

APPENDIX G

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY EXAMPLE

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Critical Thinking

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The Rise of My Feminist Views

While most children were sleeping in on Saturday mornings or watching early morning cartoons – Rugrats, Tom and Jerry, Recess – I was waking up at 7 in the morning to the sound of banda music and the smell of Pine-Sol. My mom, singing to the top of her lungs, would be my alarm clock. My older sister and I would stomp out of our room and peep into the living room where my mom would have buckets and rags lined up for us. We didn't even have to argue over who was going to clean what, we just grabbed a rag and bucket and dispersed around the house. A few hours later, drenched in dirty water and Windex, my mom, sister, and I would get cleaned up and start making breakfast for my dad and brothers. While mixing eggs with chorizo, my mom would sit me down on the countertop and tell me stories about her growing up in Mexico. It would always start with my grandma teaching her how to cook classic Mexican dishes like arroz con pollo and posole when she was a little girl and transition to how she got married to my dad at the age of fourteen. She looked down at me said she had always been a typical Mexican girl: learning domestic duties as a child, marrying young, moving to the United States, and being a housewife summed up her life.

The combination of these Saturday morning cleaning routines and my mom's stories about a "normal" Mexican girl began to make me feel as if my future was already determined.

Thinking that it was expected of me to grow up to be a good housewife, I became obsessed with anything that glorified the domestic life. I glued myself to the television as advertisements for toy kitchens and doll houses came on. There was even one Christmas where all I wanted was a Kitchen Littles toy. The toy refrigerator dispersed fake ice cubes, the oven light actually turned on, and the little girls in the commercial looked so happy while playing with it. It was always girls using the toy kitchens and doll houses in the commercials, so I thought that my mom was right: it is a woman's job to clean. Seeing it so much, I didn't even bother questioning it. I was what Ira Shor would call an intransitive thinker. I did not question why women were the ones who had to do the housework or think I should question it. I just thought that was the way things were and left it at that. The main reason I did not question it is because I looked up to my mom. Like many young girls, I wanted to grow up and be just like her. I loved everything about her: her curly hair, the way she held me when I cried, how she was always happy and smiling.

It was not until I was nine years old that my original image of my mom began to change. It began one night when I woke up around midnight. All I could hear was shouting coming from my parents' room. I looked next to me to see if my older sister was awake too, but I couldn't tell since she had the comforter over her head. The paper walls that separated their room from ours were not enough to isolate their arguing. They were talking too fast for me to catch everything they were saying, but I could hear my mom repeating the words "cheater," "cabron," and "te voy dejar" over and over again. An hour later I was drifting back to sleep and jumped awake to the sound of slamming and things being thrown around. The next morning my mom was wearing sunglasses that were not big enough to conceal her swollen eye and bruised cheek. It was at that moment that I began to realize the world was not as simple as my mom had depicted; it was more complicated than getting married, having kids, and living happily ever after.

I admit that I was never close with my dad. I desperately wished to be the daddy's girl that would run into her dad's arms when he came from work. This, unfortunately, was not the case. My dad would just come home from work, tell me hi, grab a beer from the fridge, and then go to his room and lock the door behind him. This kind of relationship with my dad went on for years. It was years of him forgetting my birthday, years of him never coming to any of my school award ceremonies, years of him barely saying a word to me. I automatically clung more to my mom as a result. So when I saw my mom with a huge bruise on her eye, the image automatically scarred me. What scarred me even more was that the bruise on her eye was not a one-time thing. There were countless nights where I would wake up to their shouting. Soon enough, their arguing escalated and began to happen multiple times throughout the day.

