2019

Mother/Artist/Teacher: The Labor of Becoming

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Mother/Artist/Teacher:

The Labor of Becoming

Miranda Clayton

Virginia Commonwealth University
Abstract
This paper explores possible applications of the experiential knowledge of motherhood in the field of art education through self-portraiture, a methodology which blends a/r/tography with elements of portraiture. A review of relevant literature situates the study within the scope of mothering pedagogy and arts-based research. Employing artistic practice and anecdotal journaling as the primary methods of inquiry, the researcher examines her experiences as a mother in a preservice art education program and the intersections of her roles as mother/artist/teacher. The researcher identifies resonant metaphors, including labor, separation, the umbilical cord, circles, the ovum, and pretending; offers parallels between mothering and art education in play, scaffolding, relationality, matrescence, changing plans, and paradigms; presents challenges such as time constraints, breastfeeding/pumping breast milk, and sleep deprivation; and provides an artist statement. The study attempts to address issues of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of mothers in art education by promoting understanding through empathetic participation.

Keywords: motherhood, a/r/tography, mother/artist/teacher, mothering pedagogy
Dedication

For my son Wesley, who made me a mother and who continually surprises, delights, and challenges me; and for my dear husband, Nick, who never ceases to support me and love me, who listens to all my wild ideas, and who follows me as I follow him.
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CHAPTER 1
CONCEPTION: INTRODUCTION

Since I became a mother, my self is all tangled up in this other person, my child, a physical extension of me. There’s this big piece of my being that was cleaved from me, emerged from me, and now is growing in a new little body, a separate life that never really feels separate from me and yet somehow is more precious than any part of me I keep inside my skin.

Every time I leave my son, it’s like I’m removing one of my vital organs, wrapping it in dinosaur overalls, and handing it over to someone else for safekeeping. Every time I pick him up, I hug him as though I could reabsorb him and kiss him like I could swallow him back down so I know he’s safe inside my body again.

But I can’t reabsorb him or swallow him. He stays out there, growing, and learning, and making autonomous decisions like whether to chew on the green block or the purple ball or to grab the dog’s ears, but I’ll never really be disconnected from him.

I have found that to say I am writing a thesis is a misnomer. Writing is only a fragment of what I am doing. A more apt description might be that I am performing research. This performance is analogous to mothering. I conceived of this research, bore it with me from its conception, and gave it birth to occupy the physical space outside of myself. I pour myself into this research and nurture it so that it might grow and one day be able to stand independently from me in scholarship.
This thesis is an act of motherhood, a labor of care through which, gradually and with tremendous effort, separates a piece of me from myself and raises it to become its own entity.

I am a mother, I am an artist, and I am a teacher. Being a mother is central to who I am—all facets of my identity are wound up irrevocably with my motherhood. In the same way that my self is tangled up in my child, my motherhood is entwined with my art and teaching; throughout this research I use the term mother/artist/teacher to refer to these interwoven roles. This research performance will explore the intersections of my mothering, artistic, and educational practices and the unique ways of knowing engendered by those experiences.

The month before I started my Master’s program, I learned that I was pregnant with my son, Wesley, and I had to discard most of the expectations I had held about what graduate school would be like for me. As I was joining the bustling and often challenging dialogue of postgraduate art education, I was also entering into the volatile, complicated conversation between motherhood, art, and teaching. I couldn’t ignore that my unfolding motherhood was quickly becoming the most significant aspect of my identity, just like I couldn’t ignore the growing belly filling the physical space between my students and me. I realized that there was something important to be learned there; a way to acknowledge my motherhood and lessen the distance separating me from the people I teach. That realization brought me to mothering pedagogy, the theoretical lens for this body of research. Mothering pedagogy admits the physicality, emotionality, and changeability of the domains of mothering and teaching, creating opportunity for a new, authentic view of mothers

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1 For the purpose of this paper, I define mothers and motherhood in the context of biological mothers. While I acknowledge that there are many paths to motherhood that do not involve a mother giving birth to their child, because this research is autobiographical, it is reflective of my experience, my narrative, and my artistic response.

2 I will discuss Mothering Pedagogy at a greater length in Chapter 2 Gestation: Literature Review.
in art education (Franklin, 2003; Gerald, 2003; Grumet, 1988; Maudlin, 2012; Poling, Suominen Guyas, & Keys, 2012; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Whitlock, 2012).

Before my child was even a whisper of a dream, my art was about him.

A few years ago, I was fixated on empty circles. I drew circles embellished on the outside with a repeating language of line and design that became central to my work during my undergraduate studies (Figure 1). Some were oblong, some round; some pen, some marker, others graphite and watercolor; others oil paint. All of them were empty. As I reflected on the meaning of these pieces, I began to recognize the circles as a symbol for my womb. I saw my empty circles as representative of my desire for motherhood.

I put down my pen for a while, but some time passed and I learned that I was pregnant. During my first trimester, I was also in the early stages of conception of my Master’s research. I was introduced to Arts Based Educational Research (ABER) in the research course I was required to take. After a talk from one of my professor’s former students, Dr. Chris Schulte, Assistant Professor of Art Education and Early Childhood Education at Penn State University, I felt a powerful pull towards using arts based inquiry to investigate my motherhood. During class one night, I was making notes in my visual journal and I decided to revisit my circle drawings. This time, I drew a circle, still embellished on the outside, but with flowers blooming inside (Figure 2). My professor, Dr. Tina Thompson, looking over my shoulder gave me an approving nod and I felt confirmation that my research needed to be about the experience of motherhood and its connection to art education.
Figure 1. Empty circle drawings circa 2014
The subject matter of motherhood was simply necessary—nothing is more important in who I am as an artist-teacher. As my graduate peers were selecting their research topics, reading and digging and discovering areas of interest, mine felt predestined. My pregnancy, becoming a mother, was unavoidable. As I sat in my first ever art education classes, I struggled with morning sickness and fatigue, I worried about how I would be able to finish my classes next semester when I had the baby, and I dreamed of names and tiny toes. My understanding of myself as an art teacher is inexorably tied to understanding of myself as a mother, and has been from the beginning.

**Personal Context**

I believe it is important to the context of this study for me to say explicitly that the conception of my son was not planned. Unexpected pregnancies carry different implications than planned ones, among other reasons, because they represent a divergence from plans. Although becoming pregnant was a surprise, my pregnancy itself had to be extensively and meticulously planned out. I laid out my course schedule by considering the weight of the course load and how much I anticipated being able to achieve at different stages of my pregnancy (or age of the baby). My due date was April 4th, more than a month before the end of the spring semester, so I met with
professors before the close of the fall semester to start discussing my options for when the baby came. Furthermore, since I knew I could reasonably expect the actual birth date to be up to two weeks in either direction of the due date, the primary plans I made with my professors had multiple contingency plans. My husband had to find a higher paying job to pay for childcare in the coming semesters with better insurance options to cover my prenatal care and birth. Rather than entertain the thought of bringing home a newborn infant to our lofted studio apartment where we already received noise complaints for our dog barking, we decided to pay our way out of our lease and buy a house. We timed our home-buying process so that we closed on my first day of winter break so that I could paint the nursery before classes started again. So much of my thought was devoted to making this pregnancy work with graduate school and with the life my husband and I envisioned for our family.

I worked hard to prepare for my son’s birth. The semester I had him, I was taking three classes. I front-loaded all of the coursework for one of my classes so that I would be finished by the time I had the baby. Another class, I arranged to take an incomplete for my semester grade and finish the final project over the summer. My third class, I worked ahead enough to cover a short time off for the birth. During the early stages of labor, I was working on a unit plan for my curriculum course; in two weeks, I participated in class remotely by video conferencing; and in three weeks, I was back in class with a newborn baby. I only turned one assignment in late.
Picture frames line the hallway leading from my bedroom to Stephie’s and Cary’s rooms. Keepsake papers from the days we were born, a photo of the three of us sitting in the oak tree in the front yard, a mall glamor shot of a four year old Stephie wearing a hat with white netting, and a picture of Mama and Stephie from Mama’s graduation day. Mama is beaming, her brown curls tucked under her black velvet cap, Stephie’s small body in her arms.

I encountered a few people who asked if I planned to defer my entrance to the program; then, if I planned on taking the semester of his birth off; then, if I was really coming back in the fall or if I was going to come back part-time, but I never considered not making every accommodation necessary to finish my Master’s degree just as I had originally planned. I think my faith in my ability to succeed in graduate school full time and have a baby comes from my mother. My mother had my older sister, Stephanie, while she was in school earning an MS in Interpersonal Psychology. Mama was 26 when she had Stephie, shortly after finishing her finals after her first year of her graduate program. I turned 26 not long after having my own baby towards the end of my first year of my graduate program. I suspect I will have a similar picture holding Wesley at my own graduation.
Artistic background.

I always considered myself an artist. As a little girl, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, sketching. “Draw what you see,” she told me, and I did, taking a sketch pad with me everywhere I went. I only had an art teacher for a few years in elementary school because the district cut funding to art programs. I kept drawing outside of school, mostly portraits. I did not take art in school again until my junior year of high school, when I took a film photography class and A.P. Drawing. I began to explore new media, experimenting with any materials I could get my hands on. In college, I studied studio art, taking coursework in drawing, printmaking, figure drawing, ceramics, photography, and painting. Painting was my primary emphasis, with a secondary emphasis in photography. After college, I did not have much time or space for painting, so photography became my medium of choice. My interest in portraiture remained constant.
Past future goals.

We were taking a quick break during painting class and a few of us were gathered around our professor as he told us about one of his most promising former students. She was a brilliant painter, he told us, and she should have gone on to get her M.F.A. But instead she got married and had a kid. Promise me you won’t give up on your goals to follow a man. We nodded in agreement. I didn’t know then what a damaging thing he had just said to me.

I earned my B.F.A. in studio art from Florida Southern College in December of 2013. I graduated a semester early; it could have been two had I chosen not to complete my minor in English, but I loved writing and wanted the transcript to prove it. I was determined to be the best. My plan, not unlike a majority of my classmates, was to continue on to earn an M.F.A. and ultimately become a teaching artist at an institute of higher education. I had been a teaching assistant for an introductory photography class and I often mentored younger drawing and painting students. I liked to teach, but I never considered going into K-12 art education. I was a painter.

I met my husband, Nick, just before my final semester of college. We lived in different cities about an hour apart and we each spent a significant amount of time traveling back and forth. We fell in love quickly and not long after my graduation, we moved into our first apartment together. After a year, we were engaged to be married. We moved to Vail, Colorado where he could pursue his hospitality career in high-end, boutique hotels. We lived there for nearly three years before moving to Richmond for me to start graduate school.
I never regret following a man. Marrying Nick and having a child together are among what I consider to be my greatest accomplishments. I may have thought for a few years that I was going to have an M.F.A., but I always knew I wanted to be a mother.

I have felt at times, however, that I failed as an artist. This thesis in some ways addresses that doubt. Similar to a thesis for the M.F.A. I once aspired to, this body of research will involve a significant amount of artmaking and will culminate in an art exhibition. I will revive and reinforce my artistic practice, and develop artmaking habits that will hopefully continue through my teaching career and beyond.

**Overview of Study**

Through this performance of research, I aim to portray my experiences as a mother in preservice art education. With artmaking as my primary method of inquiry, I will investigate my motherhood during my time as a preservice art teacher and its possible applications in art education and preservice art education programs. The next four chapters will include a review of relevant literature, a discussion of methodology and methods, a representation and analysis of results, and a reflection of the study.

**Statement of Research Problem**

As I began my graduate studies as a preservice art teacher, a pregnant, first-time mother, I found that I needed an approach to understanding art education through my developing identity as a mother. In my classes, we examined our identities and the roles they might play in our teaching. I realized that my motherhood was quickly becoming the most crucial aspect of my identity and I wanted to better understand that identity and how I might use it in my teaching practice.
While there are other mothers like me in the field of art education using art to examine the intersections of their mothering, artistic, and teaching practices (Evans, 2019; Evans, n.d., artist / parent / academic; Poling, Suominen Guyas, & Keys, 2012; Springgay, 2004; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Whitlock, 2012; Wilson, 2004), this research is distinct in that it occurs as I am a preservice teacher, and its timeline will be framed around my pregnancy, the birth of my child, and his infancy. Whereas other scholars who contributed to this field of study were already teachers, either in K-12 or higher education, as they conducted their research (Evans, 2019, Poling et al., 2012; Springgay, 2004; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Whitlock, 2012; Wilson, 2004), I am in the process of becoming a teacher at the same time as becoming a mother.

Furthermore, I recognize issues of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of mothers in art education. I hope that by creating opportunities for empathetic participation (Barone, 2010; Barone & Eisner, 2011), this research can promote better understanding of mother/artist/teachers, particularly in preservice art education programs. Like Style’s (1996) conceptualization of windows and mirrors, this research may allow mothers in preservice art education programs to see themselves reflected in their training; and open a window for professors and peers to see the mothers in their programs more clearly.

**Theoretical Framework**

I will employ mothering pedagogy as the theoretical framework for this study. Mothering pedagogy, situated in the domain of feminist epistemology, is grounded in the concept that knowledge is produced through experience, with lived realities producing particular ways of knowing (hooks, 1994). Mothering pedagogy as I use it, examines the interwoven discourses of mothering and art education, exploring the possibilities of the integration of mothering and teaching
(Franklin, 2003; Gerald, 2003; Grumet, 1988; Maudlin, 2012; Poling, Poling et al., 2012; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Whitlock, 2012). I will discuss mothering pedagogy in greater depth in the Chapter 2 Gestation: Review of Relevant Literature. I feel that mothering pedagogy can offer an approach to art education that acknowledges and gains from the unique experiences and knowledge of mothers.

**Methodology and Methods**

In this body of research, I will employ the methodology of a/r/tography, incorporating also, elements of portraiture. I will call this methodological approach *self-portraiture*, referring to its roots in arts-based research and the visual art practice of making a self-portrait. Self-portraiture examines my particular experiences and subjectivities through artistic and written exploration. Like autoethnography, I, the researcher, will be the focus of this study, however, I choose to apply the term self-portraiture because of its apparent ties to visual art practice. As is the nature of both a/r/tography and portraiture, self-portraiture is a dynamic methodology, allowing the researcher to work on data collection and analysis phases simultaneously; and anticipating change to initial plans, evolving as the researcher gathers new knowledge through the research process (Irwin, 2010; Lawrence Lightfoot, 1997).

The primary method of inquiry will be artmaking, complemented by unstructured, anecdotal journaling as the secondary method. The resulting artwork and journal entries will serve as both the data and representation of data. I will discuss the methodology and methods in greater depth in Chapter 3 Delivery: Methodology and Methods.
Discussion of Format

Throughout this paper, I will largely employ APA formatting, but I will make modifications based on the aesthetic whole of the piece. Like De Cosson (2004), I feel that formatting modifications may increase readability and enjoyability of the text. These modifications include, but are not limited to changes in font style, spacing and breaks, and formatting of in-text images and captions.

