(DE)COLONIALITY AND DOCTORAL SOCIALIZATION IN U.S. GRADUATE PROGRAMS

By

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ABSTRACT

European colonization of vast portions of the world has left its mark long after the point when most societies were supposedly freed. The coloniality of power has ensured the continuing dominance of Eurocentric ideologies in the form of racism, sexism, and the marginalization of Black and Indigenous knowledge production. In this dissertation project, I sought to understand how coloniality is manifested in the training and socialization of doctoral students. Using a duoethnographic approach, I worked with recent doctoral graduates to reflect upon our experiences through the lens of decoloniality. I found that coloniality continues to pervade doctoral programs in the form of sexism, racism, transphobia, and Eurocentric curricula and teaching practices. However, my participants also shared the various ways in which they work to resist coloniality and utilize their positions for decolonial ends. These findings offer a starting point for future scholars to explore the topic in further depth, while also providing recommendations to those who mentor and train doctoral students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I first attempted a PhD, I was under the impression that academia was a place where the truth reigned supreme. While I was certainly aware of the politics of my chosen discipline (for example divisions between certain fields, theories, or methods), I assumed these divisions represented honest desires to better understand the world. However, when my questions, methods, and style started to come into conflict with those of my department at a highly regarded university, I began to realize other priorities were at play. In a field that largely embraced positivism, I was interested in historical, constructivist approaches that problematized dominant approaches to research. While I felt that such tension created an opportunity for new knowledge to emerge, my department clearly did not agree. I received the lowest grades of my cohort and was told it would be extremely difficult for me to form a committee because no professors wanted to work with me. In the end, I left with a Master's degree, which was helpful for credentialing purposes, but it also sent the signal that I was not to be understood as a knower, or someone who produced knowledge. I could not, for example, have applied to tenure-track positions within my field or received grant funding to do independent research.

At the time, I thought it was my fault for not presenting my ideas well enough, for not having enough evidence, or for not being friendly enough. When I decided to try for a PhD again, I resolved to do better. I would be a better researcher, a better student, a better peer, and in many ways, I think I have. I also learned, though, that my prior disputes were just a small part of a much larger history of conflict stretching back hundreds of years. Ultimately, I have learned that the academy is a place where power reigns supreme. Faculty and administrators decide who passes classes, graduates with degrees, who is hired, and who gets to continue working. It may not be the power of weapons or armies, but it is power, nonetheless. It is the power of

knowledge, a power that remains concentrated among a relatively select few. During my first PhD program, I was unaware of the extent to which these dynamics reflected the legacy of Western colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Now, having learned about the colonial origins of heterosexism, genderism, racism, and classism, I have begun to recognize my conflicts with my first department as the manifestations of a colonial system designed to preserve the power of a small group of elites.

Despite what many people, myself included, have been taught, colonialism is not a thing of the past. It is alive and well, and it continues to poison our world with ideas and beliefs that support heterosexism, racism, and classism. In presenting this research, I hope that my work helps uncover and address how Western colonization of the Americas shapes the way future scholars are socialized. Specifically, in this study I aim to understand how doctoral students who seek to decolonize higher education are socialized in their graduate programs. This work is important because if doctoral socialization continues to uphold colonial values through the curriculum, practices, and requirements it imposes upon students, future researchers and leaders will be ill prepared to address the ongoing manifestations of coloniality in modern society.

The Context of the Problem

The doctoral degree is widely considered the pinnacle of formalized education, signaling a high level of mastery over a given area of study (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). Completion of a PhD requires that an individual make a significant contribution to their field of choice, demonstrating the ability to create and further knowledge about the world. While other doctoral degrees, such as the JD or MD also require years of study, the PhD is the only one where formal research is required. The process of conducting an original research project can take up to a decade, depending on the nature of the project in question. What may be considered significant

depends on the evaluation of others who already hold a PhD. As I have mentioned, a PhD is almost universally required for those who wish to continue conducting research in a formal capacity whether at a university, an institute, or a government agency. As higher education enrollment increases and society looks towards researchers to solve pressing social problems, the influence of the PhD is only likely to grow. While there are certainly other ways that a person may come to be considered a knowledge creator, the PhD is one of the most visible and widely respected.

What then are the experiences of people who seek to push the boundaries of their PhD training? As I have already hinted, PhD programs are not free from the societal context in which they first developed, in this case the colonial era that saw the mass enslavement of African peoples, the genocide of Indigenous occupants of Turtle Island, and the disenfranchisement of European women. These events are not purely historical, they continue to persist in the dominance of European peoples and ideas. For example, many people from historically oppressed groups still never have the opportunity to pursue these advanced degrees and as a result, decades of academic work has brought attention to "representational diversity," highlighting the fact that minoritized ethnic groups are far less likely to attend a college or university and subsequently graduate with a degree, especially an advanced graduate degree (ACE, 2012; Bollinger, 2003; Brown, 2004; Harris & Lee, 2019; Ryan & Bauman, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Indeed, those with advanced degrees tend to be White (Ryan & Bauman, 2016) while about 50% of those who begin a PhD program ultimately leave before completing their degree (Bair, 2004; Rigler et al., 2017).

Much has been written about how we, as a society, might address this so-called "achievement gap" and increase racial and ethnic diversity in higher education (Hanushek, 2019;

Ladson-Billings, 2006). While graduate student diversity has not received the same attention as undergraduate enrollment, it is still an important topic (Harris & Lee, 2019). Advocates of graduate student diversity argue that minoritized researchers often study different issues (or the same issues in different ways) than White researchers, thus improving our understanding of the world (Garibay, 2015; McGee & Bentley, 2017; McGee et al., 2016; Gutiérrez et al., 2012; Woodrow Wilson Foundation, 2005). Furthermore, representational diversity among the professoriate is also theorized to improve minority degree completion at several levels. Clearly, representational diversity is a crucial part of how higher education works to undo centuries of oppression.

