

Stranger Within

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I began to try to represent to myself what was happening to me by using my camera. But how to represent myself *to* myself, through my own visual point of view, and how to find out what I needed to articulate it.... and give [it] visual form? (Spence, 1988, p. 155)

I base my teaching philosophy on the continuous self-directed learning of an individual. My goal is to help my students to learn to problematize their perception, their ways of thinking, their understanding of themselves, and their satisfaction with achieved learning goals. I support my students in their journeys of becoming critical searchers and inquirers of knowledge, visibility, and perceived reality. Although it is apparent they have learned to question authority and pre-given role and behavior models, I watch them searching for shortcuts for the answers within the complex structure of too many potential solutions.

While I greatly respect my students, who are often first generation college students, at the same time I am frequently powerless in trying to explain how they, as consumers of knowledge, are protected and

blinded by the seemingly free media of this country. When U.S. troops entered Iraq, I was troubled by my students' limited interest in finding information published by sources other than American. I sadly realized how the information provided by governments that opposed the U.S. military actions in Iraq, such as France or Germany, was muted from my students by language barriers. The students too easily assumed and adopted the roles of "we" and the "other" respectively when the mainstream media, provided only homogenous and synchronized reports from the "outside."

My intention is to discuss the importance of critical investigation, analysis, and questioning of the silenced and suppressed aspects of one's cultural identity that strongly influence our interaction with others, and the way we perceive knowledge and ourselves, and, furthermore, to promote visual and written/oral narratives as a method leading to an open dialogue. Through this process we come to an increased and more complex critical understanding of diversity and "otherness" as we learn to recognize the suppressed stranger within one's self. To explain the connections I make between the importance of learning to name and articulate the suppressed aspects of one's self and critical diversity education, I first discuss my understanding of identity construction and cultural identity. I aim to question the independent and self-directed identity model of one's cultural identity, our socially and culturally learned role as an *independent individual*, and introduce my understanding of *relational identity*. I introduce the *suggested stranger* and discuss the educator's participatory role in producing otherness. I then discuss how I began to question the construction of cultural identity through my personal experiences and an arts-based autoethnographic research process and how I learned to identify and express the silenced and suppressed aspects of my identity that, though previously unidentifiable by conscious thought, strongly influenced my self-perception and my everyday interactions. I call

attention to the importance of critically studying the identification categories and classifications commonly emphasized in pedagogical discussion on the learner's cultural identity. Finally I make suggestions for critical pedagogical practices that help the learner to go beyond easily identifiable categories of his/her personal identity and learn to understand and critically investigate themselves in their varied cultural contexts in more complex ways.

Although Jo Spence (1988) focuses on photography as a method of studying and representing self, I believe that the following presents the power of visual representation and the self-directed critical study of one's identity:

If we could learn new ways of using our cameras we could start by telling our own stories in different ways...we could use the camera for a dialogue with ourselves, ...to de-censorize ourselves, or as a type of visual diary-writing....We [could] begin to re-imag(in)e who we are, both visually and verbally. (Spence, 1988, p. 214)

Culture and identity / Beyond Categories and Relational Identity

I am on the island. My legs long and slim against the granite stone marked by the moving ice, thousands of years ago. Warm sun behind my back filling what's behind with yellow light. I smell and hear the sea and I feel playful, but grounded. Even though my feet couldn't grow roots, even though the surface is too hard to spear, I feel rooted, grounded in stone, sea and its history. I can afford playfulness apart from where I now live, returned to where I used to belong. I have missed these sounds and smells, and I have longed for this connection.

Rarely do I find it though. I find it with my mother, I feel it with my sisters, but everything else has already changed and become something other than what it was when I left.



My thoughts are heavy, but uplifted with safety. If something were to happen, this sea would rescue me, these people would swim after me, this island would not forget. I would become another mark on the stone, marked against the moving ice next winter. I would rest in the colorful leaves molding against these rocks. I would become a small bit of autumn that the sea wind would carry and I could drink the juice of these tiny flowers if I ever felt thirst.