Guiding Questions

- Who am I as a mother/artist/teacher? What do my particular experiences look like in my home life? In my art practice?
- How does being a mother impact the choices I make in my art practice in terms of artistic integrity? What types of challenges does mothering present in my artmaking process? What types of possibilities does it create?
- How might the knowledge constructed by my experiences as a mother and artist be integrated into my teaching practice as an art educator?
CHAPTER 2
GESTATION: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Mothering Pedagogy

At the intersection of motherhood and art education is a variable and complicated web of experience. bell hooks (1994) used the phrase “passion of experience” (p. 91) to describe the knowledge that can be gained through experience, claiming that lived realities can produce particular ways of knowing. This concept of experiential knowledge may provide a lens through which to examine the interwoven discourses of mothering and art education. Many thinkers on this topic discuss the integration of mothering and teaching, which, for consistency, I will call mothering pedagogy (Franklin, 2003; Gerald, 2003; Grumet, 1988; Maudlin, 2012; Poling, et. al, 2012; Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Whitlock, 2012). Mothering pedagogy is situated within the domain of feminist epistemology and provides the theoretical framework for my research. The literature I examined in this review explores relationality and embodiment in mothering pedagogy and offers suggestions for what a mothering pedagogy might look like and how it might be achieved.

As I wrote this review, I was a pre-service art teacher in the Masters of Art Education program at Virginia Commonwealth University and I was pregnant with my first child. While I felt the strangeness of my changing body and the uncertainties that come with the anticipation of a child, I also felt my evolving understanding of art education and building anticipation as a preservice art teacher. As a graduate student I dig through hundreds of pages of text, unpacking new and difficult epistemologies, and learning what it is to be a mother/artist/teacher. As I look
towards my future as a mother, artist, and teacher, I seek direction and understanding from the authors of these works of literature that I review and find resonance with what they may offer for the field of art education as well as the classroom and artistic practice.

While much of the literature I reviewed speaks largely to the experience of biological mothering, I would like to acknowledge that there is no universal experience of motherhood. Though biological mothering may be considered the dominant narrative, people can become mothers through methods such as surrogacy, adoption, or uterus transplant. Likewise, I believe it is important to recognize trans-mothers, non-binary parents, fathers, chosen families, and parents of all kinds. Parenting in any form engenders systems of knowing.

I propose that through mothering pedagogy, the mother/artist/teacher could reconstruct her understanding of the discourses between mothering and art education and move towards a reflexive, embodied curriculum, unique to her particular circumstances—a mothering pedagogy that uses the knowledge she has gained from being a mother to inform her teaching and her art practice (Springgay & Freedman, 2012; Poling et al., 2012). Although incorporating mothering pedagogy in the classroom may prove challenging, hooks (1994) claimed that despite possible resistance, teaching practice that “respects and cares for the souls of our students [and ourselves]” (p. 13) is not only beneficial to students and teachers alike, but is crucial in constructing an environment for deep learning.

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3 While I recognize the complexity of the domain of mothering, I will be using she/her/hers pronouns to refer to the mother/artist/teacher for uniformity throughout this paper.

4 I recognize that the knowledge of mothering I refer to does not include potentially negative attributes of mothering.
Fragmentation of Mothers

Some authors agree mothers who are teachers are not one more than the other (Grumet, 1988; Poling et al., 2012); rather, the intersections of these discourses are complex and variable. The mother/artist/teacher’s identity is only “partially defined” (Poling et al., p. 67) by each of the roles she plays. Grumet (1988) claimed that a discourse about mother-educators (and it can be assumed, mother/artist/teachers) that excludes either love and caring or frustration and disappointment would be too limited to describe their experiences.

Pillay (2007) argued against restricted conceptions of the thinking of mothers, stating that “thinking in dichotomies and dualities diminishes understanding” (p. 41). She points out that this duality has been constructed by the perceived need to position mothering and thinking in opposition to each other, identifying these false binaries as “mind/body, reason/emotion, intellect/passion” (Pillay, 2007, p. 47).

Jeremiah (2006) used the term ‘m/other’ to describe the fracturing of a woman’s identity into ‘mother’ or ‘other,’ implying that such a binary may be damaging, reinforcing views of motherhood and teaching as separate. Franklin (2003) said of fragmentation that if a woman subscribes to the fiction of binaries, attempting to ‘balance’ her motherhood with her teaching, she “[denies herself] a richness of purpose and surrenders others to an epistemology of expedience” (p. 19); she described this experience as a “disembodied education” (p. 19).

As Grumet (1988) said, “To bring what we know to where we live has not always been the project of curriculum, for schooling … has functioned to repudiate the body, the place where it lives, and the people who care for it” (p. 128). hooks (1994), referencing Thich Nhat Hanh, called instead for a wholeness in teaching because of its focus on the teacher’s well-being, presuming that
a teacher who has taken care of herself will then be more capable of caring for others. The framework of mother/artist/teacher may offer a more useful narrative, rejecting a disembodied, binary way of thinking to write motherhood and artist teacher into one story.

### Mothering Pedagogy

Grumet (1988) defined mothering pedagogy as “[drawing] that knowledge of women’s experience of reproduction and nurturance into the epistemological systems and curricular forms that constitute the discourse and practice of public education” (p. 2). Artist educators Poling, Guyas, and Keys (2012) further explored this subject, describing the goal of mothering pedagogy as to discover a “more centered and holistic place somewhere in the ambivalence of defining our subjectivities as mother-educators within the context of mutuality that is beneficial, although not equal, to both entities—mothering and education” (p. 68).

Mothering pedagogy arouses a “creative and experimental way of thinking about teaching and learning” (Springgay & Freedman, 2012, p. 14). Though some sources emphasize methods of embodied pedagogy while others emphasize a curricula of caring and nurturing, these methods do not seem to be mutually exclusive and might be fused to generate a more complete vision of mothering pedagogy.

### Relationality of Mothering and Teaching

Caring relationships between mother/artist/teachers and their students are critical to learning (Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1984; Poling et al., 2012). Poling et al. (2012) defined care as “a heightened emotional need to/for protect(ion), attend/attention, and love” (p. 69). Poling et al. (2012) pointed out the correlations between parenting and teaching, expressing that goals of both raising children and in cultivating success in students are rooted in an intrinsic sense of caring.
These correlations are supported by care theorist, Noddings (1984), who emphasized that learning should be grounded in authentic care in which the “cared-for” (p. 78) feels the concern that the one caring has for their well-being. Furthermore, Poling et al. (2012) suggested that caring teacher-student relationships in the arena of art education can be particularly positive, allowing for both teacher and student to learn and evolve; they claimed that the bonds formed through mothering impact the way mother/artist/teachers practice as educators. The relationship between mother and child is complex; an entanglement of subjectivities (Grumet, 1988; Poling et al., 2012). To describe the nexus of the labors of mothers at home, in their classrooms, and in their artwork, Poling et al. (2012) used the term “m/otherwork,” which they define as “the intertwining, holistic, and symbiotic relationship between mothers that are academics, their students, their scholarship, and their artistic practices” (p. 67). M/otherwork offers a possible way to describe the mother/artist/teacher’s experience without overlooking the relationality in her roles.

‘Symbiosis’ is used in much of the literature (Grumet, 1988; Maudlin, 2012; Poling et al., 2012) to discuss relationships between mother or teacher and child or student. As Poling et al. (2012) indicated, there are different categories of symbiotic relationships; the types they explore include mutualism, signifying a relationship that is beneficial for both parties, and parasitism, indicating a relationship that is beneficial for one party but harmful for the other5. The flow of care mirrors these categories, however the authors argued that these relationships are “changing and fluid” (Poling et al., 2012, p. 67) and are particular to the people who experience them.

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5 Interestingly, the authors do not address commensalism, a type of symbiotic relationship in which one party benefits and the other neither receives benefit nor harm.
**Embodied Pedagogy**

Other sources offer an embodied approach as the key to mothering pedagogy (Franklin, 2003; Gerald, 2003; Maudlin, 2012; Springgay & Freedman, 2012). An awareness of the physicality of mothering, teaching, and learning is a common thread running through these texts.

Freedman and Holmes (2003) described the “best learning situations” as “those in which teacher and student acknowledged and approved of one another’s bodies and minds” (p. 2). Their argument called for teachers to accept and care for the bodies around them, their own included, by acknowledging the presence of the physical bodies in the classroom and being committed to trying to make that classroom a place that listens to and meets the needs of those bodies (Freedman & Holmes, 2003).

Maudlin (2012) and Grumet (1988) agree that the test-centric education system of United States public schools has created a sterile environment with little place for bodies in the classroom. It treats all students equally, demanding that they submit to the same rules and standards, often neglecting to see individuals with different types of bodies; different genitalia, different colors of skin, different abilities. Teachers and students are not floating minds. They bring their whole bodies with them to class each day. Education is not, as Maudlin (2012) puts it, “a process of disengaging the brain from the physical body” (p. 39), but a space whole people come together to learn; where the physical and intellectual intersect.

Motherhood clearly is not only an experience of the mind, but a bodily one as well; pregnancy, labor, and breastfeeding are a typical part of biological mothering. Although a teacher might be able to go through her day giving little thought to her body, whether she realizes it or not, the body plays a critical role in how students and teachers interact with the content, the
environment, and each other. Pregnancy in particular has a place in the literature on mothering and embodied curriculum. Pregnant pedagogy, which is addressed by Maudlin (2012) “refers back to the embodied subject and the larger contexts from which it is inseparable” (p. 39), recognizing the body and its integration in the social, cultural, and material settings of education.

**Disclosure**

According to Maudlin (2012), incorporating a mothering pedagogy in the classroom involves disclosure, flexibility, and dialogue. Maudlin (2012) proposes that the process of disclosure, or naming the subjectivities of our own bodies, may be able to “undermine the isolating and alienating fiction of normalcy and bring [mother/artist/teachers] into a more intimate relationship with ourselves and others” (p. 41). Disclosure may look like a mother/artist/teacher whose sick child kept her up all night admitting that she is feeling particularly tired that day or a pregnant artist/teacher who is experiencing joint pain sitting while she teaches. As Maudlin (2012) implied, by allowing herself to be transparent in what she is feeling, a mother/artist/teacher may start to break down the boundaries structured to confine the body within the typical school curriculum. Similarly, hooks (1994) said that an educational space that is empowering for teachers and students involves teachers being vulnerable and encouraging their students to take risks as well. Noddings (1984) addressed the idea of vulnerability in the context of caring pedagogy, explaining that vulnerability may be heightened by caring, increasing the possibility for being hurt, but also increasing the possibility for “strength and hope” (p. 33), which she related to a shift in motivation in parenting and teaching, allowing “motive energy” (p. 33) to be shared.

Gerald (2003) wrote about her experiences as a pregnant teacher, reflecting on negative evaluations from students with comments pertaining to her pregnancy, which she attributed to the
lack of disclosure she had with her classes, speaking with regret of the loss of closeness she usually felt with her students:

> If I had discussed the pregnancy with them, would they (and I) have been more comfortable in the class? Would that more open, embodied, and feminist approach have resulted in better evaluations and, more important, a better learning experience for both the students and me? (Gerald, 2003, p. 184)

Gerald considered hooks’ (1994) book, *Teaching to Transgress*, which emphasized the importance of a pedagogy in which teachers and students see each other as whole people. hooks (1994) proposed that this “engaged pedagogy” (p. 15) would defy the educational structures that seemed to “uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization” (p. 16). Gerald (2003) posited that by succumbing to this forcible detachment of mind from body, disregarding her pregnancy in order to seem more professional, she worked in opposition to that holistic pedagogy, against wholeness in the classroom (Gerald, 2003).

Maudlin (2012) advocated that, to facilitate wholeness through disclosure, a teacher could urge her students to question assumptions they might have about what education means as she does the same. Whitlock (2012) agreed, explaining that the acts and feelings that constitute motherhood might be viewed as “contested, unfamiliar, unnatural sites by which identity is destabilized and reinscribed” (p. 191), and suggested that a mothering discourse may allow us to “think about unnatural discourses of curriculum and teaching to disrupt standardized, universal, solidified, and normalized educational practices” (p. 191). A pedagogy with an embodied discourse may subvert the conventional educational practices that homogenize students by encouraging honesty and openness in the classroom (Franklin, 2003; Gerald; 2003; Maudlin, 2012; Springgay & Freedman,
2012; Whitlock, 2012). This pedagogical approach highlights individuality, working in opposition to standardization in schools, which expects all students and teachers to learn and function the same way.

**Flexibility**

Another step towards a mothering pedagogy might be the presence of flexibility in the classroom (Maudlin, 2012). Flexibility may appear many different ways; perhaps in allowing students autonomy in deciding when to take restroom breaks, providing multiple seating options, or steering away from uncompromising due dates. hooks (1994) asserted that agendas should be flexible in order to recognize students’ “particularity as individuals” (p. 7). Rigidity in the classroom may damage relationships between students and teachers; flexibility, on the other hand, may remove the teacher from the dictatorial role of giver of knowledge and redistribute power more evenly, devising an educational environment where students and teacher all feel valued while creating possibility for excitement in learning (hooks, 1994; Maudlin, 2012).

Flexibility may also refer to stretching the boundaries of the educational space. Grumet (1988) imagined the span between home and school as a shift from “domesticity to public politics, from reproduction to production, from private to public life” (p. 164). Pillay (2007), referencing Jiron-King, explained that there can be flexibility in the classroom if we look for it; when mother/artist/teachers reimagine education as a part of their lives as a whole, allowing overlap between family space and teaching space, they may find the versatility they need to thrive. Grumet (1988) suggested that intertwining mothering and teaching labors may work to bridge those gaps, creating more of a “middle space” (p. 164) where students may be more comfortable transitioning from their families into the public world.
Dialogue

Finally, mothering pedagogy may call for dialogue in the classroom. Maudlin (2012) put dialogue in terms of motherhood, describing the relationship between mother and child as “the kind of meaningful, personal exchange that does not value the contribution of one individual over another” (p. 43). Although this description fails to acknowledge the variable nature of mother/child relationships, Maudlin’s (2012) suggestion that a mutualistic relationship could be extended into the classroom offers a different way for teachers to relate to their students. Likewise, Grumet (1988) addressed the way mother/artist/teachers treat their own children as opposed to how they treat their students, proposing that instead of communicating with “other people’s children” (p. 164) like acquaintances or strangers, they could communicate with their students as they might with their own children, with “subtle, flexible, responsive language” (p. 164).

Franklin (2003) illustrated an embodied dialogue where people relate with each other as “somebody to somebody” (p. 17). Similarly, hooks (1994) contended that excitement within a classroom community depends on acknowledging each other’s presence and taking interest in each other. Prefabricated, off-the-shelf curricula reduce people from somebody to some-disembodied-thing, denying individual systems of knowing (Reynolds, 2003). A mothering curriculum could provide opportunity for students and teachers to come together in critical and compassionate conversation.