Too often, however, conversations about diversity stop at issues of access and representation while success is measured with narrow metrics like graduation rates. The public interest in diversity is usually restricted to a numbers game, how many people of color or women are visible in an organization. Many institutions of higher education only care about diversity in as much as the presence of marginalized bodies make the institution look better (Ahmed, 2009; Leong, 2021). A university or college may not genuinely be interested in addressing the historical legacy of racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of institutionalized oppression. Nor are they typically willing to acknowledge their roles in these systems as settler colonial institutions (Stein, 2020; Wilder, 2013). As a result, deeper issues within higher education, such as the way we socialize and train doctoral students, often go unexamined in the wider discourse.

I propose to address the oversights contribute to a growing field of study aimed at understanding the experiences of those students who seek to undermine the colonial nature of doctoral education. I aim to examine doctoral study through the lens of (de)coloniality, a theoretical perspective that focuses on the many consequences of European colonization.

(De)coloniality calls attention to the ways that education maintains the onto-epistemic hegemony of Eurocentrism (Gosfugel, 2007; 2012; 2013; Quijano, 2000). In addition to examining topics of racism and genderism, decolonial scholars look deeper to the ways that colonization led to particular systems of knowledge production that favor Eurocentric topics, practices, and methods. By bringing this theoretical perspective to bear on doctoral education I seek to expand our understanding of how decolonial scholars in particular experience their time in graduate school. As it stands, I fear that doctoral training reinforces colonial standards of knowledge production, meaning students seeking to combat colonial structures will be marginalized within their programs and academia more broadly.

Research Questions

Using (de)colonial theory to examine doctoral socialization, I propose the following research questions:

1. How do U.S. doctoral students pursuing decolonial research experience coloniality in both the formal and informal elements of their doctoral training and socialization?
    a. How does their theoretical and methodological training constrain them as scholars, practitioners, thinkers, etc.?
    b. How do professors either reinforce or oppose colonial practices through their mentorship?
    c. How do they resist coloniality and advance decolonial work?

These questions will best guide an exploration of coloniality in doctoral socialization. I emphasize both formal and informal practices, recognizing that doctoral socialization works through many avenues. By this I mean I will not restrict my inquiry to only classes on research methods or theory, but all instances in which students learn the norms of research practice. I

hope that I will then be able to uncover the ways in which doctoral training supports coloniality, as well as identify ways to decolonize the academy.

Significance and Contributions

This project is necessary because U.S. doctoral education is one of the most important and influential sites of knowledge production in the world. For example, global rankings of universities and doctoral programs continue to favor institutions in the United States. Many top scholarly journals are located in the United States and mostly publish scholars from the U.S (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014; Lo, 2011). Arguably as a result, countries like China model efforts on Western universities as they work to become more influential in higher education (Kim et al., 2018). However, even in the best of conditions, it would not be ideal for so much of the world's formal knowledge to be concentrated in such a way. Knowledge production is a value laden process where decisions are made regarding what topics, methods, and theories are legitimate and which are not. Unfortunately, many of these values are bound up in a colonial system.

Gonzales and Núñez (2014) argue that the very same rankings that privilege Western institutions also drive scholars towards particular types of research. Notably, ranking regimes encourage scholars to be more individualistic and make their work more homogenous. Far from being neutral, academic research is heavily impacted by social and economic forces (Gonzales et al., 2014; Slaughter & Leslie, 2001), meaning that a scholar is not simply free to pursue whatever line of thinking they wish. There are instead a host of variables they must consider if they wish to obtain and hold an academic position. For example, many social science departments now expect their faculty to compete for grant funding (Gonzales et al., 2014; Hackett; 2014). Yet funding agencies tend to prefer quantitative methods over qualitative (Carey & Swanson, 2003). Or an important journal may only accept empirical pieces, not theoretical or conceptual papers,

as is case in my field with the prestigious *Journal of Higher Education*. The rational academic will recognize these kinds of incentives and respond accordingly.

Faculty who train doctoral students are then likely to take what they have learned about legitimate forms of knowledge and transmit them to their students, especially their advisees (Gonzales et al., 2023). That is the job of a mentor after all, to prepare their mentee for what awaits them in a particular field of study (Curtin et al., 2016). The literature on doctoral mentorship unequivocally states the need for faculty mentors to teacher their students how research is done (Carpenter et al., 2009; Curtin et al., 2016; Hesli et al., 2003). However, if knowledge production is value laden, what kinds of values are ultimately being transmitted? In this paper I argue that because the U.S. was founded and continues to exist as a settler colonial nation, the kinds of knowledge doctoral students are taught to privilege will likely reflect colonial values as laid out below.

Colonialization led to the continuing genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, the enslavement of millions of Africans, and a history of Western domination that continues to this day (Quijano, 2000). As I will describe shortly, colonial attitudes form the basis for many types of discrimination and therefore pose an ongoing danger to the very concepts of diversity and equity. Any manifestations of coloniality in doctoral education will almost certainly work to undermine social justice. For example, some scholars continue to argue, based on colonial assumptions, that there are inherent, biological differences in natural intelligence between racial and gender groups (see the largely discredited works of Charles Alan Murray). This perspective will undoubtedly lead to unfair treatment of minoritized students versus White ones. Even those programs and institutions which espouse a commitment to diversity may not be adopting a limited understanding the underlying issues. For example, Rodgers and Liera (2023) discussed