It may indeed be idealistic to stress the importance of individual thought and identity construction as a means of providing answers to the intercultural, interethnic, and interpersonal communication difficulties with which we seem to be increasingly struggling. Yet, I believe it is imperative to re-evaluate the methods we use and theories we follow in studying personal and cultural identity. Reprising the argument in my prior research, I call attention to the sociocultural borders we build and live by and within, and to the moments of contradiction at the borders and their eventual or possible rupture. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) suggests a search for a more complex understanding of cultural and communal identity:

What is...need[ed] [is] to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide a terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (pp. 1-2).

Culture is in-flux, multilayered, alive, simultaneous and based on creative thinking; a constant search for meaning and a negotiation of ethical behavior. Culture is very personal, because one's age, gender, sexuality, social and economic class, exceptionality, geographic location, religion, political status and ideas, language, ethnicity, and racial identity all influence the construction of personal cultural identity and self-perception (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; and Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). Moreover, how a person perceives one's cultural identity creates guidelines and boundaries for how one views the world and how "otherness" is understood.

Like culture, identity is complex, changing and plural, and self-perception, as it can be communicated through artistic and cultural behavior or representation, is thus only a temporary expression of one's understanding of a culture (Stuhr, Krug, & Scott, 1995) and self. In order to further develop philosophies of *diversity art education* and make suggestions for finding and surfacing the suppressed stranger within, it is crucial to discuss and re-evaluate how identity is understood. Readily defined categories and classifications are related to, depend on, and change along with their evolving historical and cultural context (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997), but identity determines how we understand reality, culture, and theory. Then again, our cultural, political and theoretical frameworks strongly influence our self-perception. The political and cultural influence of critical multiculturalism, interculturalism, feminism, and postmodernism in arts, theory, and education could be argued to have caused our fragmented identity: We understand ourselves as plural, and identity as dynamic and always changing, appearing somewhat schizophrenic when we consider everything that forms the temporary selves that we are. However, the continuous process of forming a selfhood needs to be understood through the relational (Eakin, 1999) and the performative (Smith, 1998). According to Smith, there is no individual, single self, or coherent selfhood; rather, selfhood is temporarily found through performative acts of the narration of self. Stages of performance are multiple, causing the self to be always fragmentary and making coherence impossible.

I understand identity as constructed in relation to the cultural, political and historical framework of one's life, in which families (or alternatives to the bourgeois family) often provide the most influential institution by which traditions and ideas are continued. A person finds agency through relationships with others and his/her environment, but I do not believe in an individualistic, autonomous self, but rather

an identity that embodies the temporary agency of a self that is repeatedly and actively gained in an interaction with one's immediate, physical, social, and imagined environment.

Several educators and scholars, especially feminist scholars, (Eakin, 1999; Witherell & Noddings 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986) have written about relationality in the process of identity formation and learning to understand one's self. Although it has been argued that women especially form their identities in relationship to the significant people in their lives, Bhabha's (1994) analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1998) depicts this suggested 'feminine' communal identity.

The women speak...from a space 'in-between each other' which is a communal space. They explore an 'interpersonal' reality that appears within the poetic image as if it were in parentheses – aesthetically distanced, held back, and yet historically framed. (p. 17)

I do not intend to argue that understanding women's identities as communal and formed in-between, as well as within one's self, means that all women are the same or even similar. While occupying a gendered identity, a woman as a "subject occupies different subject positions at different moments [and simultaneously], and she cannot be determined by any single discursive apparatus" (Ong, 1995, p. 351). Gender identity is only part of one's identity and some feminist scholars', writers', and artists' work (Behar & Gordon, 1995; hooks 1998; 1996; 1995; & 1994, Carrie Mae Weems' art work, 1998) investigates the complexity of identity construction that crosses the set boundaries between the self and other. Lila Abu-Lughod (1995) states: "By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self,

we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide" (p. 347). Rishma Dunlop (1999) suggests that by allowing the space in the educational curriculum, critical reading of personal narratives, and interpersonal dialogue for the search of identity that is formed in a "third space" (p. 57) we can learn to recognize and understand the "other within" one's self (p. 59).