Mothering Pedagogy Conclusion

While the discourses of mothering and art education can be complicated and fluid (Grumet, 1988; Maudlin, 2012; Poling et al., 2012), mothering pedagogy may provide opportunity for a mother/artist/teacher to inscribe into her teaching the knowledge that comes from the particularities
of her experiences. Through embodied, relational practice, a mother/artist/teacher may construct an educational environment that holds opportunity for disclosure, flexibility, and dialogue for her and her students. Furthermore, I propose that reflection through the art-based research of self-portraiture may be an important piece of this holistic art education and could provide means for a mother/artist/teacher to better her understanding of herself and her teaching practice. As I continue along this path as a mother/artist/teacher, I hope to find a place within the sphere of mothering pedagogy, where art education meets motherhood meets the intricate, unique self of the mother/artist/teacher.

Arts-Based Research

Overview

The methodology I will employ in this body of research falls under the category of arts-based research (ABR). In this overview, I aim to provide a broad description of ABR, including its origins, historical context, and discussions regarding its place in academia.

Barone (2010) defined ABR as “an approach to curriculum inquiry that looks to the arts instead of to the social sciences for its investigational and representational strategies and its epistemological premises” (p. 44). ABR is a methodology that employs artistic practice as the primary means of investigation (McNiff, 2013; Sullivan 2005). Art is present in all phases of research; data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation (Leavy, 2009). Leavy (2009) explained that the arts provide researchers “a broader palette of investigative and communication tools with which to garner and relay a range of social meanings” (pp. 11-12).

The purpose of ABR is to allow the audience to participate in the cognitive and emotional experiences of others to find a more authentic understanding of their lived realities: Barone and
Eisner described this as *empathetic participation* (Barone, 2010; Barone & Eisner, 2011). What art can offer which traditional scholarly writing often cannot, Leavy (2009) asserted, is *resonance*.

Barone and Eisner (2011) wrote, “To the carpenter, the world is made of wood” (p. 4). To the artist, then, the world is made of art. Barone and Eisner (2011) argued that artists should be able to conduct research through their own frame of reference. Leavy (2009) described a “disjuncture” (p. vii) between her artist-self and the way she conducted research before coming to ABR—ABR, she claimed, has the ability to connect the artist-researcher to their work. For me, ABR came as a relief, a way to examine pertinent issues that came naturally to me.

**Background to ABR.**

The term arts-based research was coined by Eisner in 1993 at Stanford University, looking to forge a way for art educators to harness the capability of the arts to reach beyond words to portray experience in a way that might not be possible through other forms of representation, “deepening and complicating the conversation about curriculum terms, issues, and phenomena” (Barone, 2010, p. 44). Although some of his peers urged him to call the methodology arts-based inquiry, Eisner (2006) insisted on using the word *research* because he felt *inquiry* diminished the work in comparison to more traditional hermeneutical research often valued most highly in universities.

ABR emerged from Eisner’s earlier conception of art educational research based on the dialogical practices of (art) connoisseurship and criticism (Eisner, 2006). Educational connoisseurship and criticism was a start, but Eisner (2006) ultimately hoped to develop an approach to educational research grounded in the arts and that used “aesthetically crafted forms to reveal aspects of practice that mattered educationally” (p. 11). Eisner (2006) promoted
methodological pluralism, wanting to provide a space for students and faculty to move beyond traditional boundaries of method and welcome the possibilities of “alternative ways of knowing” (p. 11).

Since the first Arts-Based Research Institute at Stanford University in 1993 (Eisner, 2006), many have joined the conversation about ABR—(Allen, 2012; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 2013; Sullivan, 2005) Although ABR originated in art education, researchers across the social sciences have begun to employ its methods as well.

**Challenges and criticisms.**

Assessment and credibility are key criticisms identified by multiple scholars in the field of ABR (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Eisner, 2006; Leavy, 2009; Sullivan, 2005). Eisner (2006) confronted two major issues surrounding discussions of “believability” (p. 14) of ABR; validity, and generalization. Generalization in ABR, instead of occurring through measures of probability as in quantitative methods, comes from the audience locating themselves within the experiences of another through a sensual and emotional narrative account—empathetic participation (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Eisner, 2006). Eisner (2006) broke down validation into the three components of referential adequacy, the presence of a clear, reasonable claim; structural corroboration, the sufficient evidence to back up that claim; and consensual validation; overlap with other researchers supporting similar claims. Artist researcher Pat Allen (2012) offered these four criteria for delineating ABR: “Passionate interest or question, art as the method for enquiry, disciplined adherence to a clear method, [and] systematic evaluation of the process” (p. 17). Sullivan (2005) posited systematic inquiry as a common thread running through all visual arts research.
Speaking of the debate around the credibility of ABR, Sullivan (2005) claimed that the existence of controversy about arts inquiry is evidence that the academic possibilities of art are being vastly undervalued. Sullivan (2005) cited isolation of visual arts programs in higher education as a key cause of misconceptions and exclusions of visual arts from scholarly research.

Like our students who endure the systematic standardization in public schools, educational researchers face the threat of methodological standardization that denies alternative ways of knowing. Eisner (2006) wrote, “Clearly, arts-based research is an expression of the need for diversity and a tendency to push towards a de-standardization of method” (p. 16). Eisner (2006) went on to describe the line that researchers who use alternative methods must walk—how far can we de-standardize research and still be accepted as legitimate?

**A/r/tography**

The category of ABR that I most closely identify this body of research with is a/r/tography. A/r/tography is a type of art-based educational research that is founded in the practices of artists, researchers, and teachers (Irwin, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Pinar, 2004). “A/r/t” is a metaphor for artist-researcher-teacher with the slashes in a/r/tography representing folds between the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin, 2010; Irwin, 2004). The metaphor of the slash as intended in the term a/r/tography extends to the subject of my research to describe the folds that connect, separate, and blend the practices of mother, artist, and teacher—I employ slashes in the term mother/artist/teacher that I use throughout this research to describe my own multiple roles.

A/r/tography recognizes that artist-researcher-teachers exist within *in-between spaces*, “spaces that are neither this nor that, but this and that” (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). These in-between spaces that open
amidst the roles of artist, teacher, and researcher offer opportunities for artist-researcher-teachers to explore new territories of educational theory and practice (Irwin, 2010; Irwin, 2004; Pinar, 2004).

A/r/tography, while situated within the category of ABR, is also tied to forms of action research, phenomenology, and post-structuralism (Irwin, 2004; Pinar, 2004). Currere, the verb form of curriculum, is central to a/r/tography which understands educational, artistic, and research practices as “active, contextually situated, and creative” (Irwin, 2010, p. 42; Pinar, 1994). An active, living inquiry, a/r/tography allows for initial plans and research questions to evolve, with a/r/tographers often working on data collection and analysis simultaneously (Irwin, 2010; Irwin, 2004).

A/r/tography emphasizes relationality; relationality between aspects of the artist-researcher-teacher’s identity, and relationality between the artist-researcher-teacher and her students (Springgay, 2004). I feel that these relationships, among identity roles and among people, are tangled up together, each impacting how the others play out.

A common thread through much of a/r/tographic research is a deep investigation of self (Irwin; 2010; Lymburner, 2004; Porter, 2004; Springgay, 2004; Wilson, 2004). Lymburner (2004) wrote that the goal of her “intense self examination” (p. 76) was “to comprehend more deeply who [she is] and what [she believes]” (p. 76). By closely examining her own subjectivities, a teacher may be able to better understand her personal context within her classroom.

Wilson (2004), used a/r/tography to study her motherhood, making non-representational, personal quilts to speak to her experiences of having and losing a child with a disability. Wilson (2004) did not force a connection in her art to her teaching—the tie to her educational practice comes from the connectedness of her mother-self with her teacher-self, the roles inexorably tied.
Wilson’s (2004) research, like my own, examined her identity in relationship with her experiences as a mother, realizing that those experiences play a considerable role in forming who she is as an educator.

De Cosson (2004) offered an example of how an a/r/tographer might use format and organization in their writing as an aesthetic and artistic expression, playing with different fonts, placement of text on the page, as well as the interjection of images. In footnotes, de Cosson explained his deliberate use of alternative formatting and compared his academic writing to his sculpture, saying that like his sculptures, “so does a page come alive with the performativity of the fonts at play. . . their rhythms and interactions enhance the readability and enjoyment of the text” (p. 127).

I was resistant at first to situate my work within a/r/tography in short because I thought a/r/tography was too challenging. I like clear answers; practicality. With a/r/tography, there is no exact template to follow. Instead of straight-forward answers, there are more questions. The ambiguity of a/r/tography made me uncomfortable. Barone and Eisner (2011) argued that vagueness, comfort with ambiguity, is critical to educational research. As I examined my intersecting roles, I realized that ambiguity was just what I needed.

**Becoming.**

*Becoming,* as conceptualized by philosopher, Deleuze, refers to an existential condition of in-between, famously illustrated through a metaphor of the interspecies mating of a wasp and an orchid, in which the two are inexorably and continuously connected in a cycle of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10). The orchid must deterritorialize, shedding its own image to form the image of a wasp; the wasp then reterritorializes
on that image, but deterritorializes again to become a part of the orchid’s reproductive system; then the orchid reterritorializes as the wasp transports its pollen—the process is a “becoming-wasp of the orchid and becoming-orchid of the wasp” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10).

Irwin (2013) presented a/r/tography through the lens of becoming, as conceptualized by Deleuze. Through this article, Irwin (2013) imagined an ongoing process of mapping out the rhizome of a/r/tography which she called cartography. By becoming, Irwin (2013) referred to the liminal space between past-something and future-something—dynamic and ongoing, like a/r/tography itself, living in the in-between. Semetsky (2006) explained becoming as “The subject-in-process, that is, as becoming, is always placed between two multiplicities, yet one term does not become the other; the becoming is something between the two…” (p. 6). Becoming is never finished, but always in process (Irwin, 2013).

Irwin (2013) discussed a research project she did alongside Donal O’Donoghue and Stephanie Springgay, titled Becoming Pedagogical. In Becoming Pedagogical, Irwin, O’Donoghue, and Springgay studied the experiences of preservice secondary art teachers as they are and become artists, researchers, and teachers (Irwin, 2013). Irwin (2013) described the study as being centered around “lingering in this evolving space of possibility, recognizing that one never ‘becomes’ but rather resides in a constant state of becoming pedagogical” (p. 203). Irwin (2013) asserted, and I agree, that considering teaching practice through a lens of becoming may encourage art educators to continuously reflect and improve, promoting creative inquiry in their classrooms.

I found the framework of becoming particularly relevant not only to my own a/r/tographic research practices, but also to the content of my research. I think the language of subject-in-process
is particularly poignant, applying to my statuses as preservice teacher, new mother, and evolving artist. Subject-in-process indicates that I have begun, but am not yet (nor will I ever be) complete.

**Portraiture**

In addition to a/r/tography, my research draws heavily on the methodology of portraiture, as conceptualized by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1993). Portraiture, which is grounded in phenomenology, provides an interdisciplinary lens with which to explore whole people with their nuances and eclectic natures (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, 1997)—it is a way of looking deeper into the lives of its subjects, providing a means of discovering profound understanding. Lawrence Lightfoot (1997) described the portrait that this kind of research produces as an “evolving image” (p. xv), illustrating that the overall image changes as the portrait is coming to be. Much like in a/r/tography where researchers “allow research questions to evolve as they simultaneously and continuously theorize what they are learning” (Irwin, 2010, p. 42), the portraitist enters the research with a clear theoretical framework and guiding research questions, “but fully expects (and welcomes) the adaptation of both her intellectual agenda and her methods” (Lawrence Lightfoot, 1997, p. 186). The portraitist, like the a/r/tographer, must be receptive to change, allowing the research to guide the evolving image as it takes shape.

Similar to a/r/tography which identifies and analyzes emerging patterns and themes (Irwin, 2010), a primary goal of portraiture is to extract emergent themes from data around which to organize a narrative, with those themes simultaneously coming from the data and structuring the data (Given, 2008; Lawrence Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The iterative process of gathering themes and patterns from data is a “dynamic process of receptivity, negotiation, and accommodation” (Lawrence Lightfoot, 1997, p. 186).
There are five key features of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole (Given, 2008; Lawrence Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). 1) Context refers to the setting of the study—physical, geographic, temporal, historical, cultural, and aesthetic—as well as the personal context, or subjectivities of the researcher (Given, 2008). 2) Voice is the researcher’s perspective of the story. Through voice and thick description the researcher gives authenticity to the story and allows readers to connect (Given, 2008). 3) Relationship refers to the importance of developing relationships with participants (Given, 2008). 4) Emergent themes are the patterns and threads the researcher identifies in the data that give the data structure (Given, 2008). The researcher listens for “resonant metaphors” (Given, 2008, p. 645) that reveal something about the participants’ experience. 5) The aesthetic whole is the product of portraiture, having four dimensions including conception, structure, form, and cohesion (Given, 2008).

**Self-Portraiture**

I recognize a considerable amount of overlap between the methodologies of portraiture and a/r/tography—in both, the researcher extracts themes and identifies patterns as a form of data analysis; both place significant value on the subjectivities of the researcher; both have roots in art and education, both aim to portray human experience in a more complete, authentic way; and both emphasize accessibility for a broader audience; among other parallels (Given, 2008; Irwin, 2010; Irwin, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). I feel that their similarities can allow aspects of portraiture to blend effectively with a/r/tography.

I apply the term *self-portraiture* to describe the particular fusion of arts-based portraiture I employ in this body of research. Self-portraiture as a method of inquiry is entrenched in the visual
art practice of creating a self-portrait. I see it as way of composing a likeness of myself as the artist-researcher through means of reflexive visual and written representation.

Self-portraits, whether literal or metaphorical, act as a mirror to the artist’s inward self. Poling et al. (2012), referencing Pinar, looked at the act of self-portraiture in terms of its relation to curriculum, describing this exploration of self as an act of currere, “a form of autobiographical study that aids in the understanding of educational experience” (p. 68). Through the art practice of making self-portraits, the mother/artist/teacher can be receptive and open to herself (Muri, 2007). Scotti (2016), who used art-based research to explore the lives of mothers, emphasized the importance of self-portraiture in art-based research, explaining that because the artist acts as the observer while she is, at the same time the one being observed, “self-portraiture … serves as a powerful tool of self-exploration, and construction of the self” (Scotti, 2016, p. 67).

Portraiture “blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xv). Although in my research I am focused on the blurring of boundaries and capturing the intricacy and nuance of human experience, I am far less interested in science and empiricism. Instead, the self-portraiture that I characterize leans on ABR and the assertion of Barone and Eisner (2011) that ABR is not meant to replace or supplement conventional methods of empirical research, but stand as its own distinct methodology that allows artists to perform research in a way that comes naturally to them.

Lawrence Lightfoot (1997) emphasized the researcher’s responsibility to look for “goodness” (p. xvi). While I agree that a focus on goodness rather than a deficit-based approach is invaluable to educational research in a school setting, I feel that it is important for my self-portrait
to depict the full range of experiences I have as a mother/artist/teacher, regardless of whether they might be perceived as positive or negative.