the growing tendency to treat compositional diversity as a commodity that supports academic capitalism and exploits Faculty of Color (see also Leong, 2013; 2021). Decolonial work, by contrast, seeks to expand research and practice beyond the confines placed by coloniality. The decolonial project attempts to reclaim knowledges, practices, and traditions that have been suppressed as a result of Western colonization. Therefore, my study attempts to use the lens of (de)coloniality to learn more about those students who are working towards this reclamation and add to the growing body of literature of doctoral socialization.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is best understood as a "guide and a ballast for empirical research" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016, p. X). Despite this dissertation being a study of coloniality within U.S. doctoral socialization, I deliberately choose to draw my conceptual lens from the work of predominantly Latin American decolonial thinkers, such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh, Enrique Dussel, and María Lugones. While some of these scholars were educated in and have chosen to teach at U.S. institutions at different points in their careers, they often refuse to accommodate Eurocentric norms and practices in their work. Quijano and Dussel notably published most of their writings in Spanish, a violation of the common academic expectation that research be published in English (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018)[1]. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) explain, (de)colonial theories were not developed in the Western world, but rather by those in the so-called Third World who were attempting to reckon with the ontological and epistemic violence perpetuated against them. Their orientation was informed by Freire (2001), who believed that oppression could best be understood from the perspective of the oppressed. Furthermore, these theories and analyses tend to be heavily historical in style and transnational in

[1] Although it is worth noting that Spanish is, in historical context, a colonizer language that has propagated through the widespread destruction of Indigenous cultures and languages.

scope. This distinction is important, because similar U.S. theories, such as Critical Race Theory, are often less interested in historical or transnational analyses, preferring to focus on the U.S. national context instead (McCarthur, 2021; Meghji, 2020). These perspectives remain incredibly valuable, and I reference several in my work, but they lack some of the comprehensive insights that theories of coloniality can bring.

Coloniality in the Americas is a difficult thing to define, as it encompasses over five hundred years of European violence that continue in various forms today (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Quijano (2000) first coined the term coloniality of power to describe the complex matrix of military, economic, and social forces that serve to maintain Western dominance in the modern world. By tracing these forces to their roots in the colonization of the Americas and the enslavement of Africa, Quijano deconstructs dominant historical narratives and social categories. He shows how coloniality is manifested in the modern world through a variety of ontological and epistemological orientations. The most relevant of these manifestations for my study are the artificial categories of race and gender (along with the racism and sexism that emerged from such divisions) and the Cartesian logic that privileges Eurocentric ways of thinking.

Doctoral Socialization

Although I provide a more thorough description in my literature review, it is worth giving a brief overview of what I mean when I use the phrase doctoral socialization. Throughout this paper, I use the terms doctoral socialization, training, and education somewhat interchangeably. Although socialization does not have a universally agreed upon definition, scholars typically use the term to refer to the process through which doctoral students gain the skills, attitudes, knowledge, etc. necessary to be an academic scholar/researcher (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Twale et al., 2016; Weidman et al., 2001). This process occurs through numerous vectors and

mechanisms, including formal classroom instruction, research mentorship, peer interaction, and professional development. Socialization is ongoing and iterative, with doctoral students constantly negotiating their identity with the expectation of their mentors, program, and discipline. As I show later, it is also a process that is heavily subject to coloniality.

Artificial Ontologies: Racism and Sexism

To give a rough definition, ontology is the philosophical study of being and reality; what it means to be a human and to relate to other human beings in the world. Ontological questions and assumptions are at the heart of the colonial project, albeit not in the manner typically discussed in academia. In this project, I largely sidestep the current debates in social science and education circles regarding the nature of being and reality (i.e. positivism or post-positivism versus interpretivism or postmodernism). Instead, I focus on the ontological categories that Europeans created in order to justify mass genocide and enslavement, those of race and gender. Where one falls in these categories often determines whether they are allowed to be a knowledge creator, or if they are excluded from academic space and discourse.

Race and Racism

Quijano (2000; 2007) traced the concept of race back to the beginning of the colonial endeavor. At the time when European nations were deciding how best to exploit the resources of the so-called "New World," they were also debating how to deal with the people already occupying these lands. A key question for the highly religious Europeans was whether these new "Indians" had souls (Grosfugel, 2012). The church had already decided that African peoples were without souls, meaning that it was acceptable to use them as slave labor the same as one would any other beast. A similar issue was at stake with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, who might have also served as a convenient workforce for the colonizers. However, the church

ultimately decided that Native Americans had souls, thus making it immoral to enslave them (Grosfugel, 2012). Nevertheless, they were viewed as uncivilized due to their lack of Christianity, meaning that they could still be conquered and controlled (Dussel, 2014; Quijano, 2000). By dint of being Christian, early European colonizers began to make ontological distinctions between themselves and the Indigenous peoples of Africa and America. These religiously founded distinctions were seen as inherent, inseparable from any individual from a particular group. Thus, Europeans established themselves as the superior group, with divine right to enslave the Africans and conquer the Americans.

As time went on and colonization continued, the rationales for these ontological divisions changed, although the power dynamics ultimately remained the same. As Europe began to enter the Enlightenment, the colonizers started to use the new tools of reason and science to justify their violence. During this time, the concept of race truly emerged as a way of differentiating groups of people. As opposed to being inferior because of their lack of souls or Christianity, Black and Native peoples now came to be seen as inherently inferior by reason of biology (Quijano, 2000; 2007). Physical indicators, such as skin color or facial features were used as proof of intrinsic differences between the races. These efforts culminated in the late 1800s and early 1900s, with most of the Western world fully embracing the racial sciences. Darwin's theory of evolution in particular gave rise to the belief that White Europeans were the pinnacle of human evolution, with the other races lagging behind on the biological scale (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It was during this time that we saw extremely biased attempts to prove the natural superiority of Whites, such as comparisons between skull sizes (Gould, 1981). In the first few decades of the 1900s, scientists turned to the fledgling field of genetics to again support their a priori belief in White racial superiority (Nettles, 2019). Open expression of these ideas fell out of

fashion following the Holocaust, but Quijano (2000) sees racial exploitation as still the main foundation of modern capitalism. There are, however, other ontological categories which scholars have tied to coloniality.

