Resisting a Curriculum of Control

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I WORKED FOR AWHILE at an elementary school on the South side of Chicago. All of my students were African American and came from low income families. In my time there, I witnessed some of the effects of societal racism and classism in the lack of resources that were provided for students compared to schools in whiter, wealthier areas. As I began to study oppression further in my urban education studies classes, I started to wonder more about the ways in which schools perpetuated those oppressions. This led me to wonder how the enacted curriculum, or the "lived experience of schools," impacted students' understandings of their own identities and the way they fit into the structures of society. Therefore, I created a study to explore the way the environment of the school (or the "lived experience" of school; Pinar, 2012) sent students messages about their subjectivities. I witnessed the social control that the school tried to maintain over students and the student response to it. Because of the ways in which the students used the study to react to the social control, this paper argues that, when working with students, it is part of our ethical obligation to our participants to allow them space to create resistance in their own ways rather than trying to force our own research agendas.

Review of the Literature

Scholars argue that there is a "hidden curriculum" (P. Jackson, 1968) of social control that is a constant in all schools (Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Morris, 2005). Apple (2004) describes the hidden curriculum more broadly as "the teaching of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by [students] living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years" (p. 13). The hidden curriculum of control is one aspect of this. Examining this hidden curriculum is important, particularly as the social control within that hidden curriculum often acts as a means of reinforcing the dominance of various groups based on identity markers such as race, class, and gender (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2005). Understanding the way that social control occurs and impacts students is necessary in order to find ways to potentially combat this hidden curriculum in schools.

The social control of students takes place, in part, as control of their bodies. This includes control of movement (García & De Lissovoy, 2013; Martin, 1998), control of touching (Leafgren, 2011; Springgay, 2008), and control of dress (Happel, 2013; Morris, 2005), among others. Martin (1998) argues that the hidden curriculum "demands the practice of bodily control in congruence with the goals of the school as an institution" (p. 495); the hidden goals of the institution of schooling being maintaining control over students and the perpetuating of the current social order (e.g., privileging white, male, straight, and other dominant identities). García and De Lissovoy (2013) claim that within the hidden curriculum of social control, students must submit to "a more or less constant ordering of movement and interaction" (p. 60). The controlling of bodies occurs at all schools; however, it is often the strictest at schools in which the majority of the student population is low-SES and/or non-white (Apple, 2004). Schools see non-white bodies as more threatening, and therefore as more in need of being disciplined. Foucault (1979) argues that this constant disciplining of bodies creates "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (p. 138). In this way, schools can turn bodies that they see as dangerous and unruly into ordered, "docile" bodies.

This control of bodies takes on increased importance when we think of the body not as a Cartesian container for the mind, but instead as equal to and inextricable from the mind. Rather than thinking of the mind and body as being separate, some scholars argue that mind/body needs to be considered one, inseparable whole (e.g., Davies, 2000; Ellsworth, 2005; Hekman, 2010; Leafgren, 2011; Perry & Medina, 2011; Springgay, 2008). Thinking of the mind/body as one can be difficult, as there has been a longstanding Cartesian belief in their separation. Davies (2000) explains, "In our most familiar discourses, mind is separate from the body" (p. 19). But Davies and other feminist scholars insist that it is vital to think of the mind/body as a singular unit. Springgay and Freedman (2009) assert that when thinking of the mind/body in this way, "curriculum understood as *currere* is an embodied awareness between inside and outside and amongst bodies" (p. 32). Within this understanding, more than simply creating docile bodies, the curriculum of social control in schools produces docile mind/bodies. Morris (2005) maintains that this hidden curriculum fosters "embodiments of compliance" (p. 27). Such compliance leads students to not only have their mind/body controlled but to believe in the need for that control, which makes them more accepting of the place school tells them they have in the social order.

