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A Constant Effort: An Exploration of Feminist Disability Theory and Feminist Ethnography in Producing Just Ethnography in Special Education

A Thesis in Women's and Gender Studies and Anthropology

by

Ava Gustafson

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to combine the efforts of feminist ethnography and feminist disability theory in the production of a more full and robust research methodology for the study of special education environments and their actors. I will explore ethnography, both generally and in a feminist sense, some feminist disability theory, and current ethnographic studies of special education. Through the application of feminist ethnographic methods and feminist disability theory and a critique of current ethnographic research in special education, a more responsible formulation of a feminist disability ethnographic method can be formulated for the research of special education students and their environments. I seek to ask questions about ethnographic methods and disability theory with a particular focus on how to improve the experiences of special education students in their education and in research. In my first chapter, I explore the history of ethnography from the Greek "father of history," Herodotus, through to the postmodern questions posed by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, and concluding with a discussion of the feminist critiques of ethnography and promotions of a feminist ethnography. My second chapter focuses on feminist disability theory. I pull together the important feminist and disability scholars who proposed a combination of feminism and disability studies queries in the understanding of intersectional identities. The third chapter looks at specific special education ethnographies that have already been conducted. I seek to critique these ethnographies in order to learn where they failed and where they could be further improved by applying feminist disability theory. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of what a feminist disability ethnography method would achieve and change for special education.

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Introduction

We know that if being biologically female is a disadvantage, it is because a social context makes it a disadvantage. From the standpoint of a disabled person, one can see how society could minimize the disadvantages of most disabilities, and, in some instances, turn them into advantages.

-- Susan Wendell, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability"

The purpose of this thesis is to combine the efforts of feminist ethnography and feminist disability theory in the production of a more full and robust research methodology for the study of special education environments and their actors. I will explore ethnography, both generally and in a feminist sense, some feminist disability theory, and current ethnographic studies of special education. Through the application of feminist ethnographic methods and feminist disability theory and a critique of current ethnographic research in special education, a more responsible formulation of a feminist disability ethnographic method can be formulated for the research of special education students and their environments. I seek to ask questions about ethnographic methods and disability theory with a particular focus on how to improve the experiences of special education students in their education and in research.

This thesis is a culmination of much of my life. Before I even began to think about undergraduate degrees and papers of this proportion, I was participating in relationships and environments that are discussed in this thesis. Therefore, an important aspect of this introduction must be an introduction to myself.

I grew up in a single-mother household with two brothers who were labeled as "special education" students. My older brother has Asperger syndrome, a diagnosis that is typically seen as being high-functioning autistic. My younger brother was diagnosed similarly before behavioral testing at Yale instead pushed for "emotional disturbance," a broad category that even I struggle to understand or define. His behaviors include extreme or unlikely responses to situations he finds stressful, difficulty maintaining relationships with peers, and, most importantly, in terms of this thesis, an inability to learn in the same ways that "general education" students do. However, both of these diagnoses are protected under the U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), an act that demands the provision of free and equal education for students with disabilities.

My brother's situations have deeply affected me since I was born. While there are many personal elements of their situations I could go on about, the most important effect lies in my desire to work in special education. I was consistently targeted by grade school teachers, from elementary through high school, to work with students with disabilities. I was a gentle-mannered and patient child, but it always seemed as if my relations provided me some form of expertise that compounded upon my caring nature. This belief was proved to me when I was hired by the state of Connecticut to work as a special education paraprofessional and behavioral therapist in my town's elementary and middle school on the simple grounds that both of my brother's had special education diagnoses. My extreme concern for the special education system truly began there.

I was hired with no college degree, with no prior training, not even a resume submission. Just one phone call. I thought perhaps I would receive more training after the hiring process, but no formal training followed. I was called into the school for a brief half-day shadowing of a paraprofessional and a short conversation with the outsourced behavioral analyst. She handed me a large stack of paper and said that I should read them, and then I could begin work that summer. There was no assessment of the absorption of the knowledge, no way to prove that I was prepared to work as a professional with these children. I have continued to work as a substitute paraprofessional and behavioral therapist to this day.

This short description of my experience in special education leads to the purpose of my thesis. As a women's and gender studies and anthropology double major, my thesis aims to utilize the theories and methodologies developed in each field. I argue that feminist disability theory must be applied to current methods of feminist ethnography to achieve deeper and more robust research of special education.

In my first chapter, I explore the history of ethnography from the Greek "father of history," Herodotus, through to the postmodern questions posed by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, and concluding with a discussion of the feminist critiques of ethnography and promotions of a feminist ethnography. This chapter sets up the important aspect of ethnography to this thesis, as ethnography lends itself beautifully to the research of special education. However, ethnography has ways to improve, particularly from the application of feminist disability theory.

My second chapter focuses on feminist disability theory. I pull together the important feminist and disability scholars who proposed a combination of feminism and disability studies queries in the understanding of intersectional identities. I believe that ethnography can learn from feminist disability theory to better understand the identities and experiences of children in special education classrooms.

The third chapter looks at specific special education ethnographies that have already been conducted. I seek to critique these ethnographies in order to learn where they failed and where they could be further improved by applying feminist disability theory. By reading these ethnographies from a critical perspective and through learning how feminist disability theory would improve the research design and methods, a new ethnographic method can be formulated.

My conclusion provides this new formulation of ethnography that utilized a feminist disability theory to better fit the needs of research in special education classrooms. By promoting a feminist disability inspired ethnographic method, I argue, a fuller and more intersectional understanding of special education experiences can be reached.

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to help the research being done in special education to reach new heights and to gain understanding in order to improve the experience of the children in special education. A feminist disability ethnography must promote a cause for change, and this is my cause. Every child in a special education classroom deserves to experience their education in positive and empowering ways. A

feminist disability ethnography will work to make this a reality. This thesis works to make this a reality.

Chapter 1: A Genealogy

Whether we write with pens or type on keyboards, history possesses us as much as we create it. And the past gently mocks us in all its cacophony. -- Deborah A. Gordon "Border Work: Feminist Ethnography and the Dissemination of Literacy" in *Women Writing Culture*

Introduction

The goal of the thesis is to evaluate the benefits of researching special education from a feminist ethnographic perspective with attentiveness to disability. We must ask questions about ethnography, its goals, and its feminist critiques to understand the strengths and weaknesses of ethnography. In order to understand ethnography, it is necessary to first understand the ways in which ethnography operates as a basis for anthropological research. This chapter serves to explain the basics of ethnography and the feminist critiques of ethnography so that a cohesive path can be drawn to my proposed method of feminist disability ethnography.

For the purpose of this paper, I argue that ethnography is the strongest research method for understanding the complexities of special education classrooms and their actors (i.e., students, teachers, other professionals/children in the school). In order to demonstrate the necessity of ethnographic research methods, it is important to understand what, exactly, ethnography is.

A Short History of Ethnography

It is difficult to produce a firm background on the history of ethnography, but it is important to historicize the current methods. A clearer understanding of feminist anthropology and ethnographic methods can be achieved by first understanding the origins of ethnography. In "The Changing Story of Ethnography," in *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods,* Robin Patric Clair discusses the colonial origins of ethnography. She begins with the Greek "father of history," Herodotus. She then moves through the following stages of colonialism, including Christopher Columbus, the British Empire, and the expansion of other world powers, such as France, Italy, Germany, and Russia, and the current capitalist formations of colonialism. By beginning with Herodotus, Clair places ethnography at its beginnings in history and travel writing -- Herodotus traveled to other countries in order to record their 'cultures.'

After debriefing the colonialist beginnings of ethnography, Clair moves to a discussion of the first anthropologists, Henry Lewis Morgan, Edward Tylor, and Franz Boas. She describes the importance of both Morgan and Tylor in situating American anthropology. Clair argues that Tylor had a stronger impact compared to Morgan's materialist discussion of cultural evolution, his most important contribution to the anthropological community. Tylor began the anthropological emphasis on the defining of culture and the use of ethnography in discovering and describing cultures. Both Morgan and Tylor used colonialist and racist ideas that perpetuated the belief in the "primitive"

nature of non-Western societies, using ethnography as a form of sensationalist writing that demonstrated the Other, the non-Western, as the savage.

Franz Boas crafted a strictly different approach, compared to that of Morgan and Tylor. Boas argued that this evolutionary approach to anthropology and ethnography could not stand as there was no proof that cultures different from Western cultures were less civilized. Boas called for a stronger focus on other aspects of anthropology, such as linguistics, archeology, sociocultural and physical anthropology, and deeper attention to the holistic approach. The focus of anthropologists like Franz Boas and his students (e.g., Alfred Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, Edward Sapir, and Margaret Mead) was to preserve cultures, to practice salvage ethnography. Clair writes that these anthropologists developed this perspective because of "[t]he presence of a dominant culture that intended to exterminate, assimilate or control the subordinate culture" (Clair 8). Anthropology, as imagined by Boas and his students, focused on the political responsibility of helping these 'subordinate' cultures to survive.

Moving onto the third wave of colonialism, Clair lists many important voices that contributed to the changes in ethnographic methods. She notes the ways in which World War I and II caused changes in anthropology and the production of ethnography. Many ethnographers, such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss, found themselves in situations that allowed them to research the "Other" in novel ways. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and E. Evans-Pritchard began to look at different ways of producing ethnography from archival work. Schools began to be established to teach

ethnography and anthropology. In their ethnographies, these anthropologists asked questions about the cultures they studied and about humanity in general.

Clair ends her section on the third wave of colonialism with a short discussion of the feminist anthropologist and ethnographers who emerged after and during World War I and II. She identifies authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, whose work pushed for an exploration "of women as cultural beings defined as the Other in relation to men" (Clair 12). Clair notes the importance of feminist Marxist anthropologist, Eleanor Burke Leacock, who focused on the shaping of women's experience by Christianity, colonialism, and capitalism. Leacock inspired many feminist scholars and ethnographers, such as Betty Friedan. Many women of color, including belle hooks, disputed these universalist, white, middle-class descriptions of the female experience. More discussion of these women of color scholars will follow later in this chapter.