**Mother-Artists**

A review of relevant literature may more typically include peer-reviewed publications from books and library databases, but an arts-based thesis stands at the thin line between research and art. Just as reviewing literature helps to build my foundation of knowledge and situate my work within the scope of related research, looking at other artists who are making similar artwork to my own is beneficial to understanding the context of my art. A relevant sphere of work that I came across in my review of literature, is that of mother-artists. I relate to many of the experiences mother-artists portray, which I find helps to inform and inspire my artmaking and I see my art fitting in with this niche of art about motherhood. The artwork I produce about my three intersecting identities of mother/artist/teacher, visually appear to deal more with my mother and artist identities. My teaching identity is deeply tangled in the subjectivities that my mother and artist identities produce, so work that may seem outwardly to be about mothering and art, is also about my identity as preservice teacher and profoundly impacts my teaching practice.

Following various social media threads pertaining to motherhood, I discovered a profusion of artists making artwork that examines their experiences with motherhood. Through a recommendation made by a connection on social media, I was led to the Artist Parent Index (Irvin, 2016), a searchable database of artists who create work about parenthood founded by artist, Sarah Irvin. From there, I was introduced to the work of artists such as Monika Stockton Maddox, who transformed an abandoned house into a site for facing and processing the grief of miscarriage, titled *Monikahouse*; Kasey Jones, whose multimedia work confronts the marginalization of mothers and
women; and Madeline Donahue, whose colorful paintings caricaturize the absurd physical
closeness and intimacy of caring for a child; among many others (Donahue, 2016; Irvin, 2016;
Jones, 2016; Maddox, 2016).

In my search for other mother/artist/teachers, I was directed to the Instagram handle of
Lauren Frances Evans, Assistant Professor of Art at Samford University (Evans, n.d., lauren
frances evans). Mother, artist, and higher education art teacher, Evans started an additional
Instagram handle, artist.parent.academic, and a corresponding Facebook group, The
Artist/Parent/Academic Network, dedicated to providing a space for “emerging, established, and
aspiring Artist/Parent/Professors to come together, to share resources and advice on all things
academia” (Evans, 2019; Evans, n.d., artist / parent / academic). Through these groups, I was able
to introduce myself and my research, connect with other artist-parent-teachers, and discover a
wealth of writings and artwork related to parenthood and teaching.

Gaps

While there are several mother/artist/teachers like me examining their experiences and the
intersections of their mothering, artistic, and educational practices through visual art (Evans, 2019;
Evans, n.d., artist / parent / academic; Poling et al., 2012; Springgay, 2004; Wilson, 2004), what
makes my research distinct from the research of these other mother/artist/teachers are my status as a
preservice teacher and the framing of my research timeline around my pregnancy, the birth of my
child, and his infancy. During the time of this body of research, I am entering into motherhood,
learning who I am as a teacher while I engage in various teaching practica, and I am seeing myself
change as an artist alongside my other developing roles. I am in a unique state of becoming (Irwin,
2013; Semetsky, 2006)—becoming mother, becoming teacher, becoming artist.
In a/r/tography and other forms of autoethnographic research, the researchers offer glimpses into their own experiences, identities, and subjectivities, each one presenting new information, making moments for their readers/viewers to connect with. In that way, each mother/artist/teacher’s research helps to shape and color an image of the experiences of mother/artist/teachers. My voice, my experiences, my narrative are not exactly like any other person’s and contribute distinctive opportunities for empathetic participation, promoting a more complete understanding of mothers in art education.

My research could reveal a more holistic way of training art teachers. For those involved with educating preservice art teachers, my story could illuminate for them strengths and challenges particular to mothers and pregnant women in art education programs, perhaps enabling professors to better serve students like me. Style (1996) offered the metaphor of curriculum as windows and mirrors, emphasizing the importance for students to see themselves and people unlike them in their curriculum. Acknowledging the presence of mother/artist/teachers in preservice art education programs could open a window for preservice art teachers who are not mothers to better understand their classmates, perhaps removing the stigma of other. For preservice mother/artist/teachers, or those with similar circumstances, perhaps my words and artwork could allow them to see themselves reflected in their art education training.

Furthermore, teaching, like mothering, is arguably a labor of care (Franklin, 2003; Grumet, 1988; hooks, 1994; Noddings, 1984). As they move towards future K-12 teaching positions, preservice art educators, mothers and non-mothers alike, will find themselves in roles of caring for children. Whether or not they have children of their own, teachers care for children day in and day out. Some may even find that their students view them as a mother or parent. I feel that a primary
goal of a teacher training program is to teach people who are becoming educators how to best care for their students. By looking to mothering practice as an example of caring, art education programs could add further resonance and dimension to how they train teachers.
CHAPTER 3

DELIVERY: METHODOLOGY & METHODS

In this chapter, I will describe the methodology and methods I will employ during this research. I will outline my initial research plan, the evolution of my research process, and the consequent methods that emerged.

Methodology

At the start of my research, I received examples of successful qualitative theses from my MAE program. Although they were meant to help me get started, as I read through their tables of contents, I was paralyzed as a researcher. I tried to start writing, but I just couldn’t make my ideas fit the template. Finally, I looked up the University rules for thesis formatting and organization—as it turned out, there were none. I was set free. When I realized that my thesis itself could be a work of art, my research truly began.

A/r/tography

I situated my research methodology within the scope of a/r/tography. A/r/tography, is an active, creative, and contextually situated approach to arts-based educational research centered around the practices of artists, researchers, and teachers, represented by the “a/r/t” of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2010; Leavy, 2009; Pinar, 2004). The slashes in a/r/tography, which inspired my to use slashes in mother/artist/teacher, are a metaphor for the folds between the three roles of artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin, 2010; Irwin, 2004). Grounded in phenomenology and action research, a/r/tography is “active, contextually situated, and creative” (Irwin, 2004, p. 42). Its
emphasis on relationality and profound self-examination (Irwin; 2010; Lymburner, 2004; Porter, 2004; Springgay, 2004; Wilson, 2004) made a/r/tography an ideal means of investigation into my interwoven roles of mother, artist, and teacher.

A/r/tography allowed me to approach research as an extension of my artistic practice. “... Traditional qualitative research methods create a working space for some, still there are the others. Others for whom these research conventions make what was once a passion start to feel like a job” (Leavy, 2009, p. 1). Like Leavy (2009), I found that traditional qualitative research methods squashed my research passion. A/r/tography offered a means of inquiry that worked with rather than against my creative process. I could be messy, I could work on a dozen things at once, I could change my plans, I could experiment, I could play.

**Portraiture**

My research methodology also drew on portraiture as conceived by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1993). Portraiture, an approach to social and educational research based in the artistic practice of creating a portrait, aims to produce an image of a person or group of people that captures their nuances and encourages deep understanding (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, 1997). Like a/r/tography, portraiture has roots in phenomenology, focusing on the particular experiences of people (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, 1997). Also like a/r/tography, portraiture requires the researcher to be open to change, adapting their methods and plans as they gain new knowledge through the research (Irwin, 2010; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The portrait is an “evolving image” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. xv), shaped by the understandings the portraightist finds in their research.
Portraiture has five key elements: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole (Given, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). In my application of portraiture, I addressed context, voice, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole. Since my research was autobiographical, I did not employ the device of relationship, that refers to the importance of developing relationships with participants (Givens, 2008). Through an in-depth personal statement in the introduction chapter, I situated the research within my personal context. By including descriptive, candid journal entries I gave authenticity to the voice of my research. I addressed emergent themes in the resonant metaphor section of the results and discussion chapter. The aesthetic whole relates to the structural, formal, and visual choices I made such as structuring chapter titles around the process of labor; deviating from standard A.P.A. formatting to include alternative fonts and visual elements through the text; and the organization of visuals, journal entries, and analyses.

Self-Portraiture

I used the term self-portraiture to describe the blend of a/r/tography and portraiture I employed in this body of research. I chose to apply the term self-portraiture instead of autoethnography because of self-portraiture’s ability to recall the visual art form of a self-portrait, thus grounding the methodology in art practice. I see self-portraiture as a way of composing a likeness of myself as the artist-researcher through means of reflexive visual art and written representation.

Self-portraiture attempts to create resonance and opportunities for empathetic participation through artwork and thick description (Barone, 2010; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Given, 2008; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The process of self-portraiture mirrored that of my
artistic practice—cyclical, repetitive, and revolving, with many possible entry points. As in my creative process, vocalizing was critical to my process. I often found it necessary to talk through my thoughts with professors and colleagues. Like in a/r/tography and in portraiture (Irwin, 2010; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997), I worked simultaneously on multiple phases of research, allowing the research to change shape and evolve as the research progressed.

Many scholars have written about the potential transformative power of arts-based research and portraiture (Barone; 2010; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Clover, 2006; Given, 2008; Irwin, 2013; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 2000; Porter, 2004; Springgay, 2004; Sullivan, 2005; Sullivan, 2004). Both have unique capabilities for drawing attention to stereotypes and misunderstandings of marginalized social groups. Likewise, Self-Portraiture may carve a path for more people to be acknowledged and their stories to be shared.

Methods

Overview of Methods

In the methods section of this chapter, I will detail the research methods I employed, including my initial plan, evolution of methods, and the research methods I ultimately employed. I will also discuss my approaches to writing the body of text and exhibition of the artwork.

The primary methods I employed in this body of research are artmaking, journaling. Through frequent, descriptive journaling, I captured experiences and observations I encountered in my practice as a mother. I created artwork as a means of investigating my experiences as a mother/artist/teacher and my evolving identity. The artwork and select journal entries act simultaneously as data and as a representation of my findings.
Initial Research Plan

A/r/tographers and portraitists alike begin with a clear methodological plan and guiding questions to frame their research, anticipating that their initial plan will inevitably change as they allow new knowledge and understandings to restructure their methods (Irwin, 2010; Lawrence Lightfoot, 1997). Entering into this research, I developed a clear and structured design for how I would approach data collection and analysis. This plan evolved as my understanding of my methodologies grew and as the data I collected reshaped.

My original research proposal included a specific schedule for data collection, including 30 minutes of uninterrupted journaling twice a week, and artmaking twice a week. I adhered to this agenda for a short time before abandoning it and adapting.

Guiding Questions

- Who am I as a mother/artist/teacher? What do my particular experiences look like in my home life? In my art practice?
- How does being a mother impact the choices I make in my art practice in terms of artistic integrity? What types of challenges does mothering present in my artmaking process? What types of possibilities does it create?
- How might the knowledge constructed by my experiences as a mother and artist be integrated into my teaching practice as an art educator?
Evolution of Methods

I found that the plan I had set, although well-intentioned and sensible for the baby I had when I wrote the proposal, was quickly outdated and unreasonable as my child grew and our schedules changed. An old adage I have heard time and time again rings true here—the only thing constant is change. Mothering, as I have been continually discovering, is highly reactive. Despite my best attempts to establish routines and plan ahead, those plans seem to inevitably crumble. Thus, my initial research plan transformed into a more flexible and responsive plan.

Artmaking.

I initially thought the primary medium of the body of artwork for this research would be painting. This seemed like a reasonable expectation since painting had been my studio emphasis in my undergraduate studio art degree. I realized ahead of time that I would need to adapt my materials because of risks associated with toxicity of oil paint and mediums, my preferred media in my previous art practice. I equipped myself instead with safer acrylic paints. Although I enjoy the physicality and process of stretching my own canvases and have preferred in the past to work on a larger scale, I purchased pre-stretched, primed 18” x 24” canvases on which to paint, recognizing that I would not be wielding a drill or staple gun around an infant.

At first, I loved painting with my son. It had been too long since I had last painted and I dived into my work. Transitioning to acrylic presented few challenges and I got wrapped up in the excitement of building color and carving shapes, and the sensuality of the paint itself. Wesley would crawl and play around my studio space or I could hold him and he would happily watch my brushes. I was even able to nurse him and keep painting. It was not long before he outgrew that situation, however. He began climbing, pulling things down, grabbing paintbrushes, and refusing
to sit still. I tried rearranging my studio space, adding baby proofing devices, moving books off of low shelves, securing cords; but I was never more than a step ahead.

As my research progressed, I had to give myself space to adapt my art practice to my context as a mother and preservice art teacher. I completed only a few pieces before I recognized that my process was not working and adopted new methods. Instead of a paintbrush or a DSLR camera, my smartphone became my primary artmaking tool. I found that my phone offered portability and convenience necessary for making art and caring for a small child and completing graduate coursework. There was no set-up required to start work on my phone—I just had to pick it up and press a button to open an application, and when I needed to change tasks, all I had to do was set the phone down. So, if I was in the middle of working on a piece and Wesley began to cry or flipped the dog’s water bowl (again), I could tend to him without any detriment to the artwork.

Furthermore, the phone as an artmaking tool opened up a different range of possibilities for my art. I could capture aspects of experience like the aural experience of Wesley making odd
sounds as he slept or the rising tension of his crying that I could not have as effectively through
painting, through media such as audio and video recordings.

**Journaling.**

At first, the approach to journaling I had planned seemed to work. I was able to leave
Wesley with Nick and cloister myself in my little office in the corner of our spare bedroom to write
uninterrupted. However, I quickly found this method to be inadequate. It proved increasingly more
difficult to take a full thirty minutes away from distractions. I had important ideas and observations
at odd times of day (or night) when I could not necessarily take a full break to write or get to my
notebook. I also ran into the problem of transcribing my handwritten entries in order to begin
working them into my written analysis.

I found that instead of using a physical journal (although I did continue to write some notes
with pen and paper), using an application on my phone was far more effective. Journaling and
notetaking on my phone allowed me the freedom to take a note nearly anywhere at nearly anytime.
I developed a habit of looking for and writing down ideas as they came. My entries were
somewhat irregular in frequency, but I noticed that most often, I wrote late at night after my son
and husband were both asleep, or in the morning when Wesley seems to play the most
independently.

My journal entries usually followed one of two types of model: The first was a more
structured approach, beginning with an anecdotal description of an event or experience, and
continuing with a brief analysis and remarks on their possible significance to art education. The
second was more of a stream of consciousness, drawing upon my background in creative writing.
Although much of how I journaled changed drastically from my initial plan, the format remained somewhat consistent.

**Exhibition.**

A common reality for a Master’s thesis is that the researcher pours tremendous effort into a body of research for it to be read only by their committee and perhaps a particularly kind partner, family member, or friend, and it goes on to gather dust on a shelf or be buried in the nebulous depths of ProQuest where other researchers may access it, but not usually the general public. My mother told me last year that she still had a box of bound copies of her Master’s thesis from the late 1980’s on a shelf in her office. I do not want that future for my thesis. In order to enact any sort of change, research has to actually have an audience. An exhibition will hopefully ensure that a wider range of people experience my research.

Although I feel that craft is important in arts-based inquiry, I may sacrifice refinement in some areas in order to commit to vulnerability and honesty. Because of my undergraduate emphasis in painting and digital photography, I am most confident in my mastery of those materials, however, I also included sound and video works because I feel that those media were the most appropriate choices for expressing certain aspects of my research.