This examination of the hidden curriculum of control becomes more complicated when we take seriously the arguments of new materialist scholars (e.g., Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010; Snaza, Sonu, Truman, & Zaliwska, 2016) about the importance of considering the material and material entanglements. The social control is not simply seen as a product of discursive practices, but as an effect of the material-discursive entanglements between and among the human and non-human elements of the school entanglement. This means that the space of the school itself must be understood as more than the container for the events inside it. Foucault and Rabinow (1984) argue, "Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (p. 252). Ingrey (2013) agrees, "Space and power are linked, behaving in similar ways, in the process of subjectivation" (p. 176). Therefore, the material space of the school itself and its interactions with the bodies that occupy it contribute to the hidden curriculum of social control. This interaction of bodies and spaces should not be ignored in thinking through the hidden curriculum. This study attended to the entanglement of material bodies and spaces, and it impacted my understanding of the way the hidden curriculum operates.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

I used new materialisms and material feminism to shape my study and my interactions with participants and the data. While there is some variation both between those frameworks and within each framework, I will use both terms to encompass my onto-epistemological beliefs, as they are inspired by work from scholars in both. A deep look at each theory, as well as critiques of each, is beyond the scope of this paper. What I offer here is a brief overview of the aspects of a focus on the material that specifically informed this study and my understanding of what transpired.

Material feminism builds on the deconstructive nature of poststructuralism and postmodernism by adding a focus on the material to understandings of the world and the nature of power. Barad (2003) explains that a material focus does not mean that the discursive is unimportant, but rather that the material and discursive are inextricably linked. Instead of privileging one or the other, more can be gained from the view of interactions as material-discursive practices, in which "neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior" (p. 822). The material, then, does not take precedence over the discursive, but instead, both should be considered equally, as they are inseparable.

Entanglement is another main tenet of material feminism. Within a material feminist framework, everything (both organic and inorganic) is in a continual state of interrelatedness. These entangled relationships are a constant state of being, rather than something that we enter into by choice. Barad (2007) explains, "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" (p. 155). In other words, the autonomous self is a false construction. To take this seriously means that to attend to the experience of an *individual*, one must pay attention to everything within the entanglement.

Furthermore, material feminism, as part of its interest in phenomena, argues that all actants (human and otherwise) are in a constant state of emergence (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2003, 2007). Everything, then, is always *becoming*, rather than *being*. Grosz (2010) explains, "The subject is transformed by and engaged through its acts, becomes through its acts" (p. 146). This has important implications for research because participants will always be in a constant state of becoming, which means that even as I understand the participants and the school space, they will evolve into something new.

In planning and carrying out the study, I used a post qualitative framework. Because of my material feminist understanding of everything as emergent and entangled, I needed to use a framework that allows for a messy and interconnected design. Post qualitative methodology is a different way of thinking about terminology like *data* and *analysis* (see Lather, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011, 2013). It does not offer specific alternate methods or have a specific set of steps to follow. According to Somerville (2007) and St. Pierre (2011, 2013), within this framework, researchers understand themselves as also participants; engage in continual reflection, reflexivity, writing, and theorizing (see also Augustine, 2014; Mazzei, 2014; St. Pierre, 2015); allow the research process to be emergent (see also Lather, 2013); and avoid making objective truth claims (see also A. Jackson, 2013; St. Pierre, 2015).

The emergent nature of the design was particularly important to me because I wanted to enable participants to help shape the direction of the research. Just as I saw myself as also a participant, I wanted my participants also to be researchers. I imagined this happening through dialogue with participants to make decisions about how the study would proceed. However, I discovered that it was harder than I anticipated to let go of my plans and power as researcher.