Clair mentions another important voice in the discussion of anthropology -- Clifford Geertz, a symbolic cultural anthropologist. Geertz's method of ethnography focused on symbols, text, and language in the creation of culture (Clair 14). Geertz's definition of culture, in his article, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," shapes his view of ethnography. Geertz provided a semiotic definition of culture; "Believing… that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 311). He purports the idea that ethnography is not, and should not be, positivistic, but instead should aim to provide a "thick description" of culture as composed of "a

multiplicity of complex conceptual structures… superimposed upon or knotted into one another," as a web (Geertz 114). Geertz continued the anthropological and ethnographic movement away from colonialist forms of study. Rather than seeking to firmly define each culture and place it within a Western context, Geertz says that ethnography should be about the "guessing at meanings… [and] not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape" (318). Geertz provided a platform from which postmodernist anthropology was built.

After Geertz published his article in 1973, many anthropologists began to work towards building an understanding of postmodern ethnography and anthropology. A bridge can be created from Geertz to postmodernism through a discussion of Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson's 1983 *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Hammersley and Atkinson discuss ethnography as a set of methods rather than a set definition. Hammersley and Atkinson emphasize the importance of participant observation in ethnography; the researcher must become fully immersed in the culture of the research location. Ethnographers must involve themselves in the everyday practices of their research group. They must watch, listen, and ask questions over a long period of time in order to better understand their area of research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1). By practicing fieldwork in this way, ethnographers follow a model of naturalism, the primary goal of which is "the *description* of cultures."

Hammersley and Atkinson define naturalism, and therefore an ethnographic approach, as, "Naturalism proposes that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher… The primary aim should be to

describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place" (Hammersley & Atkinson 6). The authors continue to describe ethnography by stating that, instead of focusing on finding some universal and always-applicable truth, ethnography seeks to understand the particular truths that pertain to individuals and groups in specific societies and cultures.

In following the beliefs of naturalism, ethnography provides a method that allows for a deeper understanding of individuals and their specific cultural phenomena without focusing on natural laws or the seeking of some truth. Hammersley and Atkinson emphasize the necessity of understanding the world in the same way the researched does. They write, "We can come to interpret the world in the same way as they do, and thereby learn to understand their behaviour in a different way to that in which natural scientists set about understanding the behaviour of physical phenomena" (Hammersley & Atkinson 8).

Shortly after Hammersley and Atkinson wrote their book on ethnography, James Clifford and George E. Marcus published an anthology called, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Clifford and Marcus compiled this book based on discussions and lectures given at the School for American Research in Santa Fe in 1984. The book was subsequently published in 1986. Clifford and Marcus produced this anthology in order to demonstrate some of the downfalls of ethnography and to produce a postmodern critique of ethnography.

A definition of postmodernism is necessary for a discussion of Clifford and Marcus' work in *Writing Culture.* Jennifer Kretchmar, in an entry in the *Salem Press Encyclopedia,* claims that postmodernism is often defined as being against modernity. Modernity can be defined by principles such as "the centrality of reason, the belief in progress, access to truth, individual agency, and faith in the scientific method" (Kretchmar 2). In defining the postmodern view of research, Kretchmar notes a change of objectivity and subjectivity. The previously objective, authoritative author changes to a subjective participant in the research. Postmodernism is against the seeking of absolute truths from the Enlightenment era. Instead, postmodernists produce research that contributes to "discussion and debate" (Kretchmar 13).

Most of my chosen feminist critiques/understandings of ethnography choose to critique postmodernism and Clifford and Marcus' book. Therefore, it is critical to first look at *Writing Culture* to understanding feminist ethnography. The book begins with an introduction by Clifford that notes ethnography as an art harkening back to the "eighteenth-century meaning… art as the skillful fashioning of useful artifacts. The making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly work of writing" (Clifford 6). He continues with this definition by listing six determining factors of ethnography.

Of these six factors, the most important to this thesis are factors 1, 3, 5, and 6. Ethnography should be (1) contextual, meaning it utilizes the social environment to draw meaningful conclusions; (3) institutional, or demonstrating the connections between the everyday interactions, institutional elements, and the ethnographic writing; (5) political, that the ethnographer must understand the dynamics of power between the researcher and

the researched and the representation of culture; and (6) historical, or the understanding that the specific place and time of the ethnography are important to understanding the ethnographic material (Clifford 6). Clifford and Marcus call here for what most anthropologists would define as a postmodern prescription of ethnography, hence their redefining of the term, 'art.' Throughout their collection, Clifford and Marcus call for the reform of ethnography into a more reflexive approach and the production of specific knowledge. With Clifford and Marcus' shift to exploring a postmodern critique of ethnography, it is also important to note the postmodern shift to reflexivity.

Reflexivity as a Key Element of Ethnography

A defining element of ethnography is reflexivity. Reflexivity places researchers within their individual and specific social position and creates a space where the researcher's position defines their research. Hammersley and Atkinson further develop the idea of reflexivity by demonstrating the importance of placing the researcher within their research. They write:

> Reflexivity… implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics. (Hammersley and Atkinson 16)

By utilizing a reflexive approach, ethnography can be understood in a deeper and more complex fashion that allows for a placement of not only those being researched but of the researcher as well. Allison James and Alan Prout also extol the benefits of reflexivity in their article. In their article, "A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems," they write about new modes of childhood research in their article, stating that: "All ethnographic material has to be understood reflexively, that is as a product of a research process in which a particular interpretation is made by an observer in relation to the setting in which the observations are made" (James & Prout 26). In placing not only the subjects but also the researcher in their social locations, the ethnographic information gathered is richer, fuller, and more accountable in terms of bias in both data collection and analysis.

John Davis, Nick Watson, and Sarah Cunningham-Burley corroborate this definition in their chapter, "Learning the Lives of Disabled Children: Developing a Reflexive Approach." Davis, Watson, and Cunningham-Burley emphasize the importance and centrality of reflexivity in conducting accurate and ethical ethnography. The authors determine, through citing other scholars, that "reflexivity opens the way to a more radical consciousness of self, that [reflexivity] is a mode of self-analysis and political awareness" (Watson et al. 201). They continue by stating that "reflexivity is achieved 'through detachment, internal dialogue and constant (and intensive) scrutiny' (Hertz 1997) of the process through which researchers construct and question their interpretations of field experiences" (Watson et al. 201-2). By describing reflexivity in this way, Davis, Watson,

and Cunningham-Burley note the necessity that ethnography reflects the researcher-self in order to produce unbiased and thoughtful ethnography.

By discussing ethnography and its elements (i.e., participant observation and reflexivity), I have set up my argument for ethnography as (one of) the most effective modes of conducting childhood research. In his chapter, "Zeitgeist Research on Childhood," Chris Jenks argues that "ethnography… is a most effective methodology to be employed in the study of childhood. Children are enabled to engage and they can be engaged" (Jenks 71). James and Prout also highly recommend ethnography, both for its reflexivity and its ability to respect the voices of children in research. They note, as one of the key features of their new paradigm, that: "Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of … data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research" (James & Prout 8). As evidenced by the definitions and materials stated above, ethnography allows the researcher to engage with children and *to be engaged* by children. In this way, children's autonomy is respected by the experience of their culture through engagement with and by children.

Postcolonial Positionality versus Reflexivity

Margery Wolf provides a perfect movement from the postmodern focus on reflexivity to the feminist ethnographic focus to positionality. Wolf gives a very interesting feminist critique of postmodern ethnography and the lack of feminist ideology in postmodern critiques of ethnography and anthropology. In her short book, *A Thrice-*

Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility, Wolf reexamines a past ethnographic fieldwork study she conducted in Taiwan. While reexamining her work, she notes the ways in which her fieldwork perpetuated a White-focused, colonialist agenda. Wolf emphasizes the importance of a reflexive approach in conducting anti-imperialist and feminist ethnography. Reflecting on that first fieldwork experience in Taiwan, she writes, "When we analyzed our data and wrote them up, we felt a responsibility to 'our' village to 'get it right,' but they were 'our' data, not theirs, and we assumed only our reputations as scholars would be affected by not 'getting it right'" (Wolf 3).

Wolf continues her reflection on her reflexivity throughout her book. Interestingly, the ending point of her book is to warn feminist ethnographers against postmodernism. She notes that feminists have been conducting reflexive work for decades before the male-rooted postmodernism was legitimated. She writes that "Feminist work has always been under suspicion, often for the same things that postmodernists' critiques now celebrate -- like questioning objectivity, rejecting detachment, and accepting contradictory readings" (Wolf 135). Wolf's warning against the postmodernist developments of ethnography is echoed in Linda Alcoff's critical essay on positionality, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: the Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory."

Alcoff proposes a new form of subjectivity in her theory of positionality and standpoint theory. In this approach, she mentions the importance of Black feminism, particularly the work developed by the Combahee River Collective. Her concept of

positionality draws on identity politics, the using of one's own multiple identities to inform feminist and activist work. Her concept of positionality is based on two points: (1) that 'woman' is a "relational term" that is only definable in a constantly changing context and, (2) that women's positionality can be utilized as a place from which meaning is made rather than simply understood (Alcoff 434). In the theory of positionality, women are non-essentialized subjects capable of creating their own meanings. Alcoff's argument for positionality concludes with a plea for a move away from Western racists and androcentric universals for human, and women's, experience. She states that "The solution lies… in formulating a new theory within the process of reinterpreting our position, and reconstructing our political identity, as women and feminists in relation to the world and to one another" (435).

Wolf and Alcoff demonstrate the necessity to change the Western production of thought to a production of feminist thought by a wide variety of people who speak from a variety of locations. These new theories of positionality are further reflected in the anti-imperialist and -colonialist thought produced by Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman and Chandra Talpade Mohanty.