Narrative and Relational Identity

Narration and storytelling shape one's identity and expand one's views about self and "otherness." Three important aspects or components of narrative form a relational autobiographical narration: (1) the autobiographical aspect, the narrative of the author; (2) the biographical story of the "other"; and (3) the story of the story¹. (Eakin, 1999). The story of the story is fundamental in understanding Eakin's concept of relationality. It constructs the written narrative; it is about the birth of the story and about the complicated relationship between the narrator and the other." Through the story of the story we come to understand how and under what circumstances the narrative is composed. It tells "us something fundamental about the relational structure of the autobiographer's identity" (p. 60). It reveals the complex nature of constant self-reflective practices between self and other and is often similar to ethnographers' personal accounts about the process of their research. However, in relational narration, the story of the story is foundational to the narrative told, giving the story its structure. In relational autobiographies the story of self is as important as the story of the other. This dynamic relationship is reflected in the story of the story, which is the narration of developing the co-operation, performances, and relationship between the self-reflective narrator and the other. This relationship and the creation of the other's story provide the narrator "a measure of self-determination" (p. 61) and a possibility of re-reading the constructed self.

Furthermore, it becomes possible to understand relationality between a person, his/her surroundings, and others through shared stories and life experiences; we easily relate to the story of the narrator, and read our own stories through complex parallel readings of the other. This relational reflexive behavior promotes acceptance, because the complex and layered reading of personal and others' narratives helps us in identifying different dimensions and aspects of ourselves, some which have been suppressed and silenced, dominated by painful and problematic life experiences or trapped in pre-accepted self-identification categories. It is also through these personal narratives that we best relate to another person's experience and come to question pre-existing assumptions and stereotypes. Reading the work of Art Spiegelman (1986; 1991), Jo Spence (1986; 1995), Carrie Mae Weems' (1998) and, Sandra and Sheila Ortiz-Taylor's (1996) written and visual narratives helps us understand not only their life stories, but also our own, thus providing influential ways of teaching for educators whose goals are deepening understanding of otherness and more democratic and equal societies.

Relationality, of course, is not Eakin's (1999) original term; he has adapted the idea from previous feminist studies and the significance of his approach lies in that he enlarges and expands relationality to all autobiographical narration, not just women's. However, he is not alone in making this argument, nor is this phenomenon unique to literary studies of autobiography. Connections to relationality can be found in Michael Renov's (1999) discussions of domestic ethnography in film studies in which he focuses on the complexity of and boundaries between the self and the other, and the representation of the domestic world in film. While he views domestic ethnography as a supplement to autobiography, he further claims that there is a "peculiar sort of reciprocity (which might equally be termed self-interest) built into the

construction of Other subjectivities in this paraethnographic mode" (p. 142).

National or Cultural Identity and the Problematic Stranger Within

Not many texts by art educators specifically deal with the construction of individual identity but commonly discuss its relationship to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, multicultural education and visual culture. The basis for socially constructive or critical multicultural education, with its goals of equity and a more democratic society, is the understanding of how age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, context, language, ethnicity, and politics affect the formation of a person's identities (Hesford, 1999; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001). I understand visibility and visual culture as active concepts that include art, but which are not limited to forms of visual representations; they are complex means through which identities are both produced and represented. Visual culture circulates "visibilities (and poli[ces] invisibilities), stereotypes, power relations, the ability to know and to verify" (Rogoff, 2000, p. 20). But I argue we need more research and critical discussion on how individual learners come to combine information received using different ways of perceiving and modes of understanding, how this information constructs their self-perception, and what are the possible methods for investigating and problematizing the perceived notion of self.