My dad never cared about who was around when he yelled at my mom. He's the stubborn and dramatic type that likes to make a statement in front of other relatives, in front of his kids, and in front of strangers. I repeatedly had to watch as he would shout at my mom and call her stupid. After a while, my mom stopped arguing back and let him say whatever he wanted. She didn't cry or defend herself, she just sat there silent. One night after my parents had gotten into another argument, my mom said she was going for a drive. She asked me if I wanted to go with her and I automatically jumped into her white Dodge Durango. I was in the back seat and occasionally tried to get a glimpse of my mom's face through the rear view mirror. We just drove in circles around our neighborhood. We passed by my aunt's house, my school, my friend's house, my aunt's house again, and my school again. She didn't say anything to me the entire time, not even when I asked her questions. I looked at the clock and saw it was eleven thirty; we had been driving for forty minutes. We had just passed my school again when she randomly

pulled over and started frantically crying. I felt like she had forgotten I was even there because I had never seen her cry like that before. She kept wailing and asking God, “why?”

I did not know what to say and I did not think there was anything that I could have said to make the situation better. Seeing her crying like that made a whole series of questions run through my head: Why was my dad always mad? Why didn't anyone stop him when he yelled at her? Why did he hit her? At the time, I didn't have the answers to any of these questions, but I did know that my mom didn't deserve to be treated that way. The abuse and violence happened over and over again as I was growing up. I thought it would get better after a certain period of time, but it seemed to only get worse. My mom always threatened to leave my dad; however, she never did. In the beginning, I thought the reason she didn't was because she was scared and still loved him. After a few more years, I thought about how leaving might not have been an option for her. She never finished middle school and knew limited English, so it would have been difficult for her to find a good enough job that would support her. Or perhaps she just threatened to leave in the attempt that it would scare him enough to change his habits, which did not happen. Either way, she stayed and put up with the verbal, physical, and emotional abuse that now summed up her life.

I was about thirteen years old when I realized that the reason my mom told me her stories about growing up in Mexico was not because she wanted me to be a typical Mexican girl like her, but because it was what she did not want for me. It was with this realization that I further questioned everything that was going on at home. I began thinking about why things were the way they were. What other forces were involved? As a little girl, I had to just accept everything that was happening to my mom. I accepted it in the sense that I thought that there was not anything that I could do to make it better. Now that I was getting older, I knew that I wanted to

do something to help. Every little experience that involved my parents was slowly shaping me to realize that there was something wrong with their relationship and society. It was shaping me to develop a critical discourse for the way people view different binaries: male vs. female, right vs. wrong, acceptable vs. unacceptable. Ever since I was a little girl waking up to the smell of Pine-Sol while the guys in my family slept in and relaxed, I was being socialized into this grand narrative of male supremacy. It was acceptable for men to dominate women, it was right for women to do all the housework, it was the men that controlled the women. I did not want any part of it.

When I realized the true intentions behind my mom's Mexico stories is also around the same time that my dad decided to open up his own bar business. It had always been his dream to open up his own bar. He basically wanted to be a consumerist in a capitalist world. He thought he would be living the American Dream by owning his own business and making a lot of money. My mom would always try dragging my sister and me with her to clean up the bar. I would whine about not wanting to go. I wasn't being lazy or rude, I was just against the idea of the girls having to be the ones to clean. I eventually decided to go because my mom was pregnant and I did not want her crouching around and cleaning like a slave. We got to the bar and entered through the front door instead of through the back door like we usually do. When we entered, we saw my dad sitting down at a table with another woman and her son. My dad had a Corona beer next to him and was playing Hot Wheels with the woman's son. The woman was sitting beside my dad and had one hand on his lap. My mom's face did not look so much surprised as it did disappointed. It dawned on me that all those fights when I was a child were about things just like this. My mom had never done anything wrong to deserve being treated so badly and seeing my dad with this other woman proved it.

As I was waiting in the bar parking lot, I tried not to cry as my dad yelled and my mom held back tears. Once again, my dad was the one in charge and it was my “mom’s fault.” Seeing my mom in this state (pregnant and defenseless) made me come to another realization: that I no longer wanted to grow up and be like my mom. I mean this in the sense that I did not want to accept the patriarchal ideologies that have frame our society. Ever since I was little, these ideologies were all I was exposed to. It is the women who clean the house and cook for the men, it is the women who stay home and take care of the kids while the men go out and provide for the family, it is the women who must listen to the men. Women are always placed inferior to men and something about it did not feel right to me. If all these things were “right,” then why did they make my mom feel worthless? I witnessed how these patriarchal ideologies negatively influenced my mom to the point where she felt like she no longer had a voice. She just accepted her inferior position in silence. Watching this, I learned from an early age that there was something wrong with the way that society is organized.