Lugones and Spelman extrapolate from Alcoff's idea of positionality and the importance of meaning-making from every woman's position in their article, "Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for 'The Woman's Voice.'" 'The woman's voice' that Lugones and Spelman note in their title speaks to the white, middle-class woman's voice that has, through colonialism, been claimed as the voice of *all* women. They write, "You [white women] do have an

obligation to abandon your imperialism, your universal claims, your reduction of us to your selves, simply because they seriously harm us" (Lugones & Spelman 21). To produce anti-imperialist feminism, Lugones and Spelman call for an empathetic introspection of the singular voice of women. White women must analyze the exclusion of women of color and other marginalized women from feminism and *listen* to the voices of other women with empathy. There can no longer be one voice of women, but the voice of multiple women who speak from multiple identities and locations. The importance of positionality is stressed in the call to locate oneself in the concrete world and how a particular understanding of the world is gained from that positionality.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty makes a similar argument, taking the idea of the universal woman's voice to the universal female experience of subordination. She introduces the phrase, "ethnocentric universalism," and the discussion of "a hegemonic First/Third World connection" (Mohanty 336). In terms of this chapter, Mohanty's most important category of analysis is of women. Similarly to Alcoff and Lugones and Spelman, she argues that "women" is not a universal group, with universal thoughts and behaviors, regardless of their specific locating identities. Mohanty notes that many scholars place women in a singular category due to a perceived universal subordination of women. She uses these concepts to discuss the "colonial move." She advocates for a movement away from using "third world women" as another, different, universal. Instead, she asserts, non-western feminist scholars need to separate themselves from "re-representing" third world women and recreating ethnocentric universals and instead write from their particular positionality and listen empathetically to the voices of other women.

A Feminist Critique of Postmodern Ethnography

The points of positionality and standpoint theory are important to understanding the necessity of feminist theory in ethnography. While the scholars I have previously discussed provide important background to understanding feminist ethnography, they mostly leave out the defining elements and critiques done by feminist anthropologists. Many of the feminist critiques in this chapter discuss, or make a play on, the previously mentioned book, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. For example, Margery Wolf's closing chapter in her book is entitled, "Writing Ethnography: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," while Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon's collection is entitled *Women Writing Culture*. These chapters and collections point to the beginnings of an ethnographic critique by riffing off of Clifford and Marcus' 1986 book.

In the introduction to the anthology, Clifford notes the lack of feminist scholarship and incriminates himself in an attempt to explain away the lack of diverse contributions to the collection. He writes,

> Planning the seminar, we were confronted by what seemed to us an obvious -- important and regrettable-- fact. Feminism had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts... [F]eminist ethnography has focused either on setting the record straight about women or on revising anthropological categories (for example, the nature/culture opposition). It has not

> produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such. (Clifford 20-1)

For Clifford to claim that "Feminism had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts" (Clifford 20) demonstrates the attempt to negate the work of so many female and feminist-identifying anthropologists who had been working or completed work before 1984 (see Davis & Craven xv-xvvi).

Even Hammersley and Atkinson, who are not strictly feminist and whose first publication of their aforementioned book was in 1983, unconsciously refute Clifford's claims. They write, "Devault (1990) and Stanley and Wise (1983) have argued, the feminist standpoint may subvert and transgress time-honoured modes of writing and representation that implicitly reproduce dominant modes of thought and discourse… that self-consciously challenges some of the dominant conventions of ethnographic realist writing" (Hammersley &Atkinson 254). In citing feminist anthropological and ethnographic authors from a timeframe before and during the publication of Clifford and Marcus' anthology, Hammersley and Atkinson prove the importance of feminist work in radicalizing ethnographic research and writing.

As stated earlier, many feminist ethnographers also take issue with Clifford and Marcus. One such critique can be found in the article, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective" by Frances Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen. Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen note the ways in which feminist theory and ethnographic research have been utilizing the "new" methods (i.e., contested meanings, the political nature of language, issues of power and

domination) postmodernism is promoting (Mascia-Lees et al. 11). They also note the ways in which Clifford's "defensive, convoluted, and contradictory explanation" for the lack of feminist work in the anthology perpetuate the androcentric and elitist nature of academia (16). Using these examples, Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen ultimately argue that feminist scholars need to position themselves precariously between status as an outsider *and* an insider. They should seek to collaborate with other scholars with an end goal of working "against the forces of oppression" (33). The authors maintain their critique of postmodernism while advocating for a feminist movement in academia that will provide a more desirable and activist outcome.

The remainder of this chapter will work on clarifying the centrality of feminist ethnography to the rest of this thesis and as a vital approach to special education ethnography. I will discuss what feminist ethnography is, in comparison to the aforementioned works and elements of ethnography. In order to begin the conversation about feminist ethnography, it is important to look at Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon's responsive anthology, *Women Writing Culture*, which provides many instances of many feminist anthropologists attempting to define feminist ethnography.

Defining Feminist Ethnography

Within two years of each other, Judith Stacey (1988) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) wrote articles with the same name: "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" Stacey and Abu-Lughod do not begin the work of feminist ethnography, but they do begin a dialogue

on defining it. Working in chronological order, let us first analyze Stacey's discussion on the possibility of a feminist ethnography.

Stacey has a rather pessimistic and forewarning view of 'feminist' ethnography. She traces an outline of her previous forays into ethnographic research that uncovers that "elements of inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal are endemic to ethnography" (Stacey 23). Stacey spends most of her article explaining this claim. She states that ethnography is ultimately exploitative and creates dangerous relationships based on power and control. There can be no true feminist ethnography, according to Stacey; only "partially" feminist ethnography can exist. She does write, however, that, "[she believes] the potential benefits of "partially" feminist ethnography seems worth the serious moral costs involved" (26). Stacey acknowledges that fieldwork and ethnographic research (and writing) create power relationships between the researcher and researched that consistently leave the informants in dangerous and exploited positions.

Judith Stacey provides an extremely important viewpoint to the production of a feminist ethnographic method. She states the dangers of ethnography and argues that it is exploitative in nature; therefore, she believes informant exploitation is unavoidable. It is important to understand this view, especially in researching an at-risk group of people, such as special education students. In her exhortation against ethnography, I believe that Stacey demonstrates the usefulness of adding a feminist perspective to ethnographic research and writing. Through this warning, she creates a beautiful base from which feminist ethnography needs to grow -- for the researcher to understand their positionality and their power, and to check that power in an attempt to keep the research as

nonexploitative as possible. I believe that Stacey's self and ethnographic critique were too harsh in claiming that true feminist ethnography is impossible. Instead, I think that, through the use of Stacey's extreme wariness, a true feminist ethnographic method can be achieved.

Lila Abu-Lughod is far more optimistic about the possibility of feminist ethnography. She picks up on a thread that Stacey notes -- the importance of an application of feminist theory to anthropology. To Abu-Lughod, the question of feminist ethnography is the question of how feminism can improve ethnographic research and writing. She claims that the most important feminist lessons for anthropology are in the epistemological issues surrounding ethnocentricity and positionality, drawing from previous discussions of Alcoff, Lugones and Spelman, and Mohanty. Abu-Lughod argues that feminist ethnography and anthropology are critical in the exploration of cultural relativity and the importance of asking questions such as, "Which woman? What kind of feminine?" (21). Abu-Lughod writes that "Feminist ethnographies, ethnographies that try to bring to life what it means to be a woman in other places and under different conditions… can offer feminists a way of replacing their presumptions of *a* female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences" (27).

Ultimately, she claims that the benefit of a feminist ethnographic method lies in its ability to unsettle the boundaries of an authoritative *self* studying an *other* (26). Abu-Lughod demonstrates the necessity of a decentralizing of universal truth and a singular experience of cultural groups. Again, using the example of a universal "woman," she calls for strong positionality that can reexamine the boundaries between a researcher self

and a researched other. Abu-Lughod gives a directive for feminist ethnographers to unsettle the firm boundaries of ethnography and to place themselves at the tricky line of being both inside and outside, as previously referenced by Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen. She calls for an "assumption of difference in sameness… an other that is also partially the self," and imagines the woman fieldworker who does not deny that she is a woman and is attentive to gender in her own treatment, her own actions, and in the interactions of people in the community on which she is writing. In coming to understand their situation, she is also coming to understand her own through a process of specifying the similarities and differences.

Most importantly, she has a political interest in grasping the other's situation since she, and often they, recognize a limited kinship and responsibility (25-6). This call for a "political interest… and responsibility" are extremely necessary for special education ethnography. Abu-Lughod argues that feminist ethnography must have a political aspect that seeks understanding. For special education, research is highly political because of the interest in the educational system of power and domination over students with disabilities.

Abu-Lughod continues this argument of investment in the informant's position in her article, "A Tale of Two Pregnancies," in Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon's feminist ethnography anthology, *Women Writing Culture*. Abu-Lughod gives a beautiful example of the ways in which feminist ethnographers embody a position of both outsider and insider in a story of how her personal experience and fieldwork experience came together to provide her with a complex experience of her pregnancy. She was shaped

both by her Western, "home" experience that produces a biomedical, white-middle class womanhood, and her many years of "field" experience of reproduction in Egypt. She ends her vignette by stating, "I now thought and felt with all these resources" (Abu-Lughod 348). This story reinforces the benefits of feminist ethnography in creating multiple identities in the woman fieldworker -- someone who can draw from empathetic study to understand the positionality of her woman informants and experience her own positionality in a more complex fashion.

Ruth Behar creates a compounded story that builds from Abu-Lughod's on home and field experience. In her article, "Writing in My Father's Name: A Diary of *Translated Woman's* First Year," Behar discusses the troubles she faced in blending her home and field work in her book, *Translated Woman*. She writes a diary-like chapter about her experiences of writing *Translated Woman* and the vulnerability she created by writing about her own family experience as a juxtaposition to Esperanza in her book. She notes Esperanza's saying, "*ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente*/eyes that don't see are hearts that don't feel" (Behar 82). Behar explains how the eyes who read her book become hearts that feel, referencing her parents' negative reaction to her "shadow biography." She felt guilty for putting autobiographical information in her ethnography, exposing her somewhat abusive relationship with her father, and drawing connections between Esperanza and herself. Even though Behar, like Abu-Lughod, realized how important a blend between self and other is in feminist ethnographic work, she works to keep her work away from her parents, as eyes that don't see are hearts that don't feel.