Methods

For this study, I chose to use native photography (Banks, 2001) and focus group discussions. Native photography is a subset of visual anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1967/1996) and is not considered a post qualitative methodology. However, I used a post qualitative framework to inform how I planned the study and proceeded with my participants. In native photography, participants are asked to take photographs around a specific topic within their own environment. In my study, I asked participants to take photos of the messages that their school sends them about who to be and how to act. After photos were taken, each participant had a brief discussion with me while they chose a few photographs to print and share for the group discussion. Then, participants and I worked together to talk about and analyze photos. I intended to hold two rounds of photography and analysis discussions. While I audio-recorded the group discussions, I did not record any individual conversations or casual conversations, relying instead on extensive note taking. I listened to the data and reread my notes more than 10 times while sitting still, walking around campus, or performing various household tasks, to use my movements to assist in data analysis (for more on using movement as data analysis, see Daza & Huckaby, 2014). I did not transcribe the recordings because I did not want to put a primary focus on discourse, especially as bits of talk separated from the whole of the interactions. Since I was utilizing a post qualitative framework, data analysis included not only the photo analysis discussions that I had with my participants, but was also be comprised of reflexive journaling, visual analysis of the photographs, movement I performed while listening to tapes of the group discussions, and theorizing that I did throughout the course of the study. Consequently, the discussion sections of my study contain fewer direct quotations from participants than would be the case with a traditional qualitative study. While I do include some quotes, I tried not to focus on exclusively discursive data points.

Participants included 10 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students at a K–12 charter school in a Midwestern city. Seven participants self-identified as Black, two as Mexican, and one as white.[1] Half of the participants identified as female, and half as male. One participant only attended the first four meetings because she was expelled and could no longer attend meetings on school grounds. I met with the participants during an afterschool program that I created, which ran for three months. The program met 10 times; each meeting lasted for one and a half hours. While I did not give the meetings a name, the participants referred to them as "photography club." The majority of participants attended every meeting.

As I explained previously, while I had a general agenda for sessions, I was open to changing it. Having a research plan that was emergent meant releasing some control of my work and trusting the outcomes of the interactions within the entanglements with participants. However, for all my desire to place myself on more equal footing with my participants, I was a white, middle-aged, middle income, female adult in a school building in which the majority of the teachers were white, middle-aged, middle income females, and the majority of students (and my participants) were non-white and low-SES.

Disciplining of Bodies

One way that the school exerted social control over students that the participants frequently talked about was through the disciplining of their bodies. According to participants, this took place in many ways, including dress codes (requirement to wear a uniform) and suspensions and expulsions. However, the manner of control that participants mentioned most often was the control over the location and movement of their bodies. Participants complained that their movements were severely limited throughout the day and there were many parts of the school they were not allowed to enter. One participant shared

> *I got caught by the principal today walking through that back hallway. He said that I'm not supposed to be doing that and that the next time he sees me do that I'm gonna get in really bad trouble… I was just going to class. Me and my friend was just trying to see what was the fastest way back from the nurses office, so she walked one way and I walked the other way.*

This meant that the school not only tried to control where students went but also how they moved from one part of the building to another. This student was viewed as violating rules even though she was walking to class. They further informed me that even their movements to the bathrooms were restricted. One participant explained that when he first came to the school "they told me that we couldn't go to the bathroom individually, and I was like, 'What?'" Instead of being allowed to go to the bathroom individually as needed, students are brought to the bathroom as a class. Additionally, a student from the class is assigned to be the bathroom monitor and expected to supervise their peers while they wash and dry their hands.

What was interesting about this form of control is that while the students claimed to resent it, they also argued that it was necessary. When I asked participants what would happen if they were given more freedom to move around the school building during the day, one participant exclaimed, "There would be chaos!" Other participants agreed and gave examples of incidents that might occur. One suggested that "no one would go to class," while another argued, "There would be, like, vandalism and stuff." I argue that students believe in the necessity of such control because the school insists on control. The hidden curriculum of social control not only functions to control the movements of the students but also functions to convince the students that they need to be controlled (Apple, 2004; Foucault, 1979). Biesta (2013) claims that students often learn the hidden curriculum more effectively and completely than the official curriculum because the hidden curriculum is "located in the very practices in which children and students take part during their time in school," while the official curriculum is "a much more artificial add-on" (p. 32). This hidden curriculum of control can and does create docile mind/bodies that accept the school's insistence that they are unruly and requiring external discipline. Students can come to apply this view of their bodies as needing external discipline to broader society, rather than just within the confines of school (Apple, 2004; Biesta, 2013).