Not all talk of identity involves thinking of the self as unitary or contained; nor need boundaries be conceived in ways that make the identity closed, autonomous or impermeable. We need to think individuality differently, allowing the potentiality for otherness to exist within it, as well as alongside it. (Battersby, 1999, p. 355)

It can be argued that the concept of a nation state is problematic and its institutional and cultural maintenance need to be critically discussed (Alasuutari, 2001; Mirzoeff, 2000). Nicholas Mirzoeff (2000) argues that interpretation is the prevalent threat for a modernist nation state. While diasporic, hybrid, plural, multiple, in-flux identities constructed in-between and in the interstices of culture are widely discussed today (Bhabha, 1994; Mirzoeff, 2000), it is relevant to return to Stuart Hall's (2000) definition of diasporic identity, which "lives through, not despite difference: by hybridity... are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p. 31).

Using Bhabha's (1994) text and the feminist analysis of domesticity as my theoretical basis, I argue that there are links between the questioning of national identity as homogenous, and one's private, domestic life. While it is in the space of culturally conflictual situations and the emergence of minority and women's narratives that the need to re-negotiate the larger, cultural narratives becomes evident, it is also in those moments that the "borders between home and world become confused" (p. 9).

The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes the boundary; a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).

Feminist scholars in particular have brought attention to the richness of culturally embedded codes and power relations that can be studied through the complex interactions of domesticity. While turning the private into public in the form of fiction or biography is not new, it is characteristic to the postmodern era to read culture through such strategies.

...it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence...there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of self in the world of travel, the resettlement of the borderline community of migration (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).

Lately, I have been fascinated by the concept of strangeness within us, not just alongside (Battersby, 1999). A stranger is a newcomer to the community, somebody who lives on the edge, in-between, in the interstices (Bhabha, 1994); it is not necessarily that the 'newcomer' is profoundly different from the 'regulars' but something about her presence evokes uneasiness, questions the communal ways, initiates fear and self-protection. Thus the strangeness within is not about the newcomer but about the recognition of otherness within one's self, only evoked by the interaction with the newcomer. For a stranger to be heard requires "enter[ing] into dialogical relationship with her. Real dialogue allows for the uniqueness of the other to be brought forth" (Shabatay, 1991, p. 136). Finding a language for this dialogue requires us not to enter the dialogue with which we are already familiar, but requires questioning the dominant rhetoric within which she is heard. Referring to Goethe, Bhabha (1994) suggests that a nation's cultural life is homogenously and unconsciously lived without questioning the national culture. If we can come to recognize the relationship between

the domestic and public and the relationality of identity construction, we may be able to form new questions and educational models for teaching critical awareness and acceptance toward “strangeness” and “other.” Finally, we can arrive at the questions of exclusive/inclusive nations, and the (un)necessity to cherish and protect distinct nationality. I suggest a critical pedagogy that devotes time in the curriculum to form visual and textual narratives, and critically studies them as well as promotes relational readings of narratives of all kinds. We can begin by reading the stories of the stranger and allow these strangers’ stories to lead us to the stranger waiting to be discovered within ourselves.

Educator and the Construction of Otherness

Challenging and insightful articles outline theoretical changes to the curriculum (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Desai, 2003; Davenport, 2000), yet I believe that changing pedagogy requires more information about the personal involvement of the educators practicing disciplinary reform. Through learning about myself as a teacher and scholar, I have gained an increasing acceptance of the more private aspects of myself. On the other hand, learning to understand my private self has made me more aware and open-minded as a teacher. Andra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2000) state that “knowing ourselves as persons is very much part of knowing ourselves as professionals” (p. 15), and bell hooks (1994) talks about “engaged pedagogy” that strives for well-being and points out that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15).

Wendy Hesford (1999) writes about the politics of academic identity as they relate to autobiography, and how this must be seen within the contemporary political and cultural framework. She calls attention to the participatory role of the educators “in the construction of ‘other’” (p. xxx). To gain a deeper understanding of their participation in constructing and supporting stereotypical “otherness” in their

academic practices she, similarly to many art educators, advises all educators “to be accountable for the narratives of gender, race, and class that they [the educators] inhabit” (p. xxx). Quoting Peter McLaren (1995), Hesford argues that educators “need to be able to read critically the narratives *that are already reading us*” (p. xxx, author’s emphasis). Motivated in by McLaren’s assertions, my current research is a study on “What narratives of identity and difference shape [my] authority, and how can [I] use the authority conferred to [me] to challenge and expose these [mine and my students’] narratives?” (p. xxx). Through this research process I have gained an appreciation for my students’ stories and come to understand better how to help them investigate their complex and in-flux global, national, local and personal cultural identities through the critical study of visuality.

