collectively decided to formally end the group meetings and collaborative portion of the study with this last meeting. I met with each of the participants individually via Zoom once more as well as exchanging a final email to enquire about any final thoughts three months after the interviews had ended.

**Data Analysis**

Participatory visual research is recognized as a still evolving and emerging set of methodologies where detailing and defining modes of analysis is an ongoing, collaborative, and generative process. Gubrium and Turner (2011) noted:

> While the process of producing a digital story has been codified to some extent, the ways to analyze a digital story are in a nascent stage of development. Social researchers using digital storytelling as a method of narrative inquiry should take note of other methods of narrative and visual analysis. (p. 476)

Focusing on what I value, as a teacher, filmmaker, and researcher who has experienced and is open to the importance and value of actively listening to the voices and experiences of my students, colleagues, and of course, participants in the process of learning and creating, discerning the "best" way to approach writing about my findings has been complicated. To reiterate, the data gathered included transcripts from both the individual interviews and focus groups, the artefacts gathered during the visual journaling period, and the final scripts and completed digital stories.

***Participatory Analysis of Digital Stories***

In the final focus group interview, we screened the completed digital stories. Engaging in a final story circle, this included sharing each story followed by feedback from the other participants. Throughout the viewing, comments from each participant varied from a supportive acknowledgement of how well they turned out to more thoughtful conversations about images or parts of the story that resonated with each of them. Through this sharing of the stories, connections were drawn to events in the world that were reflected in individual stories as well as common threads between stories. This resulted in a more in-depth conversation about what key insights had been gained through this process, about both what it means to be a feminist as well as the prospects for digital storytelling in educational spaces.

### *Thematic Analysis of Individual Interview and Focus Group Transcripts*

Once the focus groups, interviews and digital stories were completed, I transcribed all the videos footage and began to analyze the transcripts for emerging themes. This included revisiting and becoming more familiar with the contents of the transcripts, followed by coding basic themes that emerged through key statements made by each participant. Using these statements, in my analysis, I introduce each participant and the perspectives they shared throughout the research process. Included in this is the analysis of the initial visual artefacts they were asked to bring to the third focus group as a visual representation of their interpretation of feminism. The analysis of these images is informed and guided by the participant's voices and explanations of the images.

The interview statements were also used to begin the process of identifying more global themes which were supported by the in-depth analysis of the digital stories. The digital stories were also analyzed both for the individual perspectives and experiences they shared and for any similar or collective understandings that emerged throughout the study about what it means to be a feminist or what feminism can "do" in a classroom.

### *Visual Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis of Digital Stories*

Visual narrative analysis is an emerging analytic model which honours the growing power and importance of the visual in how we live in and communicate about the world but also understands "we need to be careful not to focus so much on the visual as to suggest that the social sciences become a 'discipline of pictures.' The visual must be embedded in the narrative of its inception, reception, interpretation, and impact" (Mannay, 2016, p. 1). Simon et al. (2022) proposed the analytic frame of visual narrative analysis as a way through which "to understand individual as well as collective ways of 'seeing'... 'Seeing' here refers not only to the

observation itself, but also to the ontological orientations that constitute what is seen and experienced" (p. 294). This analytic model acknowledges the power of visual narratives to capture, contextualize, and share lived experiences through creative modes of expression as well as to provide counter-narratives to dominant discourses (Banks, 2007; Prosser, 1996; Simon et al., 2022; Wee & Anthamatten, 2014).

Gubrium and Turner (2011) stated digital storytelling "offers up an array of visual, oral, textual, and aural ethnographic empirical material for analysis, while both are largely directed and produced by the digital storyteller" (p. 474). Creating digital stories has been recognized as a discursive medium whereby participants engage in a process with flexible narrative guidelines and mediate meaning through image creation (Worcester, 2012). As a narrative structure, digital stories can be analysed for what they reveal about the choices people make when sharing personal narratives about themselves to others, how they identify what is significant about their lives, and the themes that emerge through the writing and creating process. Aligning with narrative analysis, which is recognized as being "loosely formulated, almost intuitive, using terms defined by the analyst" (Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1994, p. 465), visual narrative analysis "involves initial immersion into the content to get a sense of the 'big picture'" (Leavy, 2017, p. 147).

Understanding that digital storytelling combines visual and written components, I began my analysis with a visual narrative framework. Fisher (1984) defined a narrative as "a sequence with meaning" (p. 2) and argues that humans learn about the world they live in and make decisions about how to live in that world through the stories they are told. It is important to recognize "visual narrative conveys the same basic elements as language-based storytelling, namely, a story with a beginning, middle, and end, the ways in which words convey stories, and

thus, impact audiences, operate through different means than with images alone" (Goodnow, 2020, p. 266).

In digital storytelling, the images do not have to explicitly connect to the words being spoken and can offer a more metaphorical or poetic expression of lived experience or perspectives. The images can tell stories both as singular images or through sequencing images together, such as in a comic strip, graphic novel, or video. The following key elements can be used to analyze these images' meanings: character, place, narrator, and plot (Edwards, 1997; Goodnow, 2020). Through this closer examination of the interplay between these elements, I engaged in an interpretive analysis of the stories by using an analytic model of "making inferences and presenting the reconstructions of meanings derived from the data, identifying relationships, uncovering patterns" (Rubio-Hurtado et al., 2022, p. 103).

I began my analysis by watching each participants' digital story as an individual chunk of data containing "a beginning, middle, and end that reveals someone's experiences" (Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1994, p. 465). Within their visual analytical framework, Simon et al. (2020) proposed the use of an interpretive schema to "identify and interpret important features of an [image]" (p. 301). Understanding that "visual data is perhaps more complex to decipher than printed text, but both are necessary, and one informs the other" (Pennington, 2017, p. 233), I watched the digital stories first without sound. I made note of the images in each before watching again while listening to the narration using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021). Describing and detailing what I saw and heard in each story, I then identified themes that stood out, noting whether they were unique to each story or intersected with others.

One of the complexities of this process was insuring a focus on the participants voices in the retelling of their stories. Creating digital stories is considered a participatory process where

the storyteller's voice is to be honoured. Maintaining a balance between analyzing that which is explicit in the participant's stories while minimizing my influence on the storyteller's direction, vision, or ownership (Davey & Benjaminsen, 2021) was an important consideration. While recognizing the prevalence of my voice in guiding the conversations, the use of story circles ensured participants an equitable and safe space for sharing their perspectives and stories, for receiving feedback, and for working through more complex concepts as they arose. The reflections shared during our story circles are embedded and interwoven into the visual analysis I offer, ensuring the participatory nature of the study is honoured and that my own interpretations do not intrude or overtake those of the participants. To facilitate this, alongside the limitations of not being able to share the entire digital stories due to copyright or privacy considerations, I have selectively chosen images that I had permission to share. I then provide context for how they fit within the larger narrative of the story being told and interpret them using the key story elements of visual analysis outlined above — character, place, narrator (the storyteller/participant), and plot or major theme of the story (feminism and feminist identities).

**Ethical Considerations in my Study**

Although participatory methods "offer an opportunity to disrupt power relations they are unable to transcend hierarchies" (Mannay, 2016, p. 45), and there must still be consideration for power relations between researcher and participant. Within my study, it was imperative to consider the need to "fight familiarity" (Mannay, 2016) as two out of my four participants had been my students. However, the course they took from me was unrelated to feminism or feminist pedagogies which allowed for all the participants and me to enter the project without previous knowledge of perspectives or experiences in relation to my research questions or my perspectives. My project entailed asking participants the research questions as well as engaging

in research-creation through utilizing digital story techniques and media creation technology. As previous media creation experience was not a requirement to participate in the study, I did need to use part of the focus group meetings to engage in teaching participants certain elements of the process. Through this, I endeavoured to cultivate an inclusive space for participants, largely drawing on the ethical underpinnings of working in a circle format, always creating space for an individual to decline to answer a question if they were not comfortable and to tell me if they did not want something shared.

Ethical considerations were also embedded in the StoryCenter workshop model, where they stressed the importance of a strong ethical foundation when facilitating stories where participants may reveal personal experiences. Given the journeys on which researchers provoke/invite/engage their participants when using participatory visual methods to explore their own lived experiences, it is critical for the researcher to continuously turn and return to what Mitchell (2011) referred to as "the cornerstone of ethical research" which is "to do least harm" (p. 24). Addressing the ethical issues of working with communities is something she identifies as being "inseparable from pedagogy… with the idea that in community-based visual research the work is always about consciousness of community rights and responsibility, and simultaneously about protection and advocacy" (p. 14). Chalfen (2011) noted that the ethics around the use of participatory media projects are often "problematic," stating that "ethical questions arise at all stages of the research process" (p. 194). Key facets to ensuring an ethical approach includes ensuring ongoing and informed consent, checking in on the well-being of participants (speaking to the importance of creating a safe and confidential space), the ethics around the process (of sharing images or stories of others without consent being of vital importance), and the ethics of

dissemination (the need for obtaining informed consent from anyone in the story or impacted by its telling).

Within my study, I repeatedly revisited the conversation about ongoing participation with my participants. At the beginning of the study, I met with each participant individually to discuss the structure of the study and let them know that they had the option of deciding if they wanted to share their identity and name with other participants. It was discussed that they could withdraw from the study completely before the end of the focus groups. After that, it was agreed that as the visual artefacts were gathered and the digital stories were created, if they chose to withdraw, their contributions could still be utilized as data without being identified.

We had ongoing conversations throughout the process about who would see the completed stories and whether each participant would like to use their own name or a pseudonym. The creation of the digital stories involved participants deciding what images to include in their individual story with the understanding that the decision of who would see the stories would be agreed upon at the end of the study with their input and consent. While all participants were comfortable using their real names and being seen on camera during the interview process, they were given the option to use an alias in the final study. They all choose to use their real names and identities in the research process but opted for aliases (self-selected or assigned) in the final dissertation.

Once we started meeting online, participants were informed their answers to open-ended interview questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications but neither they nor their place of employment/teaching (if applicable) would be identified should they choose to remain anonymous. To minimize the risk of security breaches and to help ensure confidentiality, it was recommended that participants use standard safety measures after Zoom meetings such as

signing out their Zoom accounts, closing browsers and locking screens or devices when no longer in use. During Zoom meetings participants had the option to turn off your computer cameras if it would increase comfort. Finally, participants were given the option of having names, images, and voices excluded or obscured from the final dissertation at their discretion.

**Limitations of the Study**

Conducting my study during the Covid-19 pandemic posed some already explored challenges, including limitations on recruiting participants and shifting the research process for both the interviews and the digital storytelling workshop process to an online format. Despite having distributed my recruitment poster to various teacher education programs and organizations engaged in visual media production, I recruited only a small number of participants. Within this group of four, a limited demographic was represented; all participants came from the same province and were identified as white. While I had always planned for a small group, the lack of diversity meant limited perspectives could be represented in the findings.

Another unforeseen circumstance that emerged was in the digital storytelling creation and the ways in which some participants chose to incorporate images found on the Internet versus creating their own. Mannay (2016) stated it is important researchers "be mindful that research is wider than a set of visual techniques and think of the process as embedded within a considerably wider set of practices" (p. 95). Therefore, while this decision made by the participants led to limits on sharing the completed stories in my dissertation due to the potential for copyright infringement, it also honoured their individual processes allowing for them to each develop a meaningful and rich story despite myriad challenges posed by the pandemic.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined the participatory art-based research paradigm and arts-based and participatory research methodologies that provided a foundation for this study. Through outlining the history of visual methods and the subsequent "participatory turn," I developed a foundation upon which to explore their potential within educational spaces and as a feminist method and/or pedagogy. Detailing why and how digital storytelling emerged as the visual method for my study, I share how my training with the StoryCenter shaped my understanding of digital storytelling as a mode of inquiry, communication, and research-creation. My research design includes information about both the focus groups, which were structured around specific questions and activities, and the individual in-depth interviews, which were unstructured one-on-one meetings with each participant to discuss their process and evolving digital stories.

In Chapter 4, I detail my findings, starting with a profile of each participant. Using transcripts from focus groups and individual interviews, I provide a description of each participant based on their responses to the research questions, focusing on their perspectives and beliefs about feminism and being a feminist. This is followed by an analysis of their individual digital stories. For this analysis, I borrowed from a visual narrative analysis model, acknowledging that images tell stories. I coded the digital stories for images, themes, and emotional connections (Simon et al., 2020). I then looked for common themes among the stories. Critical to my analysis, then, were the themes that emerged throughout the study, weaving in data from the focus groups, in-depth individual interviews and the final stories produced. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I summarize my findings and offer a response to my research questions. This is followed by some possibilities for the potential of digital storytelling for

emerging and practicing educators. I end with a story of recent experience on a film set in 2021, which provoked new understandings and questions about where the #MeToo movement has led, and the limitations encountered along the way.

## Chapter Four: Listening, Looking, and Learning Through Stories of Experience

In this chapter, I introduce the participants in my study and analyze the conversations we had during individual interviews and focus groups. This is followed by a more in-depth exploration of the digital story's participants created throughout the research process. As detailed in Chapter 3, the digital stories were created after a series of individual in-depth interviews and focus group meetings, and a month-long process of data gathering by the participants through visual journaling. Critical to each step, the research questions I focused our conversations around were: *1) What stories, whether visual, written, or lived, inform emerging educators' perceptions/interpretations/understandings of feminism? 2) How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms? 3) How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

These questions were raised throughout the initial three focus groups to explore participant's understandings of feminism as well as to introduce the intricacies of the digital storytelling process. Throughout this process, there were times when I played a more active role in introducing concepts and then moments when the participant's voices were more prevalent, always with the intention of leaving space for them to inform how the conversations evolved. Out of these focus groups, themes began to emerge, as well as shared experiences, which led to the creation of a digital story prompt which guided the creation of their final digital stories: *What personal stories or experiences have impacted your orientation towards and relationship with feminism?* With this prompt, participants undertook a month of visual journaling and data collection, during which I met with each of them for in-depth individual interviews. In our last

focus group interview, each participant screened their digital story in response to this shared question, discussed their final reflections on the process they had undertaken, and offered feedback and analysis on what they had created and what had been created by others.

The sections below, as well as introducing each participant, interweave visual analysis and narrative analysis of each participant's individual digital story, informed by comments they made during our conversations. This is followed by an exploration of the common themes that evolved through the research process and in the stories. All quotes from participants were gathered over the course of the research process from either individual interviews or focus groups. It should also be noted that while participants used their own names during our focus groups, they requested pseudonyms be used in the final dissertation. The names here were chosen by me with their permission. Participants were also asked for their preferred pronouns, both at the beginning of the research process as well as at the end, to ensure accurate representation in my dissertation. Given that participants may have been identifiable within their digital stories through either sound or images and as they chose not to be identified in this research, I will not share the full digital stories here. This was also necessary due to potential copyright issues presented through the inclusion of music, images, and video footage in some of the stories. While participants were encouraged to create their own images to include in the stories, some chose to find images online, and use photographs featuring other people who could not be identified for gaining permission. Due to these limitations, I have shared only screenshots and images that I have been able to secure permissions to use or that sit in the public domain. I took up Radford and Aitken's (2016) framing of digital storytelling as "strong poetry" where storytellers are able "to remember, to provoke, and reflect on their own personal becomings... to begin to settle the meaning of profound experiences that seem to defy expression" (p. 159). The

images shared in my analysis are representative of the experiences my participants shared and I endeavour to be mindful of not over-imposing my interpretations.

**Visual Narratives Exploring Feminist Identity: Recounting the Digital Stories**

Throughout my doctoral program, I have worked as an instructor in the teacher education program at the University where I am studying. Many of my students grew up in the same city and surrounding areas as the University they were attending, looking to teach in the same schools and school systems they attended for their own K–12 education. As a result, their stories of schooling and what has called them to teaching often share commonalities, shaping their epistemological beliefs about teaching and their emerging teaching identity to largely lean in one of two directions. The first belief rooted was in an aspiration to replicate the teachers they remembered as the "best" and who had had an identifiably positive influence on them, with the other shaped by more negative experiences they had as students, leading to strongly held commitments to do better than the "worst" teachers they had ever encountered. Whichever position they held, throughout my years teaching the course, I encouraged my students to interrogate their preconceptions, to engage in what Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) referred to as the "constant re-inventing of themselves" (p. 175) as teachers. A belief in the power of stories, and the need for educators to be reflective about the experiences that have shaped their understandings of the world and themselves in it, informed how I conceived and designed this study.

My teaching experiences at the University invited me to consider the complex process of *becoming teacher,* and how stories of teaching live within those who choose to pursue it as a profession. This inspired me to work with pre-service teachers to uncover their understandings of feminism, where those understandings are rooted, and how they might inform their teaching

identity. I also decided to extend the invitation to participate to media educators who work in community-based settings who also engage in content creation and consumption with their students. As Feldman et al. (2004) stated, "through telling their stories, people distill and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations. Stories are a common, habitual method people use to communicate their ideas" (p. 148). By sharing in this research process and contributing their stories, my participants engaged in this habitual process in an open and vulnerable way. The digital stories they created primarily address my second research question: *How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms?* In this chapter, I detail their completed stories with a profound commitment to honouring their willingness to share with me and each other.

***Introducing Amy***

> *Why do we need feminism? Well, it's because girls are still getting shamed for wearing short shorts, right? ~ Amy (Individual Interview, October 15th, 2020)*

I first met Amy (she/her) in the English Language Arts curriculum course I taught during my doctoral program. Reflecting on the make-up of the class, she was very similar to many of the other students I had encountered in the teacher education program. A young, blonde, cis-gendered white woman in her early 20s, she represented a common demographic found among the students I had taught in previous years and sections of the same course. Amy did not come across as very outspoken at first, but she made her passion for social justice and interest in feminism apparent when she wore a shirt with the word "equality" with two women's fists on it to class. This led me to ask her if, once the class was completed and I was ready to begin my research study, she would be interested in participating. She said yes. Once I received ethics

approval, and she was no longer my student, I reached out to her to reiterate the invitation and she repeated her desire to participate.


*Figure 5: Equality. Photo credit: Amy (2022).*

At the beginning of the study, in the first focus group on September 16th, 2020, when asked about an image or story that shaped her understanding of feminism, Amy discussed the power of film to shape our understandings of the world and ourselves within it. She shared the

impact a popular Hollywood film called *A League of Their Own* (Marshall, 1996) had on her when she was growing up. Recognized as a liberal feminist text, the film tells the story of an all-girls baseball team during World War II and mirrors the experiences of women who entered the workforce as men went to war. Based on real events, this movie portrayed women from diverse backgrounds, sexual orientations, and body sizes, highlighting multiple "barriers to women's fulfillment" (Stier Adler & Clark, 2023, p. 3) and the social biases that women from diverse backgrounds can encounter. Amy spoke about how this film opened a window into what female empowerment might look like to her at a young age, as she watched the characters step outside of the traditional housewife role to play baseball. The importance of representation has been identified as critical to disrupting "essentialist constructions of gender, race, and sexual identities" (Brooks & Hébert, 2007, p. 297). For a young Amy, this story showcasing women playing sports prompted a disruption in her thinking.