Deborah A. Gordon, the co-editor of *Women Writing Culture*, creates another definition of feminist ethnography, again using positionality, in her article, "Border Work: Feminist Ethnography and the Dissemination of Literacy." In her article, Gordon focuses heavily on *critical literacy*, or the reading and writing of literature from a specific positionality that is never neutral and will always contain bias. She writes, "Feminist ethnography as a practice of critical literacy situates ethnographic writing within these daily life struggles of women" (Gordon 376). She seeks to understand that anti-colonial writing has existed within one group -- academia -- and that feminist literacy work needs to understand "that reading and writing may have radically different meanings for those groups that have historically struggled for literacy rather than taken it for granted" (376). Gordon demands a feminist ethnography that centers around a politically based collective effort for social change with a responsibility to the informants, along with a methodology that disrupts exclusivity in who reads and writes ethnography (385).

It is important to continue to define feminist ethnography because of its multiplicity. Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven's text, *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*, moves forward from the work done by the aforementioned feminist scholars. Davis and Craven created their book in order to help both instructors and students to better understand the connections between the feminist movement and the advances made in anthropology to achieve a method of "feminist ethnography." This book provides much information, beginning with a beautiful timeline graphic that demonstrates the important events in the feminist movement alongside feminist anthropological moments. *Feminist Ethnography* is a key

book in helping to demonstrate my points about feminist ethnography and how ethnography and anthropology can benefit from the incorporation of feminist methodologies.

In their first chapter, "What Is the 'Feminist' in Feminist Ethnography?," Davis and Craven write, "[F]eminist ethnography does not have one single definition, nor can "doing" feminist ethnography be confined to a single scholarly trajectory. Just as important is the fact that feminist ideologies have shaped and been shaped *by* ethnographic processes" (Davis & Craven 11). They go on to give a working definition of feminist ethnography, listing five goals of feminist ethnography, synthesized here into three key points. Feminist ethnography is (1) committed to noticing, challenging, and reflecting on locations of power and oppression (e.g., gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, ability, etc.), (2) utilizes the history of feminist theory, and (5) aims to produce scholarship -- in both traditional and experimental forms -- that may contribute to movement building and/or be in the service of organizations, people, communities, and issues we study (Davis & Craven 11). In crafting this working definition, Davis and Craven provide a basis from which their book can continue to build on in discussing feminist ethnography.

Davis and Craven explore the most useful methods for feminist ethnographers in their fourth chapter, "How Does One *Do* Feminist Ethnography?" From Davis and Craven, I have identified the following methods as the most important and effective in doing feminist ethnography in a special education context: participant-observation, ethnographic interviewing, oral histories, and participatory research. Each of these

methodologies focuses on the relationship individuals have with their culture and environment, while building a relationship with the ethnographer. These methods, Davis and Craven argue, are imbued with the feminist spirit "of being attentive to marginality and reflecting critically upon power differentials within the research context" (Davis & Craven 96). A feminist ethnographic method can be achieved through engagement with our subjects in their everyday life (participant-observation), conversational interviews about their positionality and their lives (ethnographic interviewing and oral history), and collaborations for social change through participancy (participatory research).

Conclusion

The feminist scholars mentioned in this chapter seek to reexamine and craft new ways of thinking surrounding the writing and conducting of ethnographies. They have crafted new definitions of what "feminist ethnography" is and created guidelines for the operations of feminist ethnography. These definitions are extremely important in understanding and creating a better method of research in special education classrooms. I argue that research methods in special education must be built from a feminist ethnographic method. These scholars have created a firm and unwavering basis from which a feminist ethnography of special education can be created.

The analysis of ethnography and feminist methodology in this chapter lends itself to the discussion of current special education ethnographies in the next chapter of this thesis. By utilizing the methods of a feminist ethnographic method, the ethnographic

material in the third chapter can be critiqued to better understand how feminist disability theory can improve research.

Chapter 2: The Disability Discussion: the Layout of Feminist Disability Theory

Thus, stigmatization is embedded in the daily interactions between people with disabilities and the temporarily able-bodied. -- Thomas J. Gershick, *Toward a Theory of Disability and Gender*

Introduction

In this chapter of my thesis, I will be looking at the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability found in feminist disability theory. By discussing these theories, we can gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of disabled individuals. The feminist disability theory in this chapter will compound upon the ethnographic history and methods investigated in the previous chapter to promote a fuller and more robust method of research for special education environments. Before working to analyze and create these methods, we must explore the movements made in feminist disability theory.

While looking for the theories for this chapter, I focused on finding theories that touched on the creation of feminist disability theory. Investigating a somewhat new field of study, I found it particularly important to discuss the origins of the theory, based in both disability and philosophical fields. I often looked for theory that used phrases such as, "towards a theory," "new," "integrating," "bring together," and "conversation/dialogue/discussion." By looking for titles that used words and phrases like these, I knew that I could engage with the articles in a way that created a discussion between disability and feminist theories. In my third chapter, I aim to formulate a dialogue between feminist disability theory and ethnographic evidence in special

education classrooms. Because of this goal, I want to discuss theory that can be used in application to research methods and research results. I plan to focus on theory that can be applied to the ethnographic evidence used in my third chapter, including theory surrounding autonomy, feminist critical race theory, as well as theory which considers the pathologizing of disability and the view of disability as feminine and *not* masculine.

The objective of feminist disability theory is to investigate the intersections of gender, as well as race, class, and sexuality with disability. This intersection of feminist theory and disability is dependent on the understanding of the existence of people with multiple identities, including gender and disability. An understanding of feminist disability theory must be crafted in order to begin this discussion. It is also necessary, in terms of this thesis, to discuss the triple-intersection of gender, disability, and race. Therefore, in this chapter, I will outline the basics and newer developments of feminist disability theory, as well as the important addition of critical race theory to feminist disability theory.

The Inherent Intersectionality of Feminist Disability Theory

Feminist disability theory is inherently intersectional because it discusses multiple identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw discusses intersectionality in her article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." She argues that it is necessary to look at the multiple sites of intersection of each person, including identities such as ability, gender, race, class, and sexuality. Crenshaw describes the failure of identity politics without intersectionality by stating:

> The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite-that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences… Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. (Crenshaw 1242)

Crenshaw's argument of intersectionality complicates and creates the beginnings for connections between the identities of race and disability. By looking at Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, a better understanding can be achieved of race and disability as sites of intersection that come into play in special education classrooms.

There must be a deeper understanding of intersectionality and race theory to integrate race into the framework of feminist disability theory. Moya Bailey and Izetta Autumn Mobley are two scholars who focus on the intersections of race, gender, and disability. In their article, "Work in the Intersections: A Black Feminist Disability Framework," Bailey and Mobley create a connection between black feminist methodology and disability studies. By looking at both black studies and disability studies, the authors note how disability and race are often overlooked. To counteract this ignorance, they utilize black feminist theory to create a strong black feminist disability theory. Bailey and Mobley work from Crenshaw's theory to create a black feminist disability framework in order to destabilize the racist ideologies that currently inform the

perceptions and treatment of people of color with disabilities. By continuing Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality into feminist disability theory, they demonstrate the necessity of an inherently intersectional feminist disability theory. Bailey and Mobley demonstrate the need to analyze multiplicities identities and the simultaneity of their existence. The importance of intersectionality and positionality is seen in the lack of work that connects feminist theory with race and disability.

Bailey and Mobley demonstrate the necessity of inclusion in creating a new and transcendent theory that assists in the understanding of lived experience. They write: "The incorporation of disability into [Afro-pessimism and Black nihilism] might help us think through the ways in which we imagine a Black life that is more than just survival and more than able-bodied utopia" (Bailey & Mobley 34). Bailey and Mobley seek to improve the lives of all people living in our racist and ableist society. By creating theory that works with the positionality of race, gender, and disability, a new respect for the multiplicity of life can be achieved. In sparking a conversation about how the intersections of race and gender complicate disability, and vice versa, a Black feminist disability framework can help bring about an infinite number of revolutions (Bailey and Mobley 35).

Like other scholars who have looked at the "othering" of marginalized bodies, Bailey and Mobley discuss the importance of viewing race and disability as similarly marginalized and "othered" identities. Bailey and Mobley note the stricter set of social regulations that are enforced upon bodies of color. Bailey and Mobley describe the intersectional experience of race and disability by writing:

> How many [Black individuals] grew up with parents who warned us of having to be twice as good as our white counterparts? Designed to fortify Black children against the profound racism that is masked in a masquerade of meritocracy, this notion of having to be "twice as good," while often true, also marks the difficulties with discussing trauma, health disparities, and psychiatric or physical disabilities within Black communities. (Bailey & Mobley 22)

When these bodies of color are also disabled bodies, these regulations and standards are more heavily enforced. This view of bodies of color as disabled stems from age-old racist ideologies that support the deviance of black bodies from white, while also portraying black bodies as hyper-able-bodied, seen only as workers. Because of this idea of hyper-ability, the stigma of disability is further compounded upon by the intersection with race.

The description of an intersectional experience of disability demonstrates that disability is never truly experienced alone. Feminist disability theory utilizes intersectionality to showcase how the other identities experienced by individuals always inform disability. With the knowledge that feminist disability should be viewed as inherently intersectional, it is now necessary to detail some formulations of a feminist disability theory.

Nancy J. Hirschmann creates an addition to an understanding of feminist disability theory as intersectional in her article, "Disability as a New Frontier for Feminist Intersectionality Research." Hirschmann details the importance of connecting feminist studies with disability studies in order to create a fuller understanding of the intersectionalities between disability and other facets of identity. She emphasizes the

importance of feminist theory to learn and expand from disability studies rather than vice versa.