**Composition of Texts**

I am a collector. A collageist. My scholarship is in a thousand pieces and the task before me is to collect those pieces and assemble them to create a whole picture.
In a/r/tography, the researcher typically collects and analyzes data concurrently (Irwin, 2010; Irwin, 2004), as is the case with this body of research during which I am working on multiple sections and phases all at once. Consequently, my writing process can seem rather messy—I see this process as a work of assemblage. My assemblage materials include journal entries, photographs, audio and video recordings, annotations of relevant literature, and other notes. Heaton (2002), who described her research as “messy texts,” said “. . . Initially my research resembles a puzzle, a collage of images and texts that do not seem to go together” (p. 2). Like Heaton, my scholarship is in a thousand pieces and my task is to collect them and put them together to reveal a final composition.

As I composed the assemblage of texts that became the written portion of my thesis, I was working with several outlines which I view as an armature for my assemblage. I proceeded, for the most part, from broadest to narrowest, laying out the structure before layering in detail. At any given time, I had at least a dozen tabs open on my computer as I bounced between sections and chapters, sticking in journal entries, images, thoughts, as I went along. It was a process of evolving understanding—although I started with an idea, I did not really know what my final product would look like until it was complete.

**Reflection**

At times, self-portraiture has been uncomfortable, even painful. There are parts of myself I did not want to examine, experiences I did not want to dredge up. There were times I felt that my work was unimportant—my voice insignificant. I looked at the art and writing I produced and wondered how it could be of value for anyone but me.
My connections with other mothers reminded me why I chose to undergo this labor of research. Some mothers I shared my work in progress with expressed to me that they could see themselves in my art and my words. By asserting the importance of my own voice, I recognize the significance of their voices. Accounts of my challenges, pain, achievements, and joy can reflect those experiences of other mothers who stand or have stood in a similar place to where I am now.

My friend and former professor Dr. Tina Thompson told me when I shared an image and excerpt I had been working on, “You are doing important work.” Although it has been hard sometimes for me to see, my labor is valuable.
CHAPTER 4

BIRTH: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

I was barely two months pregnant when I started my graduate studies in art education. With my developing identities as a mother and preservice art teacher, I sought an approach to art education that integrated my roles as a mother, an artist, and a teacher. Furthermore, I discovered what I felt to be problems with misrepresentation and underrepresentation of mothers in the field of art education. I feel that my unique position as a mother and preservice art teacher may allow me to promote awareness and better understanding of the experiences of mothers in preservice art education programs, enabling art education professors to better accommodate their students who are mothers and encouraging other preservice mother/artist/teachers to reflect on their own experiences and use them to inform their developing teaching practice. By forming a self-portrait of one mother/artist/teacher, I may begin to address problems with representation of mother/artist/teachers.

In this chapter, I will identify the resonant metaphors that surfaced during the course of my research; offer examples of observations from my mothering practice and their possible applications in art education; provide an artist statement describing the works of art which have emerged as a result of my inquiry and my artistic choices; present the main challenges I encountered as a mother in preservice art education; and pose questions that arose over the course of the research.

Resonant Metaphors

The purpose of this section is to illustrate the resonant metaphors and patterns that have shaped my data. These metaphors, labor, separation, the umbilical cord, circles, the ovum, and
pretending, illustrate my experiences as a mother/artist/teacher and the knowledge I gained through those experiences.

**Labor**

I am fascinated with labor stories. A labor story recalls a person’s experience of a pivotal event in their life. I have heard what feels like countless labor stories; some, I heard before I became pregnant with my son, but most came after—mothers seemed compelled all of a sudden to tell me their stories of shared, or soon to be shared, experience. These labor stories had some common elements; all began with a person who was pregnant, contained some sort of major event in the middle, and, usually, ended with a long-anticipated meeting with their child(ren). The stories involved waiting, pain, joy, or perhaps sorrow or regret. Yet, even with their similarities, each story is unique.

Contemplating the phenomena of labor stories, particularly my own, one of the more significant conclusions I came to is that they have no true beginning or end. Although the portion recounted typically starts with the onset of contractions and ends with the birth of a baby (or babies), the underlying story is a tale of becoming. Labor is a process through which a person becomes a mother. Labor is active, ongoing, and endlessly relational—the liminal condition of becoming (Deleuze & Guittari, 1987; Irwin, 2013; Semetsky, 2006) Labor represents the becoming-mother that lives in the in-between of not-mother and mother. I would argue that the process of becoming a mother is never really complete. Like Deleuze’s wasp and orchid (Deleuze & Guittari, 1987), my becoming-mother and my child’s becoming-person are inexorably and cyclically related. Thus labor, with its joys and pains and waiting and regrets and sorrows, is never actually finished. A mother is always in labor, always becoming.
I went into labor on the first day of spring. It was snowing that day—the last snow of the season. Looking back, the day itself was in-between. At first, the contractions were mild, barely waking me up in the darkness of the early morning. They grew stronger as the morning sun rose and I decided to contact my doula. I relayed her message to my husband, Nick: it was likely false labor, different from Braxton Hicks contractions, but still just practice. I was only thirty-eight weeks pregnant and first-born children are usually late. I should call her when my contractions started coming at regular intervals.

Later in the morning, I sat at the kitchen island, working on a unit plan I hoped to turn in before the baby came. A contraction came, stronger still. I glanced at the clock on the microwave. I typed on until another came. I looked back at the clock. Ten minutes had passed. I called Nick first to tell him it was time to come home from work, and then I called my doula back and the midwife.
I laid in bed as the contractions continued, Ray Lamontagne turning slowly on the record player, Nick beside me, timing them with my phone. I tried to get some rest while I still could.

The day waxed on and the pain worsened. Nick rubbed my back and the doula gave me positions to try to help progress my labor. I had a glass of wine, the first in several months, to calm my nerves. We kept timing my contractions and we waited.

It was 2 am before my contractions reached six minutes apart. It was time to go to the hospital. Now, my whole body stiffened and I cried out in pain with each new contraction. Between contractions, I waited in fear of the next one and excitement for my baby to come.

After reaching the hospital, I labored for many hours before my doula pulled me aside. She urged me to consider having an epidural. I had hoped to have a fully natural birth, but it had been too long since I had slept and they were all worried that I was going to be too tired to push and I would face other potentially dangerous interventions. Reluctantly, I agreed.

The anesthesiologist explained the medical risks associated with an epidural. Something like one in twenty don’t work. I signed his form and he slid the hollow needle into my spine. After that, I had to be in bed, with constant monitoring and an IV. I hated it. To this point, walking the halls of the labor and delivery unit and swaying with each contraction were the most relief I found.

I was confused when some time went by and my contractions didn’t hurt any less. The anesthesiologist pressed a nitrile glove filled with ice against different areas of my body, asking if I could feel it. Yes. I can also feel my catheter. He left and came back, repeating the same test. It felt like forever before he finally believed me that the epidural hadn’t worked and they administered another one. Soon after the second epidural, I fell asleep.
I awoke to feel my contractions, though less painful than before, strong and fast. I knew it was time to push. I pushed with the crest of each coming contraction. There was his head. Another huge push and tremendous pressure to pass his shoulders and he emerged with the most beautiful cry I have ever heard. Nick and the midwife placed him on my chest and I burst into tears. That was the moment I met my child. I was a mother. My labor story had drawn to conclusion, and yet, I knew this was only the beginning.

I am in labor. I am in a state of in-between. I am becoming. I am becoming the mother who I will be, a finish line I will never reach in my lifetime. I am a preservice teacher, in the process of becoming a teacher, a process that should continue throughout my educational career. I am discovering who I am as an artist, always changing, evolving, and learning. I am engaged in the labor of becoming mother/artist/teacher.

Separation

He began as part of my anatomy, an ovum among thousands contained within a tiny ovary. Within my womb, he formed and grew. Starting with a barely detectable flutter, I felt his movements become independent from my own, until my whole belly rippled when he moved. With great effort and pain, I pushed him from my body and into the world, and the cord between us was severed. I fed him from my breast and he spent much of his day clutched to the rhythm of my heart. He grew and began to venture away from me to explore his world. He drank less from my breast. He cried less for my closeness. With the passing of time, he needs me less and less, and we become separate.
I see the labor of motherhood as a process of becoming separate from my child. He started as part of me; through birth, left my body; and, as he grows, he gradually becomes more independent from me. Milestones like learning to walk or eat solid foods mean he needs my body less to carry him or to sustain him. Someday, he will be an adult, and his physical need for me will be minimal.

This separation is a recurring theme throughout my journals and artwork. Sometimes, I meet separation with relief, or joy, while other times, regret or sorrow. My awareness of my embodied relationality with my child becomes an undercurrent to all of my experiences as a mother/artist/teacher.

**The Umbilical Cord**

![Watercolor sketch of cross section of an umbilical cord, picturing three blood vessels.](image-url)
“Where is your belly button?” I ask Wesley. “Beh buh,” he says as he pulls up his shirt, patting his tummy proudly. I remember the thick, blue coil of his umbilical cord stretching as they placed him on my chest; the resistance as the scissors cut through, severing his tiny body from mine; the days after when the remaining stump dried and fell off, leaving behind a pink, new belly button. I am reminded of the Bible verse, “A cord of three strands is not easily broken.” The scissors may have cut through the three blood vessels of the umbilical cord, but the embodied connection between my son and me is unbroken.

In the umbilical cord, there are three blood vessels, two arteries and one vein, which connect the fetus to the placenta during the gestation period, supplying the developing fetus with oxygen and nutrients, and removing waste (Fahmy, 2018). Interestingly, the typical roles of the arteries and veins are reversed, with the vein carrying oxygenated blood to the fetus and the arteries carrying deoxygenated blood away from the fetus, a physiological order unique to the umbilical cord (Fahmy, 2018). Upon birth, the umbilical cord is severed, healing after a few days to appear as a depression or protrusion in the abdomen; the navel, or belly button.

I view this anatomical process as yet another metaphor for the mother-child relationship. In the beginning, my baby was fully dependent on me. Through the umbilical cord, I provided him everything he needed to survive and develop. Although the umbilical cord was cut shortly after he was born, for the rest of his life, my child will have his naval as a reminder of the triumvirate connection between us, where my body gave his life.
The Ovum

We started putting Wesley in the nursery at church instead of bringing him to the service. The nursery is filled with donated toys and furniture, an archive of past childhoods. There is a doll cradle that I had when I was a child. It’s pale pink plastic, now paler with time, with a little cabinet underneath with cartoon pictures of baby toys on its doors. I remember being about four years old, playing with my friend, Tori, out in my driveway on a summer day with the cradle and our waterbabies.

Leaving Wesley in that room, with that toy I played with when I was a little girl feels strange. Worrying about leaving my baby while I remember being a small child myself—in a single moment, I am both mother and child. It’s similar to how I feel being held by my own mother when I am now a mother myself, or when I am first waking, still holding onto the wispy tail of sleep and I hear my son cry out for me. It is a feeling of simultaneity, of convergence of needing and being needed. It is a space where I am both infantile and maternal.

Being simultaneously infantile and maternal is an anomaly that I have seen recurring throughout my research. It is mirrored physiologically by the formation of ova. When a biologically female fetus reaches 20 weeks gestational age, there are already around seven million eggs in her ovaries, and by the time she is born, a baby girl has all the eggs she will ever have.

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Waterbabies are rubber baby dolls filled with water to make them feel more realistic. The original Waterbaby like I played with came out in 1991.
(Krock, 2010)—this is astonishing to me. As an infant, I already possessed the cell which, twenty
five years later, would make me a mother.

I see this biological phenomenon as a metaphor for the simultaneity of maternality and
infantility, such as the experience I wrote about with the toy in the church nursery. It illustrates how
I am able to have experiences that I might classify as infantile overlapping with experiences I see as
maternal. In the church nursery, I was able to recall the feelings of excitement and pleasure I
derived from playing with baby dolls as a toddler, while at the same time experiencing a distinct
maternal anxiety leaving my child with a new caregiver. Infantility, I might characterize as naive,
vulnerable, and dependent, whereas maternality tends to be protective, instinctive, and caring.

I encounter this paradox of being both maternal and infantile with some frequency. When I
left crying after dropping my parents off at the airport, singing through my tears to calm my own
fussy child in the backseat. When I changed Wesley’s diaper, nursed him, soothed him, even while
I had the flu and needed care myself. I find that this metaphor extends to my status as a preservice
teacher as well. I am a teacher, and I am a student.

Furthermore, although my concept of maternality involves being the caregiver, the one who
is depended on, motherhood has required me to be more, rather than less, dependent. Particularly
as a mother in preservice art education, I have needed to rely heavily on my friends and family. I
believe I could not have completed my coursework or written this thesis without my mother-in-law,
or my best friend, or my teenage cousin coming over to watch Wesley while I lock myself away in
my office to get a couple hours of concentrated work done; without the intellectual and emotional
support from my art education cohort and advisor; without the love and support of my husband.
The last two years have been some of the most vulnerable of my adult life.
Circles

Circles have been a recurring theme in my artwork, even before beginning this body of research. As I discussed in the introduction chapter, I came to recognize the circles which appeared in much of my earlier artwork as a metaphor for my empty womb. The circle motif has reappeared in the artwork from this research, but the symbol has gained new meaning. Now, instead of being empty, my son is at the center of the circle. At first, the circles appeared unintentionally, but later, I sought them out for my compositions. I feel that, in part, these circles around Wesley represent fulfillment—a womb that has produced a child.

At the same time, the circles also suggest a cycle. This is especially poignant as I near the end of this research. The research will not truly come to a close, but continue in a cycle with new questions, new ideas, new knowledge.
I dreamed that I was sitting in an auditorium, holding my baby on my knee. Only there was no baby—I just had my arms out what I thought was about the right distance, pretending to hold a baby. A woman sitting behind me asked if she could hold my baby. I said no. She became hostile, saying I was being rude, but I maintained my position because I didn’t want a stranger touching him. I was his mother and I didn’t have to let anyone hold him who I didn’t trust.

My memory of the above dream and its details gradually materialized over the course of my morning. I do not usually invest much thought in the analysis of dreams, but the strangeness of this one provoked me to reflect on its possible symbolism:

I interpret the aspect of pretending to hold a baby who was not really there as representative of my feelings of being an imposter. Although I conceived, carried, birthed, and have been caring
for a child, I still have some underlying feeling of un-belonging, that I am somehow not truly a mother and I am just a young, foolish me, pretending to be a mother.

The aspect of the woman asking to hold my baby and my refusal could represent the parenting decisions I make and often find myself in a position of having to defend to others (all the while I am only pretending to have a baby). I assert choices as though I know they are the right ones, even though I am really so new to all of this and very uncertain. I worry that maybe I am not fit to be making these choices in the first place.

Further, I feel this analogy could extend to my scholarship. I have chosen to undergo a thesis project when my Master’s program gives the option to either take a comprehensive exam or write a thesis. Most of my peers chose the comprehensive exam. By making the choice to do a thesis in the first place, I am asserting that my scholarship and thoughts on art education are important. Then, by choosing to perform an autobiographical arts-based thesis, I am placing the value of my research in my own narrative and in my artwork. As an artist, and particularly as a new researcher, I find this extremely daunting. I worry that maybe I am only pretending. Imposter syndrome, that troubling suspicion that I do not belong, pervades.