I saw similar phenomena with other aspects of the hidden curriculum in the building. For example, the school is full of motivational posters. There is at least one in every hallway. They cover a variety of topics, from responsibility, to respect for school, to study habits. Some of the participants said that the posters help them to feel inspired or motivated. I asked them if they needed the posters to feel motivated, one participant said, "Yes. Without the posters we wouldn't know what we were supposed to do." Several other participants echoed with "Yes," while the rest nodded their heads. While the explicit curriculum of the posters is to help motivate students, the hidden curriculum sends the message to the students that they are unmotivated and, once again, in need of the intervention of the school. Even these non-human objects that are part of the material

space of the school seemed to contribute to the curriculum of social control by sending the students messages about the lack of motivation and discipline they possess.

The participants also referred to the students of the school as "bad kids." They said that teachers tell them "that our class is so bad," and they agree that "our class really is bad though." My participants seemed willing to accept messages about the criminality of their peers. When one of the participants was expelled, the other participants were initially outraged. One participant said, "She didn't even do nothing. That is so weird. It just ain't even right." However, two weeks later, the participants spoke differently about the expelled participant, agreeing that it was her fault that she was expelled. During a discussion about discipline, a participant claimed, "She shoulda known better. It is her fault for doing stuff she shouldn't do." The other participants agreed with the narrative that students at the school deserved the suspensions and expulsions that they received.

The participants saw themselves as unruly, dangerous, unmotivated, and in need of the school's intervention, even as they expressed their resentment for it. The school's curriculum of control changed the ways in which the students felt about themselves and each other. While they claimed to wish they did not have to follow so many rules, anytime I asked about what it would be like if the rules went away, the participants insisted that the student bodies were too unruly. They believed that student bodies were too dangerous to be allowed to remain undisciplined by the authority of the school. This is made more complex because it is not only the students in the building who come to believe these messages, but all of the adults as well. The messages subtly acted on everyone, even me.

Changes to the Plan

It is, as it turns out, easier to plan an emergent design and plan to trust the direction your participants want to take the research than to actually allow the research to go in a new direction. I found that as the research strayed from my agenda, I felt a lack of control that manifested itself as anxiety and queasiness that I regularly had to overcome. Even as I tried to uncover the school's curriculum of control, I had to try to fight my own desire to maintain control over the bodies and agenda of my participants. I had to resist the temptation to see my participants as unruly bodies in need of my intervention and guidance. I spent many years as an elementary classroom teacher in schools with majority non-white populations, and the same messages of the necessity of control that were acting on my participants had acted on me. I had to recognize those messages as false narratives, and fighting those subtle messages can be difficult.

My participants began the study following my plan, as they said they would in initial discussions. They took pictures, they talked to me while they selected pictures, and we worked as a group to discuss what the pictures meant in the context of their intra-actions in the school. However, after the first round of photos and discussions, the students moved away from my plan. They did not, however, inform me of the change in their intentions. They proceeded in their interactions with me in the same way we had in the first round of photo taking. Therefore, it was only slowly that I began to understand what was happening in the study.

The first signs came in conversations that I was having with participants at the start of the sessions. We would meet briefly to check in and talk about things they might photograph that afternoon. But I was confused by many of the conversations we were having about what to photograph. As an example, the following conversation occurred:

> Me: What do you want to take pictures of today that you haven't had a chance to photograph yet?
> Fifth grader: The music room.
> Me: Do you like music class?
> Fifth grader: We don't have music class in fifth grade.
> Me: Did it used to be one of your favorite classes?
> Fifth grader: No.