Hirschmann begins by describing both the social and medical models of disability, which are important to understanding a feminist disability theory. A social model of disability argues that, like gender, disability is socially constructed within a culture, meaning that a body is only "disabled" in the socially constructed meaning of the word. Therefore disability, "is thus a term that refers exclusively to what society, social conditions, prejudices, biases, and the built environment have produced" (Hirschmann 398). A medical model, however, marks disability as part of an individual's body that must be cured or alleviated for that body to enjoy a full and 'normal' life. By this standard, disability is all that is not "male, white, in perfect health and physical attribute" (398). Hirschmann uses these models to explore the experience of disabled individuals by using the social model of disability to connect disabled experiences with that of gender and sexuality. Hirschmann argues that femininity can be seen as a disability as female bodies are seen as passive and lacking due to their lack of masculinity. Similarly, gay individuals experience the 'disability' in pathologizing of the homosexual experience in society's search for a 'cure' for their 'deviant' sexuality.

Hirschmann's theory works to create a more complex understanding of what feminist disability theory should be as she explores the differences between both outlooks and advocates for a combination of the feminist theory and disability studies. She details the radical change that will occur when feminist theory incorporates an understanding of disability. Hirschmann's arguments lend themselves to a clearer understanding of the

impact of feminist disability theory on ethnography and ethnographic practices, as will be explored in my third chapter.

Many feminist disability scholars entered the field by promoting a meeting of disability studies and feminist theory to create feminist disability theory. In the following sections, a focus will be placed on theory that promotes the creation of feminist disability theory through the combination of feminist theory and disability studies. Theorists such as Nancy J. Hirshmann, Susan Wendell, Judy Rohrer, Thomas J. Gershick, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and Shelley Tremain focus on these intersections. These theorists finally begin to make the long-awaited connections between feminist theory and disability studies.

Constructing a Feminist Disability Theory

As Hirschmann opens the discussion of feminist disability and emphasizes its intersectionality, Susan Wendell historically begins the discussion as one of the first theorists who focused her work on feminist disability studies. In her 1997 article, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability," Wendell considers the improvement of feminist theory through an attentiveness to disability. After Wendell began suffering from a chronic illness, she started writing about the experience of being a person living in what society considered a disabled body. Wendell focuses on the social model of disability, writing about the social construction of disability, likening it to gender. She notes, as most other authors outlined here, that the disabled are named as "other," or misfits. She

argues for an integration and acceptance of disability in society as a way to allow all people to feel liberated in their bodies.

Wendell writes primarily about the "othering" of people with disabilities and the social construction of disabled bodies, whether visible or invisible, as "handicapped." In order to create an understanding of the social construction of disability, Wendell notes that age is also disabling when following the construction of disability. By marking aging as disabling, Wendell demonstrates that "disabled people are not 'other,' that they are really 'us'" (Wendell 108), as all people will age.

Wendell uses the social construction of gender as a point of comparison for the social construction of disability. She discusses the definitions of disability that are posited by the able-bodied community and by other high-powered officials, including the UN, as well as medical and educational institutions. Wendell makes the argument that just as the world is created for the male gender, it is also made solely for the use of able-bodied people. However, Wendell complicates this argument by discussing the general inability of able-bodied people to understand and sympathize with disabled people due to the construction of disability as "despised, pitied, and above all, feared" (Wendell 112). Wendell ultimately advocates for a total reconstruction of bodily acceptance, criticizing the idealized body standards produced by individual cultures.

Wendell discusses the idea of the "disabled hero," a disabled person who overcomes their disability and, in some way, aligns with social standards of able-bodiedness. This "overcoming" of disability reinforces the glorification of independence in North American society. Because of this stress on independence, disabled people are

constantly considered failures, due to their inability to conform to standards of independence, health, and ultimately, constructions of morality. This distinction between "us" versus "them," or "normal" versus "other," brings out a discussion of sameness and difference. Wendell argues that sameness negates any inherent value of disabled life, while difference allows for a deeper understanding of the lived experience of people with disabilities.

Wendell demands an improvement of current feminist theory through an inclusion of disabled experience through examples like the ones stated above. She argues that the only way to improve feminist theory is by creating a space in which disabled people, particularly women, can write and share their lived experiences. She states:

> If disabled people were truly heard, an explosion of knowledge of the human body and psyche would take place. We have access to realms of experience that our culture has not tapped (even for medical science, which takes relatively little interest in people's experience of their bodies). Like women's particular knowledge, which comes from access to experiences most men do not have, disabled people's knowledge is dismissed as trivial, complaining, mundane (or bizarre), less than that of the dominant group. (Wendell 120)

By listening and including the voices of disabled people, she argues, feminist theory can be formulated and expanded to look more responsibly at the intersections of gender and disability.

While Wendell focuses on the lack of disabled (women's) voices in feminist theory, Thomas J. Gershick examines the lack of strong and definitive feminist disability

theory. Gershick writes his article, "Toward a Theory of Disability and Gender," to ask and answer questions pertaining to gender performance and identity in connection to disability in order to contribute to the creation of a comprehensive theory of gender and disability. He begins his argument by stating, "accounting for the experiences of women and men with disabilities makes feminist theories of gender more inclusive, complex, and nuanced… a theory of the relation between gender and disability provides another tool that people with disabilities can use to understand and challenge their oppression" (Gershick 1264). Similarly to Wendell, Gershick creates his propositional theory through a discussion of disability as "other" and the social constructions of gender and helps to organize the oppression of disabled people.

Gershick continues his argument by including a discussion of properly conscribing to social constructions of gendered behaviors, similarly to both Hirschmann and Wendell. He argues that "people with disabilities are in an asymmetrical power relationship with their temporarily able-bodied counterparts" (Gershick 1264), noting the power structures between ability and disability, like between masculine and feminine bodies. Although all people are socially required to both enact and *embody* gender to produce an adequately gendered output, disabled bodies are held to an extreme reiteration of the same unattainable standard that able-bodied people are pressured to conform to. Disabled people are forced to prove their gendered existence by following the extreme standard, therefore placing disabled people in an asymmetrical relationship with their able-bodied counterparts. Gershick defines the illegitimacy of disabled bodies through discussions of gendered activities and the ability to complete them due to the centrality of bodies in

"achieving recognition as appropriately gendered beings" (Gershick 1264). When disabled bodies are deemed inadequately gendered, they are also deemed illegitimate and dehumanized.

Similarly to both Wendell and Gershick, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson discusses the importance of improving both disability studies and feminist theory by placing them in dialogue with each other. In her article, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," Garland-Thomson argues that by engaging in a discussion of disability studies from a feminist theory perspective, a deeper understanding of ability and disability can be achieved. She explains the ability/disability system and the connections between societal norms and the policing of bodies and their actions. She presents four domains through which feminist theory can engage with disability studies: representation, the body, identity, and activism. Garland-Thomson notes that disability inherently contradicts societal norms and that feminist theory can work with disability studies to help further critique these societal norms.

Interestingly, Garland-Thomson explicitly states a connection between the discussion of disability as a part of identity and as a sector of identity studies. She notes the connections between feminist studies and disability studies as sites of examination of identity and the ways that both feminist studies and disability studies raise the separate questions of womanhood and disability. Garland-Thomson argues that "Just as feminism has expanded the lexicon of what we imagine as womanly, has sought to understand and destigmatize what we call the subject position of woman, so has disability studies examined the identity *disabled* in the service of integrating people with disabilities more

fully into our society" (Garland-Thomson 2). By looking at this connection, Garland-Thomson argues that both feminist and disability studies ultimately have a similar end goal -- to minimize oppression. By combining feminist disability studies and the utilization of lived experience, a stronger critique of the oppressions of society can be advanced.

While Wendell and Gershick focus on the necessary elements that are required to create a feminist theory of disability, Garland-Thomson directly posits a feminist disability theory. In order to formulate this theory, Garland-Thomson creates a discussion surrounding the cultural saturation of bodies with meanings. To discuss this saturation, she argues that feminist disability theory must propose an analysis of ability and disability, or the ability/disability system. She writes, "A feminist disability theory denaturalizes disability by unseating the dominant assumption that disability is a deficit. By this, I mean that it mobilizes feminism's highly developed and complex critique of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality as exclusionary and oppressive systems rather than as the natural and appropriate order of things" (Garland-Thomson 6). Garland-Thomson advocates for disability study's use of feminist theory to provide a deeper understanding of disability and for feminist theory to incorporate disability as one of its many points of intersection.

Judy Rohrer continues this discussion in her article, "Toward a Full-Inclusion Feminism: A Feminist Deployment of Disability Analysis," by looking at the ableism consistent in daily life and the way that able-bodied individuals contribute to this oppression. Interestingly, she focuses on the idea of "special rights" that are 'allowed' to

people with disabilities. She begins her article with a quick discussion of the idea of "special" education, moving onto the law and court systems in dealing with ADA "special" versus "normal" rights.

Rohrer directly looks at the discussions presented by Susan Wendell and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson. She critiques these works by claiming that theirs is a stronger focus on applying feminist theory to disability studies. Rohrer advocates for the pursuit of a disability theory of feminism. Rather than focusing a feminist discussion that includes disability, Rohrer calls for a disability discussion that includes feminism. She notes that questions on an additional intersection of disability to other identities, "remind us of the trap of privileging one subjectivity over another and deemphasizing interrelation" (Rohrer 42). She calls for an understanding of the simultaneity of subjectivity, a form of intersectionality.

Ultimately, Rohrer creates a theory based on the work previously completed by disabled women. By engaging with the work of disabled women and by calling out their ableist proclivities, "nondisabled feminists will find both our theory and praxis liberated" (Rohrer 59). She encourages moving 'towards' an inclusive disability theory of feminism by listening to the lived experiences of disabled women and understanding all permutations of positionality and their individual, experiential knowledge.

Conclusion

All of the scholars discussed above assert the importance of both feminist theory and disability theory to grow and build from each other. In order to conclude this chapter

compiling feminist disability theory, it is important to return to the purpose of this thesis. By compiling these works of feminist disability theory, I aim to create a more robust set of feminist ethnographic methods that improve the research being done in special education classrooms. These scholars demonstrate how feminist disability theory is inherently intersectional and how disability is a gendered experience, how disability parallels the 'othered' experiences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and in the marking of disabled bodies as deviant.