Throughout the interviews and data gathering, Amy was completing the final semester of her teacher education program. This included a course component as well as a field experience during which she was student teaching in an urban high school. As we progressed through the study, her encounters in the classroom informed her responses as she reflected critically about her experiences as a woman, a student, and a future teacher. Throughout the research process, Amy spoke strongly about the issues she had with what she perceived as sexist policies in education, identifying the first line of inquiry emerging in her story– there is a need to "recognize when things are patriarchal," as well as understanding that patriarchy exists in both implicit and explicit ways in the world. She stated: "if kids are playing on [the] monkey bars, you're more likely to say to a boy, 'it's fine [to] fall,' but with girl, you're likely to grab her and say, 'I'll catch you.'" She expressed that this example highlighted how differently she has seen

boys and girls treated in school settings, including how even at young ages they are treated differently on the playground (Focus Group, September 16th, 2020).

Addressing her initial experiences entering the classroom as a pre-service teacher for her field placement, she made insightful comments about how school staff interacted and behaved both in and out of the classroom. In her placement, she had two mentor teachers, one man and one woman, which allowed for observations around how the students reacted and responded to them differently. This carried over into staff meeting dynamics where she witnessed a young male teacher speak with authority and confidence, whereas older women teachers were submissive and apologetic when expressing opinions. Reflecting on these events led to her second line of inquiry for her story: "How will my gender impact who I can be in the classroom" (Individual Interview, October 15th, 2020).

**Amy's Story: A Response to Post-feminism.**

*You bet your misogynistic ass I'm a feminist. Because boys sing songs like this and go viral, and when I scroll through my feed, I still see videos about the angry feminist, I listen to poets tell stories of when their voices weren't heard. I see women belittled for wearing too little, and others for wearing too much. No, I'm not DONE being a feminist yet. Because when I walk into school, my choice of text is either old white man or the banned book list. Because I play films for my students, and they tell me they love the female representation. They're warriors, but those warriors don't speak. Because IF I decide to walk somewhere at night, I keep one headphone out. I check over my shoulder so that I know who is around me. When I get into my vehicle, the first thing I do is lock the door. When I shop for an apartment, I make sure I'm on the top floor, just to feel a little safer. But the thing is that you know, and I know, that that isn't the worst of it. It's just what I live in my day-to-day life, and If I think about that kooky little*

*concept that we call intersectionality and I think about my cis-straight white existence, I am reminded that I am only me. Just one girl in a pretty big world. But still I know, without any doubt in my mind, that until every woman at every intersection is seen as fundamentally equal to men, I'm not done.* (Transcribed narrative from Amy's digital story)

***Beginning.*** The opening images in Amy's digital story scroll through a series of posts to an Instagram account, *@didsomeonesaypostfeminist,* she created during the process of visual journaling. As the images move across the screen, they are accompanied by the following lyrics from country singer Trey Lewis's 2020 song "Dicked Down in Dallas" which contains derogatory and misogynistic language. Amy spoke to how angry this song made her, not only because of its lyrics but also because of the way she had heard it spoken about on the Internet. Released at the same time as a song called WAP (Wet-Ass Pussy) by female rap artists Cardi B and Megan the Stallion (2020), Amy shared her frustration, stating:

> some people on Tik Tok are comparing [the songs]. [I don't agree], because, in WAP, it's a woman talking about what she is doing. In Lewis's song, it's a man talking about how what he is doing to somebody else. Or what other men are doing to someone else. (Individual Interview, December 7th, 2020)

Her comparison of these two songs underscores the current tensions that exist in feminist conversations. In both the WAP song lyrics and video, newly liberated sexuality is overtly expressed demonstrating how "the nature of female sexuality can be viewed as a means to dismantle long-standing misogynistic views propagated by the patriarchal hip-hop industry" (Banh, 2021, p. 1). The song was met with great critical acclaim and applause for the way in which the artists "objectify and subjugate themselves by means of language and image, [as] they

are not beholden to sexual obligations but, rather, enforce their own agency" (Edelman, 2021, para. 4).

*Dicked Down in Dallas* (2020) was also well-received, gaining a large TikTok following, and hitting number one on the charts. The artist described it as a "love song" about a man willing to take back his ex-girlfriend despite her promiscuous behaviour (Freeman, 2020) while others have found it to be a regressive representation of "bro" country music (Baker-Johnson, 2020). Recalling the debate I had with my student about Beyoncé, where I was called out as a second-wave feminist who did not understand the empowerment Beyoncé represented to younger generations, these two songs highlighted the complex and disparate ways in which women's bodies are portrayed in popular culture.

As the song in Amy's digital story plays, then fades into the background, we continue to scroll through the Instagram account she created for the study. We see how she curated articles focusing on popular culture references that resonated with her own thinking about feminism and post-feminism. These posts include images of singer Taylor Swift being asked about her love life, references to the reality show *Wife Swap* (Davies & Lambert, 2004–2020) where men trade wives, and a poem expressing the experiences of a young woman carrying pepper spray to feel safe in public spaces. In the poem, the father implies to his daughter that feminism is no longer needed, demonstrating a postfeminist sensibility that sits in contradiction to his request that she carries pepper spray to keep herself safe. This theme of safety is echoed in Amy's digital story alongside her recognition that feminism is far from dead as she proclaims, "I am not done being a feminist."

Social media provides a space where the challenge of defining feminism as one thing is further complexified, which Amy's use of Instagram highlights. Boler and Davis (2021)

examined how “affect, identity, and social difference are interwoven in the contemporary media environment” (p. 28). Social media creates new spaces for racism and misogyny to flourish. This is exemplified through Amy’s use of memes from the television series *Wife Swap* (Davies & Lambert, 2004–2020) “where women are either portrayed as commodities, desperate individuals obsessed with marriage, or ..., entirely measured by their success in the domestic sphere” (Fairclough, 2004, p. 344). These negative portrayals of women threaten to undo [the progress of feminist movements] due to a hearkening back to an outdated and conservative representation of wives and mothers” (Fairclough, 2004, p. 345). They prompt new discussions around both feminism and anti-feminism in popular culture amid a shift from one media space (television) to another (social media) as a primary way of viewing content. Amy’s incorporation of social media in her story highlighted how, while it has provided “a virtual space where victims of inequality can coexist together in a space that acknowledges their pain, narrative, and isolation” (Dixon, 2014, p. 34) and where new expressions of feminism can emerge, it has also contributed to entrenching divides amid feminist movements and the growth of feminist hate in online spaces (Ging & Siapera, 2019).

Ging (2019) argued “that the dominance of a postfeminist cultural sensibility in Western society for the past decade or more has functioned as a logical precursor to the emergence and shaping of toxic masculinity politics” (p. 45). These politics have begun to infiltrate classrooms, most recently with the rise of such online personalities as Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson. Both are well-known social media influencers who have gained a massive following on social media spaces under the claim of standing up for generations of disenfranchised men or “lost boys,” whom they see as harmed by feminism and other equity-focused social justice movements (Copland, 2022; Stahl et al., 2023). This evolution requires feminist educators to think critically

about affect as they navigate the difficult emotions which arise amid the presentation of troubled knowledge for both boys and girls. Stahl et al. (2023) called for an investment in creative pedagogies within school spaces which "offer potential to support boys and men to better understand the power of emotions that shape the development of their identities and lifeworlds" (p. 372).

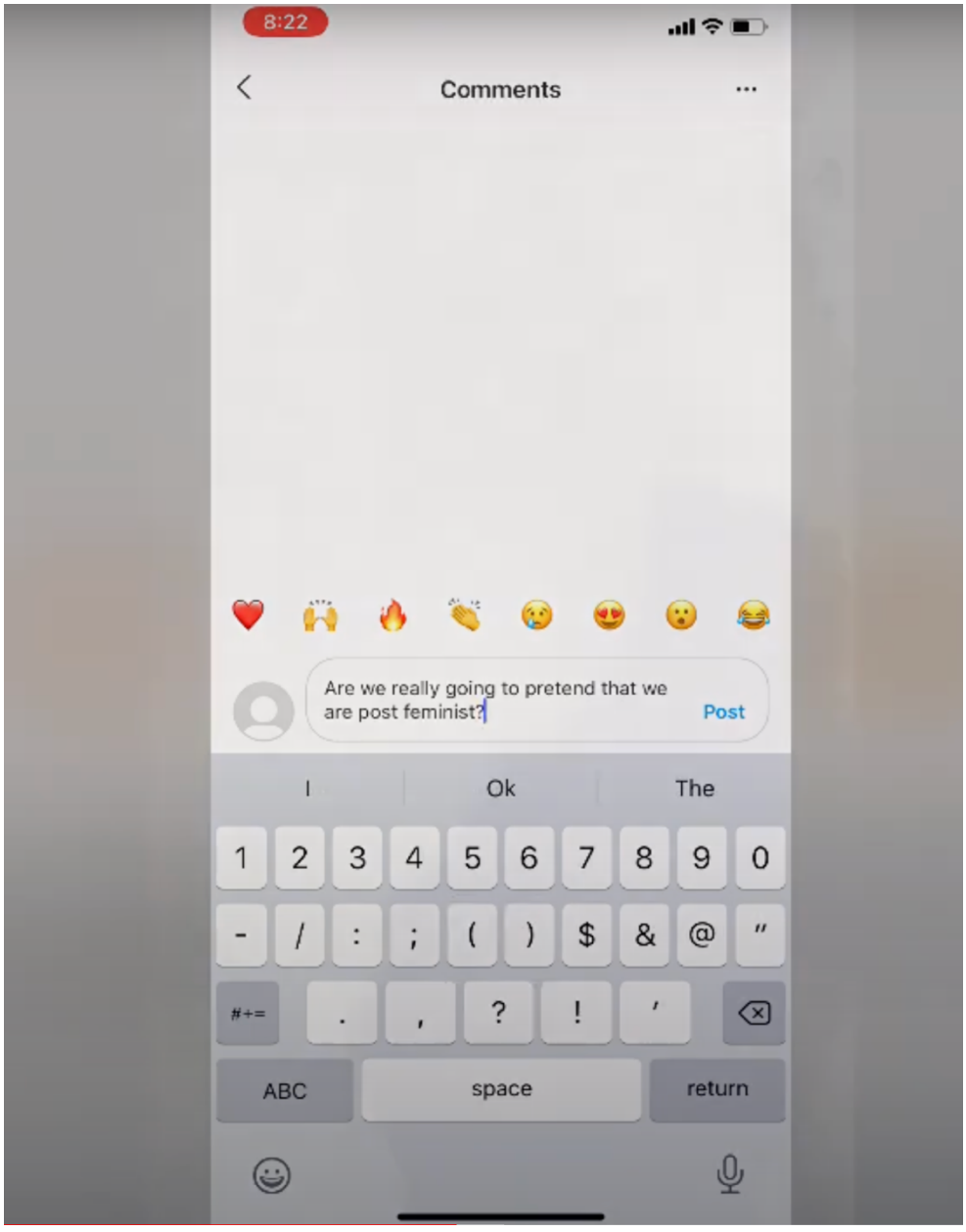


*Figure 6: Screenshot. Modern Communication. Photo credit: Amy (2020).*

Amy proudly states “you bet your misogynistic ass I am a feminist” in the opening of her digital story. Her inclusion of social media in her digital story was reflective of the ways in which she, as a young woman, uses social media to explore feminism — which was highlighted in her visual journaling process, which she began with screenshotting posts on Instagram (Individual Interview, October 15th, 2020). Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, social media provided “young people with a way to remain connected with others, especially with peers... becom[ing] the new norm” (Ferraz et al. 2022, p. 1) for how they communicate, connect, and form identities. As Amy’s story progresses, the last shot from her Instagram account is of the question “are we really going to pretend that we are postfeminist?” being typed on the screen accompanied by her voice. Amy spoke openly about her own doubts that we are truly in a post-feminist era (Focus Group, September 30th, 2020). I interpret her question about postfeminism as reflective of her increased awareness of the growing divide amongst feminisms. For feminist educators engaged in exploring any visual media and/or media literacy with their students, Amy’s introduction raises the issue of how to best engage students in learning that invites them to think critically about both what they see/watch, what they share or repost, how they comment in online spaces, and what they create.

***Middle.*** The screen is now dark, and it is night. Amy’s camera shows her point-of-view (POV) as she walks down the street at night. The camera is handheld and shaky as she looks all around. The audience sees her feet moving quickly on the sidewalk in front of her. She pans across the street, then tilts down to see the keys in her hand. The camera quickly pushes forward, moving with momentum and speed creating an effect of urgency and fear. We hear her voice say: “If I decide to walk somewhere at night, I keep one headphone out. I check over my shoulder so that I know who is around me. When I get into my vehicle, the first thing I do is lock

the door." As she reaches her car, we can see her keys in her hands. A common practice for women walking alone at night; one I was taught as a teen — to carry your keys with one wedged tightly between your fingers. If someone grabs you, use the key to jab at your attacker. When said out loud, it sounds somewhat improbable that it would have much effect. However, to this day, it is a lesson young women are still learning. She climbs into the car, looks all around, then reaches to lock her door. Another lesson learned early in life. Finally, she can pause for a moment in the confined safety of her car. In describing this portion of her digital story, Amy spoke about the everyday danger women's bodies are subjected to and how that impacts the ways in which we move about the world. I interpreted this section of her story as seeking to portray that experience for the viewer in a way that would craft the same sensation of uncertainty and anxiety she feels when traversing city streets at night.

In both her story and her statements during the interviews, I observed Amy's deeply embedded awareness of how girls' and women's bodies area treated differently revisited. Her insights included addressing the issue of dress codes in schools which "have long been used to discipline female bodies and marginalize their voices" (Neville-Shepard, 2019, p. 2). She shared a personal experience when she wore a top with spaghetti straps in high school. She was told she was breaking the girls' dress code and made to wear the "shame outfit" – a big, baggy shirt, "so long that it was covering my shorts, so then it just looked like I wasn't wearing pants" (Focus Group, September 23rd, 2020). Identifying herself as a "confident kid" in high school, she demonstrated a clear understanding of the hypocrisy of dress codes that cultivate shame reproduce harmful beliefs about girls' and women's bodies and re-entrench systems of inequality.

*Figure 7: Screenshot: Quick! Lock the Door! Photo credit: Amy (2020).*

***End.*** Amy's final image is a rotating photo of a blue sky. As it spins on the screen, her voice challenges the audience to consider the ways in which women must live with fear, a sense of being on guard all the time, influencing and shaping what we know about ourselves, and ourselves, and how we relate to others. The movement of the photo stops the audience's eye from settling in one spot for too long, prompting a sense of unease and slight confusion. During the interview process, Amy addressed the tension of growing up in a time of postfeminist beliefs and her discomfort around how women's bodies are often spoken about and represented in popular culture. Her perceptions and personal research were openly guided by her ongoing interaction with varying cultural texts she encountered throughout the journaling process. This included a sex podcast called *Call her Daddy* (Cooper, 2018–present) where the two hosts (both women) found themselves involved in a contract dispute that led to one of them speaking poorly about the other on the air. Identifying this as an example of how women can be complicit in reproducing sexism against one another, Amy reflected on this as failed feminism where one woman undermined another, rather than the two women supporting one another in collective strength and solidarity.

The final image of the sky rotating resonated with a query that informed Amy's story, which emerged while she was "scavenger hunting" for images, stories, and representations: *"What does good feminism look like?"* Her final words share her perspective that, "I still know, that without any doubt in my mind, until every woman, at every intersection, is seen as fundamentally equal to men, I'm not done." These are words of resistance, but I also see them as words of critical hope. Bozalek et al. (2014) stated:

> Critical hope departs from “naïve hope” and unquestioned perceptions of reality. Critical hope is embedded in flexibility and openness rather than being rooted in rigidly held expectations... Critical hope is an ongoing process, expanding capacity for perception and insight rooted in materialist recognition of both the present and the past as formative not fixed. (p. 2)

*Figure 8: Screenshot. Look Up. Photo credit: Amy (2020).*

Embedded in Amy’s story is her very palpable sense of how women need safe spaces. By ending her story with a low-angle image of the sky, she infers that despite the restrictions she feels placed on her body, she will continue to advocate for herself and others. Amy’s digital story tells the tale of a young woman who recognizes that the work of feminism is far from done,

highlighting the complex ways in which women are represented, pitted against one another, and the violent, derogatory language that is used to speak about them. However, her final image is one filled with light and her final words resonate with strength. Greene (2001) speaks to the power and importance of imagination, urging students "to come awake and find new visions, new ways of living in the fragile human world" (p. 207). Reflecting on Amy's story, I see the tale of an emerging teacher unafraid to confront the ways in which sexism lives in the world.

### *Introducing Tammy*

*Do you have to be part of the system to dismantle it? Or can you dismantle the system without being part of it? ~ Tammy (Individual Interview, December 9th, 2020)*

Tammy (she/her) was a student in a course my PhD supervisor had taught. Recognizing that Tammy may be a good candidate for my research, my supervisor shared the recruitment poster and email I had composed, and Tammy emailed me for more information. After an initial meeting, she agreed to participate. In the first year of her after-degree program in Education, Tammy was a unique student to encounter in this context as she had recently completed a doctorate in Musicology at a university in Europe. This experience resulted in her bringing a deep understanding of the research process to the study as well as a mature and pragmatic perspective on teaching and learning.

Originally from Edmonton, she represented a similar demographic as Amy — a white cis-gendered, heteronormative woman. However, she was slightly older and had lived outside of Canada while pursuing doctoral studies. She was open about the limited number of academic positions in her field of scholarly expertise, which had led her to return home to pursue a teaching career in K–12 education. Influenced by her family, which included many teachers, she was open about her hopes that working in K–12 education would offer her a way to make a living while she pursued independent research, which she identified as more of a passion and

calling. In our initial meeting, she shared multiple encounters with overt sexism that she had experienced while a doctoral student. These experiences also informed her keen awareness of how sexism is subtly prevalent in all aspects of society, including her personal life. For example, during an early focus group in which personal experiences of sexism were shared, Tammy told a story of looking for clothes for a family member's baby boy. In her search, she was struck by how, even in the simplest ways, the world is made more functional for boys/men essentially from birth. Sharing a photo of a pair of jeans designed for a three-month-old boy, she stated:

> My story is pockets. I have a picture of the pants…because it's unfathomable to me [how] the world is set up for [boys]. [Pockets say], "You know, [the world] is going to work for him." And, you know little girls don't get pockets until... if [they're] lucky, grade seven. (Focus Group, September 23rd, 2020)

Relating this to her experience in the academy she spoke to the ways her appearance and dress were up for constant critique by those around her. It became apparent to me that the challenge of trying to overcome deeply embedded barriers had a lasting impact on her claiming a feminist identity. When discussing *feminism*, Tammy pointed out one of its effects is to "rile people up," and that while people might agree with the concepts guiding feminist movements "as soon as you label it feminism, they get all defensive and weird about it. [So, while] it's useful for conceptualizing things to label them [feminist], in labelling something, you also reduce it somehow" (Focus Group, September 16th, 2020). Tammy noted that we put things in "little boxes" that lead to affective responses and relationships that can be either hurtful and harmful or empowering depending on one's ontological orientation towards the word in question.