Gender and Sexism

While not a key consideration in Quijano's original formulation of coloniality, several scholars have since introduced gender classification as an important feature of the colonial project (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). For several decades now, feminist scholars have interrogated the previously taken for granted gender binary. In an activity that might best be described as reinventing the wheel, academics such as Butler (1999), Connell (1987), and West and Zimmerman (1987) have come to the conclusion that gender, far from reflecting natural biological categories, is instead a social invention. Men, women, and the traits attributed to them in modern society, are artificial categories that primarily serve to maintain male domination. However, none of these researchers managed to identify the origin of these artificial ideas.

Lugones (2007; 2010) on the other hand, made the case that prior to colonization, the notion of gender did not exist in any truly organized sense. This is not to say that divisions did not exist based on conceptualizations of masculinity, femininity, and other supposedly sexual differences. However, any such divisions were heavily dependent on individual cultures and were not necessarily hierarchical. The idea that men and women are inherently different, and that men are inherently superior to women, was by no means universal. Indeed, Lugones argued forcefully that many Indigenous cultures in Africa and the Americas held femininity in high regard. Women occupied positions of power and were honored for their wisdom. However, European men, in an effort to consolidate their growing power, began to violently enforce the gender binary both at home and abroad. Grosfugel (2013) describes the witch hunts of the 16th

and 17th centuries as an attempt to deliberately repress feminine influence and power in European society. To this day, women of all races and ethnicities remain disadvantaged through pervasive sexism and misogyny. Furthermore, colonial heterosexism prescribes certain behaviors to which all people are expected to adhere (Morgenson, 2012).

Summary and applicability

Through the violent enslavement of Africa and colonization of the Americas, Europeans established categories of being that are still in use today. Through the colonial matrix of power, they were able to universalize such divisions as race and gender, while also enforcing hierarchies between and among groups. Over the course of five hundred years, Westerners have done their best to establish these artificial categorizations as ontological truths that describe the objective nature of the world. By contrast, decolonial scholars teach us that gender and race are actually social constructs with very real impacts on how people are treated. Despite not describing anything empirically true about the world, they remain powerful imaginaries that reinforce the power of White men. Neither higher education as a sector or field are free from these influences. As I have previously described, individuals from marginalized ethnic groups do not have the same access to education as those from privileged backgrounds. Moreover, even when allowed into higher education spaces, people with marginalized identities often face discrimination and hostility (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Women of color (itself an imperfect, colonially informed descriptor) are particularly vulnerable as a result of occupying multiple sites of oppression (Collins, 2009). In summary, they are often not allowed access to the position of a knowledge creator. It is these ontological forms of marginalization in the form of representational diversity that tends to receive the greatest attention in higher education scholarship and discourse. In other

words, colonizers used ontological hierarchies of race and gender as the basis for deciding whose knowledge counted.

Privileged Epistemologies: Descartes and Eurocentrism

While ontology refers to the study of being and reality, epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and knowing. Epistemological scholars ask questions such as what counts as knowledge, what things may be known, and who may produce knowledge. Decolonial thinkers examine these questions through the power-focused lens of coloniality. Dussel (2014) argues that colonization was not only a material project (meaning the conquering of lands and people for resources), but conceptual and abstract as well. Europeans colonized minds as well as bodies through the systematic destruction of Indigenous ways of knowing (Grosfugel, 2013). In doing so, they established European rationalism as the only path to a "true" understanding of the world (Grosfugel, 2007). Today, the colonial matrix of power ensures that Eurocentric epistemologies remain dominant.

Dussel (2014) identifies 17th century Rene Descartes as the primary originator of modern philosophy, with its emphasis on rationalism. Descartes was heavily concerned with questions of consciousness; what a person could know about themselves and those outside of them. His work culminated in his most famous conclusion, "Cogito ergo sum," or "I think therefore I am." Dussel argues that such a statement was far more radical than it might appear to modern audiences because it placed the ego, the rational self, at the center of being and knowing. Prior to this, European philosophers believed that truth could only be reached through God and the Church. Descartes instead supplants God and the Church in favor of the rational self as the source of knowledge and truth. Dussel makes the case that such a move was possible because it was preceded by over a century of colonization, where Europeans became accustomed to

thinking of themselves as the center of the world, superior to all others. In his view, "I conquer, therefore I am," paves the way for "I think, therefore I am." European philosophers soon adopted Descartes' ideas, making White men the primary sources of knowledge in the world.

According to Grosfugel (2012; 2013), these philosophical shifts fundamentally affected the way people related to the world. For one, rational philosophy separates the mind from the body, raising the mind to the God-like position of knower. By contrast, the body is viewed as a somewhat inconvenient tether for the mind and largely inconsequential for the creation of knowledge. To Descartes and his fellows, only the mind could produce truth, and only then through rationalism. Furthermore, Eurocentric rationalism relied on new conceptualizations of the Subject and the Other. As I have already described, "I think, therefore I am" places the thinker in the God's-eye position. This positions those outside of oneself as the "Other," denied the possibility of being knowers. In a mass scale, Europeans have applied this logic to all other peoples of the world, creating an artificial reality where only Europeans may be knowers, and everyone else are simply objects to be studied. Through this process, European knowledge comes to be seen as natural, objective, and universal. It also allowed European thinkers to reify the messy, segmented history of human society into a single linear thread that inevitably led to European society (Grosfugel, 2012; 2013).