Through the discussions from my first and second chapters, my third chapter can complete an analysis of current special education ethnographies. The ethnographic history and methods explained in my first chapter and the feminist disability theory described in this chapter provide the necessary background information from which to build a critique of special education and some ethnographic work in special education. Feminist ethnographic methods and feminist disability theory come together in this critique that promotes a more just and robust method of research and representation for special education environments and its participants.

Chapter 3: A Feminist Disability Ethnographic Critique

...[W]hat has become special about special education practice is its specialization: close attention to isolated skills and abilities and segments of behavior across the human systems. The severely and profoundly mentally retarded and multiply handicapped, who cannot speak for themselves, are provided services and programs which do not adequately match the realities of their experiences and understandings of the world. The congruence which should exist between programs and services and individual needs becomes circumstantial and ephemeral.

-- John Joseph Gleason*, Special Education in Context: an Ethnographic Study of Persons with Developmental Disabilities*

Introduction

In my first and second chapters, an in-depth discussion of ethnographic history and methods and feminist disability theory, respectively, are used to inform the perspective this thesis will take. By compiling ethnographic history and theory and feminist disability theorists and theories, I have created an understanding of the positionality of this paper and my method of analysis. In this chapter, I wish to build off of the theory presented in both the first and second chapters. I want to use feminist ethnography to create a better standard for conducting ethnography and feminist disability theory as a lens through which to critique and improve upon ethnography and ethnographic research. In looking at theoretical prescriptions for ethnographic research and written ethnographies of special education classrooms, it becomes increasingly clear

that a feminist disability rethinking of ethnography is necessary. Therefore, in this chapter, I will utilize feminist ethnographic methods and feminist disability theory to critique the current model of ethnography as a method of conducting research with special education students and in their classrooms.

Ethnographic Materials

In creating a strong definition of ethnography and its defining factors, I have demonstrated the purpose behind my emphasis on ethnography as a critical method of childhood research. This background on ethnography sets the scene for the following discussion of ethnographic research on children in special education settings. Ethnography focuses on the children's own engagement in their special education culture; therefore, it is the most suited method of research. However, I argue that with the applied use of feminist disability theory, an even fuller and more complete research can be conducted by using a method of *feminist disability ethnography*. In my conclusion, I will prescribe this new theory of feminist disability ethnography. This new methodology will utilize the feminist disability theory described in my second chapter to further inform ethnography as research methods with a focus on the intersections of disability, race, and gender. In order to begin crafting this new methodology, an in-depth study of previous ethnographic research needs to be conducted. By critiquing current ethnographic methods through a feminist disability lens, this new methodology can emerge.

In this chapter, I will be critiquing five different ethnographies, each that either utilize ethnography as a method of researching children in special education

environments or researching the way that children interact with ideas about special education and disability. Each of these ethnographies touches on important aspects surrounding a disabled, raced, or gendered experience. However, each ethnography lacks important elements that demonstrate an intersectional understanding of race, gender, and disability.

In order to fully demonstrate the shortcomings of these ethnographies, I will utilize the tenets of feminist ethnography as provided by Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven in *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*. Davis and Craven claim that feminist ethnography is (1) committed to noticing, challenging, and reflecting on locations of power and oppression (e.g., gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, ability, etc.), (2) utilizes the history of feminist theory, and (5) aims to produce scholarship -- in both traditional and experimental forms -- that may contribute to movement building and/or be in the service of organizations, people, communities, and issues we study (Davis & Craven 11). In uses these important descriptors of feminist ethnography, I can describe the ways in which these ethnographies can be improved to do better justice in researched special education environments and their students.

I structured the following paper by key analytical categories that each ethnography focuses on that could be expanded in terms of an intersectional, feminist disability framework. In order to begin this analysis, a short description of each ethnography is in order.

The first ethnography discussed is Sarah Becker's, "Badder than "Just a Bunch of SPEDs": Alternative Schooling and Student Resistance to Special Education Rhetoric." Becker's study is conducted at Cromwell Alternative North (CAN), an alternative high school on the East Coast of the United States. Becker focuses on the use of language in the identity formation of special education students based on the social positioning of educators and other professionals. She notes the fine social lines that students have to tow, to be seen as "SPED" (special education) for educator approval, and as "bad" for social peer approval. In discussing language, Becker notes the discourses of behavior and labeling that surround special education children with disabilities. She creates divides between bad behavior being seen as a disability, vice versa, and also ways to maneuver social positions through behavior, regardless of labels such as 'disabled' or "SPED."

Eva Hjörne and Ana-Carita Evaldsson also discuss labeling in their ethnography, "Reconstituting the ADHD Girl: Accomplishing Exclusion and Solidifying a Biomedical Identity in an ADHD Class." Hjörne and Evaldsson demonstrate the changes that happen in the specific case study of one girl, Annika, in a Swedish, male-dominated special education, ADHD, classroom. The authors demonstrate the way that labeling creates situations of exclusion from both general education and special education based on the labeling of both gender and disability. Hjörne and Evaldsson develop ideas that demonstrate the ways in which labeling relates to control of disabled bodies and the connections to gender.

In her ethnography, "Control, Membership and Consequences: Analysis of Discursive Practices to Respond to Behaviors of Kindergartners with Disabilities,"

Brianne Orsati continues to discuss elements of control. Orsati creates a connection between labels, language, and control of disabled bodies. By looking at the relationships between special education United States kindergarten students and their educators, she develops a language analysis surrounding ideas of labels, control of bodies, and issues of inclusivity and exclusivity. Through the use of language, including labels and other forms of communication, Orsati finds that educators can enact behavioral and social control of children with disabilities in special education.

Donna Koller and Valerie San Juan utilize a slightly different method of ethnography. In their article, "Play-Based Interview Methods for Exploring Young Children's Perspectives on Inclusion." Koller and San Juan use ethnography to conduct interviews about disability with young, day-care, and preschool-aged children. By playing with these children using dolls with visible/inferable disabilities, the researchers gather information about practices of inclusivity and exclusivity and the social conditioning of children and their ideas about disability.

Only one ethnography covered in this chapter actively tries to create an intersectional analysis of gender, race, and disability: Fernanda Tebexreni Dávila's "Critical Race Theory, Disability Microaggressions and Latina/o Student Experiences in Special Education." Dávila utilizes a critical race theory (CRT) perspective to look at the ways in which racial microaggressions are exaggerated in a special education setting. She demonstrates the ways that racialized and disability identities compound into multiple microaggressions that affect the ways in which Latinx special education students

experience their education. These microaggressions, based on race and ability, lead to disruptions in education and in academic success.

Key Elements

While reading through my chosen ethnographic literature on special education, briefly explained above, I determined four key elements that the ethnographies focused on: (1) labeling, identity, and social position, (2) control of disabled bodies, (3) issues of inclusivity and exclusivity, and (4) the compounding of racial, gendered, and disabled identities. While successfully attending to some very important aspects of living a disabled experience, these ethnographies lack an emphasis on the intersectional experiences of living as disabled in gendered and racialized bodies. It is important, then, to apply an *intersectional* feminist disability analysis to the readings of these ethnographies and to rethink their take on the key elements of special education ethnography. By adding the analytical categories of race and *gender*, and by utilizing a feminist disability analysis, a deeper understanding of special education and the experiences of special education children can be achieved.

Labeling, Identity, and Social Positioning

I will begin looking at my collection of ethnographic evidence by discussing the use of language in describing special education individuals and their abilities/classrooms, along with the labels formed around their cultural and social position. In her ethnographic article, "Badder than "Just a Bunch of SPEDs": Alternative Schooling and Student

Resistance to Special Education Rhetoric," Sarah Becker discusses the labeling of "special needs" students of Cromwell Alternative North (CAN), a Northeastern United States high school. She delineates the different statuses -- students *with problems* and *problematic* students -- awarded to the students of CAN by their teachers and supervisors (Becker 60). The students who attended this school were either labeled as having disciplinary problems or learning problems. Students who *had problems* were regarded as 'out of control,' 'difficult,' and 'unwilling to comply' with teachers.

Becker describes the ways that the students navigate the differences between being labeled as a special education student, a SPED, or as a student with behavioral issues. Becker details the ways in which the students navigate socially rewarding behavior with academically rewarding behavior. By engaging with these specific labels, the students of CAN were able to navigate different identities, allowing them to garner teacher sympathy by adhering to a SPED label while also gaining social capital by behaving as "troublemakers" (Becker 80). While Becker creates a strong argument for the use of language, labels, and navigation, I argue that Becker's ethnographic evidence falls short without a feminist disability discussion of masculinity and disability.

In her article, Becker consistently describes situations where the (dominating) male and the racialized population at CAN demonstrate strong resistance to the label of SPED. One such example involves the "unambiguously" SPED student, Frank (Becker 74). Frank did not navigate between the labels of "bad" and "SPED," but simply rested his identity in being a special needs student. Becker describes Frank as "socially isolated and often ridiculed" (74). Students would continually categorize Frank as *other*, such as

when one female student stated, "'And then there's Frank. He's in his own little group'" (74). Another example is clear when another SPED student, Charles, was sitting with Frank. During a shared study hall, Charles confided in Becker that he was diagnosed with ADD. When Frank shared that he was also diagnosed with ADD, Charles immediately amended his statement, saying, "'I actually have ADHD'" (74). When other students interact alongside Frank, they constantly, "set [themselves] apart from Frank, making it clear that [they weren't] "just a SPED." [They were] bad, too" (74). By identifying themselves as "bad," they reaffirmed their masculinity and social acceptance, rather than falling in the "disabled" category of SPED, like Frank.

Eva Hjörne and Ann-Carita Evaldsson further discuss labeling in their article, "Reconstituting the ADHD Girl: Accomplishing Exclusion and Solidifying a Biomedical Identity in an ADHD Class." While Becker discusses the ways in which students navigate between labels, Hjörne and Evaldsson utilize theory surrounding membership categories to explain the effects of "special needs" labels on children in education. Hjörne and Evaldsson write, "the processes of categorization have material implications, which have consequences for the social and personal identifications of people" (Bowker and Star 1999; Hjörne and Säljö 2014; Evaldsson 2014) (Hjörne & Evaldsson 629). By looking at the specific lived-experience of a ten-year-old girl, Annika, Hjörne and Evaldsson demonstrate an "identity trajectory [that] develops from being cast as a capable girl managing her life at school to being a problematic student and a typical ADHD girl over the year" (630). Hjörne and Evaldsson utilize documents sent between school and home

detailing Annika's behavior to further exemplify the use of language and labeling to create a disabled and othered identity.