Excavations into my Personal Silences

I have come to write this text through my own experiences as a “newcomer” in a previously unknown country and social system. Like any stranger in a new environment I had to learn to cope and manage according to what appeared to me as strangely defined coding for appropriate social behavior. Unlike many other newcomers, however, I was simultaneously working as a university educator teaching about issues of diversity, social awareness, and art within the United States, thus I was in a position of assumed power. I had come to the United States from Finland to study art education at the Ph. D. level and my main interest at that point was to learn about theory and the various philosophical thoughts influencing teaching and our understanding of visual knowledge construction. In my dissertation work I positioned myself through different components of my identity “in relation to the great traditions, be these epistemic structures, the signification of specific location and its national/cultural identification or gendered narratives and histories” (Rogoff, 2000, p. 123) that have formed my

self-perception. My life and story began reshaping as I relocated to a new social and cultural context at The Ohio State University and my study focused on the first three years of my life there. However, I soon found myself delving into layers of family history to understand how it was that, even before I was born, events took place that influenced who I assumed I was. Although I had found this change in living conditions and cultural environment helpful in questioning my socially learned and adopted identity, my "sliding" back to old behavioral patterns and daily routines required investigation when I was re-writing my identity. In this process I applied different theoretical and conceptual frameworks to approach the concept of identity construction. While my writing relates to many contemporary, social, and cultural phenomena, I am mainly writing myself into the map or genre of writing and representation. According to Carol B. Stack (1993) "the goal is to explore and experiment – to learn and write as much about our understanding of how we locate our voice[s] in our writing as possible" (p. 81).

My study focused around the questions, "*Who am I?*" and "*How is my culturally informed identity and self-perception constructed?*" The starting point for the critical study of cultural identity was the first months in this country, and how the culture and educational system, new professional roles, changed the way I viewed myself. The following three years caused a questioning all the aspects of life and knowledge I had previously accepted as the basis of my existence. During the first year in Ohio I was a stranger, an alien, and I experienced the privileges and downfalls of being incognito. The beauty of strangeness lies in the freedom for self-creation, but fears are easily fed by insecurity and a need to become part of the new society and to feel accepted. Virginia Shabatay (1991) following Stein's (1995) work, argues that a stranger faces difficulty and struggle in a new cultural and living situation because s/he is still living in part in the old and what was before. The

richness of this multicultural experience is that I have lived multiple lives, personalities, and roles at once that may never merge. Yet, multiplicity naturally causes a loss of a united sense of self.

Visuality, Narration, and the Ways I Came to Learn About Myself



Pool

Swim, swim, swim and float.

Water gives you comfort.

Soft, calm, slow and easy,

Surrounded by older people.

The founding idea of my arts-based autoethnographic research methodology that I suggest here is to learn more about the process of identity construction. One naturally desires positionality and the sense of security provided by a feeling of belonging within the intricate structures of everyday life as well as within the academy. One of the ways belonging could be understood is "the ability to live out complex and reflexive identities which acknowledge language, knowledge, gender and race as modes of self-positioning" (Rogoff, 2000, p. 13). We read texts and visuals from our contemporary perspectives, bringing personal desires and needs into reading (Kuhn, 1995). Through this 'reading,' and the interpretation of the information, Irit Rogoff (2000) suggests that we "fragment, appropriate, rewrite and utterly transform those texts" while these visuals and texts simultaneously change and mold our understanding of culture and our place within it; visuals and texts "constitute us rather than being subjected to historical readings by us" (p. 9). According to Rogoff, by constantly asking oneself the question "Where do I belong?" and pursuing the articulation of this question in relationship to one's life brings awareness to the process of self-positioning, in-flux identity and the complex process of writing one's self into culture.