I did not follow up initially, because I unsure of what to say in response. Soon, I noticed that it was part of a pattern that was developing. The sixth graders, who did not have art, wanted to get photographs of the art room; the fifth and sixth graders wanted pictures of the playground, because they no longer had recess there; all the participants wanted to explore the high school side of the building, which was forbidden to them.

However, for all their talk about where they wanted to take photos, I soon discovered that they had all but stopped actually using their cameras to take pictures. The students were taking the cameras and going into the spaces that they wanted access to, but they were not using the cameras to take pictures when they got there. Instead, the students were using the cameras as access keys—keys that allowed them to enter spaces that they were not allowed to occupy during the school day. They carried the cameras around in their hands, rather than putting them in a bag or pocket, which gave the impression of a readiness on their part to use the cameras. I witnessed an adult trying to stop one of my participants from entering the school library. My participant held up the camera and said, "But I need a picture for photography club." The teacher then allowed them to enter. The cameras acted on the participants in such a way that the camera/student entanglement was viewed differently by the adults in the building than the students without cameras.

The school strictly controlled the movements of the students' bodies during school hours, and so they were using the study as a way to get around the restrictions that were placed on them. They discovered that if they showed the cameras, they were allowed in most spaces. And when that failed, they told me that they wanted pictures of a space, and I arranged access to the space (still thinking that they were going to take pictures there). For example, I arranged for them to be able to spend time on the playground and the blacktop. They spent about 20 minutes in those spaces, and only five photographs were taken (three of them by the same participant). They stopped pursuing my research agenda and started operating on their own agenda.

Seeing them moving around the building with the cameras led me to believe that I would have all sorts of photos to look through after each session. However, when I looked through the memory cards, there were almost no new photos. It was frustrating to watch this happening. I could not understand why they had stopped taking photos. My first thought was that I had to get them back onto my research agenda. I wondered what prompts I might need to give them to get them to start taking pictures again. I thought about having them make checklists of what they wanted to photograph. For all my talk about an emergent design, I was unprepared to see my research project change. I tried the next week to offer a different prompt for them to think about in taking pictures. They brainstormed things they might photograph with me. Then they did not take any pictures. I felt defeated. It was in writing and thinking through a reflection that I began to realize I needed to let the students take the study in the direction they chose.

After that, I stopped offering new prompts and trying to get the participants to brainstorm what they might want to take pictures of. Instead, I asked them where they wanted to go in the school and why. The participants agreed that what they wanted—what the "photography club" gave them—was "freedom." Obviously they did not mean larger societal freedom, but temporary

freedom from the control of their movements that occurred all day long at school. It was a freedom from the continual disciplining of their bodies. They moved freely (at least somewhat—they sometimes still had to show their cameras to gain access to spaces) throughout the building and even took advantage of the opportunity to use the bathrooms unmonitored.

Resistance

When I planned the study, I had ideas of students resisting the control of the school through art; they would take photos and create art with them that we would display in a show, and the show would be some radical act of resistance. I thought of this as a way of potentially creating lasting change. I imagined the teachers and administrators seeing the work, thinking about what it meant for the school, and considering policy changes. This agenda, however, was not working for my participants. This is not because they did not feel a desire to resist. In fact, Morris (2005) argues, "Strict social control from school officials can provoke resistance from students" (p. 29). My students did seem to have a desire to resist, but not in the way I intended. Instead, the students used the movements of their bodies as a form of resistance. By occupying forbidden spaces, students were pushing back against school rules that sought to discipline their bodies. This form of resistance was more immediate and less abstract than what I had in mind. By using the movements of their bodies as resistance, the students also did not have to find a discourse to defy the school's control. Because they often spoke of the measures of control as being necessary, it may have been harder for them to use discourse as a means of opposition to that control.