This fear of inadequacy seems to relate to my state of becoming. Because I find myself in the in-between, I tend to feel that I am not yet a mother, an artist, or a teacher.

**Parallelisms**

In this section, I will present observations from my daily life as a mother and parallels I find with my art education praxis. Mothering pedagogy as I introduced in the review of relevant literature strives to implement knowledge gained from mothering in teaching. Using mothering pedagogy as a framework, I gleaned correlations between my experiences as a mother and my
developing praxis as an art educator. These parallels may act as a bridge between my mothering and teaching practices, allowing my mothering knowledge to pass through to my teaching praxis.

I do not attempt to make claims about art education that are new or revolutionary—for the most part, they echo theory I learned during my graduate coursework, such as social constructivism, situated learning, and play as studio art practice. Rather, I hope to relate art educational theory to motherhood and demonstrate an alternative approach to constructing knowledge as a preservice teacher.

**Play**

I have been reflecting a great deal on the concept of play. Watching my son as he becomes a toddler play more independently, I have been thinking a great deal about the applications of play in my art practice and in art education.

Figure 12. Wesley plays with a cardboard tube, from “Still Frames” series.
I am making coffee and putting away dishes. Wesley has found the inner cardboard tube from a roll of wrapping paper. He walks around with it; he waves it in the air; he unfolds it; he bangs it on the floor, the door, the refrigerator. He exhausts every possible iteration of the material before he moves on to rummaging through the pots and pans.

His play mirrors that of a studio artist. There is exploration, repetition, nuance, discovery. It is ripe with deep learning.

I consider the possibilities for incorporating this kind of play in a secondary classroom. I think there are often more opportunities for play in an elementary or early childhood setting. This, I think, may be in part of popular pedagogical strategies such as choice-based art education, or Reggio Emilia or Montessori inspired approaches that place strong emphasis on play and experimentation. I worry that by high school, and sometimes even middle school, many students have forgotten how to play. They may have had less opportunity for play and therefore less practice. Systems of testing may have taught them a one-right-answer mindset that play, with all its ambiguity, cannot conform to. They may be uncomfortable with the vulnerability of play, not wanting to risk “damaging” their appearances with their peers.

I think it is our responsibility as art teachers to provide students with opportunities to play. I also think it is crucial to teach our students why to play and how by showing them how play is deeply embedded in the practice of artists. There are videos of many contemporary artists at work, showing their workspaces, and talking about their process. Art21 (Art21, n.d.) is one resource with a wealth of videos like these, but they can also be found on artist and gallery web pages, video
streaming websites such as YouTube or Vimeo, and social media platforms like the artist’s Instagram handle or Facebook page.

While the idea of play being central to studio practice and art education is certainly not new (Grotewell & Burton, 2008; Hafeli, 2014; Lowenfeld, 1935; Szekely, 2006; Walker, 2001), I propose reconceptualizing play in art education through the lens of mothering pedagogy. This could mean mother/artist/teachers looking to their own children as exemplars of play; observing, participating, and reflecting on the play of young children, and aiming to inject that spirit of play into their artwork and the curricula they write.

**Exploration and experimentation as play.**

For his birthday, my son received several new toys including a penguin bath toy that swims when you wind up its flippers. I sometimes take a bath to find some quiet space to read and unwind. Today, when Nick took Wesley with him on a run, I grabbed the book I have been reading and some lavender soaking salts and drew myself a bath. Inspired by my recent reflections on play, I decided to take the penguin along. I read a chapter and then it was time to try out the penguin. I turned its flippers several rotations and then released them, listening to the whir of the propeller. I wound it up again and dropped the penguin in the tub. It swam the length of the tub before bumping into the wall and running out of steam. I wound it another time and put it back in the water. This time, I pulled it out while it was still going—its spinning flippers splashed water up at my face and I laughed. For the next few minutes, I wound and released again and again, watching the little penguin swim and splash around the tub.
Recognizing this experience of playing with one of my child’s toys as potentially significant to my research, I began to take pictures of my play. Many aspects of my experience of playing with the penguin toy were mirrored in the process of creating the resulting artwork and since I had to continue my play with the toy in order to take the photographs, the experiences of artmaking-play and toy-play, overlapped, sharing space and time. I took dozens of pictures. I tried starting the penguin in different locations, making ripples and textures appear in different places. I played with reflections and light. I explored different perspectives. Then, using an application on my phone\(^7\), I edited the pictures I took. I converted the images to black and white (a choice that will be addressed later in this chapter), then I played with possibilities for whites, blacks, highlights, and shadows, sliding the toggle on the adjustment bar back and forth, trying out different combinations until I found the one I liked best. Play, whether I am actively aware of it or not, is a significant part of my artistic process.

Walker (2001) lists play as one of the artmaking practices common to many studio artists. A substantial way an art educator can encourage play in their classrooms is by giving students opportunities to experiment with materials. This might look like setting aside class time before introducing a less familiar process such as printmaking or textiles for students to explore the materials they will be using without instruction or constraints. Walker (2001) argued that teaching students to incorporate play in their artmaking might enable students to use art as inquiry and create meaning in their art. By facilitating play in my classroom, I can help my students incorporate curiosity, experimentation, and creativity in their own artmaking processes.

\(^7\) I used Photoshop Express, an open-source mobile application by Adobe used for basic photo editing and collage. Photoshop Express contains simplified versions of the adjustments bar found in Adobe Photoshop among other filters and tools common among mobile photo editing applications.
Figure 13. Series of photographs playing with a penguin bath toy.
Imitation as Play.

Figure 14. Wesley imitating Nick drinking coffee, from “Still Frames” series.
Wesley holds a coffee mug. He puts the rim to his mouth and tips it up as though he’s drinking and says “cuh” (cup). Nick says “coffee cup!” and pretends to take a sip, making an exaggerated slurping sound. Wesley laughs, takes the mug back, and takes another sip. Nick adds, “Yum! I like coffee! Is it hot?” and he shows him how to blow on the cup. Wesley blows too. They continue their game for another minute or two before he moves on.

Imitation and play are central to how toddlers learn and develop. Through imitation, children attain important social and cognitive skills and learn how to use objects (Nielson, 2006). Moments such as the instance I described with the coffee cup are rife with learning. By copying Nick, Wesley is learning about language, social cues, self-feeding, and more.

Just as toddlers mimic the behavior of adults, student artists can learn by copying the behavior of professional artists. By providing examples of artists’ studio practices, an art teacher can model artistic behaviors for their students to imitate, and through that imitation, build their own artistic practices. Walker (2001) argued that showing students the artmaking practices of studio artists promotes students use of artmaking as inquiry. Art teachers can enable their students to imitate studio practices by showing their students not only the products of artists, but their processes as well. Visiting artists, field trips to working artist studios, process videos and images, and demonstrations are some ways a teacher could accomplish this.

The artist-teacher could also bring their own art practice into the classroom. Porter (2006) felt that working on her own paintings in her high school art classroom was valuable to her students both by providing an example of actual studio art practice and by bolstering her
relationships with them. My undergraduate painting professor, William Otremsky, always had a painting in process in his office. I remember watching the painting as it went through various stages of progress—I think that helped me better understand my own process. When I was a teaching assistant for an undergraduate photography class, I would often work on my own editing alongside them, present to answer questions and taking breaks to make rounds. I found that my students often wanted to watch how I did a certain thing or to talk about my concept development. I am interested in implementing methods such as these in my future classroom.

**Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development**

![Image of Wesley building block towers, from “Still Frames” series.]

Figure 15. Wesley building block towers, from “Still Frames” series.

Wesley is stacking blocks. He selects a blue block and places it carefully on top of a white block. Next, he chooses an orange block and places it on top of the blue block. Then, a grey block. Then, a green. The tower becomes more precarious as it grows taller. I straighten the blocks and hold them steady as he adds each new story. When he is finished, he is thrilled by the tall tower he’s
made. The tower is six blocks high. I count the blocks the blocks and name the colors before we
knock it down.

He begins to stack again, but this time I don’t straighten or hold the blocks steady. His tower
reaches three blocks high before it comes tumbling down. He tries again to the same effect. He
becomes frustrated and scatters the blocks. He is unable to build more than three blocks high
without my help.

Playing and working together with Wesley is critical to his learning and development.
According to theories of situated learning and social constructivism, we know that learning
happens in a social context with input from others (Ebbers, 2015; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Powell &
Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). In their original model of situated learning, Lave and Wenger
(1991) asserted that learning happens in relationship with others, within an authentic context,
through social interaction and spontaneous activities. By engaging with Wesley during his natural
play, I help him develop new knowledge and skills.

I wonder, as with my teaching practice, where to draw the line with assistance. How much
help is too much? I know Wesley can build a three block tower on his own and that he will soon
be able to build a four block tower, and, in time, he will be able to reach a six block tower without
my help. When I straighten and steady his tower, he is able to build much higher and he is happy
with the result; but when he cannot build nearly as high when he tries himself, he is disappointed
and his confidence is shaken.

As a crucial part of his larger theories about social constructivism, Vygotsky (1962)
conceptualized what he called the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal
development describes an area in a child’s learning where the child is able to grasp a new concept with a teacher’s assistance (Vygotsky, 1962). As the student reaches the initial goal, the zone expands and the amount the student is able to accomplish increases (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Scaffolding describes the support the teacher provides for the student in the zone of proximal development to help them achieve the next level of understanding (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). Thinking about Wesley’s tower of blocks in terms of social constructivism, those three extra blocks he is able to add to reach a six block tower is his zone of proximal development. The assistance I provide by straightening and bracing the tower as he builds is scaffolding.

According to the theory of social constructivism, the student should first be allowed to accomplish what they can on their own, before they receive help from the teacher (Powell & Kalina, 2009), so I may conclude that I must let Wesley build the three block tower himself before intervening, even though it will fall and he will become frustrated. Scaffolding, then, I should support Wesley’s learning in his proximal zone of development, but I should still allow him to build his tower, even though I could stack the blocks myself and build the tower much higher than six blocks. Ultimately, I want him to learn, which may mean allowing him to be disappointed in the moment.

With my students, employing these concepts can be less straightforward. I have to decide how much assistance really is scaffolding. In discussions, this may look like providing enough background and examples for students to base their answers on, or recognizing when I need to restate a question. In artmaking, it may look like demonstrating a skill or how they might better accomplish a desired effect, while still encouraging my students to explore possible methods on their own. They may not build a ten block tower at first, but by enabling them to first build three,
then six, their zone of proximal development will grow and they may, with time, be able to build that ten block tower on their own.

**Relationality and Symbiosis**

![Figure 16. In the above images, I photographed Wesley through and around a toile curtain. I used the sheer fabric to obscure and reveal his figure, playing with complex shadow, light, and visibility to represent my relationship with Wesley.](image)

I have this little person who needs me more than anything else in the world. He follows me around. He cries when I leave the room. He calls out “Mama” when he wakes in the middle of the night. He reaches for me when I hand him to someone else. The pressure of his dependence can be very intense. But I need him too. I need to kiss him. I need to watch him dance. I need to hold him in my lap as we turn the pages in a book and hear him laugh when I tickle his belly. It is a relationship unlike any other I have had. It is powerful, complex, and volatile.

Motherhood is a type of relationality like I had never experienced before. The relationship between Wesley and me, child and mother, is convoluted and infallible. Its balance is always in flux. It can be difficult to navigate and is certainly difficult to understand. I find it makes sense to
consider our relationship in terms of biological symbiosis, how two different organisms relate to one another. However, instead of having a predetermined arrangement like a sea anemone and clownfish, our symbiosis and mother and child shifts depending on perception. Oftentimes, our relationship can feel much more like parasitism—when I am sitting at my computer, trying to fit in some writing and Wesley is pulling on my clothes, crying for me to pick him up; or when I leave the room to use the bathroom and his little feet come running after me; or when I try to get him into his car seat to go to the grocery store and he arches his back, screaming and hitting. Other times, like when we dance in the kitchen while I make coffee, or when we snuggle on the couch and read a book at the end of a long day; we are in harmony.

I am reminded of a teacher’s relationship with their students. Like my relationship with my son, a teacher’s relationships with their students are complicated and subject to change. At times, the symbiotic balance may seem to tip, but, ideally, the relationship between teacher and students would be mutually beneficial. Students would learn from their teacher, and their teacher from their students. Both parties would feel respected, cared for, and valued.

**Matresence**

People treat me differently now that I’m a mother.

“You look like such a mom today,” says one of my colleagues as we arrive at the preschool where we’ve been teaching. I look down. I’m wearing a cardigan and jeans and I’m carrying a travel mug of coffee. “Hey, Mama,” a friend says as she slides into the seat beside me. I know she means it affectionately, but it feels weird. “That’s so mom-ish,” a classmate remarks after I make a comment in class. What does that even mean?
People treat me differently now, but I am different. Standing in front of the mirror, the woman staring back at me is familiar, but strange. She has my blue eyes, my determined mouth, my strong arms. But faint wrinkles embellish those eyes, tired and dark. Her scarred belly hangs loosely where pregnancy stretched her skin. I’ll never be the same as I was before, but I don’t really know who this woman is yet either. Being a mother isn’t really what I expected.

Figure 17 (Top) self-portrait after birth. Figure 18 (Bottom) self-portrait during pregnancy.

Early motherhood, like adolescence, is a time of transition. New mothers and adolescents alike experience major shifts in self-identity. Physically, chemically, emotionally—they are changing. I first heard the word *matrescence* while viewing a TED Talk by reproductive
psychiatrist, Alexandra Sacks (Sacks, 2018). Matresence, Sacks (2018) explained, citing a 1973 essay by Dana Raphael, describes the period of tension and change new mothers experience during their transition into motherhood. Like adolescence, during matresence, a mother experiences hormonal and physical change as well as emotional turmoil and shift in identity (Sacks, 2018). In her TED talk, Sacks (2018) argued for the use of the term matresence as a framework for understanding the transition to motherhood. Sacks (2018) asserted, and I agree, that by considering new mothers through a lens of matresence, the process of developing into the role of a mother might be demystified, offering a better way of understanding the upheaval they experience during this period. By confronting the silence that often surrounds the transition to motherhood, matresence might repudiate the unrealistic expectations many mothers have for themselves (Sacks, 2018).

I feel that matrescence aptly describes what I have been experiencing as a new mother. Much like in my adolescence, I feel insecure and uncertain in my identity. I am figuring out who I am now that I am a mother and how I relate to the people around me and the culture I live in. My body now, like my pubescent body during my adolescent years, is going through considerable changes—my weight is changing, my feet have grown, I have acne and greasy hair, and hormones have me feeling moody and strange. I find that I have a renewed empathy for my teenage students; I understand again just how uncomfortable it is to exist in a state of constant change. I think that being able to relate to the changes my secondary students are going through may improve my relationships with them and help me to be more accommodating to them.
Changing Plans

I decided to try to make spinach pancakes for Wesley. My sister swears by them; her son loves them and it’s a great way to sneak in some extra vegetables. I got out the KitchenAid food processor that I got as a wedding gift and have only used like three times since, filled it with fresh spinach, and blended it to a puree. I added it to the Bisquick in my mixing bowl and the batter turned a rich green. Wesley sat up in his high chair and watched while I poured out little circles of batter on the electric skillet. I made a whole batch. Wesley grabbed the first pancake and devoured it. I was so pleased.