Although Laurel Richardson (2000a) focuses on text I believe that the concept "writing, a method of inquiry" can be extended to visuals, artistic visual production, and narratives that combine visuals and text. I have used the artistic medium of photography, the medium I know the best and am most comfortable with to study changes in my life situation, ideals, and self-perception. Most of my ideas are born while photographing, and I can best analyze and understand my behavior when writing in a fictional or poetic form in relationship to my photographs. Only lately have I found writing to be an important expression for self-reflexivity and therapy through the theoretical writing of my dissertation. I now write to verbalize my conceptual

understanding; I write to further the complexity of embodied and tacit knowledge represented in my photographs. For me, combining and intertwining visuals and writing has “created new ways of writing and reading” (Richardson, 2000b, p. 154). It has changed me—the ways I understand knowledge, the ways I read and write/create visuals and text. This, I believe, is due to the nature of visual and bodily knowledge, the awareness and understanding of something that has not ‘reached’ the level of linguistic self-expression or logic. I am not merely reading theoretical knowledge into existing visuals (though this also happens) as could be argued, but claiming that some of the epistemological understandings existed before I came to write about them. My work is theoretically influenced by critical visual sociology (Chaplin, 1994); critical visual ethnography (Pink, 2001); embedded in critical ethnography (Clifford, 1986) that recognizes the partial nature of all ethnographic knowledge; cultural studies (Hall, 1997); and interdisciplinary visual culture studies (Mirzoeff, 1999; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) and studies of visual methodologies (Rose, 2001) that have greatly advanced the social, cultural, and political nature of visual knowledge. I have studied visual and textual autobiographies and memoirs as well as theories of autobiographical writing, knowledge construction and individual artists’ works. I have also been involved in studying contemporary art theory, and the study of artists’ work (especially that of women photographers) whose work is engaged in studying cultural, gendered and situated identity and who have written about their own work. Like other scholars studying the construction of visual knowledge, I argue that the study of art and art theory helps to critically re-evaluate the academic methods of studying identity. I am also, and especially, influenced by feminist works that through questioning the established practices “produce different structures of intelligibility that, in turn, produce different epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 2).

I have written my story into being through domestic ethnography that “play[s] at the boundaries of inside and outside” (Renov, 1999, p. 141). The process “functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial other” (p. 141), but it has been written as a narrative about the cultural framework within which I think and function. I question my subjectivity, identity, authority and intelligibility during the process, never separating these from the discourse. I have broken boundaries between the other and myself through our mingled stories inseparable by blood, past, memories and experiences. While I started studying my identity with the intention of approaching this study from the perspectives of gender and ethnic or national identity, what exposed me to the hybridity of experience was not the physical and mental transition from one context to another (Finland to the United States) but the problematic overlapping of these layered and complex experiences that most strongly caused the confusing tearing down of the boundaries and fragmentation of selfhood –or the hybridity. Through my experiences in Ohio, I found myself simultaneously mainstreamed based on my looks and skin color yet exotic for the same reasons. For example, the overlapping similarities, yet the defined and complex differences of assumed female roles helped me to understand the problematic nature of these globalized roles but simultaneously exacerbated the context bound experience of my female identity (Jagodzinski, 1996). Today, several years into the process of conscious and intense study of my selfhood, I realize that the current *relationality* that I use to reflect my identity is the mythical essence of Finnish identity. I found that the most painful re-negotiations of my identity stemmed from the heretofore well-hidden and deeply cherished notions of my romanticized national identity, the influence of traditions, folklore, personal and public past that culminate in my experiences of nature and self. I studied my relationships to women in my family and

analyzed the changes in my behavior as I tried to modify my attitudes to fit the cultural roles based upon women in an American university context, yet I was slow to understand my own gender positioning (or my confusion of why I could not quite fit) through these gender behavioral models. Through the alternative and artistic research methods (named in the next section of this article), I was able to temporarily enter a realm of lost boundaries; a realm where caring about the real, unreal, imagined and fantasized did not direct my inquiry for knowledge but a desire to understand my self as embodied, spiritual, emotional, and vulnerable. What I wrote was not solely personal, professional, or theoretical but articulated my understanding of all these aspects. Giving space for the vulnerable nature of exposing one's self to the public scrutiny through my visual installations and texts, I lost some of the fears of facing problems I did not know how to solve. I became, for brief moments, one with my breath as if meditating, and found a pause from the reflection or vision I had learned to think of as my self.