*Figure 9: Baby boy jeans. Photo credit: Tammy (2020).*

At the beginning of the study, Tammy expressed hesitancy with the words, “feminism” or “feminist” for the ways they can limit interpersonal connection. However, as I listened to her experiences in academics, I heard echoes to what might be thought of as a “feminist snap... a way of thinking more creatively and affirmatively about breaking points” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 187). Utilizing the metaphor of a twig breaking as something that happens under pressure, Ahmed (2017) notes:

> If pressure is an action, snap is a reaction. Pressure is hard to notice unless you are under that pressure. Snap is only the start of something because of what we do not notice. Can we redescribe the world from the twig’s point of view, that is, from the point of view of those who are under pressure” (p. 189).

The pressures Tammy felt as a woman consistently confronted with barriers, seemed to have led to her own snap to action. Her experiences of overt sexism in the academy were pivotal in her path to becoming a teacher and what she hoped to bring to her students’ understanding of the world. She stated, “I feel like there needs to be role models for women or young women too, and men, to realize that there's a diversity of people who can actually do all these positions and jobs” (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020). Her pursuit of a teaching career, she hoped, would allow her to be such a role model while also allowing her to continue to conduct research outside of the constraints of an academic institution.

An exploration of how women are encouraged to live in the world was evident in the early stages of Tammy’s digital story planning. Building on her experiences of anxiety dwelling amid masculine norms in the academy, her emerging story was rooted in the question: *“How did I get here?”* Reflecting on her travels to and from campus as well as other experiences, she spoke to a heightened awareness of the ways in which the men around her can move about the

world with less fear than women. Traversing the river valley regularly on her way to classes, she noted how men assume a level of safety that she cannot, especially as winter encroaches and daylight hours shorten. Connecting the sensation of emotional discomfort with the physicality of taking up space in the world, Tammy's story emerged as a personal narrative of uncovering and confronting the questions: *"When do I feel safe? And why don't I feel safe?"*

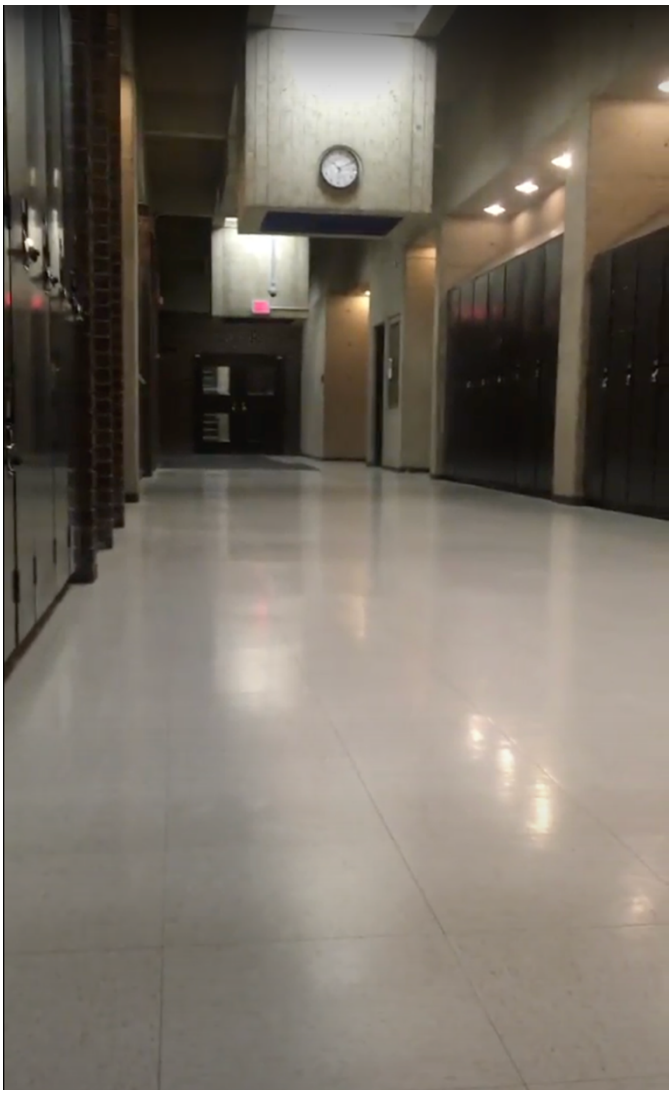

*Figure 10: Screenshot. Where is here? Photo Credit: Tammy (2020).*

**Tammy's Story: Getting Here.**

*How did I get here? Some days I've walked, others I've driven or cycled.*

*How did I get here? When I walk, I pass along the river where, when I was still a teenager, friends complained that they were nervous walking to rowing practice alone. Sometimes, they said, I wish I could walk through the river valley alone like the men on our team do.*

*How did we get here? When I drive the taillights of the other driver's flash in my eyes. Those other drivers who never seem to signal. Sometimes, stuck behind a new driver I think about what it felt like at 16 to be the mistress of my own destiny.*

*How did I get here? As I cycle under the glowing streetlights, I watch myself appear and disappear. Which version is really me?*

*How did I get here? Where is here? This is a place; I've come to the University campus. Other iterations of me have to come here for class — an education. What a privilege. I have now played the game and am part of the system that will only allow me to go so far. If this is my education, then what was getting here?* (Transcribed text from Tammy's digital story)

***Beginning.*** When discussing her doctoral work in musicology, Tammy shared that her favourite composers were those who had a very minimalist style. Her penchant for this style continued with her digital storytelling which begins, slowly and methodically, with feet walking upstairs. Mirroring Amy's use of the camera, Tammy's story is told entirely using her filmmaker's point-of-view. Using such a point-of-view involves framing the camera to "assume the position of the subject in order to show what the subject sees" (Branigan, 1984, p. 103). Revisiting the concept of the gaze in filmmaking, Tammy's use this point-of-view for the entirety of her digital story, draws to mind the act of reclaiming the gaze as an act of resistance or an emancipated "camera-eye which can no longer be enslaved by the dominant patriarchal gaze" (Koch, 1985, p. 143).

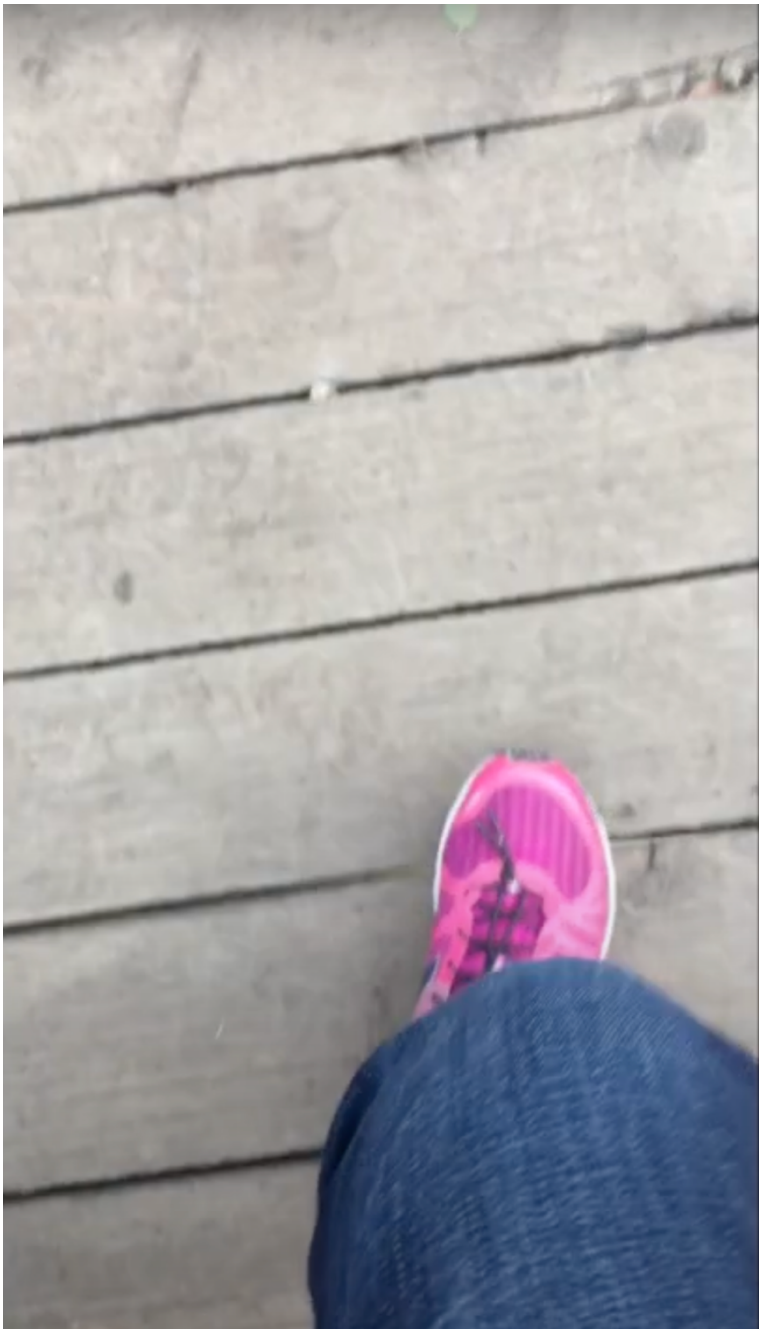

*Figure 11: Screenshot. Climbing stairs. Photo credit: Tammy (2020).*

Tammy's powerful creative choice draws the audience into the storyteller's experience, as she documents some of what a woman sees when navigating the world on her own, as Amy did in parts of her story as well. The camera points down to the ground, reminiscent of the way

many women walk in the world — eyes downcast, avoiding the potential of inadvertently making a connection with a stranger that may be misunderstood. Tammy's is walking through a river valley. In the city in which she lives and studies, the river valley is commonly spoken about as an attractive feature of the city. Filled with walking paths and proximity to nature, it is meant to be a natural oasis amid concrete and cars, but for Tammy the river valley also held threats. "When I was still a teenager," she says, in her digital story, "friends complained that they were nervous walking to rowing practice alone. Sometimes, they said, 'I wish I could walk through the river valley by myself like the men on our team'... *How did we get here?*" I interpreted this shift to the use of a collective "we" as signaling a recognition of shared experience — moving from the individual experience to a collective one — that this sensation of fear or apprehension is common for many women walking alone in public spaces.

***Middle.*** In the middle section of Tammy's digital story, the camera's gaze shifts to the inside of a car; Tammy is taking us on a journey with her. It is dusk and the moon rises through the windshield. We hear her voice asking, "how did I get here?" We collectively gaze from the driver's side as the car begins to move forward, passing through a wooded street at twilight. Unknowingly, in evoking both the river valley and the wooded streets of her locale, Tammy engaged in what is referred to as place-based digital storytelling, an evolution of the method which has emerged with the proliferation of technology, in particular cell phones, allowing people to take photos wherever they might be (Lambert & Hessler, 2018, p. 103). Place-based digital storytelling can evoke memory and a sense of belonging; place is also pedagogical, as "each place has a history, often a contested history, of the people who inhabited it in past times. Each place has an aesthetics, offers a sensory environment of sound, movement and image that is open to multiple interpretations" (Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 215). Marshall et a. (2022) stated, "place-

based digital storytelling encourages inter-subjective extrospection, exploring how stories unfold within physical, social, and (geo)political contexts" (p. 110).

*Figure 12: Screenshot. View from the dashboard. Photo Credit: Tammy (2020).*

As we journey with Tammy through her past and present, she reflects on how her perceptions have changed as she has grown from girl to woman. During an individual in-depth interview in the middle of the research process, Tammy reflected on a memory of being in the river valley with a friend when night was approaching, and they spotted a man on his own. She stated:

> This guy was standing in the middle of the trail without a [light or] headlamp... And he's standing there, [just] chilling, walking through the river valley by himself in the dark. And my friend and I were both like, "if we were men, would we feel that empowered to be in the river valley at dark at night?" And as I was walking through the river valley this morning... it just gets to the point where I start to question: "When do I feel safe? And why don't I feel safe?" (Individual Interview, October 13th, 2020)

In shaping her digital story using her point-of-view, taking the audience through the places she ventures daily, she cultivated a similar feeling of tension through movement, engaging in a recursive extrospection of who and where she is in the world.

A sense of movement continues as Tammy's story transitions to the next section – that of a cyclist riding at night, with the camera pointed towards the handlebars and the road moving swiftly below. As the bicycle moves under the streetlights, shadows fall on either side and we hear her say, "I appear and disappear, which version is really me?" This reflects Tammy's comments throughout the interviews on the pressures she felt as a young woman in the academy to conform to expectations around her appearance, including colleagues telling her to let her hair go grey and "make sure that you, like, don't do your makeup, [but do] wear your glasses" (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020).

Speaking about the ways she felt isolated as one of very few women scholars in her field, she reflected on how ongoing comments about her dress and appearance were presented to her as "suggestions" to make her understand how she needed to present herself to be taken seriously as a scholar. Upon entering the academy and working with mentors, she shared encountering a consistent narrative of having to "toughen up," implying that to find success as a woman, she had to embrace more masculine ways of being and responding in the world. I interpreted this as meaning that she was advised to make herself appear less feminine and to avoid behaviours which would be perceived as overly emotional or "girly" while pursuing an academic career.

In her digital story, the simple image of a solitary bike rolling through the night can be seen as a metaphor for the way Tammy reflected on needing to keep moving, amid a sense of isolation in the academy. She expressed that she had been told that she would "never find a job" in the field of musicology by her male professors (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020). The need to keep moving in her video pointed to an embodied sense of being unable to find a space to be still and safe — moving forward but torn between conflicted identities — her identity as a woman presenting visible and invisible barriers in the face of the less-feminine identity the academy was attempting to impose on her.

***End.*** At the end of Tammy's digital story, the screen turns to white; the camera is pointing down to a snow-covered ground. Feet enter the frame walking quickly, moving forward. Tammy's voice asks, "how did I get here? Where is here? Here is a place..." This place is revealed to be the University campus, a space she has visited and revisited throughout her academic career – for rehearsals, classes, presentations. "Today," she says, "I am here for class, an education. What a privilege... I've played the game and I'm part of the system that will only allow me to go so far."

*Figure 13: Screenshot: POV Bike riding at night. Photo credit Tammy (2020).*

While watching Tammy's visual story in combination with her narration, she points to both implicit and explicit representations of the limitations placed on women. Tammy's words combined with her POV cast down to her feet in the snow, constantly moving forward, both explicitly and implicitly tell her story. They can be interpreted by what Clarke (2014) referred to as a "landscape of limitation, a landscape defined by borders of fear, of isolation, of the unknown, [which] shapes an understanding of experience also defined by limitation and marginalization" (p. 108). Throughout the research process, Tammy shared that as a woman she

had encountered sometimes hostile environments and experiences both in and out of academia, mirroring Ahmed's (2021) theory that "a hostile environment is not always an official policy. A hostile environment can be masked by official policies" (p. 354). Hostile environments can also kill joy.

Tammy's story highlights the ways in which limitations have been placed on her as a woman; this includes limits on her body, appearance, and on how she moves through and in outdoor spaces that should provide joy but are often places of fear. When sharing her story and the process of writing it, she spoke about the myriad challenges she had encountered in traversing her life in academia including the pressures she felt to conform, to modify her appearance and behaviour to be taken seriously, and how she continues to navigate the systems of education that are meant to cultivate a love of learning. Tammy's story is one of solitude and disappointment in many ways, yet also one of reinvention and perseverance. As the screen fades to black, we hear her ask: "If this is my education, then what was getting here?", which I interpret as an expression of frustration and betrayal at having followed the "rules" of academia yet having experienced myriad barriers and restrictions because she is a woman. I also heard this as a story of resistance through which Tammy confronts and questions a system of education that she believes in, yet which has failed her in many ways.

Relating her experiences to classroom dynamics she had observed as a pre-service teacher, Tammy expressed that she has witnessed that "boys are more likely to be called on than girls, for whatever reason, even by female teachers" (Focus Group, September 16th, 2020), noting that this is a behaviour she strives to be very conscious of in her own teaching practice as it evolves. Tammy's story evokes those of many critical educators who have come before, expressing the need "to continue to use our intellect and our imaginations to forge new liberatory

ways of knowing, thinking, and being, to work for change" (hooks, 2010, p. 170). This continues to be a challenge today, highlighted by the #MeToo and the prevalence of other hashtag movements that have emerged such as #BlackLivesMatters, emphasizing the need for pedagogies to dismantle cultures and systems of oppression and abuse.

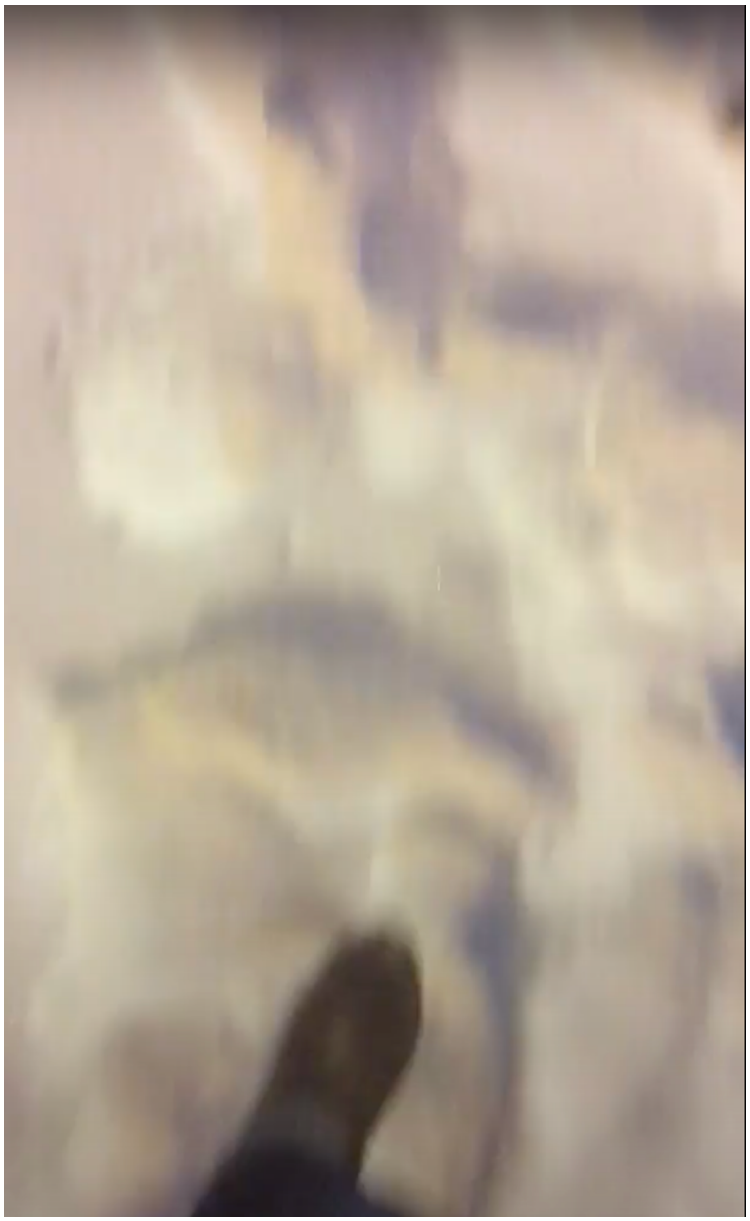

*Figure 14: Screenshot: Walking through snow. Photo credit: Tammy (2020).*

### *Introducing Mark*

*I would say that I would identify as a feminist if you forced me to, but I try to avoid the label. I find it easier to dialogue with people if I am able to identify my position rather than just coming out with a one-fits-all label. ~ Mark (Individual Interview, August 25th, 2020)*

Mark (he/him) was a preservice teacher in the final year of his teaching degree who identified as a cis-gendered, heteronormative man. Another former student of mine from the English Language Arts curriculum course I taught, he approached me multiple times during the course to discuss the theoretical concepts that had come up in class and his desire to pursue an academic career. Given the depth of his questions and interest in research and philosophy, I felt he would be a strong candidate to participate in my study. He openly shared that both of his parents were teachers and they had been a great influence on his decision to pursue teaching as a career because it had been such a reliable profession for them. He majored in science education, with English Language Arts education as his minor teaching subject area. Although interested in spending some time in the classroom, he was eager to apply for graduate school and spoke about working as a substitute teacher to supplement his income while pursuing his Master's. I interpreted his desire to pursue a Master's in philosophy as an indication that while he was interested in education, ultimately it was not his passion.