For his snack later on, I warmed up another pancake. When I tried to give him a bite, he turned his head and refused it. I figured he just wanted to do it himself, so I put the pancake on his tray. He immediately threw it to the dog. I tried putting some peanut butter on it. Again, to the dog. Long story short, he never ate another spinach pancake.
The spinach pancake scenario is a fairly common one in my home. Another time, I cooked salmon with green peas, put them down in front of Wesley, and he screamed and threw the entire dish across the kitchen. I want so desperately to provide Wesley with nutritious food. I spend time looking for new recipes, shopping for different foods, and preparing them in a way I hope he will like, and inevitably, he will refuse them and wind up eating goldfish and mandarin oranges. As the saying from Robert Burns goes, the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

Cooking a meal for Wesley that he refuses reminds me of students refusing to participate in a lesson plan I wrote. Research plans, teaching plans, art plans, parenting plans—I often spend a great deal of time and effort making plans just to have to change them. As a mother and as a teacher, I make plans that involve other people. Although I try to anticipate the interests of my son or my students, the reception of my plans is not always positive. When Wesley does not want to eat something I make for him, I reflect on why that might be and how I might adapt my plan. For example, if Wesley refuses to eat his carrot sticks, I can try dipping them in hummus, which I know he likes. If students do not respond positively to a lesson, I can adapt future plans to their interests. While Wesley is not able to verbalize what foods he would prefer to eat, most of the students I will teach are able to communicate their preferences—I just need to ask.

Paradigms

I flicker between light sleep and anxious waking. My breasts hang heavy and full over my skipping heartbeat. The irony is not lost on me that on Wesley’s first time spending the whole night in his own room, I am barely sleeping. From birth, Wesley has slept in our room and since he was five months old, he has slept with us in our bed. Anytime he woke, I pulled him close and nursed
him back to sleep. Now he is one year and a week old and the sweet little baby body tucked against
mine has turned into a sideways toddler with a foot in my ribs. His empty crib weighs on me, a
reminder of all our failed attempts. “You’ll never get him in his own room,” it taunts. The baby
monitor buzzes to life and my heart leaps as Wesley’s cries begin to engulf the static. I nudge Nick
awake; “The baby’s crying,” I tell him. We have agreed that I will try not to go up to break his habit of
comfort nursing during the night. “Want me to bring him down?” But we said before bed that we
needed to be consistent—he sleeps in his own bed now. I touch my breast—the hard lump of a
clogged duct is forming, a preview of the pain ahead weaning will bring. I listen to Nick struggle
over the monitor and I know I’ll have to go up. It feels like a losing battle.

Sleep has posed some of the biggest challenges of parenting so far. I come across a vast
array of advise regarding infant and toddler sleep habits: recommendations from family, friends,
and doctors; articles and baby books; blog posts and online threads—the volume and disparity of
information is confusing and overwhelming.

I am finding that there are different epistemologies for parenting just as there are for
teaching. The paradigm that structures my teaching practice also shapes my mothering practice. As
a mother and as a teacher, I value an approach that is responsive, flexible, and places trust in the
child. Knowing where I stand in my parenting paradigm guides the approach I use in teaching
Wesley to sleep. My paradigm acts as a sieve through which to sift all of the advice I encounter. I
adopt strategies that align with my principles, and reject those that do not.

I approach parenting and teaching through a feminist paradigm of care and embodiment. In
my approach to Wesley’s sleep, this looks like responding as soon as I am able to Wesley’s cries. I
trust him when he is communicating to me that he is upset and needs me. I feel that I am building his trust in me through my repeated quick response. His independence may come more slowly, but is being built on a foundation of mutual trust and care. In teaching, a parallel might be an approach to grading. Rigid due dates and grading scales that favor failing grades over passing feel unnatural to me. Instead, I prefer standards-based grading systems and flexibility.

Awareness of my epistemology helps me to make decisions about teaching and parenting strategies. Still, strategies which in theory, I agree with, do not always work out when I implement them. Flexible due dates could cause problems when students choose to wait too long to turn assignments in, leaving the student without enough time to meet the objectives of the assignments, and leaving the teacher with an unmanageable number of assignments to evaluate. Likewise, my ideas about Wesley’s sleep can be problematic in action. By nursing Wesley back to sleep when he wakes during the night, I reinforce his sleep associations, meaning he continued to need me to put him back down between his sleep cycles at over a year old, while friends of mine with a son the same age used sleep tactics I rejected and their child has been sleeping through the night since he was four months old. So, while I feel that a teacher or parent should incorporate practices in their teaching which agree with their paradigmatic stances, they should also acknowledge when what they are doing is not working and adapt. Putting theory into practice involves troubleshooting, reflection, and adaptability.
Figure 20. Teaching Wesley to sleep in his crib, from “Still Frames” series.
Still Frames

My portraits of Wesley are an effort to understand myself through my relationship with him. They are about the mother who I was when I took the picture and about the mother I will be. Each image is a still frame from my saga of motherhood—the photos are a reflection of me, not just in a singular moment, but in a process of becoming.
“Still Frames” is a series of black and white photographs capturing moments from my daily domestic life, caring for my son. I call them “still frames” because I see them as frozen moments, like stills from a movie. The photographs I take of my son are more about me than they are about him. They are an exploration of relationality, of my formation of self in relationship to Wesley and my domestic situation.

I chose to create these images in black and white because I feel that black and white has the ability to unify otherwise unrelated elements in an image. By removing color, the viewer is able to consider all of the objects from an even playing field, so to speak. It creates room for other elements to emerge, such as light and motion. Because these photographs are not staged and are taken quickly so as not to lose the moment, they often contain colors and objects that might otherwise be distracting. Furthermore, since most people see in color, black and white takes the every-day to a slightly different place for the viewer.

“Still Frames” are printed in a 4” x 6” format, the standard size for drugstore film prints, recalling the photos of my own childhood that once filled family albums. I mean for this small scale
to make each picture an intimate moment, while at the same time being part of a vast collection.

The photos work together, like tesserae in a mosaic, forming an image of a period of my motherhood.

#momselfie

Figure 22. Images from “#momselfie” series.
#momselfie is a scrapbooked collection of selfies. For the title of this series, “#momselfie,” I adopted vernacular popularized through social media. By its most basic denotation, the hashtag symbol (#) is used in social media platforms to identify specific topics. A user can employ hashtags in their own content to give their posts more visibility to potentially interested followers. However, the broader use of the hashtag is much more nuanced. Hashtags may contextualize a post within larger trends or movements, adding allusions or specific connotations to an otherwise brief discourse. Their uses extend beyond online posts into verbal and other written language, acting as a dialogical tool to connect speech to a wider social context.

For #momselfie, the hashtag becomes a rhetorical device, alluding to my artwork’s possible existence and/or reception on social media, and is meant with some cheek. I use “selfie,” a commonly used term, to refer very generally to a picture I took of myself. I consider selfies to be separate from a self-portrait because, unlike a self-portrait which I intend as art, selfies act as a presentation of a desired self-image to an online community. “Mom” refers to online stereotypes of mothers on social media—that I do not actually use the term mom to describe myself and prefer variations such as “Mama” or “Mommy.” I play on tropes from images on social media, such as the “mirror selfie,” a picture taken with the phone or camera directed towards the mirror so that both the photographer and the camera are visible; the “duck face,” a pose with slightly pursed lips, the “smize,” a partial, closed-mouth smile; and, specific to mothers, the “brelfie,” or breastfeeding selfie.

The physicality of a scrapbook renders tangibility to images which typically exist only digitally. The time and care of making a scrapbook is ironically juxtaposed to the disposability of a

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8 For the purposes of this body of research, I will not investigate this topic thoroughly, however, I am deeply interested in how mothers represent themselves on social media and will likely pursue this as a future research subject.
selfie—someone might take several selfies and only post one, or not post any at all, leaving most to be deleted. By spending time with the display of my selfies, I offer reverence to images that might otherwise be deemed worthless, cheap, or vain.

The concept for #momselfie emerged from a realization I had about a shift in my social media presence and the photos I took with my phone after the birth of my child. I went from posting flattering pictures of myself to only posting pictures of Wesley. Upon closer examination, I deduced two main causes of this change: by becoming a mother, I was often concerned more with my child than myself; and I no longer felt that I was attractive and so I could not take what I considered a flattering picture of myself. I began to shrink into the background of my own life and my disappearance from the pictures I took was evidence.

Figure 23. Digital collage of selfies taken before my pregnancy, as shared during critique.

The series started with a collage of images I took before my pregnancy, reflecting on the times when I felt attractive. I shared the piece during a critique in one of my graduate classes and I
was startled by its reception. When I explained my collage, my classmates expressed how sad they felt it was, which forced me to see how much I was actually hurting from my negative self-image. Through #momselfie, I confront the deterioration of my self-image through pregnancy and motherhood and my diminishing self-representation.

**Video Collage: Mother and Child Collaboration**

“Video Collage: Mother and Child Collaboration” is an audio/visual video piece I created in collaboration with my newborn child to portray early motherhood. In the foreground, I strung together video clips portraying me sitting in a checkered armchair that I usually used for nursing, wearing a sleeping Wesley against my chest in a cloth wrap, slowly blinking with the quiet weariness of a new mother at rest. In a smaller screen in the upper right corner, play video and audio clips of a month-old Wesley crying. The clips, depicting Wesley crying at various times and locations, progress rapidly, with increasingly shorter intervals, representative of the heightening anxiety I felt as he cried. Throughout the video, a multi-layered audio recording plays. Wesley nursing noisily enters first as the base. Following is my voice singing a lullaby, a version of James Taylor’s “Sweet Baby James” instead saying “Sweet Wesley James,” a song I have sung to him since I was pregnant and we first decided his name. The video ends as the song ends, with no real resolution, in anxious stillness.
Figure 24. Still from “Video Collage: Mother and Child Collaboration.”

Sound Stories

“Sound Stories” is a sound piece consisting of a series of audio recordings strung together of typical encounters I have with my son, such as the rustling and laughing as he plays in a pop-up tunnel, his cries over the baby monitor while I take a shower, or the odd chirps and snores he makes while he sleeps. “Sound Stories” uses the unique sensory ability of sound to recall emotionally charged memories, portraying motherhood with a particular poignancy visual imagery may not. This piece acts as a narrative self-portrait, an aural performance of my mothering experience.

Pump Portraits

I created a handful of paintings and photographs of my breast pump. I consider these works to be portraits rather than still-lives because of the reverence with which I treat the objects in them. My breast pump becomes personified, captured as though they were the subjects of portraits.
Challenges for Mothers in Preservice Teaching

Although motherhood presents me with many opportunities for forming new knowledge and better relating to the theories of teaching and learning, and curriculum development I encounter as a preservice art teacher, it also poses distinct challenges for me as a student in an art education program. I feel that it is important to identify the most significant difficulties I have met so that professors may consider how they might better serve their art education students who are mothers. My biggest concerns are related to breastfeeding/pumping breast milk, sleep deprivation, and time constraints.
Time Constraints

I’m buried deeply beneath the pressures of graduate school, of being a wife, of being a mother, of being an artist, of being myself. With my son, caring is a constant labor. When my attention is turned from him, he either demands that I give it back, or I feel guilty for not attending to him. I feel guilty that my time with Wesley is so divided. I try to get him to play by himself, or I turn on Sesame Street, or I even hire a sitter for the day so I can get some work done. I want to be on the floor playing with him, coloring with him, dancing with him, going on walks with him, but I have papers to write and lessons to prepare. I care deeply for my child and I also care deeply for art education—the conflict between these can be painful.

Oftentimes, the time spent working, rather than the work itself, is the biggest challenge I face as a preservice art teacher and mother. My graduate coursework was, of course, demanding.
My classes involved far more reading and writing than my undergraduate courses and the content was significantly more challenging. By taking a full course load, I committed to between nine and twelve hours of class time per week. The graduate teaching assistantship I held during the first year of the program added an extra 20 or more hours of work each week. During the second year, teaching practicum placements at various schools around the city demanded additional travel time and on-location preparation. Group assignments meant meeting with partners outside of class time. Occasional mandatory department meetings added a couple hours here and there. These time obligations are not unlike those of my colleagues, and my professors are fully acquainted with them.

The time obligations that my professors and colleagues may not be aware of and that I would like to briefly draw attention to, are those that might be associated with being a mother within a preservice art education program. Mothering takes time. Feeding, playing, soothing, reading, holding, bathing, putting to bed, taking to doctor’s appointments, cleaning up after, loving, worrying about, recharging—a lot goes into caring for my child. Taking care of my son while a graduate student created many specific challenges with time. Childcare required additional time and planning any time I had to meet for classes. When I used a daycare, it took time to get my son ready, drive there, and get him situated in his classroom. When I used a nanny or babysitter, I had to anticipate them encountering traffic or otherwise arriving late. My class schedule often interfered with feeding times and bedtime routines. In order to attend meetings for the art education department or group assignments, I had to plan ahead for childcare or, if I intended to bring my son, anticipate additional travel time and items he might need. Getting my classwork done usually meant waiting for my son to go to sleep, and as he got older, my son took fewer naps and
demanded much more attention when he was awake. More often than I would have liked, I had to miss out on trips to the park, stroller walks, or bath time, so that I could read another article, work on a lesson plan, or test materials. I often wonder what it would be like to do graduate school without a baby or a baby without graduate school.

By sharing these struggles, my intention is not to complain, but to hopefully provide insight into additional time obligations required of mothers and expectant mothers in preservice art education, such as me.

**Breastfeeding & Pumping Breast Milk**

![Photograph of breast pump and bottles with breastmilk](image)

Figure 28. (Left) photograph of my breast pump. Figure 29. (Right) photograph of bottles and flanges with breastmilk.

Some of the aspects of motherhood which posed the most significant challenges to me as a preservice art educator were those associated with breastfeeding and pumping breast milk. When my son was with me, I nursed him every hour or two. On the occasions that I brought him to class, I usually stepped out to breastfeed. Early on, I needed both hands to breastfeed, and as he got older, Wesley would grab things like papers or books, so multitasking was not an option. Each breastfeeding session could take us somewhere between five and twenty minutes.
When he was not with me, I had to pump every few hours to replace the feedings I missed. If I did not pump while I was away from the baby, I risked my milk supply decreasing, the physical discomfort of being over-full, pain of a blocked milk duct, or even the dangers of mastitis. Most days, I nursed Wesley right before I left for class and rushed home to pump while the nanny was still there or before I picked him up from daycare. A couple times, I pumped in a professor’s office or empty classroom. On multiple occasions, I sacrificed privacy to hand pump in class to avoid missing out on learning important material. I sometimes used a hands-free bra and car adapter for my electric pump so that I could pump on the way to or from teaching placements.