The colonial project worked in tandem with the growth of modern rationalism through the active destruction of other systems of knowledge. After all, in order for Descartes' insights to be true, they had to apply to everyone, which thus necessitated the suppression of any opposing ideas. Colonizers accomplished this through what Grosfugel (2013) termed epistemicides. According to Grosfugel's analysis, colonizers did their best to destroy or suppress any non-Eurocentric ways of knowing during the process of conquest. One strategy was book burning,

which resulted in the loss of massive libraries in the Al-Andalus and Americas that far surpassed any other repositories of knowledge present in Europe at the time. Colonizers also prevented Native and African peoples from practicing their traditional religions and customs, forcing them to adhere to Christian, European norms.

In modern times, coloniality maintains a monopoly on knowledge production through what philosophers Miranda Fricker and Kristie Dotson have termed epistemic violence and oppression (Dotson, 2011; 2012; 2014; Fricker, 2007; 2017). Drawing on decolonial thinkers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, they identify a number of forms of epistemic violence that, whether intentional or not, serve to silence those who occupy marginalized positions in society. The primary goal of the various forms of epistemic violence and oppression are to maintain the status quo of knowledge production, which in modern society inevitably upholds Eurocentrism. As with the other ontological and epistemic falsehoods perpetuated by Europeans, the colonial matrix of power has continued to support Eurocentrism even after physical colonization ended.

Summary

Decolonial scholars warn against thinking that higher education is free from these manifestations of coloniality. Race and gender are still very salient as colonial categories, with people of color and women often facing discrimination, harassment, or outright exclusion from academic spaces (Patton, 2004; Stockdill & Danico, 2012). The Subject/Object dynamic also continues, with centuries of work that marginalizes and pathologizes anyone who is not a White man (Espino, 2012). Non-Western epistemologies are devalued and marginalized in order to support the false universality of Eurocentric narratives (Grosfugel, 2013). Issues of *what* knowledge counts are inherently tied to questions of *who* is allowed to produce knowledge. Despite the existence of prior studies on topics of racism and sexism in doctoral study, there are

relatively few studies that explicitly use the coloniality of power as a framework. As I show in my literature review, my study therefore addresses an important gap by bringing together the study of both ontological and epistemological exclusion in a single empirical study.

Structure of the Dissertation

Having established the nature of the problem I am seeking to address, the rest of this paper will chronicle my investigation into the topic of (de)coloniality in doctoral study. In Chapter 2, I then discuss the literature on doctoral socialization and education before demonstrating the relative dearth of work using a colonial lens. In Chapter 3, I lay out the methodological approach I took when collecting empirical data for this study. In order to follow a decolonial ethic, I draw from dueothnographic and post-qualitative researchers who advocate innovative practices. Chapter 4 contains the findings from my discussion with three recent doctoral graduates who are well versed in decolonial theory. Finally, Chapter 5 lays out the major themes I identified in my research, along with my recommendations for future work in this field.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to convey the nuance and importance of these questions, I have organized this literature review in a semi-inductive manner, starting broadly and narrowing into the exact nature of my work. First, I begin by giving a (far too brief) history of U.S. higher education as a colonial set of institutions. In the majority of the review, I provide a critical synthesis of the scholarly literature on doctoral education, training, and socialization, using the theory of coloniality as an analytic lens. I make the case that coloniality continues to exist in both obvious and subtle ways in doctoral training. One obvious mechanism is through the ontological exclusion of ethnic and gender minorities, two constructs inextricably tied to colonial mindsets. However, the most subtle manifestation of coloniality is in the epistemological marginalization of non-Western topics, methods, and sites. I argue that the current literature on doctoral socialization barely engages with this issue, and rarely through the theoretical lens of (de)coloniality. I draw upon the thinking of Indigenous scholars in the U.S. to illustrate higher education's hostility towards non-European ways of knowing and conducting research. Finally, I conclude by returning to my research questions as an important site of scholarly inquiry.

Literature for this study was gathered as part of a different collaborative project also dealing with doctoral socialization. In that project, my co-researchers and I attempted as complete a review as possible of scholarly articles studying doctoral education, socialization, and training. In JSTOR we conducted repeated searches using the terms described in Appendix A. We restricted our search to articles published since the year 2000, given that doctoral education has changed greatly since the 1990s. For example, the 2000s saw a noticeable uptick in the number of doctoral students of color compared to previous decades (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). We then reviewed the first 500 abstracts in each search to ensure that they met our criteria for

inclusion. In that study, we were primarily focused on empirical works, but I retained several conceptual pieces that spoke to how faculty think about doctoral socialization. After eliminating duplicates, we were left with a database of over 200 articles, which I have supplemented with several books, reports, and other relevant pieces not identified in the initial search. Using the NVIVO qualitative analysis software, I reviewed and coded all articles for relevant findings related to coloniality in doctoral training and socialization. I was hindered slightly by the fact that few prior studies explicitly used coloniality as a theoretical lens, meaning I had to interpret other scholars' findings through a framework for which they were not originally designed. As a result, I eliminated many articles that did not speak to the topic, such as studies on attrition rates, evaluations of individual programs, or employment outcomes. I was ultimately left with several dozen relevant pieces that define, discuss, and sometimes problematize doctoral socialization. I should also note that this review is not comprehensive, but rather meant to provide a representative overview of the most closely related pieces of scholarship.

A History of Colleges and Universities in the U.S.

Higher education (as a sector, not a field of study), first began to emerge in the colonies in the 17th century as the European colonization of the Americas was well underway. The early colleges, such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, were primarily religious in those days, serving as training places for priests, pastors, and future leaders (Thelin, 2011; Wilder, 2013). These budding institutions held deep ties to the slave trade, advertising their schools to slavers while sometimes owning slaves themselves (Wilder, 2013). Many of them advocated against the abolition of slavery, promoted segregation, and housed scholars who created eugenics and racial sciences. While most of these institutions have since sought to downplay or outright erase these histories, they were unequivocally hostile to people of color for centuries (Thelin, 2011). Most

institutions of higher education were fully segregated until the latter half of the 20th century, and many remain functionally segregated to this day (Posselt et al. 2012).