As the only male-identifying participant, Mark approached the questions I posed from a place of seeking to understand the experiences of the women around him, often reflecting on the question of where he, as a cis-gendered white man, fit into the conversation of feminism today. When asked during our introductory interview if he identified as a feminist, he responded, "I agree with, the philosophy of feminism at large. I don't openly identify as a feminist just on principle... I don't like labels" (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020). His hesitancy did not surprise me as I know there are many perspectives on whether men can and should identify as

feminists (Crowe, 2013). Crowe (2013) addressed the question of whether men can be feminists. He stated:

> Full engagement with feminist objectives requires men to move beyond self-interest and treat the viewpoints and concerns of women as important in their own right. This is an important project for men to adopt, but even men who take their engagement with feminism very seriously cannot see feminist issues exactly as women see them. (p. 2)

However, following hooks' (2015) suggestion that "most people have no understanding of the myriad ways feminism has positively changed all our lives. Sharing feminist thought sustains feminist movement. Feminist knowledge is for everybody" (p. 24), Mark's presence in the study illustrated the important voice that men can offer to contemporary conversations around inclusion and allyship. Throughout the study Mark spoke about his belief in the need for intersectional and inclusive feminism yet was always mindful of the careful way he positioned or oriented himself toward the topic. While acknowledging how issues such as representation and control of the female body are critical to feminism today, he expressed greater comfort talking about feminism within the broader context of equity and an awareness of the importance of language when engaging in conversations related to sexism and racism. He spoke about feeling the need to acknowledge his privilege as a man when engaging in conversations about feminism with women-identifying friends and family, striving to "take a back seat a little bit more, and try to listen" (Individual Interview, October 15th, 2020).

When asked to share an image that represented feminism, he shared one of Simone de Beauvoir in 1972 leading a group of younger women at a march for women's rights. He said he chose this for the ways it represented the need for intergenerational dialogue and mentorship in feminist movements. Expressing a belief in a "progressive need for feminist attitudes in our

society" alongside a concern that "we haven't really moved very far from where we began" (Focus Group, September 23rd, 2020). As he shared his image and thoughts around the current state of feminism and feminist movements, he re-shared his thinking of feminism as more of "a philosophy rather than an identity" (Focus Group, September 16th, 2020).

*Figure 15: Simone de Beauvoir leading a women's march. Photo credit S. Julienne (1972). Licensed through Sipa International.*

Throughout the research process he appeared to approach the questions asked with an analytical lens, engaging in active listening and an authentic sense of care in his questions. At the heart of this, Mark expressed a belief in the importance of identifying the root causes of inequality, and how power and privilege are abused, which shaped the focus of his inquiry throughout the study: "*How do the values and ideals of our society and what we reproduce*

*support these inequities? And how do we come to a consensus around these topics?"* As I watched his story, it also became evident to me that locating where he, and other men, belong in these conversations was integral to his exploration.

**Mark's Story: A Fly on the Yellow Wallpaper.**

*Where do men fit into the schema of feminism, if there even exists a spot for men at the table of feminist thought? Are the traditional roles reversed at this table: men, thus, serve as mere facilitators of female discussion, preparing the sustenance for female minds whose exclusive rule decides on the rights of women and men alike regarding feminism and its outcomes. Is the contemporary role of men destined to be passive? For their transgressions reverberate through generations of female minds and bodies. Or is it that Eve has begun to take the fruit once forbidden to her? While the gluttonous Adam has ravaged entire orchards, Eve has reclaimed what is hers in a revolution for autonomy.*

*These questions matter for women and men alike as knowing where one fits within this schema is significant. While I certainly did not believe in the sentiment of a reversal of roles regarding feminism to be appropriate – that is, matriarchal control over female discourse thus simply displacing patriarchy – the function of male voices within this discourse required orientation. This is especially true in light of contemporary Adam, who remains unsatiated and views Eve's autonomy as illegitimate.*

*And so, while male bodies inevitably occupy the milieu of feminism either as oppressors or as allies how should men – men of good faith and conscience, men of equity and opportunity – orient themselves? While many of such men exist, the Zeitgeist of patriarchy prevails: the voice of Adam silencing every member of The Other Sex.*

*This leads us to one story in particular, Charlotte Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper. Therein, we find the antithesis of what I concede is man's role within feminism. This antithesis has a name, and his name is John. John not only serves the function of the antagonist of The Yellow Wallpaper, he is, most importantly, representative of a greater social structure and role. The role of 'physician' is what is inextricably meant by this. Here, we do not reference John's medical title, but rather, the greater patriarchal judge and analyst of woman, someone who attempts to cure female 'ailments', 'hysteria', and 'disillusionment' within society.*

*A renaissance of such 'John's' – male-centered thinkers who espouse remedies for feminine social issues – can be seen across North America, their actions working to degrade decades of progressive reforms that have worked to assert female autonomy. And so, women are, once more, enclosed within four yellow walls. Under such conditions, the voice of these John's work to silence and direct female thought within a space demarcated by men, with the intent, of course, of doing what is best for their 'patients'.*

*What if, however, instead of diagnosing women as if they were patients, men listened? What if men acted as flies on yellow wallpaper, heeding the female voice? Moreover, instead of directing feminism and female thought, men could watch intently, as women issue their grievances that only they themselves could truly ever understand. Like a fly, men should be: hovering, present, and always near, thus, included within feminist thought, not excluded, but neither domineering of women's needs. This, I concede, is the placement of men within feminist thought. Allies and listeners, emboldened by the experiences of women in order to utilize privilege towards the achievement of true equity, opportunity, and emancipation: tangible goals of feminism.*

*Perhaps, all we need is a fly to get there.* (Transcribed text from Mark's digital story)

***Beginning.*** Mark chose to find images on the Internet for his story versus creating his own. While surprised by this, it was one of the challenges of conducting my research during the pandemic in a format that didn't allow for us to be in shared time and space for making images. Beginning with a black and white image of a group of men from what looks to be the 1920s or 1930s with photoshopped posters from women's rights protests on it. Juxtaposing contemporary messaging such as "my pussy my choice" and "porn isn't hip anymore," with a historical image of grim-faced men, Mark's voice chimes in with the question: "Where do men fit into the schema of feminism, if there even exists a place for men at the table of feminist thought?"

As shared earlier, Mark did not easily identify as a feminist, expressing concern and a lack of ease with labels. He expressed concern about labelling himself in this manner out of a concern over how it might impact the ways in which people perceived and interacted with him.

Mark stated, “I would say that I would identify as a feminist if you forced me to, but I try to avoid the label. I just find it easier to dialogue with people if I can identify my position rather than just coming out with a one-fits-all label” (Focus Group, September 23rd, 2020), describing the use of the word “feminism” as “fraught” (Focus Group, September 23rd, 2020). His dis-ease reflected the affective tensions often encountered when the word feminist or feminism is invoked (Ahmed, 2017). This was not a new idea for me as it echoed the negative sentiments or connotations which I encountered in my own experiences in the classroom. I interpreted his choice to open his story from a place of inquiry as a way through which to position himself within the conversation without dominating it.

The next images in his story continue to question the role of men in feminism, beginning with a photo by Eli Rezkellah (2018) from his exhibit titled *In a Parallel Universe* through which he recreated the aesthetic of advertisements from the 1950s, otherwise known as the mad men era. Inspired at a family dinner, Rezkellah (2018) stated:

> I overheard my uncles talk about how women are better off cooking, taking care of the kitchen, and fulfilling ‘their womanly duties.’ Although I know that not all men think that way, I was surprised to learn that some still do, so I went on to imagine a parallel universe, where roles are inverted, and men are given a taste of their own sexist poison (para. 1).

Rezkellah’s work is an explicit challenge to the sexist ways in which men discuss women’s roles, seeking to reverse the male gaze through inverting gender roles to “question modern day sexism, as there is still this outdated ideology of women being housewives and men being breadwinners” (de Asis, 2018, para. 3). As Mark incorporates such role reversal images in his digital story, he asks, “is the role of men in contemporary feminism meant to be passive?” This question reflects

the ongoing inner and outer dialogue Mark said he engaged in throughout the study. This includes the earlier referenced conversations about feminism with women friends which he shared as being sometimes "heated." Themes that he described emerging from these conversations included intersectionality and how the word feminism is used in the world.

*Figure 16: Adam and Eve [Painting]. By Jacob Jordaens (1630). Public Domain.*

***Middle.*** In the middle section of his digital story, Mark continues with his line of inquiry about the role of men in feminism. His digital story proceeds through including a Renaissance painting *Adam and Eve* (1630) by Flemish artist Jacob Jordaens. This image places Eve above Adam; as she consumes the apple he is situated on the ground, lower than her and reaching up in an imploring way. Mark's accompanying narrative acknowledges the ways in which men have

more power and access to "abundance." Conjuring the story of the fallen woman who is responsible for leading mankind astray, Mark reinterprets the image in the narration of his story, as a "gluttonous Adam who has devoured orchards while Eve seeks to reclaim what was forbidden to her."

Engaging in this study following the #MeToo movement, Mark responded to larger cultural conversations concerning the real potential for "co-optation, paternalism, appropriation, infiltration, and the like that provoke… skepticism toward putative feminist men" (Harding, 1998, p. 192). In his story, Mark embedded the image of a compass, speaking about the need for a "reorientation" of men's voices within feminist movements and discourse. It can also be a representation of how disorienting it can be for men to be confronted with the ground shifting beneath their feet as feminisms re-emerge, transform, and demand increasing social change. Heath (2013) stated:

> Men have a necessary relation to feminism — the point after all is that it should change them too, that involves new ways of being women and men against and as an end to the reality of women's oppression — and that relation is also necessarily one of a certain exclusion. (p. 1)

Men's feeling of exclusion is challenging to navigate and can result in backlash as confronting systems of oppression can result in anger, fear, and resentment (Ahmed, 2014a) from those who have enjoyed privilege. Zembylas (2012) argued "that there needs to be an explicit pedagogic attention to students' emotional responses during classroom discussions of racism, social justice, and critical pedagogy" (p. 113). Returning to Boler's (2014) pedagogy of discomfort, which "recognizes and problematizes the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines, and complicity with hegemony" (p. 29), the need for compassion when

confronting difficult knowledge is invoked. Mark's compass acknowledges and challenges the ways in which feminism elicits emotions and the need for what Zembylas (2012) refers to as strategic empathy, which "can function as a valuable pedagogical tool that opens up affective spaces which might eventually disrupt the emotional roots of [difficult] knowledge" (p. 114). Mark asks, "and so, while male bodies inevitably occupy the milieu of feminism either as oppressors or as allies how should men – men of good faith and conscience, men of equity and opportunity – orient themselves?" This question is a critical one that can also be applied to emerging and ongoing conversations around other social justice movements and the issue of whose voices should be centred.

Moving between images of conservative politicians such as Donald Trump, who he refers to as a "contemporary Adam" in his digital story, and images of women's rights protests and the struggle for equality – by both men and women – Mark's story acknowledges the prevailing power of patriarchy, with particular emphasis on the fraught and ongoing issue of abortion rights. Turning next to literature, he introduces images representing the story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), written by Charlotte Gilman Perkins, and claims that within this story from long ago, lies the antithesis to the bodily autonomy for women and women-identifying individuals which modern feminism seeks. The story is of a woman diagnosed with nervous depression after giving birth which:

> dwells in the middle of Patriarchy. She is living in "ancestral halls," has just given birth to a boy, is surrounded by men – her husband, her brother, and somewhere in the background, Weir Mitchell – and even the female or females in the house appear to be cardboard figures cut out by the patriarchy. (Ford, 1985, p. 309)

Largely sequestered to a room with yellow wallpaper, the protagonist begins to read the wallpaper and begins to see both a woman imprisoned in it as well as a way for her to escape her own circumstances (Lanser, 1989).

I interpret Mark's decision to visually represent a short story written in 1892 as a way through which to understand feminism, as representative of how little progress has been made in the last 120 years in the battle for control over women's bodies and lives. This was reinforced with Mark's inclusion of old black and white photos of men standing over a woman on an examination table and surrounding a woman in a fit of hysteria with perplexed looks on their faces. These images are reminiscent of the ongoing proclivity and power held by men – as politicians or doctors, to make decisions about women's bodies and inform the way they move through the world. As Mark describes in the narration of his story: "male-centred thinkers who espouse remedies for feminine social issues."

Mark's digital story dives into the political fray of the moment, sharing headlines from various newspapers telling the story of political divide which has turned into a chasm over recent years. His story foreshadows the reversal of Roe v. Wade in the United States. This legislation that has long protected a women's right to have access to abortion in the United States at a federal level was repealed on June 24, 2022. With this action the precarity of women's rights, and by extension the rights of other marginalized groups, was revealed. As Justice Clarence Thomas stated, "the legal rationale for Friday's decision could be applied to overturn other major cases, including those that legalized gay marriage, barred the criminalization of consensual homosexual conduct, and protected the rights of married people to have access to contraception" (cited in Totenberg & McCammon, 2022, para. 15).


*Figure 17: Grab 'em by the Patriarchy [Photo]. Photo Credit: Kathy deWitt (2017). Licensed through Alamy.*

***End.*** The ending of Mark's digital story he returns to the story of the yellow wallpaper by showing an image of a fly against a yellow background and asks: "What if men acted as flies on the yellow wallpaper, heeding the female voice?" As the screen transitions to an image of men alongside women at a protest march. Mark states in his digital story that men should be included in the discourse about feminism but "never domineering of women's needs;" acting as allies and supporters, but not centering themselves in the conversation. Resonating with current conversations occurring within social justice and equity movements (Kalina, 2020), the question of what it means to be an ally is a complex and contentious one for many and needs to be interrogated within educational contexts. Throughout the research process, Mark demonstrated an awareness of his power and privilege and the importance of context, which might include geographical, cultural, and temporal factors that shape and inform perspectives and

understandings of feminism. Recognizing the complexity of being a man engaged in feminist discourse, he never shied away from acknowledging the need for men, including himself, to do what is commonly referred to as "checking one's own bias" when confronted with or brought into difficult conversations about sexism. In his digital story, he conjures an image of allyship as being present, acting as a listener when dwelling in spaces where feminist activism occurs, alongside a supposition that there are limitations to what he can offer as a man.

Identifying, or being identified as an ally, has increased prevalence in social justice movements in recent years, leading to shifting perspectives and language around allyship. Although long used within men's activism as a term of support in the fight for equity and against gender-based violence, a new critique around the terms ally, allies, and allyship has emerged, "urging for an evolution of our collective thinking about what is needed from people privileged by or benefitting from inequalities" (Carlson et al., 2020, p. 890). A question that arises in the current conversation about allyship is: What does allyship both look and feel like? Carlson et al. (2020) have noted that the term ally, while often viewed as a proclamation of support, must also be examined for the potential harms it can cause. This is further complicated when considering that within feminist and anti-racist discourses, the efficacy and intention of allyship have become increasingly critiqued, leading to the use of the term "performative ally," which indicates "when someone from a nonmarginalized group profess[es] support and solidarity with a marginalized group, but in a way that is not helpful" (Kalina, 2020, p. 478). Mark's story resonated with me; many of his observations and challenges as a man discussing feminism echoed my own challenges as a diversity consultant with a large urban school board where my presence as a white, cis-gendered woman requires a great deal of reflexivity and unlearning. These correlations will be further explored in the analysis of common themes that emerged through the research

process, drawing on Mark's supposition in his story that "men can and must circulate as flies," and his wondering, "when does the fly has become a pest?"

***Introducing Krista***

*Whenever I hear [the word] sensation or that something is [sensational], I always think about, film phenomenology [and] bodily responses to things.*
*~ Krista (Focus Group, September 30th, 2020)*

Krista (she/they) responded to the poster I sent out to various not-for-profit groups. Not a formal educator, she worked for a small independent film cooperative in Southern Alberta where she led workshops and worked with emerging filmmakers. Having completed a master's degree in film studies, she was very interested in exploring alternative forms of filmmaking and ways of working with emerging filmmakers. She was the only participant who identified outside of a cis-gendered heteronormative identity and used either she/her or they/them pronouns. Her partner also identifies as a non-binary person of colour, which informed Krista's responses. Throughout the research process, Krista brought more of a filmmaker than an educator perspective to the conversations, with her story and responses oriented more towards media messaging and working with adult learners versus working in a school context.

Having joined the project out of an interest in the topic and a love for visual storytelling, what evolved through her digital story was a personal journey of rediscovering creativity and thinking through the potential of digital storytelling for independent filmmakers. As the only group member identifying as queer, she also brought a diverse perspective to the conversation, as intersectionality became increasingly intertwined and centred in our group conversations (more on this in the discussion of the theme to follow). She agreed with Amy's assertions that feminism must be for all women and was an open advocate for centring lived experience when the topic of

trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) (Worthen, 2022) was brought up by another participant.