Understanding Research and Educational Practices as Acts of Self-Creation

I believe that people create an understanding of who they are through reflecting on the stories they tell and the images and other documents created about their lives. I believe that as educators all the research we do, all the academic texts we publish, and all our interactions with our students also change our understanding of who we are (Richardson, 1997). Accordingly, conducting research and redefining one's pedagogical philosophy is an active form of self-(re)creation; thus I find it important to actively engage in processes that seek for methods of researching visual and linguistic knowledge construction that best express one's intentions and epistemological understanding. While artists are trained to be deeply involved in the process of inquiry emotionally and through bodily experiences,

scholarly and scientific modes of cultural and social learning often separate the body, senses, and emotions from the process of knowledge construction and devalue forms of knowledge construction other than logic (Pink, 2001). Many art educators have shifted their curriculum toward teaching about life in its multiplicity through the critical study of art and visual culture and several scholars have shown innovative interest in studying humanity through art and creative behavior. I believe, however, that we need to continue critically re-evaluating the methods we use to study art, visual cognition, and identity construction with the intention of creating links between the complexity of knowledge construction and how identity can be critically studied in the context of an increasingly diverse society through local, personal and artistic experiences and critical self-reflective methods.

Finding and modifying methods for my research forms the heart of my epistemological narrative that is tightly linked to the more personal narrative as it is told and that evolves simultaneously. Through my research I promote an alternative approach to researching cultural identity, one based on personal experiences using investigation through creative behavior and visuality. At the beginning, I did not know what kind of research project would emerge from my intuitive and creative investigation. I started photographing my life and writing short stories based on the photographs, but theory was read into my behavior and practices afterward while writing my behavior into wider cultural contexts. In this kind of research process, methods and theory form and emerge through practice and deep engagement with the research topic. What I aimed to construct was an allegorical and layered text that continually turns inward, travels and forms connections between different layers, stages, and through the process, interprets itself (Clifford, 1986).

Some Suggested Methods for Studying Self-perception

The following are the methods that evolved during the research process of studying my self-perception and aspects of my socially and culturally constructed identity.

Photographing and participant observation as methods are based on critical visual ethnography and critical visual anthropology but also intuition, bodily-, tacit-, and craftsmanship-knowledge, as well as recognition and analysis of feelings and emotions. I photograph people I socialize with and places I feel comfortable or am troubled in, such as the roof patio of my dorm building, the only window of my room, and the old gym swimming pool where I did water aerobics with elderly women.

When engaged in "*photo-writing*" (my own term) I write, with my photographs in front of me, informal, self-reflective narratives. I meditate with chosen photographs. This is a secondary creative process and an important stage between the initial visual process and the subsequent critical essay writing.

Memory work is a systematic study of memory in the political and social context through public and private visual documents: a critical analysis and recollection of past events and memories, also silenced and untold, in the contemporary context. Performing memory work involves three stages: (1) awakening of the questioning of life and world around a person (critical consciousness); (2) finding a voice for the questioning followed by (3) endless learning and understanding when this critical consciousness has been awakened (Annette Kuhn, 1995, 3 stages modified from pp. 102-103). Memory work as a method has helped me to theorize and contextualize my personal narratives.

Photo therapy means that instead of studying existing documents alternative representations of self are created to critically analyze one's socially and culturally constructed identity (Spence, 1988, 1995, Spence and Solomon, 1995). Through photographing my surroundings, family, and the people I socialize with, I created an alternative "family album," and alternative representations of myself. This method, combining visual and verbal narratives, provides me with an opportunity to actively re-create multiple representations of myself as I wish to be "seen." Although I am mostly physically absent from my images, all my images discuss and re-negotiate my identity in relationship to the topic currently under investigation. The absence of my body is a way of claiming the power of gaze instead of being observed. My study is about my vision and visibility, not about others seeing me.