Furthermore, many colleges and universities were founded and continue to exist on the stolen land of Indigenous peoples. The Morrill Land Grants Act of 1862 enabled settlers to continue the genocide against Native peoples through the seizure of their ancestral homes (Stein, 2020). This violence was justified based on the previously discussed inferiority of Native peoples in the United States. Many of the largest and most influential colleges and universities were founded with the help of land grants (Stein, 2020). These flagship state universities continue to serve as leading higher education institutions to this day while still occupying stolen land. As institutions, they therefore cannot be separated meaningfully from the settler colonial project (Bonds & Ironwood, 2016).

Doctoral Training and Socialization

Weidman et al. (2001) produced one of the most influential reports on doctoral socialization at the turn of the 21st century. In it, they defined socialization as "the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills" (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 5). They articulated four stages of doctoral socialization, summarized as follows:

1. Anticipatory: where students start to become aware of the expectations and nature of the role they inhabit. This typically takes place during recruitment, application, and admission.

2. Formal: where students begin formal instruction and training, gradually gaining competence in required areas as evidenced through the completion of courses, examinations, and eventually the dissertation.
3. Informal: where students encounter those expectations that are not always explicitly articulated, such as how to behave in professional situations.
4. Personal: where the student accepts and internalizes the expectations of doctoral education and begins to identify as a scholar in training.

Subsequent scholars have utilized and expanded this framework for understanding doctoral study. In a series of studies, Gardner (2007; 2007; 2010a) created a 3-step model that streamlines and combines the phases of development. Phase 1 encompasses the time from application to initial matriculation, where students are just beginning to meet their faculty, colleagues, and transition into their new environment. Phase 2 runs from the beginning of coursework to the beginning of candidacy and incorporates both formal and informal experiences (see Hawthorne & Fyfe, 2015 for in depth examples). Phase 3 begins when students start work on their dissertation work and come to see themselves as independent researchers. Unlike prior models, Gardner allows for more agency within these phases, recognizing that students are not passive in the socialization process (Austin, 2002). In particular, she highlights the ambiguity of doctoral education and the stress this causes students across all phases (Gardner, 2010a).

Because these definitions are necessarily broad, I want to draw particular attention to the most relevant elements of socialization. For example, I am most interested in Weidmam et al.'s (2001) use of the words "knowledge" and "skills" in their definition. There are things that must be known, and skills that must be acquired, before a doctoral student is able to take part in the profession. Clearly, the dissertation serves to demonstrate that the student has the knowledge and

skills expected of their field of study. As this is a study of knowledge, these components of doctoral socialization are thus the most important; what students are taught to recognize as knowledge and what skills their programs view as necessary in order to produce knowledge. I am especially concerned with those students in Phase 3 of Gardner's model, the dissertation stage, as this is when students are truly grappling with their work, values, and their relationship to their field. Moving forward, I will describe some of the specific mechanisms of the socialization process, namely in the importance of mentorship and disciplinary context. This discussion will necessarily focus mostly on those mechanisms which most directly impact knowledge production.

Mechanisms of Socialization: Disciplinary Context

The precise way in which a student is socialized into academia depends greatly on their disciplinary context. As Austin rightly points out, "Any discussion of graduate preparation and socialization for academic careers must take into account disciplinary contexts" (2002, p. 97). Scholar Thomas Gieryn has drawn attention to the importance of scientific boundaries as a "practical problem" (Gieryn, 1983, p. 1). Using sociological theory, he argued that scholarly boundaries represent ideological stances meant to establish a discipline's legitimacy. Disciplines are in a constant state of negotiating and defining what forms of knowledge and inquiry lie within their boundaries, and which lie without (see also, Massey, 1999). In other words, disciplines are best understood as social constructs that often reflect the power dynamics of the societies in which they exist (Gieryn, 1983; Fuller, 1991). Being a member of a particular disciplinary community thus has important consequences for the kind of knowledge that gets produced (Gieryn, 1983).

As a response to some of these perceived shortcomings, many scholars and institutions have begun pushing for a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary education. Advocates of interdisciplinary education argue that working across disciplinary boundaries will enable scholars to better address pressing social issues (Pfirman & Martin, 2010). However, interdisciplinary doctoral education has not yet replaced disciplinary contexts as the primary form of training. Indeed, one of the biggest difficulties in promoting interdisciplinarity in doctoral studies has been the vastly different academic cultures of various disciplines (Boden et al., 2011). Even students from a single discipline or related fields may find that their department does things much differently than another department (Adler & Adler, 2005; Matz, 2001).

Based upon these insights, doctoral socialization can be assumed to look quite different depending on the discipline in question. In particular, Gardner has (2007; 2010a) highlighted the very different paths that students take to becoming independent researchers in a variety of disciplines. For example, while independence is an important attribute in many disciplines, the lab setting of chemistry appears to provide those doctoral students greater supports than those in history (Gardner, 2007). Students in chemistry receive guidance from their peers more than history students, who rely almost exclusively on their advisors. However, students in mathematics and engineering appear particularly isolated, a phenomenon Gardner (2010a) attributes to their high proportions of international students. Differences in racial or gender equity between disciplines may also affect the nature of the socialization environment. Then, of course, within the disciplines there is the critical role of the research mentor.