Trans-exclusionary radical feminism has been framed as the "new white feminism," or a "feminist discourse that hinge[s] on hegemonic notions of gender, sex, and sexuality and therefore helps to maintain and extend the privileges of women of a particular racial, sexual, bodily, national, and class orientation" (da Costa, 2021, p. 317). Krista openly addressed the need to understand the roots of varying social justice movements, such as LGBTQ+ rights and anti-Black racism to truly think intersectionally. Out of our conversations, a key question that emerged for her was: "*Who gets to decide?"* or stated otherwise: "*Whose feminism is the 'right' feminism?*

The first image Krista shared in the interview process was of a film camera, highlighting the importance of this storytelling tool in her own life and how, unlike the other participants, she confidently identified as a filmmaker with a passion for and belief in visual storytelling. The camera in the image represented her position working in an independent film cooperative where older film cameras can be found and are used by emerging filmmakers to explore modalities and formats. It also signified her love and appreciation for old movies, which was revealed during the research process. Highlighting her background in film theory, she spoke to engaging with the world in a phenomenological way – allowing her bodily responses to events and moments to shape the images she is drawn to, including what she gathered for her visual journaling process. Reflecting on how media dense the world we live in is, she spoke about how her teenage niece "performed" (Individual Interview, October 20th, 2020) on social media by conforming to stereotypical images of herself with lots of make-up on and always looking perfect. Thinking about how representations of women in the media impact how we see ourselves and others, her

feminism was rooted in a sense of care, stating that feminism for her was about leaving the world "better for the next generation or stopping young girls from going through the same kind of things [I've gone through]" (Individual Interview, September 8th, 2020). A larger question emerged for her around how images of women in popular culture impacted her own sense of self and identity – this was to become the focus of her digital story.

*Figure 18: Old School Film Camera. Photo credit: Krista (2020).*

**Krista's Story: Mediating Feminisms.**

*When I was a kid in school, I was so nervous to raise my hand or share my thoughts. I knew the answers but never spoke up because I was too afraid of being seen- both visually and through my opinions. I lost out on so many opportunities to learn and express myself because of my low self-esteem. I was chubby and shy and didn't look or feel like the women I saw in the media I consumed. As I grew up, I was exposed to more positive media representations of women that didn't fit the traditional idea of what a woman should be. In a lot of mainstream or classical Hollywood cinema, women were either the love interest or a supporting character. In film school, I started watching films about complicated women who were not conventionally attractive, my whole perspective changed. I realized that these representations of multi-dimensional women were impacting the way I conceptualized myself, and how powerful media representations can be. I went on to write my honours thesis about women in film noir, about how film noir allowed for subjective representations that depicted women's internal mental state. These films allowed women to be violent, witty, aggressive, emotional, manipulative, and in control of their sexuality. Representations of all different types of women are so important because it impacts the viewer. It taught me that my value doesn't come from how I look. Once I graduated, I started working as a film programmer. Now I get to curate films professionally, allowing me to ensure the films I screen allow women to be multifaceted. I think of the young girls who might be watching. I am no longer afraid of voicing my opinions.* (Transcribed text from Krista's digital story)

***Beginning.*** Utilizing the more traditional digital storytelling format of the personal narrative, Krista's story begins with images of a classroom alongside her reflection on how nervous she was to participate in class discussions when she was young. In the first image, a stock photo from the Internet, we see the backs of students' heads, all with hands raised in the foreground, and the teacher, out of focus and smiling, in the background. Krista then transitions to a photo of herself as a child, outside in the rain, obscuring her face with an umbrella. "I was always too afraid of being seen, both visually and through my opinions," she says. Resonating

with my own experience, her story made me reflect on how I spent a lot of my younger life hiding. Both as a youth performing on stage, where I could disappear into different characters, or as an adult working in role on set where I was taught “if you are in front of the camera you are in the wrong place.” This is a common phenomenon among adolescent girls who desire to hide their bodies — “behind the curtain when getting changed, behind loose clothing or behind their friends in order to feel safe, comfortable and to ‘look right’ or ‘feel normal’” (Goodyear et al., 2014). In her story, Krista incorporated a photo of herself and her sister under umbrellas. Their faces are blurry and slightly obscured, standing in nature and wearing oversized raincoats. Still young girls, they embody an innocence untouched by the dominant narratives and expectations placed on young women as they emerge from girlhood (Currie, 2015).

*Figure 19: Screenshot: Hiding Under Umbrellas. Photo credit: Lea Safranovich (n.d.).*

Krista's approach to her digital story echoed Miller's (2005) use of autobiography "as a form of political inquiry that could interrogate both silence and speaking" (p. 3), by offering insights for inquiry into how women see and are seen. Rice (2014), in her research looking at coming of age in an image culture, speaks to the issue Krista raises. Rice stated, "diverse women's stories bring attention to an underlying, pressing issue: the ways in which our relationships to our bodies – hence, our sense of ourselves as embodied – are increasingly mediated by commercial media" (p. 26). One's relationship to the body, and the body to world, was a recurring theme throughout all the digital stories created in the study and will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Krista completes the opening of her story with an image of herself as a teenager followed by a piece of artwork showing a woman with two faces, one in black and white, one in colour. Created by her friend, Calgary artist Janeen Scott (2016), this is a powerful image that I interpreted to reflect the complexity of navigating an inner world, the difficulty of growing up as a girl, and all the challenges that are presented in the process. In the image, the dominant face is a black and white one with another face, in colour, emerging from behind – a visual representation, in my interpretation, of *breaking silence,* or "bursting through the surface of the other's hearing, fleshing what is resisted, cloistered" (Davies et al., 1997, p. 75). The interplay of black and white with colour in the image is provocative as the black and white face looks directly at you while the face in colour has eyes cast down. One defiant; one demure. One a woman in hiding and the other baring her body through the lifting of her skirt for a strong gaze. Bettis and Adams (2005a) spoke to the "emergent identities" of girls and noted that girls construct their identities both within the "formal design of schooling as well as outside of its purview" (p. 4). I internet this image as reflective of the ways in which girls and young women

must navigate myriad pressures and expectation placed on them as they engage in identity formation, of which school plays a large part (Heilman, 1998).

*Figure 20: Screenshot Woman with Two-Faces [Drawing]. Artist: J. Scott (2016). Used with permission from J. Scott.*

Different from Mark's investigation, which questioned performative allyship, Krista's story brought to the fore another use of the word performative. Butler (1988) argued that gender is "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief" (p. 540). I interpreted Krista's use of this image as reflecting the impact of growing up surrounded by messages telling girls and women who and what they should be, how one should relate to the outer world, and how we must cultivate multiple faces through which to perform and face the world.

***Middle.*** The middle part of Krista's digital story continues to tackle the issue of media representation and the impact it has on self-image by offering visual counter-narratives which helped her question traditional gender roles and begin to construct a story for herself beyond the limitations the social construct of gender. Sharing a collage of romantic comedy movie posters, a genre of film which Negra (2009) noted for its "enchantment effect" (p. 6), promising working women a release from their current existence upon meeting the perfect man, Krista shows how women have been portrayed within this genre. She then transitions to images from films that represent women in more complex and diverse ways – including Charlize Theron in *Monster* (2003) where she transformed her physical appearance to portray serial killer Aileen Wournos and a movie poster for the film *Phat Girlz* (2006) starring Mo'Nique, which portrayed a woman representing something different than the "white and skinny" stereotype so often seen. In her story, Krista highlights how powerful these portrayals were for her, helping to foster a deeper understanding of how the images on screen shaped the way she saw herself in the world growing up.

Krista continues her exploration of the film narratives that influenced her the most with a brief montage of clips showcasing how women have been portrayed in film noir, which was also the topic of her master's thesis. Specifically, it was the portrayal of the femme fatal, defined as "the woman who 'never really is what she seems to be' and is therefore, in a patriarchal culture, ungovernable and threatening" (Spicer, 2002, p. 90), that was most intriguing for her. For Krista, these characters highlighted the importance of representing real female subjectivity in film; through such complicated characters women's interiority or "internal mental states" could be explored and brought to light. The femme fatale has also been characterized as "an explicit challenge to the postwar consensus that women should be fulfilled by the roles of wife and mother" (Spicer, 2002, p. 91), operating as an early representation of a postfeminist sensibility in media culture. Classified as a "new type of woman," feminist film theorists have critiqued "[the femme fatal] as representative of deep-seated patriarchal anxieties stemming from cultural shifts in gender dynamics" (Lindop, 2015, p. 1). Such analyses also underline the complexity of representation that continues today as feminists navigate the landscape of popular/post/neoliberal feminisms alongside intersectional and anti-racist discourses.

***End.*** At the end of her digital story, Krista's images transition from those of films that influenced her to images of her contemporary professional role as a community educator and film programmer, and the importance she places on centering diversity in the films she teaches and curates. "I think of all the young girls who are watching, and I am no longer afraid to voice my opinions," she says in her narration. The final image is of her on stage giving a presentation. I no longer see a little girl hiding beneath an umbrella. She expresses having found a sense of purpose and place through contributing to the world of visual storytelling: "Now I get to curate

films professionally, allowing me to ensure the films I screen allow women to be multifaceted. I think of the young girls who might be watching. I am no longer afraid of voicing my opinions."

Krista's story, while different from my own, in many ways feels somewhat familiar to me. I have also been deeply impacted by film narratives portraying complicated women. It was through watching movies that I was exposed to many of the constructed identities that mainstream Hollywood can produce and impose on women. However, it is through participating in and exploring life behind the camera, that I began to think about how these narratives are constructed not real. That I, and all women, can be more than the single story that may be present on the screen. Returning to the image of the woman with the two faces, Krista's narration helps frame it in a different light for the viewer. Bettis and Adams (2005b) acknowledged that girls and women in today's world can be framed or seen as multiple things — "powerful, powerless, confident, demure, strong, nice, pretty, and athletic" (p. 276). Krista expressed how her digital story reinforced the power of filmmaking and how she thinks about "all of the young girls who might be watching" in her position as a film programmer (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020). As a viewer, her story represented the need for different stories and representations through which multifaceted girls can see themselves portrayed. It also highlighted the power of being the one holding the camera and constructing the story as Krista was able to share her own journey to empowerment through image and word.

**Summarizing the Stories**

As demonstrated by the diversity of the stories created, digital storytelling provided a space for the participants to individually explore their perspectives and experiences amid shared conversations around curriculum, the world, and how they inhabit it. Given the complexity of understanding these stories, the need for more critical media studies and analysis in schools,

allowing young people "to explore issues of positionality, intersectionality, and subjectivity that embrace difference and counter the notion of a universal human experience," (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 52) is implied. Through both the interview and focus group processes and the stories themselves, common themes emerged offering insights into how feminism and *being* feminist are understood. These themes are analyzed below to formulate a response to my third research question: *How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?* These common thematic threads are, intersectionality, which was a key concept discussed during the research process; the body/how we embody spaces in the world, which emerged in all four digital stories; and digital storytelling as pedagogy or practice. Following a closer look at these themes, I conclude this chapter with an exploration of the unexpected limitations and possibilities of my study. Including a closer look at the complexity of the time we have all lived through over the last couple of years as the world has endured what Endo (2021) referred to as the "dual pandemic of Covid-19 and structural racism" (p. 116), and how the emergence of both has impacted where my research sits within current feminist and educational discourses.

## Thematic Analysis: Intersectionality, the Body, and the Power of Digital Storytelling

### *Intersectionality: What's in a Word?*

Throughout the research process, the topic of intersectionality and how each participant valued and perceived it was discussed. Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016) addressed the complexity of the term intersectionality stating, "people increasingly claim and use [the term] for their diverse intellectual and political projects" (p. 11). Emerging in the 1960s and 1970s as "African-American women activists confronted the puzzle of how their needs simply fell through the

cracks of anti-racist social movements, feminism, and unions organizing for worker's rights" (Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.), intersectionality has become a term commonly used as an analytic tool through which various communities view and "grapple with the complex discriminations they face" (Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 12).

**September 23, 2020 Focus Group.** After my initial conversations with participants where they each claimed the identity of feminist, it was important to further explore what that meant to each of them. In my work at the school board as well as in my exploration of contemporary feminist movements, I was curious to know if my participants perceived intersectionality as central to their own understandings of feminism. This led me to begin the 2nd focus group (September 23rd, 2020) with the question: "Is there a difference between feminism and intersectionality?" This question was informed and prompted by the increased attention to intersectionality as critical to current feminist conversations. This line of inquiry was also informed by a comment made to me by an academic colleague and mentor in a discussion about feminism when she said to me that she shied away from using the word feminist, preferring to call herself intersectional (C. van Kessel, personal communication, November 8, 2019). I was curious to know if this shift in language resonated with my participants and, if so, why, and what it meant to them.

Amy offered the first response, stating that "feminism isn't just about white women. For it to be feminism, you have to think about the intersections, but I don't think that necessarily means it's not called feminism anymore." Krista followed, agreeing that she saw intersectionality as a "crucial aspect" of feminism, and that importance had to be placed on "all women." The use of the term "all women" led to further conversation regarding who defines a "woman," or how "woman" is defined, which has emerged as a controversial political topic in recent years, with

the emergence of an anti-gender ideology movement. This reactionary movement is defined by Butler (2021) as a belief system founded in the notion "that the traditional family is under attack, that children in the classroom are being indoctrinated to become homosexuals, and that 'gender' is a dangerous, if not diabolical, ideology threatening to destroy families, local cultures, civilization, and even 'man' himself" (para. 2). Krista's use of the term "all women" prompted Mark to re-introduce the topic of TERF's (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) – what he referred to as "exclusionary trends," and whether they were antithetical to a "true feminist attitude. Krista responded that for her, they would be. However, at the same time, she acknowledged that this would not be a universal belief as those who held trans-exclusionary feminist beliefs would disagree. At this point, Tammy joined in the conversation, asking, "Why are we so worked up about necessarily what we're calling [feminism]?" Instead of engaging in a conversation about "what" people are calling themselves, she suggested, perhaps we should look at the "why." She asked, "why are people identifying as...intersectional feminists?" and stated that she felt the entire conversation about labels was exclusionary, serving as way to "divide and conquer," with the goal of distracting from the collective human need for equity.

Tammy's "divide and conquer" statement resonated with me for the way it touched on the complexity of defining intersectionality as a feminist theory. Acknowledging the popularity of *intersectionality* in recent years, Naples (2016) addressed how it is at risk of operating as a buzzword lacking in specificity. Davis (2008) identified intersectionality as a topic that can lead to a fair amount of confusion even amid scholars, stating "some suggest that intersectionality is a theory, others regard it as a concept or heuristic device, and still others see it as a reading strategy for doing feminist analysis" (p. 68). In the conversation with my participants, I saw a shared perception that intersectionality is an important component of their relationship to or

understanding of feminism, yet what it meant beyond an identity-stance and what that might mean for their teaching practice and emerging pedagogies was vague. Davis (2008) addressed this shared ambiguity, stating it "encourages complexity, stimulates creativity, and avoids premature closure" (p. 79), ultimately encouraging those who wish to claim an intersectional method or identity to "roll up their sleeves and get to work" (p. 79). A sentiment which is echoed in Ahmed's (2017) description of intersectionality as "messy and embodied" (p. 119).

**November 11, 2020 Focus Group.** While it had not been my intention through raising the initial question that intersectionality be centred in future conversations, Mark brought it up again during our November 11th, 2020 focus group. He shared that he had spoken with friends, "specifically female friends" about the term since our earlier meeting and discussion. As we revisited the word, we shifted from seeking a concrete definition of what it means to be intersectional, towards thinking more intentionally about what intersectional theory as a teaching practice might look like. Amy shared having raised the concept with the students in her student teaching field placement and expressed that it was a difficult concept for her high school students to grasp. She stated that while they were able to understand the importance of race and gender, thinking outside of that towards different identities was a struggle. While all participants agreed that intersectionality offered potential for cultivating inclusive environments in increasingly diverse classrooms, the politicization of the term was raised as a concern.

In the annual Speech from the Throne that opens Canadian Parliament every September, the Canadian federal government, led by the Liberal Party, had announced that they were focused on an "intersectional, feminist response" (Payette, 2020) to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was met with staunch critique from then Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, who called intersectionality a "kooky academic theory" (Kenney, 2020), and likened the concept to a

"bright, shiny object" to distract the public in lieu of talking about health and job creation. Mark raised Kenney's comment, expressing a belief that there is a fear of theories such as intersectionality and critical race theory and stating that he found it problematic that they were being dismissed and "shut out by our own government." Amy commented that a week after Kenney called intersectionality a "kooky" theory, he then applied the same term to describe white supremacists, after holding a rally, as a "small group of kooks." She asked "is it that [Kenney] is an idiot with a bad vocabulary? Or is he smart? And he's using his words wisely? I don't know what I think."

Geis (2012) states "political language commonly conveys information on two levels. The first is the linguistic meaning of what is said. The second is the body of political beliefs that specific instances of political language presuppose and evoke when used" (p. 8). The battle between politicians on theories aligned with equity and diversity has always been present. What we saw unfolding in the Fall of 2020, with the word intersectionality at the centre, was an example of how "language can influence the political significance of events" (Geis, 2012, p. 8), and I would also offer, cultivate political divide.

Tammy offered the opinion that both the use of the word intersectionality in the Throne Speech as well as Kenney's dismissal of it as a kooky theory, were intentional, and raised one of the key underlying tensions educators are confronted with today. Talking about the Music curriculum she was learning about in her teacher education program, she said "you're supposed to know composers, and all the composers you're supposed to know are old white men: European, German. Anyway, I have thoughts about that... White supremacy and music, academia." As she began to make connections between our conversations and the written curriculum she will be tasked with teaching, she began to unpack ways in which she can weave

alternative “intersectional” ways of learning into her lessons. Stating that perhaps sometimes you have act “subversively... When you’re talking about [intersectionality], you just describe the thing, and this is how it works. And [students] don’t need to know what it’s called if it’s a problem.”

During this focus group, Mark stated that he was starting to think of feminism as “paradoxical” because it could mean so many things to so many people. He stated that to him the purpose of feminism was to “achieve an avenue that is better than what we've had, [that] achieves true equality or equity, you know, and then by trying to define [it as one thing], we [create divide] and hold ourselves back from unifying.” This resonated with both his and Tammy’s previous statements expressing discomfort with labels which might imply a fixed way of being. Crenshaw (1991) addressed the challenge of interpreting intersectionality as being tied to identity, arguing “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend differences, as some critic’s charge, but rather the opposite, that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences’ (p. 357). Ultimately, the conversation around intersectionality with my participants highlighted the need for more critical discussions about the ideas that can inform or undergird pedagogies of resistance, such as intersectionality, feminism, and anti-racism. Understanding that if we are too fixed in how we view these complex terms and by extension, one another, we risk impeding collective action towards a better world.

***Women’s Safety: The Body Holds the Story***

In feminist discourses, women’s bodies have been greatly discussed. Simone de Beauvoir (1973) stated “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p. 301). While watching the digital stories, the theme of the body, or bodies – more specifically how gendered bodies move in and occupy space – emerged. During the focus groups we had some discussion of the ways in which

women and girls move through and embody the world in a more guarded way, constantly vigilant of the potential dangers that may exist. Revisiting Ahmed's (2017) belief that "becoming feminist puts us in touch with the world through alienation with it" (p. 42), the visual journaling part of the study invited participants to consider how they both engaged with and are alienated from the world. They were invited to generate ideas about the world they encounter, how they encounter it, and how they could visually represent those engagements. When we reconvened to share the stories, this theme of the body was observed by all participants as living within all the digital stories, leading to conversation in our final focus group meeting (December 9th, 2020) about what that meant.