The older I got, the more my experiences at home were persuading me to want to combat patriarchy and the gender roles that came with it. It was from my family discourse that I gained my feminist views. When most people think of feminism, they automatically think anti-male. This is not what feminism is about; it is about gaining the critical discourse required to be able to look at deeper issues in our society. I am not anti-male; I just think men are players in a larger system. I don’t hate my dad either. Although I do resent some of the things that he has done, I know deep down that he is not a bad guy. Once I was in high school, my mom actually vented to me and told me stories different from the ones she told me as a child. These stories were about how different my dad used to be. She said that he was once caring and made her feel loved every day. It was not only some time after moving to the United States that he began to change. I asked

her what it was that made him change but she couldn't give me a response beyond "I don't know." My mom venting to me gave me a better sense of how she was truly feeling. She told me how she hated feeling abused, worthless, and trapped. However, I knew she would never tell my dad how she was feeling. Seeing my mom hurt over and over was sealed into my mind. In the article "The House from Cellar to Garret," Bachelard states, "For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world" (4). My house was my first universe and in this universe, I was exposed to violence and socially accepted ideas of patriarchy and gender roles. From the beginning, I saw the negative effects of these socially accepted deceptions. My feminist views began in the home and these views shaped not only how I see my "corner of the world," but how I see the whole world. I saw my mom get abused, stay silent, and get yelled at. My corner of the world influenced me to want to make more people aware of women's inferior position in society and to justify why it is wrong. The gender roles that are prevalent today categorize gender, where men are put higher than women. As a result, women get abused and degraded. I don't want to stay silent like my mom. Instead, I want to use my desocialized thinking to change society's perception of gender.

From my primary discourse, I have learned about multiple problems in our society. I identified and thought about these problems at an age where most kids do not even want to think beyond what they were going to eat that evening. My home did not socialize me into feminism in the same way that a person who is born into a sports-centered family is socialized into loving sports. Rather it is from my family that I was exposed to issues that lead to me becoming a feminist. By being a feminist, I have also become more of a critically conscious person. My feminist views towards the world can be summarized by the following quote:

Society is a human creation, which we can know and transform, not a mysterious whirl of events beyond understanding or intervention. The various parts of society affect each other, even though not all people have the same power to make laws, policies, trends, mass media, and income. Elite groups wield dominant power and wealth, but nonelite sectors can organize to change power relations. (Shor 128)

I am not part of the elite that has control over large political issues. However, that does not mean that I cannot do something to change society's view of gender and all the other topics that intersect with it such as politics, race, etc. Because my feminist views started from an early age, I have become very passionate about feminism and want to use it to reshape society. Some might question why I chose liberal studies as my major when applying to college when I could have chosen something more "feminist-oriented" like women's studies or sustainability studies. It was actually a hard choice since I have always been drawn to teaching, but I also have strong feminist views. I ended up choosing liberal studies because I wanted to make an impact on people when they are younger. It is harder for people to become exposed to these kinds of radical ideas when they are older because they've been socialized into accepting patriarchy and gender roles. By reaching a younger audience, I will be able to influence a whole new generation of people who will be able to question society instead of just accepting it.

Looking back at my childhood and family, it goes without saying that my home was not a nest of solitude. There was too much negativity, which has caused all my bad memories to cloud all the good ones. However, at some level, I am glad that I experienced everything that I did. It revealed things to me about society that other people do not get exposed to until they are older. Even though I decided that the age of thirteen that I did not want to be like my mom, I cannot deny the fact that I am like her. I am strong like she is. Like her, I am aware that there are

problems in this world. While stayed silent about these problems, I will not. With these feminist views, I want to be the voice that my mom thought she never had. She deserves that, I deserve that, and all women deserve that.