Mechanisms of Socialization: Mentorship

Numerous scholars have stressed the fundamentally relational nature of doctoral socialization. In Austin's words, "Socialization is a process through which an individual

becomes part of a group, organization, or community. The socialization process involves learning about the culture of the group, including its values, attitudes, and expectations" (2002, p. 96). While this definition might appear quite similar to Weidman et al.'s (2001) definition, the emphasis here is on the social element of doctoral study. Austin stresses the importance of groups and communities, not just skills and competencies. One important relationship may be between classmates, particularly in cohort-based programs (Gardner, 2010a; Watkins & Mensah, 2019). However, the most critical socializing relationship in doctoral education is certainly that between faculty and students.

Good mentorship is ultimately one of the most important components of doctoral study, given that mentors are ideally the ones who guide students in the crafting of original research (Feldon et al., 2023; Sugimoto, 2012). Students and faculty both tend to agree that mentors should teach students good research practice, provide feedback on their work, and help them find funding for their research, and publish their work (Barrick et al., 2006; Lechuga, 2011; Sims, 2012). Troublingly however, it appears that mentors may not be good at assessing their students' skills (Feldon et al., 2015), although that is an issue beyond the scope of my current study.

In addition, many faculty see it as part of their mentoring responsibilities to address some of their students' emotional needs and wellbeing (Lechuga, 2011). This type of support appears particularly salient for students of color and international students, who may experience additional social challenges as a result of being in the ethnic minority (Ku, 2008). Zambrana et al. (2015) argue that mentors must understand the effects of systemic oppression on marginalized groups, particularly at PWIs (see also Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Quality mentoring has been theorized to improve career outcomes for marginalized groups (Dixon-Reeves, 2003). Unfortunately, there is evidence that people of color, particularly women, receive less support

from their mentors than other demographic groups (Noy & Ray, 2012). In these cases, students often turn to peers from similar backgrounds to serve as co-mentors (Godbee & Novotny, 2013; Phruksachart, 2017). Indeed, Patton (2009) argues that such communities are critical for many students of color to thrive in doctoral education. The need for community might help explain why HBCUs are particularly good at developing positive, productive relationships between mentors and students (Garrett, 2006).

Section Summary

A key takeaway from these studies is that context appears particularly salient in studying doctoral education. This insight might help explain why qualitative studies vastly outnumbered quantitative ones in the literature sampled. After all, qualitative methods are better able to capture the messy nuances of human experience than large scale data sets. The importance of disciplines also suggests the possibility that my participants may share radically different experiences. They also direct particular attention towards the relationship between students and their mentors, as faculty are main avenues through which students learn about research and academic expectations.

These various definitions and explanations draw attention to doctoral socialization as both an ontological and epistemic process. From an ontological perspective, doctoral socialization seeks to create a certain kind of *being*. There is something called a scholar or researcher that exists in the imagination of a given program, department, or discipline. While precise definitions might vary, doctoral education aims to shape individuals until they adequately resemble this imaginary. Alternatively, a person may be excluded from doctoral study altogether if they do not fit the prevailing image of a scholar. From an epistemological perspective, the socialization process trains individuals to see certain kinds of knowledge, methods, and topics as

more or less legitimate than others. Depending on disciplines or subfields, certain approaches to research or topics of research may not be considered real knowledge. Alternatively, a mentor may encourage or discourage students' interests or pursuits. The scholars whose definitions I have cited appear to view these processes as necessary or value neutral. However, in reality, those from historically marginalized backgrounds face many challenges when pursuing their doctorates (Austin & McDaniels, 2006). According to Phruksachart (2017), "Minoritized graduate students understand all too well that their topics, modes of analysis, physical appearance, or personal experiences can a priori prevent their work from being taken seriously" (p. 117-118).

Ontological Marginalization: Heterosexism and Racism in Doctoral Study

While not identifying either category as colonial constructs, a number of scholars have examined how students experience racism and sexism in doctoral study. Although these issues are not the primary focus of my study, it is still important to include at least some discussion of them. These forms of marginalization are ontological in nature because they relate to supposedly inherent characteristics that students embody. As I described in Chapter 1, the current discourse is primarily concerned with representational diversity; the ontological question of what types of bodies are allowed in academic spaces. Prior studies on these topics are therefore relevant in showing why my focus on epistemological diversity is necessary. Furthermore, all of my participants identify with at least one group that has been marginalized as a result of coloniality.

In particular, women of color appear to face extreme marginalization in their doctoral programs. As Noy and Ray argue, "Given research about the challenges students of color and women face, intersectionality suggests that raced and gendered experiences in graduate school may be multiplicative" (2012, p. 885). Empirical findings seem to bear this out, with women of

color describing almost continuous racism in their doctoral programs (Borum & Walker, 2012; Espino, 2014). An interviewee in Carter's (2002) study on Black women in Special Education remarked that, "I wanted to feel to a comfort level and be friendly with my White doctoral student colleagues but I was constantly reminded of their racist lenses" (p. 304). Black women may also feel greater pressure to succeed in doctoral study, given the scrutiny their identities bring (Zeligman et al., 2015). For example, "the stereotype that African Americans are not competent in academic domains is one that African American women in doctoral programs are faced with on a continuous basis" (Shavers & Moore, 2014, p. 28). Some Black women believe that some programs are "not prepared to deal with Black graduate students" (Borum & Walker, 2012, p. 373). Even the very act of *being* a Black woman in the academy appears to offend some White faculty and students (Nixon-Cobb, 2005).

Native women relate many of the same racist and sexist stories as other women of color, if not worse. Indigenous scholar Adrienne Keene described a pervasive sense of invisibility in her graduate program, where she was the only Native student (Keene et al., 2017). Her classes never featured the work of Native scholars, yet her research was highlighted by the university as an example that they cared about diversity. Far from being an isolated experience, this sense of marginalization appears common all too common for Native doctoral students (Fox, 2013; Shotton, 2017). Furthermore, when they are acknowledged, many Native women negatively stereotyped in class, disrespected by staff, and mistreated by their non-Native mentors (Fox, 2013). Participants in Shotton's (2017) study describe numerous instances of being put down or pathologized on account of their Native identity. Many were automatically assumed to be less capable simply because of who they were.