In that final group meeting on December 9th, 2020, Tammy and Amy both addressed the sensation of fear that women and girls live with, which they had expressed through their visuals of traveling outside at night, whether via foot or on a bicycle. Using first person point-of-view, they used the camera as a tool through which to share the perspective of a woman alone. Amy commented on how she found it interesting that they both portrayed the walk to the car in their stories, identifying it as a "common experience" during which women instinctively "have their keys out" as a potential weapon of self-defence. In relation to Tammy's story, Krista agreed that this imagery was representative of a shared experience common to women.

Watching Amy and Tammy's digital stories, the shared theme of safety emerged through their portrayal experiences of walking at night. In relation to this theme, Bannett (2021) states, "a walking woman challenges American social norms since her very footsteps interfere with men's attempts to control her movements, to keep her rooted and bound to the domestic sphere" (p. 2). The sensation of being in touch with the world alongside a sense of alienation was raised through these shared experiences. The conversation of women's safety in public spaces reminded me of

my own experiences traveling on my own and the number of times I had been told "it's not safe for women to travel alone."

As a teacher, I have come to recognize that even schools are not always safe spaces for girls and women. As inherently gendered spaces, schools are recognized "as locations of agency that generate hegemonic gender regimes that influence and shape pupils' behaviour" (Walker, 2022, p. 550). McMillan et al. (2006) highlighted the ways in which travel to and from school also raises greater risk for girls, noting, "that sex does affect active school travel; specifically, boys are more likely to be allowed to travel "actively" to school than girls" (p. 85). In schools, violence is often directed towards girls and women, leading to "female students and teachers report[ing] being aware of dangerous locations in and around the school building" (Astor & Meyer, 1999, p. 202). This theme of safety across two of the women participants' digital stories highlighted the importance of "recognizing (and then acting to change) the 'malestream curriculum' entrenched in schools that perpetuates the subjection of women in patriarchical classrooms and societies" (Monchinski, 2012, p. 89). This conversation with my participants drew my thinking to Rohrer's (2018) invocation that "sexism is in the room" and the call "for a reevaluation of the seductions of neoliberalism and a reinvigoration of critical pedagogies that necessarily expose and challenge structural oppression" (p. 576) in the wake of #MeToo.

As Amy and Tammy shared their digital stories, a sense of shared understanding and solidarity in experience emerged for the women watching. Mark expressed a different perspective, one that I interpreted as tentatively hopeful. While he admitted that this sensation of walking alone and feeling fear was not something he could relate to; rather, he identified a metaphorical theme of movement, that women can't be still in the world. In response to Amy's story, he stated:

> I also really like your use of movement. I think we talked about this before the use of movement and motion throughout, right? I think it not only emphasizes where you've come from, but where you're going to. And I think maybe that is more important than anything else, where maybe feminism is going or where you're going. (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020).

He reflected that this provided him with important insight into common women's experiences. For some men, these sorts of insights may be difficult to hear and, in some cases, even rebuffed as what Simon called "shocks to thought... resistance to thought and a narrowing of what might be learned from such encounters" (2011, p. 434). For Mark, through watching Amy and Tammy's digital stories there was an opening to begin to understand how he embodied the world differently from them, resulting in a visceral awareness of his increased levels of safety in public spaces. I interpreted these emerging connections and understandings as indicative of the power and possibilities of digital storytelling to approach difficult knowledge in education, which can be understood as "representations of social and historical traumas in the curriculum (epistemological layer) as well as the learner's affective encounters with them in pedagogy (affective layer)" (Dadvand et al., 2021, p. 287).

Reminded of my earlier story in the principal's office, which I referred to as a moment of thrownness (Lagerkvist, 2017), Mark's observations opened a new window of understanding of the conflict that led to that upsetting conversation. Through using the word "feminist" to identify myself to my students, I had inadvertently sent the young male student who had complained into his own moment of thrownness — defined as "uncertainty, precarity, vulnerability" (Lagerkvist, 2017, p. 6). If I am honest about that moment, I cannot deny that I expected that he and other students may have had a strong emotional reaction to the word. However, at that moment, it was

my identity that I centred in the classroom instead of the student's affective responses and reactions. As I have grown as an educator, I have sometimes called that incident my greatest moment of "failed pedagogy," which resulted in renewed understanding around the need for a relational ethic of care as well as pedagogies that create space for emotional and embodied reactions for our students.

***Digital Storytelling as an Act of Social Imagination and Engaged Pedagogy***

At the heart of my study sits a belief in the power of story and the need for more critical and participatory modes of inquiry in our classrooms. Embedded in this is my belief in the importance of visual stories alongside an acknowledgement of the importance of cultural production as an act of resistance. Greene (1997) addressed the need for learners to move beyond the social constructs which inform our understanding of ourselves and the world. Her work on social imagination, rooted in Freire's (1971) model of critical pedagogy, invited educators to think of teaching as an opportunity to focus learning on how a student might order "the materials of his [sic] own life-world when dislocations occur, [so that] what was once familiar abruptly appears strange" (Greene, 1997, p. 142). In our last focus group, I approached the final question of my study: *How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

**Focus Group December 9, 2020.** After viewing the stories, we engaged in a sharing circle through which the participants were invited to discuss their experiences as creators and storytellers and what they thought the process offered from a pedagogic standpoint. Krista commented that she thought it was a "great way to express [personal] stuff, in a form that is understandable to other people." I interpret understandable as relatable. She continued to talk

about how, through using a form of media creation, she was able to share her voice, personal images, and experiences, in a way that might invite more productive conversations around difficult topics. Amy agreed, expressing an interest in experimenting with digital storytelling in a high school classroom. She did note that in asking students to engage in potentially challenging topics, it would be vital to equip students for what may arise. She suggested a teacher needs to be sure she's "laid the proper groundwork, so [students] are prepared."

When asked how participating in the study informed his thinking about the possibilities for digital storytelling in the classroom, Mark stated that he thought digital stories "can be used to bring clarity to an issue." He referenced a comment Krista made about how the storytelling process "shifted and molded" her thinking on feminism, to explain how he thought engaging students through digital storytelling could "expand their breadth of knowledge" on a subject. Amy was more specific about where she saw potential use for them, identifying possibilities for digital storytelling to replace writing a personal response essay, a common assignment in high school English Language Arts classrooms. My participant's statements aligned with previous research on "multimodal technology practices showing that digital storytelling has the potential to transform pedagogical practices and provide opportunities for new knowledge building and the development of new literacies and identities" (Scott Nixon, 2009, p. 64).

A significant question we identified in our conversations centred around the pedagogical process and how students might respond to the act or expectation of sharing personal stories or being vulnerable about their learning. Krista reiterated a concern Amy raised earlier that students may feel unsafe sharing personal narratives or opinions. Tammy countered this with a comment that, in her experience working with post-secondary students, the need to share with peers made students "think a little bit" and encouraged them to be more critical about how and what they

shared. Krista's concern was rooted in an emerging understanding of the ways in which digital storytelling is a powerful tool for sharing personal narratives but did wonder about the vulnerability required during the process. Expressing "I found it tricky to be vulnerable in front of strangers... I'd be interested to see how young people relate to that [feeling]" (Focus Group, December, 9th, 2020). In response, Mark expressed the importance of cultivating caring relationships with students so they can find ways to relate to both course content and each other. His perception was that the digital storytelling process would provide a safe space for students to approach challenging ideas "that [they're] not fully sure about or haven't fully flushed out yet" (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020).

This line of conversation inferred understandings that I have seen echoed in the course I have taught at the university, as well in my work as a diversity consultant, around complexities of teaching in the 21st century and the need for renewed attention on how to foster safety alongside developing critical thinking skills. With the COVID-19 pandemic, attention to both safety and critical thinking has become even more vital as more young people are consuming larger amounts of content and information in online spaces. Adding to this, as the idea of honouring student voice in teaching and learning spaces has grown in recent years, "the centrality of certain kinds of human relationships within the process of education" (Fielding, 201, p. 104) has emerged as increasingly important. However, cultivating these relationships calls for a willingness to engage in and confront difficult knowledge and the complexity of "encountering the self through the otherness of knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755).

Our conversation about vulnerability and relationships recalls the need for pedagogies rooted in an ethic of care. This idea of feminism as an ethic had emerged in our November 9th, 2020 focus group in response to Mark stating, "feminism is more than one thing." Zembylas

(2014) juxtaposed the need to guide students through difficult… knowledge with a caring ethic, stating "what is important is to critically engage with students' troubled knowledges and discomforting emotions; taking sides too early may in fact make it impossible to build a constructive point [for learning]" (p. 13). Cultivating these relationships requires an awareness of the ways in which students, those from marginalized spaces, might not feel safe at school and how the policies that are put into place often function to reinforce existing hierarchies of power versus dismantle them. Through our conversations and the creation of the stories emerged a discussion about how feminism can act as a powerful tool. Mark stated that engaging in dialogue about feminism "makes me check my own privilege, it brings into a sharper focus, the actual… the actual position that I have in society. I don't think that it harms my position, I think it brings it into focus so that I can realize what I'm doing right or wrong" (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020). Krista agreed with this conceptualization of feminism as a tool, stating it encourages you to "think about yourself, think about your relationship to groups of people, think about society, communities, all this kind of stuff, thinking of it as like a tool or like a way being, an ethics of being" (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020).

hooks (1994) stated that "without the capacity to think critically about ourselves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow" (p. 202), and cited the need for engaged pedagogies. Conceived as "a teaching strategy that aims to restore students' will to think, and their will to be fully self-actualized" (hooks, 2010, p. 8), at the heart of engaged pedagogy sits the endeavour to invite students in critical thinking and the potential for challenging the very systems in which teaching and learning take place. According to hooks (2010), teachers must focus their energies more on learning who their students are and on building community than on curricular outcomes and learning materials. Digital storytelling

responds to this need by promoting reflective intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogues among and between students, allowing storytellers to develop an awareness of their strengths, diverse ways of thinking, and perspectives on a topic (Chan & Holosko, 2019).

One of the most powerful observations I made about our digital storytelling process was how, through the story circles, space was cultivated where participants were able to present their views, experiences, and concerns in a respectful way that invited constructive dialogue. The most concrete example of this was in the conversation that evolved around Mark's metaphor of the fly after viewing his digital story. Amy shared that it stood out to her because:

> A fly is so opposite as to what we typically think of [as] masculine... flies are small; they're quiet. That's opposite to what we typically think of men being. And yet, sometimes everybody needs to be quiet. I think that was a good comparison. (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020)

Mark responded that his pursuit of this metaphor evolved out of the previous focus group on November 11th when he first introduced this as a concept for his story. Sharing that he was taking this research process as an opportunity to listen to the experiences of women, Tammy expressed that she saw the fly as representing the need to "stir things up," stating:

> I really like [your] analogy that you're "like a fly on the wall." We've all been in a room with a fly [when] you're trying to sleep... There is both sides of that experience. The fly is both an observer and an irritant. (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020)
>
> As we were revisiting this metaphor of the fly in our final focus group, Krista stated to her the fly was in important image coming from Mark as it represented the need for men to "support feminism, and, like, just always be there and listening" ((Focus Group, December 9th, 2020)


*Figure 21: A Fly on the Wall [Drawing] Credit Hayward (2011), Used with permission from the artist.*

Through our dialogue in this study, participants were able to safely explore the topic of feminism and their relationship to it –weaving together theoretical concepts with personal experience. The completed stories were very different from one another visually and

conceptually, demonstrating each individual's a sense of agency and autonomy. Yet, at the same time, between the stories there was what I think of as connective tissue, created through the process of sharing experience, exploring difficult knowledge, and building relationships over the course of the study. The research process affirmed for me that the digital storytelling process invites storytellers into an imaginative space through which to engage in self-inquiry and reflection about moments of dislocation, or alienation, to come to a deeper understanding of their relationship to feminism and/or a feminist identity and what that means for their work as educators.

**That's a Wrap**

As the final focus group for my study concluded on December 9th, 2020, the open way that participants shared their experiences and opinions of the process indicated that working over an extended period had cultivated a sense of collective trust and collaboration. Mark expressed that knowing he would be sharing his digital story, encouraged him to really "hone in on the exact message" he wanted to portray, asking the question: "What do I want to say to the audience" (Focus Group, December, 9th, 2020)? In the end, he stated "this process has clarified for me where my position is in relation to feminism... my orientation within feminism itself" (Focus Group, December, 9th, 2020). He explained this as meaning that he saw himself as an ally who needed to "not be a nuisance to women and progressive movements but be progressive myself." He also spoke about being optimistic, in that he believed that most men entered conversations about social issues from a place of genuine intentions to help versus do harm. He also acknowledged the danger of becoming too complacent or self-assured in the belief that good intentions are all that matter. Referring to his digital story and the tale of "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Perkins Gilman, 1892), he spoke about the physicians in the story who "attempt to

alleviate the various 'ailments' women have." He then acknowledged his realization that "in the effort to heal things for women, men often reinforce the patriarchy." He finished saying that he still felt there was a place for him to be "included within feminist thought" but that his predominant role was to use his "privilege to help others rather than dominating a conversation."

Mark's focus on listening echoed the work done by Low et al. (2017) who acknowledged the ways in which the importance of voice has been emphasized in the literature on participatory media, and countered that listening is also a "significant mode of participation" (p. 4). They argued that "intersubjective listening happens in what [Winnicott, 1971] describes as a transitional space, in which participants can experiment with and negotiate their own becoming in a world that is not me" (Low et al., 2017, p. 4). Using this idea of a transitional space, I interpreted Mark's journey through the research process as one that reoriented his relationship with feminism. Reflecting on Mark's query: "When does the fly become the pest?", from the first focus group to the end of the project, Mark journeyed through conversations with the other participants as well as with women-identifying friends and family, to the creation of his story, landing on being the fly – the one who needed to listen.

In contrast to Mark's comment about focusing on what he wanted to in his story, Tammy was more invested with the personal journey to being feminist that the research process facilitated. Acknowledging that, as a younger woman, she would not have called herself a feminist, the storytelling process invited her to ask why she was now more at ease with not only using the term but embracing a feminist identity. She identified her return to the post-secondary institution where she was had completed here first undergraduate degree as being informative. She was able to verbalize a conscious awareness of being different, stating "it was really weird to be in that space a dozen years later, and be a different person in the same space." (Focus Group,

December 9th, 2020). Observing her evolution through the four months of the study, Tammy stood out to me at the end as understanding "how feminism can be a coming alive to a world that had been closed off by the requirement to live your life in a certain way" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 248).

During the November 11th, 2020 focus group when she shared the first draft of her story, Krista observed that Tammy had called herself the "mistress of her own destiny" in her story. Tammy commented: "I was going to say master of my own destiny, but then I [thought], 'Why do I always revert to the masculine form of a word?' So, I purposely [changed it]." This statement underscored how her experiences had led her to a place of acknowledgement and comfort with the potential of engaging in the project of being a "feminist killjoy... a project that comes from the critique of what is" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 249); for example, when she would stand up for herself amid overtly sexist remarks in graduate school. She gained a level of comfort with calling herself a feminist since our first meeting on August 26th, 2020, largely as a result of her experiences in the academy, but in a final email at the end of the study she stated that participating in the research "has re-started [an] exploration into what I mean when I call myself a feminist and I have been inspired to do more reading, thinking and listening" (Tammy, personal communication, January 28th, 2021).

Amy and Krista were less able to verbalize if they had experienced any personal changes of perspective as feminists. Amy felt engaging in the research project allowed her to "express opinions that I already had," (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020) and based on what she said, I surmised that it was her experience of the digital storytelling process as a form of storytelling and expression that was the greatest takeaway for her. Krista expressed that thinking about "education, feminism, and digital storytelling has been a real pleasure," (Focus Group, December

9th, 2020) but she did not offer any other personal insights about how participating in the study impacted her understanding of or engagement with feminism.

***Emerging Intersections: Digital Activism Amid a "Dual Pandemic"***

My research study occurred at a particularly impactful time for social justice movements, as it took place in the wake of George Floyd being murdered by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Bennett et al., 2020). This event highlighted the ways in which "systemic racism [is] baked into our consciousness, ideologies, and laws" (Endo, 2021, p. 118), leading to large scale protests and increased importance being placed on anti-racism initiatives in schools. Another consequence was renewed focus and attention being placed on the word "ally" as people from all corners of the world reacted with horror at the video of a Black man being held down by four police officers, with the greatest outrage being expressed towards Derek Chauvin, the White officer who suffocated Floyd through placing a knee on his neck until he stopped breathing. Waves of White people, from civilians, to celebrities, to political leaders, began posting across social media platforms their "newfound" awareness and care about the horrors of Floyd's murder. These attempts at allyship became increasingly viewed as tokenistic or performative (Endo, 2021). As a result, the conversation about allyship, as well as the intersections between anti-racism, and questions such as mine about feminism, in the aftermath of a large-scale social awakening, became increasingly important to address.

At the time of Floyd's murder, I had been working as a diversity consultant with a large urban school board for three years. As the world, and education systems, grappled with what had happened, language started to emerge about the need to amplify marginalized voices but that "allies should avoid the spotlight" (Carlson et al., 2020, p. 893). This became particularly complex in social media spaces where many began to engage in what has been called

"performative activism," when a person engages in activism to increase their social capital versus demonstrating an ongoing dedication to a cause (Yoo, 2022). Social media provided the most overt place for this to occur, as people around the world used various platforms as the primary spaces to engage in their performative activism. This resulted in an emerging trend, which Roberts (2021) defined as digital activism: "activism that uses tools across organized digital networks for social and political purposes, as well as counter-activism and hashtag activism" (p. 40).

While I did not dive directly into conversations about digital activism with my participants, the shifting landscape of diversity work towards the more directed title of anti-racism, alongside increasing awareness and use of the language around the construct of whiteness, conversations about into our conversations. As my participants and I were all white-bodied, the lack of racially diverse voices in our conversations was particularly acknowledged during our conversations about intersectionality, but at the same time, we were able to speak openly about being white educators and where we envisioned our individual and collective responsibilities lay.

The Covid-19 pandemic also presented new considerations for how and when technology is used in our lives, both in and out of schooling. As I addressed in Chapter 3, this research study was significantly impacted by the need to move the interviews and creation processes online. While at one point, I had hoped to extend the study to include the use of the digital stories towards creating a collaborative film with my participants, it proved too challenging to execute given the restrictions on physical distancing and the temporary closure of facilities where filmmaking equipment could have been rented. I did address the idea with my participants, but little interest was expressed. I believe this was partially due to the factors listed above as well as

the overall sense of fatigue felt by many as we navigated the complexities of living through a pandemic. Given the large-scale need to live our lives online, I believe my study became even more relevant for the ways it invites opportunities for teachers to engage in digital literacy with students. What has become increasingly apparent to me is the ways in which social justice, pedagogy, and storytelling sit at the heart of this study. My discovery of digital storytelling and the opportunities to develop my skills as a facilitator, which I was able to do online during the pandemic, continue to provide me with critical insights into how it can be brought into schools as a critical and creative form of learning.