The process of "discovering" the above-mentioned two image-based methods prepared me for re-writing and re-conceptualizing all aspects of my study as well as my self.

Critical essay writing as a method intertwines visuals, creative and theoretical / academic essay writing. Through critical essay writing I analyze my visibility and photo-writing in the light of relevant theories and in the disciplinary context. This method is influenced by autoethnography, narrative research, arts-based research, and especially Laurel Richardson's approach to "writing as a method of inquiry" (1997; 2000a; 2000b).

Through *public display and presentation of my visuals and creative writing*, presentations and exhibits, I offer myself and my texts and images to public exposure and discussion. While I have sometimes been anxious about the feedback and about being judged based on the criteria and expectations of quality set for

professional artists, I have been excited to add another level to the interpretation of the images. The feedback has been less judgmental and more focused around sharing personal narratives. One of the main goals I set for my projects is to provide spectators a way to relate to another person's narrative and in that, find temporary self-determination.

Pedagogical Suggestions

As educators we need to start from the learner's perspective in helping them define the elements that structure his/her "self," when the learner in their current and contemporary situation is willing and able to define themselves. We can then help our students move beyond these boundaries and begin questioning his/her identity as previously perceived.

I suggest that similar methods of visual and self-reflective inquiry as those described earlier in this article can be adapted to the study of self and other in diversity education at different levels. Methods of visual ethnography, domestic ethnography, critical visual anthropology, photo-writing, memory work, photo (any visual) therapy, critical essay writing based on critical visual analysis, and public display and discussion of visual artifacts can be used as tools for critically studying identity and the learner's perception of themselves. Through these visual and critical inquiries of self in relationship to personal and public experiences, we ask learners to alter themselves in transforming their thinking and worldview. The pre-requirement for engaged (hooks, 1994) and critical pedagogy is the creation of safe communal atmosphere in the classroom that supports sharing. The process of studying knowledge construction and self requires willingness to expose one's self to public scrutiny, which at times, hurts. If the classroom is seen as a place where attitudes and behavior are transgressed the educator has to be willing to share their personal narratives and experiences first (hooks, 1994).

Although we write about or create images about ourselves, and the text discusses themes specific to our personal lives and thinking, I believe that we can find temporary self-determination through relating to other's personal narratives. As an educator, I believe that there is a continuous need to re-evaluate methods used in multicultural and diversity education. My critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1994; hooks, 1994; 1995; Hesford, 1999; Dunlop, 1999) is based on an in-depth study and understanding of individual learners' as well as cultural producers' contextual lives and narratives. Acknowledging the achievements of diversity education thus far, I assert that we need to reconsider the categories that some multicultural and ethnic philosophies of education assume and instead focus on interpersonal communication and critical reflection on a very basic individual level. I am not suggesting that we should abandon categories, but that we need to see beyond gender, ethnic, cultural, sexual, geopolitical, and social classifications, and focus on the complexity and fluidity of identity construction. We have to be willing to listen, hear, and share, take the time and commit to developing further understandings of "otherness," that which is strange to us, and recognize the "stranger" (Shabatay, 1991) and otherness within ourselves (Dunlop, 1999) that makes interpersonal communication complicated. Pausing and recognizing the uniqueness, strangeness, and sameness of each learner, we can create new grounds for acceptance. This requires curricular material and practices that do not rely on pre-set categories but recognizes the relational nature of identity, the inseparable nature of I and the other, the "polyphonic nature of our world," emphasizes the "multiplicity of voice[s], the intertwining of speech and silence, ellipses, autobiography and fiction" (Dunlop, 1999, p. 59), and still reads these experiences through the recognition of the importance of individual experience. Central to my pedagogy is pausing to listen to self or other when sensing that silences that inform our experiences are not being articulated.

Notes

¹ While I talk about autobiographical narration, I believe that the same aspects or principles of telling a story can be applied to everyday narration and short anecdotes. Stories about self are always told in relation to self as seen reflected in others and even short stories are often about this (re)negotiation of relationality between self and others.

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