While in class or while teaching, I might have a let-down, a nerve reflex that releases breast milk. I wore special pads in my bras to prevent leaking at those times, although I forgot from time to time which resulted in embarrassing wet spots on my shirt. For me, a let-down is a sudden, stinging sensation in my breasts. It can be very distracting.

Professors might be able to help their breastfeeding preservice teachers by being in conversation with them about their needs. They could provide options for pumping and nursing, including comfortable, private locations, and keep pumping in mind when creating schedules to minimize their discomfort and the amount of class time mothers have to miss. While my professors have been overall, accommodating, there was certainly more they could have been done for me.
I lie beside Wesley, curled to fit in his little toddler-sized bed, holding him close until I feel the last bit of tension leave his body and his breathing relax. I slowly pull my arm out from beneath his head and carefully slip off of his bed, gradually creeping towards the door. I pass through the threshold noiselessly and pull the door closed. I release the knob cautiously until the door softly clicks shut. I turn to step towards the stairs and a floorboard creaks. I wince. I hear Wesley sit up in bed with a little cry. His feet pad across the carpet to the door as his crying increases. I take a deep breath and open the door to start the process again.

Sleep causes some of my greatest difficulties in being a mother. When we first brought our son, Wesley, home, my husband and I took turns sleeping because Wesley would not sleep unless he was being held. After Nick’s parental leave, however, I took the brunt of the sleep deprivation so that he could be rested enough to make it through his work day. Wesley had moderate acid reflux as a newborn, causing stomach pain that made it especially difficult for him to sleep. We put
him on medication for his reflux, which helped some, and after several months, he eventually grew out of it and slept a little better. After that, it was waking up to nurse that cost me the most sleep. Every three hours, like clockwork, he would wake, and nothing but nursing him would put him back to sleep. Now, at almost a year and a half old, Wesley can do a five to seven hour stretch without waking some nights, but others he is right back to the three hours.

Tired gained a whole new meaning for me when I became a mother. I have not had a good night’s sleep since before Wesley was born. My body needs more sleep. Night after night, it builds up, and makes it a struggle to get through my day. Apart from the embodied discomfort of being tired, sleep deprivation made it difficult for me to think and speak coherently. I often found myself stumbling over my words in classes, which was embarrassing and contributed to feelings of inadequacy. Although in the beginning, I felt that my professors and classmates understood that I might be struggling with sleep deprivation, but as Wesley grew older, I felt like my sleeplessness was getting to be just an excuse and that I should keep it to myself. Perhaps greater awareness regarding the possibility for extended difficulties with sleep could have made me more comfortable.
Conclusion and Further Questions

Through this research, I portrayed my experiences as a mother/artist/teacher, the knowledge those experiences produce, and their possible applications in the field of art education.

As I gathered and analyzed data, I sought out patterns and identified resonant metaphors that appeared in the data. The resonant metaphors included labor, separation, the umbilical cord, the ovum, circles, and pretending.

Through what I referred to as parallelisms, I compared observations I made regarding my experiences as a mother to possible connections within the scope of art education. These parallelisms included play, with exploration and experimentation, and imitation as play; scaffolding and zone of proximal development; relationality and symbiosis; matrescence; changing plans; and paradigms. Through my parallelisms, I provide a more tangible example of what mothering pedagogy could look like, applying knowledge created in motherhood to an art educational setting.

My artist statement discusses the artwork which emerged as a result of and as a means of investigation into my experiences as a mother/artist/teacher. Through artworks and series such as Still Frames, #momselfie, Video Collage: Mother and Child Collaboration, Playing dress-up, and Object Portraiture, I created a portrait of myself as mother/artist/teacher in labor of becoming.

Furthermore, I addressed the most significant challenges I encountered as a mother in preservice art education, including time constraints; breastfeeding and pumping breast milk; and sleep deprivation. I hope that a heightened awareness of these challenges could enable professors and colleagues to better accommodate mothers in their preservice art education programs.

As I reach the close of this research performance, I am still left with more questions about the applications of mothering pedagogy:
I am particularly interested in the possible applications of this research for teachers without familial children whose students view as mother figures. What might mothering pedagogy offer them in terms of caring for their students?

I also wonder what changes I will undergo when I am no longer preservice as a teacher. Teachers in full-time teaching positions have different relationships with their students from preservice teachers in their students because of conditions such as longevity. What knowledge might I gain from those deepened student-teacher relationships? I expect that I will continue to evolve as an artist and I wonder where those changes will take me. How will the ideas and artwork of my students and the exposure to different materials in my classroom impact my personal artistic development?

Furthermore, what changes might I encounter as my child grows older or in adding another child to my family? What might I learn from my experiences with an older child? What new knowledge might emerge from observing the complexity of sibling relationships?

The practices of mothering, artmaking, and teaching are highly reflective. As I move forward from this body of research and from preservice teaching, I hope I will continue to question, learn, and change.
CHAPTER 5

POSTPARTUM: REFLECTION

This body of research is a self-portrait. It is an image of me in process; a portrayal of my experiences as I am becoming mother/artist/teacher and the knowledge that labor produces. I hope that through the course of this paper, I have opened a window through which others can view the experiences of a mother/artist/teacher, and produced a mirror in which other mother/artist/teachers can catch a glimpse of themselves (Style, 1996).

It’s hard to ascribe value to my thoughts, my words, my images, but this research is important. It offers possibilities for incorporating the experiential knowledge of mothering into art education. It adds to the growing body of literature and art surrounding the topic of motherhood in art, and motherhood in art education, creating opportunities for understanding and confronting misconceptions through representation.

The night of my gallery reception, I was asked three different times to quiet my child. Two other artists had openings that night and they were giving a talk in the room across the hall. Of course, I understood that they just wanted to hear the speakers, but as a mother and artist, it made me feel like I didn’t really belong there. It was my reception too, but my child wasn’t welcome, so I wasn’t welcome—not fully. I take these microaggressions as confirmation that what I’m doing here—creating a portrait of a mother/artist/teacher for others to see and be seen—is actually necessary. Mother-artists, teacher-artists, and mother/artist/teachers need space in the arts. As an art educator, I intend to teach my students that mothers and children belong in art spaces.
The Exhibition

I staged my art exhibition in two adjoining rooms on the second floor of the campus art gallery. The staging of the exhibition echoed my research process on a whole. Like so much of this thesis work, hanging the show was an act of assemblage, piecing together my artwork like a mosaic, arranging and rearranging to form an image. Similarly, the main points of the exhibition revealed themselves as I put all the pieces together, forming new meanings in the tensions and connections between them—in the liminal spaces. The three main points of the exhibition that I identified in reflection were these: the reformation of my understanding of self through my relationship with my son; my diminished self-representation as a mother and process of reclaiming my self-image; and my transformation as an artist away from painting and towards more convenient and accessible digital media.

The assemblage began with laying out the 126 photos of “Still Frames” out on the floor, arranging them roughly in chronological order. I walked the rows, picking up photos and moving them, rearranging according to aesthetics, mood, and theme. I played with their groupings and spacing. Starting with a single photo from the day we brought Wesley home from the hospital, the columns gradually increased to four photos high and then diminished again to just one.
One of the first pieces I created was an acrylic portrait of my breast pump. My intention was to continue painting “portraits” of significant objects to my mothering experience, but I soon realized that painting was not a reasonable method of artmaking for me anymore. The digital image
of my breast pump hanging beside the painting here represents that shift away from painting as a medium. The paired display was a choice I made as I hung the show, as I came to more fully understand my artworks all together and their meaning as a body of work. I felt strange hanging just one painting among all of my digital work and, out of hesitation, missed the opportunity to showcase the pairing of these two works as a way to introduce one of the key concepts of the exhibition; my evolution as an artist.

![Image of a breast pump and a painting]

**Figure 35. Installation view, “Portraits of My Breast Pump.”**

I put together the #momsselfie scrapbook in the days leading up to my exhibition. I developed the concept for the book early on and collected images throughout the data collection phase of the research, but I saved the actual construction of the scrapbook for the final week. I had the photographs printed and ordered a scrapbook kit from Amazon. The kit, which reminded me somewhat of a flux kit, included a recycled cardboard, spiral bound book with black filler pages; two different types of pattern scissors; four metallic felt-tipped pens; and several sheets of gold stickers, all with different themes like wedding celebration, memories, and just cats.
I looked through each of the images, cutting and pasting, and adding stickers as I went. In silver pen, I scrawled the question, “Would you still like these pictures if it was just me?” Then, I began to cut Wesley out of the pictures. These cut-up selfies of me beside an empty space were oddly powerful. They created a significant tension with the Still Frames series where every picture was of my son with me noticeably absent. The juxtaposition posed a resounding question: Who am I now that I am a mother? I wonder if I stage another exhibition with this work, if I could show only Still Frames and #momselfie, emphasizing the struggle with representation and self-worth as a mother.
I was surprised by the reception my exhibition received. Many family members and friends who came to support me, did not fully understand the art conceptually and were more attracted to works that they saw as beautiful or cute—they spent more time with Still Frames in particular. Many mothers who I discussed the exhibition with did not connect with the work as much as I had expected. Some of the artwork, I think, was too specific to me and my child to give them the room to see themselves in the work. Surprisingly to me, some of the strongest reactions I saw were from people without children.

I did not foresee how powerful the #momsselfie scrapbook would be. I saw a woman crying as she turned through the pages. I received a message from an acquaintance afterward who said
that he and his wife who are hoping to have children soon felt that they learned from #momselfie and hoped that it would help her avoid similar experiences of diminished self-worth when she becomes a mother.

In hindsight, I believe viewers might have connected better with the exhibition if I had titled the sections similarly to the chapter headings in my thesis: Conception, Gestation, Labor, Birth, and Postpartum. However, as this was my first attempt at ABR and my first solo art exhibition, I felt that I needed to include much more of the artwork I produced than I actually needed. I wanted my results to come across and I felt like I needed to include a lot of breadth and depth of work to achieve that. Likewise, with two large rooms for my show, I may have felt compelled to fill the space. As a result, I think some of the strongest questions and tensions were drowned out by the noise of all the extra work.

**Grief of Mothering**

At the time of my thesis exhibition and defense, I was full of pride for my accomplishments and hope for my future. I finally turned in the paper I had spent so much of myself on for nearly two years; I staged my first solo art exhibition and revived my once-stagnant art practice; I defended my labor to four art education experts and they affirmed my efforts and gave me their endorsement. As a mother, my child had finally begun sleeping through the night, I had finally been successful in my attempts to wean from breastfeeding, and after a few months of keeping meticulous logs of my bodily cycles, I was pregnant again. As an academic whose entire scholarship thus far has revolved around my motherhood, I was pregnant for the second time during graduate school and I was thrilled. I felt so accomplished and so hopeful and excited for my future.
Then, a few weeks into student teaching, my final semester, I started to bleed. At first, it was very little and my midwives told me it did not necessarily mean anything yet, but after a week or so of light spotting, I began to pass clots. On Friday of that second week, my cooperating teacher taught my afternoon classes and I went to the hospital. The ultrasound showed that my baby was still measuring five weeks and six days; I would have been nine weeks pregnant. The baby was not growing anymore. I chose to take misoprostol to expedite my miscarriage, although it was anything but expeditious. I bled heavily for nine days. I was exhausted, anemic, and intensely sad.

As I endured the loss of my pregnancy, I reflected on its correlation to my research. Miscarriage is much like the labor of birth with contractions, pain, and anticipation; but also with secrecy, confusion, and grief. Similar to the way I would leak breast milk when I was away from Wesley, the blood I saw every time I used the bathroom would remind me of the baby I would never have. Just like the aches of pregnancy, or the exhaustion after one of Wesley’s sleepless nights, I felt fatigue and pain from the miscarriage as I taught.

In my student teaching weekly reflection, I questioned my assertions that the experiential knowledge of motherhood can be used to inform teaching practice:

This week was difficult emotionally and physically after my miscarriage. I taught my classes and they actually went quite well over all, but I found myself in certain moments drifting away from my lesson. It was difficult to stay focused and in those moments, I wasn’t always as compassionate to students as I feel I normally would be. I wonder how the framework of mothering pedagogy I wrote about in my thesis would come into play here. There are certainly times when my experiential
knowledge as a mother is useful in the classroom, but motherhood can also be traumatic. The care of mothering is easily applicable to teaching, but what about the grief of mothering?

Figure 39. (Left) Positive pregnancy test with blood from miscarriage. Figure 40. (Middle) Selfie taken in bathroom at student teaching placement while taking a break to change pad during miscarriage. Figure 41. (Right) Self-portrait while grieving pregnancy loss.

I feel that clearly there are an abundance of useful theoretical applications of knowledge that can be gained through mothering, but not everything learned from motherhood is constructive. My mothering experience has taught me manipulation, self-doubt, resentment, self-pity, among other destructive habits and tendencies. My pregnancy loss was traumatic and left me feeling disconnected from my students, lost in my own grief. Hiding my miscarriage from my elementary students was, I feel, the best choice, but I wonder if I would have felt more supported and less alone if I had discussed the loss with my colleagues. In the future, perhaps I will find the answers to these questions. Perhaps through deep self-examination, I will begin to unlearn toxic mothering habits. Maybe I will even find a way to use my experiences with the grief of mothering to help me relate to my grieving students and to guide my students to heal from their own trauma.
Conclusion

As my thesis research draws to conclusion, I find myself in a very different place from where I started. I have changed drastically in a number of ways. Possibly the most obvious change is that I was pregnant when I began this research and now, as I complete it, I have a toddler. Further, I started in my first semester of graduate school, and now I have completed the coursework for my Masters of Art Education. What began as a small idea among a list of brainstormed research seeds, grew to become around 100 pages of writing and images, and two gallery rooms worth of artwork. Physically, my body grew by nearly fifty pounds, and then returned to its original size--my shape changed, my skin changed, my feet changed, my body chemistry changed. More immaterially, my knowledge and understanding about motherhood, teaching, art, and myself have evolved. My overall identity changed, and with it, all those subjectivities which are like the shadow cast by identity. Two years ago, I would have said I was going to be a mother; I was going to be a teacher; I used to be an artist. Now, I say I am a mother/artist/teacher.

I discovered through this body of research that the process of becoming a mother, artist, and teacher is ongoing. I exist in a state of in-between; always changing, always learning, never complete. Although this paper is ending, my labor of becoming mother/artist/teacher continues.
Exhibition Images

Figure 42. Installation view, panorama, “Still Frames.”

Figure 43. Installation view, “Still Frames.”
Figure 44. (Top) Installation view, “Video Collage: Mother and Child Collaboration,” and “Portraits of My Breast Pump.”
Figure 45. (Bottom) Installation view, “Untitled Triptych I,” “Untitled Triptych II,” and “#momsie.”
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Figure 47. (Left) Installation view, “Sound Stories.” Figure 48. (Middle) Installation view, “Video Collage: Mother and Child Collaboration.” Figure 49. (Right) Installation view, “#momsselfie.”
Figure 50. Installation view, “Portraits of My Breast Pump.”

Figure 51. (Left) Untitled Triptych I. Figure 52. (Right) Untitled Triptych II.
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MOTHER/ARTIST/TEACHER

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doi:10.1007/978-3-319-62383-2


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