Hjörne and Evaldsson discuss the changes in language use, from the labeling of Annika as a "good girl" to an "emotional girl" (Hjörne & Evaldsson 635). They demonstrate the power of language in their ethnographic evidence of interactions between Annika, her teachers, and her male classmates. By the end of the year, Hjörne and Evaldsson describe that,

> By the end of the school year, the teachers and parents, and the teachers and classmates, have mutually constructed the negative identities ascribed to the girl in everyday classroom interaction. Furthermore, Annika herself has internalized the negative identities and deviant behaviors recurrently ascribed to her, identifying herself as a girl without friends and a problematic student who does not belong anywhere. (Hjörne & Evaldsson640-1)

The teachers and male students described Annika as negative and emotional, using words such as, 'whiny,' bossy,' 'annoying,' 'disruptive,' 'sore,' 'stupid,' 'thinking boys are tiresome,' and 'nasty.' One of the boys even stated that Annika should be hit and was a "fucking whore." Another said that she should leave, "and don't ever come back" (Hjörne & Evaldsson). Creating Annika's identity in such a way caused suicidal ideation and ultimately resulted in another placement.

In looking at the descriptors and comments made about Annika, I argue that the teachers and other students worked to further pathologize her ADHD identity through her gender. Through language and labeling, Annika's identity was reconstructed from a

capable student to disabled through the medicalization of her ADHD and discussions of her "disruptive conduct," "emotional disturbances," and inability to "[handle] the boys' provocations" (Hjörne & Evaldsson). Hjörne and Evaldsson made little discussion of Annika's special position as a female with ADHD in an all-male classroom. They argued that "The girl in this case was excluded from main- stream class and placed in a special class containing only boys diagnosed with ADHD, in which all ascribed some form of incompetence, deviance and otherness to Annika" (cf. Wortham 2004; Evaldsson and Karlsson 2012; Hjörne and Säljö 2012). However, they lacked any theory from which to present the idea of the social positioning of Annika as the disabled female other.

Becker and Hjörne and Evaldsson all focus on the importance of labeling in creating a social position for the disabled individual. While looking at varying aspects of special education (Becker; social navigation with labels and Hjörne & Evaldsson; labeling as creating disability), both lack the important compliment of including a feminist disability theory perspective. Becker and Hjörne and Evaldsson leave their findings in a strange and unmaneuverable place. It is necessary to analyze their ethnographic findings further to create a feminist disability understanding of special education ethnography. Both ethnographies failed to craft an understanding of the positionality and ramifications of labeling a child as "special education" or "disabled." Becker and Hjörne & Evaldsson did not emphasize the distinct power differentials between the students in their special education environments. Without a discussion of these power differentials, these ethnographies demonstrate inadequate attention to the positionality of their researched students.

Control of Disabled Bodies

Fernanda Tebexreni Orsati argues a similar point to that of Hjörne and Evaldsson. In her ethnography, "Control, Membership and Consequences: Analysis of Discursive Practices to Respond to Behaviors of Kindergartners with Disabilities," Orsati argues that educators' words strongly influence the pathologizing and positioning of the disabled as deficient and therefore creating structures of power and control over disabled bodies, particularly the kindergarten students she researched. While Hjörne and Evaldsson focus on derogatory words used to position Annika as *other* and therefore control her social behavior, Orsati focuses on "utterances" that demonstrate control over disabled bodies. She writes, "The analysis of language revealed how power was stated through language in the classroom" (Orsati 130). She identifies a set of terms that create structures of power and control: 'wild,' 'trying me/you/them out,' picking your battles.'

When students failed to comply with 'normal' behavioral standards, the educators utilized these terms to enact power and control. For example, when sitting during reading time, Dave, a special education kindergartener, moved around and was playing with nearby objects. The educator, Ms. Elmwood immediately stated, "He's *wild* today. Go get the vest" (Orsati 131). By categorizing Dave as *wild*, Ms. Elmwood identified his behavior as unacceptable and in need of control, therefore bringing out the 'vest,' a heavy pressure garment created to provide soothing stimulus.

Orsati analyzes the use of these terms and phrases by stating, "Descriptors of unwanted or non-compliant behaviours from students set out a chaotic, sometimes hostile

environment, where relationships between educators and students were adversarial and often seen as battles" (Orsati 136). By using these descriptors, like the negative descriptors used for Annika, a new identity and spaces are created that maintains power and control.

Orsati writes, "Language generates discursive practices, and is centrally involved in power and struggles for (or over) power (Fairclough 2001)" (Orsati 129). In describing the seizure of control over disabled bodies, through the use of language as a discursive practice, she sets up her ethnographic evidence for a feminist disability analysis. She promotes the idea that,

> Educators' talk and language become the reality of the classroom through the practices implemented. When educators move away from a discourse of control and membership they apply practices that allow student learning, input and participation in classroom decisions. (Orsati 140)

In stating this truth about the construction of classrooms, both general and special education, Orsati begins the analysis of the importance of autonomy for students -- in this case, primarily special education students. Orsati failed to complete her analysis in her lack of discussion of the autonomy of the special education kindergarten students. By looking into the analysis of seizure of control as a seizure of autonomy, Orsati can continue to read her evidence through a feminist disability lens. A deeper understanding of feminist disability theory could help to inform and create a more complex understanding of the control and power enacted upon the special education kindergarteners she researched. With proper attention paid to the situations of these

students and the power differentials between educators and students, a more robust feminist ethnography can be achieved.

Inclusivity & Exclusivity

Orsati also focuses on the threat of exclusion as a regulatory practice in the special education classroom. Because Orsati focuses mainly on power and control through language, it follows that she would understand exclusion as punishment and a form of control. She notes that exclusion is used as a consequence when students demonstrated behaviors that did not follow the "behavioural standards pre-established by educators" (Orsati 137). By denying students membership to their classrooms, usually through physical force (i.e.; physically removing students from the classroom), Orsati claims that:

> [I]t became clear that control of behaviour is the ultimate goal, not a classroom environment free of distraction for other students, which is usually the justification for such practices. *The real underlying motive for students' exclusion was related to the need for the adults to keep control in the classroom.* (Orsati 137)

Orsati notes that use of language, such as words like 'if,' signaled exclusion to the students. *If* you do not do *x*, you will be removed from the class. In looking at the phrasing used by educators, Orsati claims that exclusion is used as a punishment and as a maneuver of power and control over disabled bodies. For example, Orsati notes the interactions between Ms. Elmwood and another special education child, Rick. During a

quiet circle time activity, Rick was making humming noises. Ms. Elmwood responds to the noises by saying, "'Quit it, or you will have to leave.'" Ms. Elmwood continued by giving Rick a card with a picture of a boy with his hands over his mouth, signaling quietness (Orsati 136). Orsati notes that Ms. Elmwood's words show that she believes Rick could control the noises, while his agitated behaviors paired with the noises show that he cannot. In this example, the educators are continuing to enact power and demonstrate the exclusivity of inclusion for children with disabilities.

Donna Koller and Valerie San Juan also discuss practices of inclusion and exclusion (referred to as 'segregation') in their article, "Play-Based Interview Methods for Exploring Young Children's Perspectives on Inclusion." While using an interpretive, ethnographic approach, Koller and San Juan gathered important information from general education child informants about inclusion and segregation of disabled and special education children. While they were not conducting ethnographic information of special education or children with disabilities, Koller and San Juan used play-based, ethnographic interviews to gauge levels of inclusivity and exclusivity of non-disabled children. Their utilization of ethnography placed importance on the children's individual voices and truths. However, their research did not apply disability theory nor feminist theory in a way that complicated and placed the children's answers within American society.

Koller and San Juan note that, when asking children about inclusion and segregation, some of the children answered negatively about including children with

disabilities into their classrooms. They note these advocacies for segregation in the following excerpt:

> When probed to explain their reasons for supporting segregation, one five-year-old girl (ECC8) said that no one would be available to assist a child with a disability because "everyone else is busy playing." Another child (ECC7), who had previously equated disability to sickness, explained that children with and without disabilities could not play together because they might contract the disability like a disease (e.g., "And that guy might get his cough and his sick"). (Koller & San Juan 622)

Koller and San Juan did no further analysis of these answers. I argue that it is important to analyze the use of words and actions as they demonstrate common ideas behind disability, such as disability as a hindrance to others and disability as contractible through contact. Orsati and Koller and San lack an understanding of both disability and feminist theory. By applying a feminist disability perspective to their ethnographic evidence, Orsati and Koller and San Juan could create important understandings about the socialization of children and their socialized responses to disability. Feminist disability theory on inclusion and on the pathologizing of disability can be used to further their analysis.

Compounded Identities of Gender, Race, and Disability

One of the key components of special education ethnography is the discussion of compounded and intersectional identities. In the same article mentioned above, Sarah

Becker looks at how race creates an intersection of identities among students in special education. In addition to the social location of being "bad" or "special needs," students at CAN also inhabit racial identities. Becker consistently makes claims such as,

> Race and gender affected how successfully a student could manipulate the SPED–bad tension. With few exceptions, "shining stars" [students who were most successful in teacher and peer culture(s)] were white and/or female students, and "troublemakers" were non-white and/or male students… [T]he role a student's race, gender, and social class status play in how he or she engages with the SPED–bad tension and how teachers receive his or her strategies for managing that tension deserves further exploration. (Becker 80-1)

While Becker is able to demonstrate the immediate and detrimental issues with the conflation of race, ability, and behavior, she does not engage in a critical discussion of race and masculinity. She defines the instances where educators behave in reactionary ways to primarily male students of color. Educators use phrases like "out of control," or even describing them as "obviously" being gang-affiliated (78). For example, Becker discusses Kyle, a Cambodian student whose family has had legal trouble, is always seen as a threat, rather than a student needing help. When falsely accused of stealing a ball from school property, Kyle expresses frustration, saying, "'Fuck this place,'" an educator immediately calls for back up, calling agitatedly, "We need coverage outside!" and demonstrating the view of Kyle as out of control (78).