# Chapter Five: Reflections, New Understandings, and Pedagogies of Hopeful Resistance

## Looking Back to Look Forward

On January 21, 2017, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration to the office of the presidency of the United States, women around the world took to the streets to march in support of women's rights. I remember walking around the Legislature Grounds, the site of the Women's March in Edmonton, Alberta, taking in the shared energy of people from various backgrounds as they came together for a collective purpose. At that time, there was great uncertainty around the unfurling political landscape, creating a sense of unease around what Trump's election would mean for women and marginalized groups. As I walked around with my camera, making photographs, capturing the emotion, and chatting with others in attendance, there seemed to be a sense of much-needed collective hope and purpose.

In the wake of the worldwide women's march in 2017, Fisher et al. (2017) asked the question: "Can a diverse crowd of individuals whose distinct issues related to racial identity, class, gender, and sexuality mobilize around a shared issue?" (p. 1). Since 2017, when the #MeToo movement entered the cultural zeitgeist with full force, conversations around feminism and feminist movements have been fraught with competing visions and hopes for how it might cultivate change and facilitate agency. My research aimed to contribute to these conversations, amid what can seem like increasingly difficult times, with the intention of gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to identify as a feminist or embrace a feminist pedagogy in educational spaces. While my initial intention had been to utilize participatory video, digital storytelling emerged as the method I used for my study due to a growing awareness of the power of these short personal narratives, but also due to the emergence and impact of the Covid-19

pandemic. The result was quite a happy accident that led me to begin to think more critically about pedagogy – more specifically feminist pedagogy and digital storytelling *as* a pedagogical practice.

Reflecting on day of the women's march and all that has transpired since, I must admit there have been some incredibly difficult moments, and such moments have heightened during recent months as an increasing backlash against the #MeToo movement has emerged (Lehnen, 2022). Political events such as the overturning of Roe v. Wade have occurred. Alongside this, I recognize the ways in which the emergence of #BlackLivesMatter following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 resulted in complexities and new conversations around the intersections of race, gender, and social justice movements. This led to unanticipated directions and connections in communications with my participants as well as in my own thinking.

Throughout this text I have described my doctoral studies is a "journey." Smith (1999) reminds us that "the word 'journey' originally meant daily work, so in a sense, everyone is always on a journey" (p. 1). In this chapter, I revisit this journey, the contents of this dissertation, and share personal reflections on what the last five years have meant for true change and progress in feminist movements. I offer support for digital storytelling as a feminist pedagogy that educators can utilize as we work together to imagine a world yet to come. Thinking through all that I have learned, from my course work to my research project to the analysis process, I realize that at the heart of my life as an educator and as a feminist sits a belief in critical hope (Zembylas, 2014). What this means will be further explored in the pages below.

**Summary**

In my first chapter, I contextualized my study by sharing my personal experience or journey to "becoming feminist." I identify with Ahmed's (2017) belief that "feminism often

begins with intensity; you are aroused by what you come up against. You register something in the sharpness of an impression" (p. 32). Understanding that my personal experiences as a woman, educator, and filmmaker are entangled with one another and within this research project, I shared critical moments that have led me to my doctoral journey. I engaged in a telling of personal stories of intensity that played a pivotal role in my journey to developing my research questions. These questions were: *1) What stories, whether visual, written, or lived, inform emerging educators' perceptions/interpretations understandings of feminism? 2) How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms? 3) How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation elicit new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?* In this chapter, I also introduced my intention to use participatory visual methods for my research. Rooted in my lifelong love for visual stories – as a consumer and a creator – I continued to detail my experiences in education where I encountered a dismissive attitude towards the use of film texts in the classroom. Believing that visual literacy was undervalued in K–12 education, I shared how and why visual stories have played a critical role in how I developed understanding of the world and social justice issues.

In Chapter 2, I offered a review of the literature and a theoretical framework for my research. This began with an outline of the history of Western feminism, focusing on the ways in which cultural/media production has been a critical tool of advocacy and activism in the pursuit of women's rights. Tracing back to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), through to contemporary scholarship around feminist media practices, I explored how representations of women in media changed throughout the 20$^{th}$ century through to today. Tracing the historical pattern of Western feminist movements, I identified the recursive shifting

between calls for collective and individual action and the ways in which this ebb and flow has informed the women's rights movement, how it is perceived, and why there are so many competing and complex standpoints on feminism. Finally, I explore the history of feminist pedagogies and where they sit within the larger context of critical pedagogies invested in Freire's (1971) ideas of education as liberation.

Chapter 3, my methodology chapter, lays out the paradigmatic and methodological foundations and a process for exploring my research questions. I briefly defined arts-based and participatory research approaches and traced the evolution of participatory visual methods, detailing what is referred to as the "participatory turn" (Gubrium et al., 2015) in visual research. This chapter also outlined the digital storytelling process, largely informed by the online workshops I had attended with the StoryCenter in San Francisco. Using their seven steps as my guideline, I detail how I structured my study – including recruitment of participants, the breakdown of individual interviews, focus groups and the visual journaling process, and the use of story circles.

In Chapter 4, I analyzed the digital stories that my participants created. This began with an introduction to each participant, followed by a weaving together of narrative and visual analyses of the individual stories, followed by an exploration of the common themes that emerged. To support my analysis, I draw on conversations that took place throughout the research process, both in the individual in-depth interviews as well as in the focus group sessions. I consider how my work as an instructor in the undergraduate teacher education program at the University of Alberta informed my understandings of the preconceived beliefs held by many emerging teachers about the profession, their role as educators, and the complexities they will confront when in the classroom.

Throughout my analysis, I endeavoured to centre my participants voices and honour their experiences. I concluded my analysis with a recognition of the ways in which the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the research process, from the need to move online, to the complex combination of challenges and opportunities it presented. I also discussed the tragic murder of George Floyd in May 2020 which led to the resurgence of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the increasing need for critical conversations around hashtag activism and its impact on teaching and learning.

The section below details how the findings of my research address each of my research questions. To conclude the dissertation, I discuss future considerations and opportunities for future research – particularly regarding social justice work in schools. Critical to this is an awareness that "making sense of information is both social and relational" (D. Scott, personal communication, April 15, 2023). My research explores the potential of feminism as a pedagogical orientation which supports a relational ethic of care fostered through the sharing of stories. I conclude with one last story about an experience I had in 2021 while working on a film set in Calgary, Canada. Through this endeavour I witnessed the real-world impacts and current challenges of the #MeToo movement. Returning to Greene's (1995) notion of social imagination, I complete my dissertation with reflections on the power and potential of digital storytelling to confront difficult knowledge in our schools today.

## Responding to the Research Questions

### *Question One*

My first research question was: *What stories, whether visual, written, or lived, inform emerging educators' perceptions/interpretations/understandings of feminism?* This question was largely informed by a desire to understand how my participants aligned with feminism and what

stories led them to claim, or not claim, a feminist identity. From the initial introductory individual interviews, where I met each participant and detailed the project to them, three of the participants openly identified as feminists, and one, the only man participating (Mark), explained that while "he agreed with the philosophy," he tried to avoid labels (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020). Heath (2013) claimed that "men's relation to feminism is an impossible one" (p. 1) and as the only man-identifying participant in the study, Mark stepped into a tenuous space without knowing how he would be received. At the same time, his presence offered a critical perspective as the research unfolded. The other three participants, two of whom identified as women and one as non-binary using, she/they pronouns, had a more comfortable relationship with feminism. Their responses varied from Amy's simple statement that "I am for equality" (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020) to Tammy's acknowledgement that before attending graduate school she would not have identified as a feminist, but her experiences led her to identify more comfortably with it, despite discomfort with the limitations of being labelled (Individual Interview, August 26th, 2020). She oriented her feminism as a vehicle through which to promote social change and equity in the world. Krista's feminist identity was rooted in a sense of responsibility and care for future generations, recognizing her actions in the world today and the stories she tells can have long term impact (Individual Interview, September 8th, 2020). Throughout the study, participants engaged in shared learning about each other's experiences and perspectives which were embedded into their digital stories. Though I worked with only a small sample of participants, as we progressed through the research it became evident that their understandings of and orientations toward feminism were shaped by myriad and differing stories.

For Amy, these stories were from pop culture and social media spaces. Her discussion of the competing narratives about how women's bodies are "made subject" (Juhasz, 2003) in two very different songs — one from a perspective of female empowerment that the artists employ.

> an assortment of sexual metaphors and allusions to convey to the listener that she is not afraid to fully embrace her sexuality, as women should be free to do without fear of judgement both within the hip-hop community and the rest of society. (Banh, 2021, p. 51)

The other was filled with overtly racist and misogynistic language, which objectifies and shames a fictitious girlfriend for breaking up with her partner who, if the lyrics are any indication, had little respect for her or her body. Amy also highlighted stories about women told in social media spaces. Explicitly challenging the line of thinking that we have moved into a post-feminist era, these stories informed her stance that "that until every woman at every intersection is seen as fundamentally equal to men, I'm not done" at the end of her digital story.

The stories that Tammy shared were more rooted in her personal experiences and those that had been shared with her by other women. These included the lack of a feeling of safety walking through the river valley on the way to rowing practice and her experiences in graduate school which led her to re-orient herself towards a feminist identity. Exploring the challenges confronted by women in academic spaces, she shared stories of being told how she should alter her appearance, downplaying her femininity. In her story, she stated, "as I cycle under the glowing streetlights, I watch myself appear and disappear. Which version is really me?", underscoring her discomfort with labels amid the difficulty of being constrained by them.

Mark explored literature, specifically *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892), in his digital story. He also referenced contemporary news stories confronting the emergence of a complex political landscape that placed women's rights and bodily autonomy

under threat. Drawing connections between Perkins Gilman's story and the current moment, his story expressed a belief that "women are, once more, enclosed within four yellow walls. Under such conditions, the voice of these John's work to silence and direct female thought within a space demarcated by men." His story called for men to act as flies — close and always listening — as they re-orient themselves as allies and de-centre themselves from positions of power.

The power of film sat at the centre of Krista's story — both as consumer and creator. She shared the impact of media representations of women, the stories that they told her about her body and whether she was good enough. She addressed the power of learning about the portrayal of the femme fatale in film noir, stating "these representations of multi-dimensional women were impacting the way I conceptualized myself, and how powerful media representations can be" in her digital story. In her life as a film curator and creator, she discovered a way to make her own contribution by supporting the creation of complex and multi-dimensional stories on the screen.

***Question Two***

Having encountered great resistance to the use of the word feminism in my life both inside and outside of educational spaces, I entered this research project acutely aware of the negative emotions and responses it can evoke. Additionally, my experience in schools had been that visual narratives are generally not seen as powerful teaching tools despite the myriad ways in which young people engage with them in their lives. My experience informed my second research question: *How might the participatory process of co-creating visual narratives contribute to uncovering individual and shared interpretations of feminisms?* which was rooted in a strong belief in the need for critical conversations around the power of visual stories in schools – both as critical forms of literacy and tools for crafting relationships. When my participants met for the first focus group, they were not familiar with each other and arrived at

the group with their own beliefs about feminism and comfort levels with media production. Uncovering participants' influences on their understandings of feminism occurred through the shared conversations in our focus group meetings and through the completed digital stories. Based on these conversations, two key interpretations emerged: the importance of intersectionality and the need for allyship.

For example, during the December 9th focus group where the stories were screened, Tammy and Amy's shared use of the visual imagery of walking alone at night was immediately recognized by Krista as a "common experience" for women. In contrast to this, Mark reflected that it was not a feeling he could relate to, but that this provided him important insight into common women's experiences. As shared in the thematic analysis, Mark interpreted the movement in Amy and Tammy's videos as something more hopeful: "[to me the movement] emphasizes where maybe feminism is going." (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020). This perspective represented the potential sharing stories can have for understanding someone else's lived experience. Engaging with the stories of the women in the group, he was exposed to new knowledge about how women live in the world. In his interpretation of the stories, they were sharing their experiences while also expressing hope. However, as Glass (2014) noted, "when hope is not critical, it can become lost in despair" (p. 103). The question that emerges is how to differentiate critical hope from its more naïve counterpart when taking on complex conversations about diverse lived experiences in classrooms.

***Question Three***

First introduced to the idea of digital storytelling as a pedagogy through the work of Hessler and Lambert (2017) who identified the ways in which these visual stories represent a "responsible pedagogy [that can] train college students to interrogate media from the inside out"

(p. 22), I recognized how my belief that this should also be occurring in the K–12 system informed this study. This resulted in the formation of my third research question: *How might engaging in a storytelling process through media creation process foster new understandings of and potential for feminist pedagogy in formal and informal educational spaces?*

Hessler and Lambert (2017) posit digital storytelling can open the door for learners to have a transformative learning experience through which "storytellers look at events or issues through the lens of personal experience, but then also look at the way they are looking, on how they are working toward a process of discovery" (p. 23). As emerging educators, my participants straddled the world of teaching and learning and were able to offer fresh perspectives to this question. At the end of the process, during the December 9th focus group, they all expressed interest in exploring digital storytelling with their students/clients. Krista expressed a belief in the possibilities digital storytelling could offer to the emerging filmmakers she worked with to understand the power of personal narrative. Returning to her reflection on digital storytelling as a tool, she stated she saw it as a tool to "think about yourself, think about your relationship to groups of people, think about society, communities, all this kind of stuff, thinking of it as like a tool or like a way being, an ethics of being" (Focus Group, December 9th, 2020).

I drew a connection between this statement of an "ethics of being" to Noddings (1988) relational ethic which is "tightly tied to experience because all its deliberations focus on the human beings involved in the situation under consideration and their relations to each other" (p. 218). This vein of thinking became increasingly important to me as I progressed through my research process and analysis, leading me to ask the critical question: *If* digital storytelling is a pedagogy, what kind of pedagogy is it? I turn now to a deeper discussion of the pedagogical possibilities of digital storytelling.

## Pedagogical Possibilities

### *For Feminist Pedagogies in Schools*

> *Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds... Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 1)*

Over the last five years, the future of feminism has been up for debate as the #MeToo movement sparked critical conversations around systemic sexism which then became intertwined with other similar hashtag movements supporting social justice. Since 2017, social media has transformed rapidly with the inception of Tik Tok and the introduction of Instagram Reels. Talib (2018) noted "social media permeates the daily lives of millennials" (p. 55). This almost constant engagement with content has led to new understandings of how youth are immersed in both conscious and unconscious learning through social media and the need for more critical literacy pedagogies. To return to Rohrer's (2018) discussion of the need for a re-invigoration of feminist pedagogies in the #MeToo era, social media is "in the room," and educators and educational institutions are confronted with the need to grapple more intentionally with what that means for policies and practices. I will address this in greater detail in the considerations for media literacy section below.

The potential for digital storytelling as a feminist pedagogy was evident through my study. Reflecting on my participants' shared stories and experiences, they were able to locate common themes or resonances through taking ownership of the media-creation process. Despite not knowing each other or having had the opportunity to share physical space due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they were able to express, share, and create language around their disparate perspective and experiences. Through the journey of my doctoral studies, I have come to think

about the power of critical hope for cultivating dialogue amid difficult times. While my participants shared certain things in common, they had diverse lived experiences requiring them to listen carefully to one another's perspectives and what shaped them. Much of this was facilitated using sharing circles for responding to questions and story circles for more intentionally engaging in the storytelling process. Boler (2014) stated "compassion is one bridge between those suffering a pedagogy of discomfort and those who have invited new ways of being into the world fully replete with imperfections" (p. 39). The story circles cultivated a space for learning about one another, developing compassion, and critical hope.

Throughout the study, there were not any particularly heated exchanges or vastly differing opinions shared, however, participants did share personal stories requiring vulnerability and touching on topics that can be framed as difficult knowledge. Confronting difficult knowledge requires acknowledging the harms embedded in our social world — such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism —and the ways in which we can be complicit in holding up and reproducing systems of oppression. It also requires individuals to engage with complex emotions. Latimer (2020) proposes the need for educators to develop a "feminist ear," a way of hearing that allows us "to break down, kill, or at least examine some of the very things we assume we should retain in our pedagogy, in order think about strategies for teaching" (p. 79). Even teachers are not immune to having emotional reactions when discussing difficult topics, specifically those to which they may have a personal connection. As Boler (2014) noted, "the pedagogical relation is a negotiation of hegemonically constructed habits, internalized as attachments to particular beliefs and corresponding reactions to change" (p. 38). When teachers/educators are confronted with their own attachments and

position of power, they too must confront themas they engage in a collective learning journey with their students.

Returning to the story that opened my dissertation, of the male student who proclaimed my feminist agenda to my principal, I can now recognize with much greater clarity how we, metaphorically, stood on opposite sides of a bridge. My role as the educator should have been to find a way to meet him partway on that bridge and support him in that complex in-between space. Boler spoke about extending compassion to those experiencing a sense of alienation, or struggling to maintain identity during what may feel like a threat of annihilation (Boler, 2014). She contended, "if I am asking students in some sense to annihilate the self as I have known it, I must be able to meet their discomfort with compassion — and with resources to help them replace the lost sense of self" (p. 37). I suggest digital storytelling as a feminist pedagogy that might have potential for traversing that bridge with my student and for building bridges to new understandings of world. Engaging in a digital storytelling workshop creates shared spaces for exploring worldviews through the lens of personal narrative, allows for complex conversations through the equitable structure of a story circle, and fosters a space to explore empathy and understanding through viewing each other's stories. In the process, small ruptures occur; it is here that we can begin to listen and learn anew.

***For Critical Media Literacy in Educational Research and Schools***

Digital storytelling can also support the need for the integration of critical media literacy into school spaces. My study was rooted in two very personal topics for me. The first was the issue of sexism in schools and the challenges faced by feminist teachers and the second was the need for more critical media literacies that recognize the ways in which young people are engaged in both multimodal content consumption and creation. From the outset of my study, the

ways in which I have witnessed forms of media, popular culture, and visual literacy underrepresented in educational spaces have been something I have wanted to unpack and open to new lines of thinking.With the cultural and technical turn to the visual, it has been recognized that “the status of the visual has reached that of the written word and narrative” (Tsang & Besley, 2020, p. 2). Through the exploration of digital storytelling with my participants it was affirmed as an active strategy through which to engage in creating, sharing and making meaning while allowing for the opportunity to be exposed to the or beliefs and experiences of others.

Within my study, participants' perspectives on how various forms of media impact our understandings of feminism and each other became evident. Throughout the interview process the impact of various forms of media were explored — including songs, reality television, literature, artwork, and film. We explored the ways in which contemporary politicians use the media to politicize topics related to social justice movements such as intersectionality, trans-exclusionary radical feminism, and systemic racism. Tammy commented that at times, teachers need to be “subversive” when taking up topics aligned with difficult knowledge such as anti-racism, feminism, and gender identity in their classrooms. Mark’s exploration of an historical short story through his digital story, demonstrated the potential this modality offers from weaving together historical and contemporary beliefs and experiences, generating new dialogue and shared understandings. Acknowledging the ways in which labels are being used to promote social and political division in social media spaces, we considered the need for teachers to develop new strategies to build community and engage students in complex conversations.