This student method of resistance did not lead to policy change or differences in the way that the administrators or teachers functioned. And I think that it was naïve of me to think that my plan for the study would have led to real change in the way the school operated. The social control that the school participates in is too central to the hidden motives and goals of the school as an institution. However, this does not make the students' resistance insignificant. As previously stated, the restriction of movement that the students experience causes them to take on the message that they are unruly and in need of control. As the students moved more freely through the school building, not causing chaos or vandalizing the hallways, they instead received the message that their bodies are not in need of external restrictions. This is not to say that the students were able to permanently throw off the messages the school sends about the dangerous unruliness of their bodies, only that the students were able to have moments of pushing back on those messages.

Ethics

Understanding the ways in which my participants changed my study as resistance caused me to think more deeply about my obligations to participants in my research practices. As a researcher, I try to approach my interactions with participants with an ethics of entanglement informed by the new materialisms. In an interview, Barad claimed that "ethics is therefore not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 69). This ethics, Biesta (2013) argues, is not something we enter into, but something that we are always already a part of. Therefore, my ethical obligation to my participants is not just because I am a researcher and they are the subjects of my research, but because we are part of the research

entanglement together. Biesta claims that this ethical relationship is "a relationship of infinite and unconditional responsibility for the Other" (p. 19). Within a new materialist understanding, this care for participants is not simply about care for the Other, but about care for the self that is also Other. This means I must attend to the power relations within the entanglement and the ways in which I may worsen the power imbalance by taking more power from my participants. I cannot write about the importance of empowering my participants while using my power as researcher to demand that participants follow my research plan. However, trusting my participants was more difficult than I anticipated.

The participants all agreed that the freedom to move around the school was the part of the study that they most valued, despite the fact that I initially did not see the value in it. Because of this, it was especially important to allow them to shift the study. In addition to the fact that they had their *own* ideas about how to resist the school's control, it is possible that my idea of resistance would not have worked for them. When they spoke about the school's control, they claimed to not like it, but they also claimed that it was necessary. Therefore, it might have been difficult for them to resist by using a counterdiscourse to refute the discourse they had accepted, which was that the control was needed. Using the movements of their bodies was a way for them to resist the control while also proving to themselves that their bodies were not dangerous and unruly.

This experience has led me to believe that, as researchers, we need to think carefully about whose agenda we are serving when we create and insist upon specific research agendas. I thought that my plan would ultimately serve the students, but the students had different ideas about what would be the most beneficial to them. Had I forced them to follow my plan throughout, it is possible that I would have left the study believing that I had benefitted them in some way, when, in fact, I would have been one more adult in the school creating rules and plans that they had to adhere to. I had to really trust the desires of my participants and accept that they were not unruly bodies in need of my control. It was easy to discuss that belief as I planned for my study and much more difficult to enact it.

If we are to take our ethical obligations to our participants seriously, especially within a post qualitative framework in which we see ourselves as entangled with our participants, studies must be left open to changes by our participants. Barad argues that we have

> an obligation to be responsive to the other, who is not entirely separate from what we call the self. This way of thinking about ontology, epistemology, and ethics together makes for a world that is always already an ethical matter. (Barad, interview by Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 69)

Meeting this obligation can be difficult, especially if we feel that we know the best way to proceed. But letting go of some of the sureness of our own knowledge and power as researchers may be the best way to serve our participants.

Conclusion

Through the course of my study, I saw the ways in which the material-discursive practices of the school forwarded a hidden curriculum of social control. I watched it impact my participants and started to understand the subtle messages it ingrained in me in my years as a teacher. While many scholars have discussed how dangerous such a curriculum is to students and society more

broadly (e.g., Apple, 2004; García & De Lissovoy, 2013; Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Martin, 1998; Morris, 2005; Pinar, 2012; Slattery, 2013), more conversations need to take place, especially those that take into account the importance of the body and the material. Those conversations are necessary if we want to find new ways to resist and dismantle such systems of social control.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper, I chose to use the terms that the students used to describe themselves.

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