I argue that Becker could use feminist and critical race theories (F/CRT) in order to utilize her ethnographic evidence to create discussion surrounding the intersections of

race, gender, and disability in the treatment of special education students. By failing to utilize necessary feminist theoretical history, this ethnography fails to create a lasting and deep ethnographic analysis of the situations of special education students of color.

However, some ethnographies do utilize CRT in exploratory and revolutionary ways. In her article, "Critical race theory, disability microaggressions and Latina/o student experiences in special education," Brianne Dávila demonstrates the microaggressions that take place against special education students of color. Dávila uses ethnography to create an understanding of the inequality that persists in education, particularly special education, based on race. She not only focuses on microaggressions surrounding race, but also looks at disability microaggressions. These microaggressions consisted of low expectations of ability, disregard of the students as individuals, and bullying. One example of the combined microaggressions of race and disability occurs during a conversation between a special education Latinx student and an educator in a special education setting. The educator, Ms. Green, frustrated with the student, Danny, says, "You sit here and do nothing! I'm gonna kill you…" before walking away (460). Another special education educator immediately turns to her one on one student, Adrian, asking him if Ms. Green was addressing him, showing anger and disbelief that Ms. Green would speak that way. While the jibe was not directed at Adrian, the one on one educator's reaction demonstrates the harmful nature of Ms. Green's comments, even as she attempts to diffuse the situation by calling it all playful (461).

Dávila notes that the students who face these microaggressions often decline the help that they need in terms of accommodations in order to 'prove their teachers wrong,'

along with a desire to fit in. While Dávila demonstrates the important intersections of race and disability in the welfare of the students she worked with, she lacks an important intersection of gender in her analysis. Dávila notes that educators would often disregard male students more frequently when compared to their female counterparts (Dávila 457). She writes,

> Latina/o students in special education experience an educational environment that blurs distinctions between their racial identities and disability statuses. In the learning center, teachers convey messages that communicate to students that academic ability and performance are racially assigned, and, therefore, unchangeable. This treatment shapes students' orientation towards their specialized services, such that they refuse to utilize them. In this way, the design of their special education program, one intended to supplement their general education curriculum, is undermined, and the students' education compromised. (Dávila 462-3)

Even though Dávila conveys the important aspects of a compounded racialized and disabled experience, she lacks an understanding of the ways that disability and race become compounded upon in these instances. In her ethnographic evidence, males are more frequently the impacted party of both racial and disability microaggressions. However, she does not look at the ways in which these compounded identities (race, gender, ability) create different positionalities for the students nor the implications of these identities. Therefore, I argue that her ethnographic evidence could be further

analyzed through a discussion of feminist disability theory, particularly surrounding a *feminist* critical race theory.

Conclusion

By looking at the ethnographic evidence created by the aforementioned scholars, it is critical to realize the important work that has been done for the field of special education and disability studies. While I point out the flaws in the arguments and the points from which a stronger, deeper, and full analysis can take place, I would not be able to do so without these arguments. In critiquing these important ethnographic studies, I am demonstrating the privileges of scholarship. Without the work of these ethnographies as my foundation, I could not build my own theories.

That being said, I do believe that these ethnographies demonstrate areas where ethnographic methods can be taken (multiple) steps further. In this chapter, I utilized feminist disability theory and feminist ethnographic methods to critique the current model and use of ethnography as a method of conducting research with special education students and in their classrooms. The ethnographic evidence put forward by Sarah Becker, Eva Hjörne and Ann-Carita Evaldsson, Fernanda Tebexreni Orsati, Donna Koller and Valerie San Juan, and Brianne Dávila can be improved by looking at feminist disability theories of the pathologizing of disability, the view of disability as feminine and *not* masculine, autonomy, and feminist critical race theory.

Each of these ethnographies lacks the factors that define ethnography as feminist. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the important elements of feminist ethnography

include a commitment to acknowledging locations of power and oppression, utilize a history of feminist theory, and contribute to activism or help the subjects of the research. These ethnographies all lack these important factors. None acknowledge the locations of power and oppression within their research sites, nor do they provide a meaningful analysis of these power relations. None utilize a discussion of feminist theory in a way that promotes a deeper understanding of these positions of power and control. Most importantly, none of these ethnographies provide a substantial call to action. None discuss the ways in which their research can be used in activism or movements that seek to create better environments for special education students.

In the following conclusion, I will theorize ways in which feminist ethnographies on special education can fulfill these important aspects of feminist ethnography and, therefore, better assist the special education community.

Conclusion

In my first chapter, I created a brief history of ethnography through to the creation and critiques of feminist ethnographic methods. My second chapter draws on different formulations of a feminist disability theory through a combination of feminist theory and disability studies. The final chapter of this thesis attempts to pull the two previous chapters together in a critique of current ethnographies of special education students and their environments. In structuring my thesis in this way, I wanted to demonstrate, firstly, the importance of feminist ethnography as a research method, secondly, the necessity of applying a feminist disability theory to a feminist ethnographic method, and, thirdly, to outline the shortcomings of current special education research projects.

The structure of this thesis leads, ultimately, to this conclusion. Through the application of each of my previous chapters, I want to explore what a new method of feminist disability ethnography would look like. It is necessary, then, to reiterate the most important aspects of each chapter in the creation of this new method.

The first chapter describes the benefits of using ethnography and, more importantly, feminist ethnography, in conducting research with special education children. Good ethnography, as defined by my chapter, utilizes reflexivity and positionality, notices power differentials between researched individuals, and is dedicated to producing scholarship that is committed to change.

The second chapter discusses feminist disability theory as inherently intersectional. Feminist disability theory demonstrates the parallels between a disabled experience and the experiences of other minority groups, such as people of color and

nonheteronormative people. The second chapter also outlines some specifics pertaining to a disabled experience of gender, along with the marking of disabled bodies as deviant.

The third chapter utilizes specific ethnographic examples of research in special education to explore the ways in which disabled bodies are labeled, controlled, and excluded. This chapter also includes a focus on the disabled experience as intersectional by discussing the connections between gender, race, and disability. By critiquing the specific ethnographic examples, a clearer understanding of the shortcomings of current research in special education can be reached.

After debriefing the arguments of my thesis, I would now like to explore what it would mean to conduct ethnographic research in special education while utilizing feminist disability theory and the effects that the research can have on the special education community. I began this thesis with a personal discussion of my experiences in special education, so I would like to imagine what my thesis could mean for my specific experiences and community.

If you were to enter the special education room I work in, you would first need to find the basement and the long, bland corridor with two plain doors, whose windows are covered from the inside. The first thing you would see upon entering the first door would be four little cubicle desks, neatly into rows. Each desk has two chairs, one for the student and one for the aide. The next thing you would notice is the small closet to the right of the entrance. Dark and padded, an old, round boombox lays next to a small light projector. At the ready are calming noises and stimulating light shows, weighted

blankets, and bean bag chairs. This room truly is a closet, not big enough for even three people to fit within comfortably.

This room, with the desks, chairs, and closet-turned-sensory-room, is where you would find students at their desks, working with their aides. You would hear phrases like, "Quiet mouths, quiet bodies, quiet hands, quiet feet," constant reminders of the control enacted upon these students. You would find reward boards, where students win a token for every display of good behavior or completed tasks and can earn a break for full board.

Further into the room, you would find a locked door. This door leads into the second room in the bland basement corridor. This door stays locked, but with the proper key, you could go beyond into a larger classroom. One desk sits alone in the room, three chairs instead of two at its side. The rest of the room is completely bare. The closets with the sliding doors at the back of the room are kept firmly shut. This room was created entirely for the control of one black, male, kindergarten student.

The school system deemed this student so 'out of control' that he needed two aides at all times, both equipped with walkie-talkies that connected immediately to security officers and some of the more senior special education professionals. These professionals would often hold the students immobile during certain behaviors in order to gain control. My brother, while not a black child, was often subdued in similar ways and came home with cuts and bruises from these violent attempts at control.

My argument of a feminist disability method of ethnography can directly analyze the ways in which this special education environment enacts architectural and spatial, as well as physical, control over students with disabilities. Not only are the special

education classrooms sequestered in the basement of the school, but they are placed in locked, barren rooms in this basement. Most important for this analysis is the understanding that this additional locked room had no existed until the Black, male kindergartener was placed into the special education classroom. Immediately, he was marked as particularly violent in his outbursts, to the point of consistent physical restraint, by both educational professionals and local police force security guards, all while locked in a room with no stimulus but four white walls.

I believe that, by conducting feminist disability ethnographic research in environments such as those described above, deeper analysis can be achieved of the reasons for these conditions. Questions, like those that were asked by the ethnographies I critiqued, must be asked, but with more purpose. Why is it that special education students, students with disabilities, are being relegated to the basements of our public schools? Why are additional empty, locked rooms kept particularly for male students of color?

While I pointed out a few failings of ethnographies in my third chapter, the most important seems to be a lack of a call to action. These researchers note the ways in which the educational system is failing our students, particularly special education students, with multiple identities. However, they do not discuss methods for combating the environments and actions that so deeply affect the special education students. Ethnography that describes environments like those in the ethnographies explored of the one that I've described above needs a call to political action against the mistreatment and spatial, physical, and verbal oppression and denigration of our special education students.

Ultimately, I argue that a feminist ethnographic method, informed by feminist disability theory, is the best method for changing research with special education students and their environments and creating respectful and just scholarship on their experiences. A feminist disability ethnography would provide a method for reformation or movement-building to help the individuals that are participating in the research. There must be a call for the betterment of the environment for these students, and an attentiveness to the systems of power and oppression that operate in the special education system. Feminist disability ethnographies are attentive, first and foremost, to the positionality and betterment of education for students.

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