With the rapid evolution of social media in recent years, critical media literacy has become even more important to consider in schools, given the increased ways in which youth

engage across the media landscape as both consumers and creators. As highlighted above, As Nesi (2020) stated:

> today's media landscape is larger and more diverse than ever before, with youth having access to an unprecedented volume of digital content across numerous devices, including smartphones, tablets, computers, laptops, and gaming consoles. Social media represents a central component of this landscape. (p. 116)

The evolving media landscape can be seen as playing a critical role in how social justice movements are being organized, through moving into online spaces, and, subsequently, in the backlash that has begun to materialize through the growth of influencer culture and increasing political divide. As a result, teachers are confronted with the need for pedagogies that can engage in what Chidgey (2014) called DIY (do-it-yourself) or maker culture. As a feminist media pedagogy digital storytelling can support and "enhance the kind of meaningful discovery outside of one's networks and circles to produce the kinds of relationality needed to push back against the narrowing work performed by social media algorithms" (Berliner & Krabill, 2019, p. 7). As Funk et al. (2016) argued, critical media literacy "guides teachers and students to think critically about the world around them; it empowers them to act as responsible citizens with the skills and social consciousness to challenge injustice" (p. 319). Through creating digital stories, my participants engaged in a process requiring experimentation with content creation as a way of navigating personal experience, pedagogy, and complex conversations.

**Future Research Directions**

A few months after my research study was completed, I checked in with my participants to ask if they had been able to experiment with digital storytelling in their lives or embed it in their teaching practices. While they all responded that they would like to, and that they enjoyed

the process themselves, challenges such as lack of access to technology, the traditional teaching methods of their partner teachers, or not having had the opportunity were expressed as barriers. Having worked in schools, all these scenarios are familiar to me, and unfortunately, I worry that media literacy will continue to be underexamined in public education systems in Canada for some time. In my experience, working with pre-service English Language Arts teachers, I fear that traditional perceptions of reading and writing may continue to sit at the heart of their future classrooms. As I look forward to potential directions for my future research, studies encouraging the inclusion of participatory arts-based encounters in classrooms may provide productive space. Critical media literacy must find a place in educational research, teacher education, and in schools. The growth and power of social media require that teachers be willing to engage in the messy work of learning how it is impacting students and, I suggest, will require teachers of all ages to step out of their comfort zones and learn more about how to engage with digital media production.

**Possibilities & Limitations**

Through the research process, my participants were confronted with the challenge of thinking about their personal experiences and perspectives on feminism as well as how learning about the process of digital storytelling might inform their teaching practices. What transpired went in unexpected directions. Upon reviewing the transcripts and reflecting on the process, I can now better see how and when I followed their lead and when my own questions and queries informed what came up along the way. I feel, despite the challenges of learning to work in the liminal space of zoom meetings with which we were all confronted, that the digital storytelling process, including the story circles, proved a powerful tool through which to foster a space where we could all openly discuss a complex topic, and which, in the classroom, can at times become

what is known as difficult or troubling knowledge. Our conversations initially began with understanding our own relationships to feminism and our experiences of sexism as prompted by the #MeToo movement, but also included emergent and urgent conversations around other social justice movements.

Forced into undertaking my research online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the creation of the creation of digital stories could not be as collaborative a process as it may have been in person. Specifically, the editing process, which normally would have occurred in a shared space and time, became something that participants did on their own, outside of our scheduled meetings times. We discussed the potential of holding an editing session online, however, participants expressed that they preferred to work on their own time. This was understandable given the amount of time people were spending online by November/December 2020 when the editing occurred. It is difficult to say if working alongside each other in the editing process would have resulted in differences in their stories or their understandings of each other's stories. However, working independently allowed them more time and space to reflect on our previous focus group conversations and weave ideas that emerged there into their individual stories.

**Personal Reflections and Final Thoughts**

Undertaking doctoral studies has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my lifetime. Over the last six years, I have been pushed and pulled in myriad ways, constantly being encouraged to question, support, and craft my ideas and beliefs. It is not for the faint of heart. What I have learned is multi-fold – from the opportunity to deepen my knowledge and skills in practical ways around teaching and learning, to digital storytelling facilitation and content creation, to expressing my ideas in the written word.

There is no denying that we are living in tenuous times when the need for increasingly critical and caring ways of engagement are often difficult to find. I know there are many who do, and will, critique my argument for empathy, considering it a way of "extending the self into the other, reinforcing subject points instead of transforming them, allowing for a gobbling up rather than a genuinely subjective or epistemological movement precipitated by engagement with the other" (Hemmings, 2011, p. 200). I am not naïve to these potential pitfalls. Accepting that full understanding of another's lived experience is not possible, Hodgson et al. (2018) stated "it is precisely the challenges of living together in a common world that constitute the hope that make education a worthwhile activity" (p. 16). Conscious of the myriad ways hope can be defined, I argue for conversations around critical hope, which is defined as "an ongoing process, expanding capacity for perception and insight, rooted in materialist recognition of both the present and the past as formative but not fixed, influential but not over-determining" (Bozalek et al., 2014, p. 2). Zembylas (2014) added to this, stating critical hope is a:

> relational construct that is both emotional and critical. To say that someone is critically hopeful means that the person is involved in a critical analysis of power relations and how they constitute one's emotional ways of being in the world, while attempting to construct, imaginatively and materially, a different lifeworld. (p. 13)

My study has reinforced my belief in the power of story as a source of critical hope. I concur with Zembylas (2022), who stated, "to speak of hope, it is to speak about the capacity or drive of humans for a better future against all odds" (p. 28). Unlike a naïve or passive hope, which can work to maintain the status-quo (Boler, 2014), critical hope refuses to accept the present status quo.

### *Visual Storytelling as an Act of Critical Hope*

Visual storytelling has always played a vital role in how I have learned about, experienced, and now challenged existing power relations. This began with watching movies with my dad as a child, allowing me to discover not only the gift of learning about the world through the stories on the screen, but also about the person with whom I was watching them. Now that he is no longer with us, the childhood memories of watching black and white films of distant times and places are deeply cherished and of immense value to me.

Reflecting on those experiences, I am reminded of the unique relationship I was able to foster with my dad, an otherwise quiet man, who in many ways was a mystery to me throughout my youth, through the simple, shared act of engaging in stories. Films can evoke both the horrors of the world as well as encourage imaginative spaces of possibility through the portrayal of human connection, struggle, and care. If my work can provide anything to those who read it, or to those whom I am gifted with the task of teaching in the future, may it be that all I have learned can foster equal space for imagination, acts of resistance, and critical hope for a better, more equitable world to come.

### *Moving Beyond #MeToo: One Last Story*

In the fall of 2021, after a year and a half of working remotely and lots of upheaval in my work in diversity education, I felt the need to reconnect with my creative life in film. I was invited to script supervise on a limited series based on the true story of the murder of a woman and her child in a Mormon community outside of Salt Lake City in 1984. At the heart of the story was the deeply embedded misogyny and patriarchy within a belief system that subjugates women, requiring them to follow the lead of their husbands or priesthood holders. It was a powerful experience that came along at an interesting time in my doctoral journey and invited

me to experience life on a film set five years after the #MeToo movement had rocked the industry.

Having worked sporadically for a few days here and there on various shows in those five years, I was aware of the initiatives in which the crew were expected to participate to learn how to identify and prevent harassment and bullying. These initiatives, usually one-hour-long online sessions, involved little to no participation or demonstration of learning to ensure any understanding of what combatting harassment and bullying should look or sound like in real life. From a pedagogical standpoint, the purpose of the sessions seemed much more a protective mechanism for the production company than embedded in any desire to shift cultures or promote behavioural change.

From the outset, I knew this show would be a unique experience as it was made clear to me when I was hired that the first director on the series did not want a script supervisor on the show. Largely ignored during the preparatory phase of production by him and his team of assistants, this was affirmed on the first day of filming when, upon being confronted with my physical presence on set, he looked me in the eye and told me that he felt script supervisors were "redundant." He said while he would "allow" my presence, he would not speak to me, nor was I to speak to him. He did not want to see me close to the actual set and I was forbidden from speaking to the actors, which is normally a critical part of my job. As the show progressed, he held true to his word, and only spoke to me once or twice over the course of the five weeks he directed. He avoided making eye contact with me or speaking to me. It was made clear that my physical presence in space with his was unacceptable. I was assured by the showrunner and producers that things would change when the next director arrived, so I did as much of my job as I could within the limitations presented.

Having worked on myriad film sets before and experienced a variety of eccentric personalities, this director's behaviour was not all that jarring for me. Rather, what stood out to me were the ways in which people, both in powerful positions and on the crew, went out of their way to make excuses for him. His female co-producer told me that he "had a bad experience in the past," apparently with a script supervisor who was deemed too "outspoken" in the face of his unconventional filming style. The showrunner, who wound up having his own conflicts with the director and was essentially banned from set as well, acknowledged the overt misogyny. Even he shrunk into the shadows though, only making the odd appearance when he would simply share how many days we had left with this director.

One of the cameramen defended the director as a "great guy to have a beer with and share stories." The practice of sharing "who worked with whom and on what" stories is common on film sets, to both impress those around you, as well as push back the ever-present fear that someone will decide you are not good enough, an imposter who needs to be replaced on the spot. The cameraman was someone I became friends with over the course of filming and knew him to be a strong supporter and defender of his wife, a veterinarian. He would share stories with me about the sexism she had experienced in her profession and how much it angered him, yet he was reluctant to recognize it as clearly in my situation. I asked him how he would feel about his wife working with men who told her she was "redundant," refused to speak to her, look her in the eye or acknowledge her knowledge. He responded in a quiet voice, "I don't like that question very much." In a similar conversation with the woman camera assistant, when I expressed my experience, she accused me of "not liking" the director, suggesting I should "chill." The irony is that I was quite "chill" despite weeks of increasingly alienating treatment. At no point did I lose

my temper or even try to change the situation. I recognized it would have been a futile waste of energy. Regardless, even in my complicity, I was the feminist killjoy.

The last day of filming on his episodes arrived and the next director took over. She was a woman. From the outset, she made it clear that she not only wanted me on set but that she relied heavily on her script supervisor. It was refreshing and welcomed after what had been a long five weeks. However, as we were to discover together, the tone and culture established during the first five weeks would not be so easily shifted. By this time in a production, I would normally have established relationships with the cast and figured out how I could best support each of them in my role. Having not spoken to any of them for the first five weeks, I was now put in the awkward position of having to find a way to introduce myself to each of them. The women cast members were shocked and somewhat appalled to realize that I had been there all along. As I got to know them, I discovered I had not been alone in my experience of overt sexism. For many of them it had not been just from the director, but also from the lead actor. While disappointing, this was not a surprise. Earlier in the production, I attempted to introduce myself to him when he had been engaged in a conversation near me. I extended my hand, saying, “my name is Trish. I am the script supervisor on the show. I know [the director] has asked I not give continuity notes to the cast while he is here, but I wanted to intro...” He cut me off at this point, stating, “I would prefer it stays that way,” and walked away.

Over the five months that followed, the lead actor received a lot of press and accolades as he was nominated for multiple awards for a performance in a recently released film. I watched as he went on the talk show circuit and presented himself as a kind, funny, and humble man who would then return to set where he would berate crew members, treat the female cast disparagingly, and abuse his privilege and power. His behaviour was also excused away by the

few people in positions to challenge him or demand that he behaves in a respectful, unharming way. As the top-billed actor, also known as #1 on the call sheet, he was responsible for acting as a leader in establishing a safe and inclusive culture on set. What became apparent was that even though the first director was physically gone from the show, his impact was imprinted on how the production would move forward.

There are endless stories I could share about the time I spent on this set. The experience culminated in a realization that the story we were creating for the screen had similarities to the one unfolding behind the camera. As we told a story about systemic misogyny and a community where women were forbidden from expressing their ideas, going to school, or being independent, many women, both those on camera and behind the scenes, were experiencing the exact same dynamic as being portrayed on the screen. Another actress, who felt disrespected by the first director, shared that when trying to discuss her character with him, she was reprimanded and told to stop "trying to destabilise [the project] with a feminist narrative." Shortly afterwards, she had buttons made saying "let's destabilise this with a FEMINIST NARRATIVE" which she handed out to any crew members willing to wear them. On her last day of filming, she gifted me a book of feminist poetry, with an inscription imploring me to share what we had all experienced. This is the first time I have attempted to put it into words.

The lead actor openly undermined the actress playing his wife by going behind her back to the showrunner to gain the upper hand in a discussion about the creative direction of her character. When she expressed her anger at the overt attempt to manipulate her, she was immediately labelled as the problem for not complying and for naming what she found offensive. While he was invited to make changes to the script, tell directors what he would or would not do, and delay production with demands and outbursts, she and other cast members were expected to

show up, do their jobs, and not ask questions. As shooting progressed and scripts were revised, both women saw their roles threatened with cuts to their dialogue and screen time. Despite their status as principal cast, with agents and managers fighting on their behalf, and both having accomplished reasonable amounts of success in their profession, they were subject to explicit sexism and misogyny within this production. On the last day of filming, the actress who played the wife hugged me, thanking me for supporting and bearing witness to how she had been treated. It is a moment I will never forget.

Both actresses were labelled problematic by the people in charge, one for being too strong in her willingness to speak out and ask challenging questions. The other for not being as submissive and easily manipulated as they anticipated her to be. What became apparent was that, like me, many had signed up for the project thinking it would be a strong statement about violence against women. What unfolded was less about the women in the story, than about the fictional character played by the lead actor. As he was given endless close-ups through which to emote and demonstrate his acting prowess, the women faded into the background of the story. Begging the question: When will women be able to be the lead, both on camera and off, in telling their own stories within mainstream media?

Why do I share this in this dissertation on feminism and teaching? Perhaps because despite seeing this opportunity as a break away from my studies and research, this experience richly informed where I locate the importance of my study. As women and other marginalized groups are perceived as having greater voice, agency, and representation in media spaces, often attributed to social media movements like #MeToo, it is time for critical questions to be asked about whether systems of oppression are actually changing, or in some cases just being reproduced. I am not alone in that wondering. As Tamara Burke (2022), the creator of the

hashtag, observes, while “the [feminist] movement was given a shot in the arm by #MeToo, the idea that it would be the antidote to decades of entrenched ideas and behaviours is wildly unrealistic” (para. 19). In this statement, she acknowledged how #MeToo reinvigorated the conversation around systemic sexism while acknowledging there is still a great deal of work to do. She notes how sensationalized headlines and celebrity court cases have informed how many view #MeToo as having been a success, stating, “while those individual stories may be relevant, they aren’t at all descriptive of what this movement is or prescriptive for where it is going” (Burke, 2022, para. 19).

My experience on the film set highlighted the need for a collective re-imagining of what #MeToo, and other social justice movements, have accomplished and can accomplish. Having lit the spark of change, I return to a question which I carry with me in almost all areas of my life: How do we build a world that has never been? Burke (2022) herself calls for this shift in thinking, asking that we look for what the #MeToo movement has accomplished versus looking for reasons to say it has failed. I began to understand the need for critical hope, the kind which Maxine Greene (1995) first introduced me to with her concept of social imagination – the power to “invent visions of what should be and what might be” (p. 5). Juhasz (2003) stated “film and patriarchy share the project of women’s objectification—they make victims. Video and feminism see women as complex, worthy selves—they produce subjects” (p. 71). Like Juhasz, I envision digital storytelling as a powerful way through which to share narratives of experience and continue the act of resistance through content creation inherent to Western feminist movements. My study has helped demonstrate this feminist way of looking is not solely for women, as Mark’s contributions offered meaningful insights into how this multimodal process, can support meaningful dialogue.

So, what is my takeaway? When I look back at myself as a teacher standing in front of a class declaring myself a feminist, I do so with a fresh perspective. Over the last six years of study, I have come to understand that perhaps the power is not in the word or identity claim of *being a feminist*, but in the ethic behind it. An ethic of care rooted in a hopeful belief that education holds the possibility of creating spaces for difficult conversations. When I reflect on my stressful time on the film set, I recognize that quitting was an option and one that would have been respected and understood by many. However, I contend that my greatest act of feminist resistance was to stay, be in the way, stand in solidarity with the other women experiencing sexism and misogyny, and then tell the story.


*Figure 22: Solidarity. Photo credit Patricia Jagger (2022).*

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**APPENDIX A**

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED~ MEDIATING FEMINISMS IN EDUCATIONAL SPACES THROUGH PARTICIPATORY VISUAL METHODS

*Are you an emerging educator who identifies as feminist?*

I am seeking emerging educators who identify as feminist and who are interested in using media pedagogies to join this study. You must meet one of the following criteria:
a. Currently be in a teacher education program.
b. Have graduated from a teacher education program in the last two years but not working in schools.
c. Be a community-based educator working with youth and interested in media arts.

All genders and ages welcome!

This study will occur from September 2020-December 2020

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# APPENDIX B

## Coffee and Cigarettes

“I'm proud of you,” my dad said.

I stood in the Student Union Building the University of Calgary basking in the relief of having successfully defended my master's thesis. I knew that if I called my mother first with the news, she would tell him before I had the chance. And this long worked-for success was one I wanted to share myself. There were certain things I did not hear often from him growing up. This was one of them–not because I don't think he was proud of me; more so because he, himself was too proud to show his emotions.

When I arrived back in Winnipeg, he was there at the airport to pick me up. As we walked through the parking lot to his van on that cold but sunny winter day, his heavy breathing and slowed pace warned me that something was wrong. Having grown up amid the haze of his cigarette smoke, it was not surprising, but as my father, he had always seemed invincible, like he would live forever.

The months that followed, were, to quote Dickens, the best of times and the worst of times, I was living a vagabond carefree life. That summer, I went to work on a TV series in Saskatoon. It was to be my last film gig before embarking on a different life and career in the West Coast City I'd always felt was my heart and soul’s home. It was a magical time amid canola fields, blue skies, and good company. A gift to carry with me through the month ahead, as we were to discover the cancer was swiftly and mercilessly ravaging my dad's body.

*Diagnosis August 20; deceased September 22.*

The weeks in between are a blur. My new job in Vancouver disappearing into the ether.

Moving boxes put back into storage.

The world falling out from beneath the feet my dad had always said I would land so firmly on. On our last night together, I sat with him for hours until the doctor encouraged me to let him get some rest. As I left his room that night, I was granted the parting gift of an “I love you.” The other words that he always struggled to say.

I didn't know those would be our final moments. Although I recall earlier that evening watching him study the doorway to his hospital room, which was noticeably narrower than the bed he was lying in. With a determined look, he said, “they got me in here, so there must be some way they can get me out.” Words that made me smile as much then as they do now. Much like my dad, I’m not very good at being held to one spot for too long, especially if the coffee isn’t very good.