Lest we think these negative attitudes are directed solely at women of color, students of color in other studies have described their negative racialization as "universal" (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Taylor & Antony, 2000, p. 189). African American students in one department reported being told by their White peers that they only received the prestigious NSF fellowship because they were Black (Slay et al., 2019, p. 272). Often the faculty reinforced this attitude with their hostility towards diversity (DeAngelo, et al., 2021; Slay et al., 2019). A Hispanic doctoral student described how one professor openly advocated her removal from the program until a senior administrator came to her defense (Espino, 2014). Asian students appear to fare no better in their treatment, despite misconceptions that they are more at home in the academy (Noy & Ray, 2012). Even when students do not face such overtly racist comments or actions, they may still be subjected to frequent microaggressions that leave them confused or in turmoil (Burt et al., 2019). Despite these experiences, many doctoral students of color feel it is better to stay silent and avoid conflict, lest they be labeled difficult or combative (Espino, 2014; Gildersleeve et al., 2011).

Gender creates a similarly fraught dynamic, although it is worth mentioning that most scholars tend to focus on the experiences of women in STEM. These departments often embody a traditionally masculine culture, meaning that they reward competition, while discouraging practices of care or harmony (Sallee, 2011). Some physics departments appear particularly susceptible to this environment, with one faculty saying that "A woman who is very aggressive, tough as nails, can project into the group" but that they have to "adapt to succeed" (Fox, 2000, p. 53). While some departments make an effort to adjust this sexist culture, some appear perfectly happy with the status quo (Fox, 2000). Perhaps unsurprisingly, women may then be discouraged from activities that may make them appear too feminine or uncommitted to academia, such as

having children (Maher et al., 2004). This is notably not an issue that men face because "Men don't have families. As soon as they have the wife [they have] someone who'll take care of the child" (Erickson, 2012, p. 369). What is surprising is that women in these situations sometimes deny that they are treated any differently than their male peers, perhaps as a defense mechanism (Erickson, 2012). In addition, there seems to be some evidence that these competitive environments are detrimental to doctoral students, impacting their ability to complete their studies (Gardner, 2010b; Wofford & Blaney, 2021).

Proposed improvements to doctoral socialization

In response to these problems with the socialization process, some scholars have begun to offer recommendations for how they believe doctoral education can be made more inclusive. In their handbook chapter on the subject, Austin and McDaniels (2006) advocate for greater awareness of different kinds of knowledge cultures, although they do not go into specifics. In their follow up to their original, influential piece, Twale, Weidman, and Bethea (2016) revisit the socialization model with a greater eye towards issues of diversity and equity. They offer more concrete suggestions, such as making more of an effort to recruit students of color, training faculty in racial sensitivity, expanding curriculum to include more underrepresented voices, and providing more professional development opportunities, among others, recommendations echoed by other scholars (Carpenter et al., 2009; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Ferrales & Fine, 2005). Slay et al. (2019) note that few graduate schools dedicate the sorts of resources to doctoral student support as those of undergraduate programs and colleges. However, as valuable and well-meaning as all these recommendations are, they do not go nearly far enough.

The core problem with most of the socialization literature, including those works that seek to create more equitable space, is that they see the process of socialization itself as

something either good, necessary, or at the very least value neutral. Austin and McDaniel's (2006) or Twale et al.'s (2016) problems with doctoral socialization implicitly lie in the fact that the process is not open to all students. Their solutions are aimed at increasing access and success, but only within the already existing structure. Too many of these scholars fail to realize that their image of equity is simply adding marginalized peoples to an oppressive system, not changing that system itself (Feldon et al., 2023; Leong, 2021). In short, they see diversity primarily as an ontological challenge, not an epistemological one. They recommend broadening doctoral curriculum, not fundamentally changing it. For example, Posselt (2018) notes that expectations of rigor in graduate study often have a racialized component, but her solution appears to be bring more People of Color into graduate programs, as opposed to reexamining the colonial assumptions imbedded in our notions of rigor. Consider also the following way that Austin and McDaniel (2006) define good a good academic research project: the ability to "frame appropriate questions," "design and implement scholarly projects," "collect and analyze data," "present results," and "give and receive feedback" (p. 424-425). These criteria might seem completely intuitive and appropriate for many of us, but they do not challenge the epistemological assumptions that underly most of Western scholarship. For example, they do not challenge or problematize the preference for rationalism versus experiential knowledge (Espino 2012). Nor do they engage with the ways in which the enforcement of dominant epistemological practices can harm students.

In a break from the above cited authors, Bathurst (2012) describes doctoral training as a culture learning process which is "more accurately understood as a process of 'culture making' that involves the internalization of systems of domination" (p. 34). Students in Gardner's (2007) study describe the socialization process as "grooming" (p. 734), a particularly unpleasant but

potentially apt metaphor. Turner (2015) likens the process to being a prisoner, trapped by the boundaries of the discipline or field of knowledge. While more hopeful, Robbins et al. (2023) advocate for the recognition of the cultural backgrounds which doctoral students bring with them into their programs. The socialization process, far from being value neutral, can instead be viewed as a process of indoctrination where dominant, Eurocentric ways of being and knowing violently replace any other beliefs or practices, marking them as illegitimate. Although not as numerous as their fellows who limit their focus to the ontological problems with doctoral socialization, there are a growing number of scholars who recognize the epistemological shortcomings of doctoral education.

Epistemological Marginalization: Knowledge Constraint in Doctoral Study

The epistemological manifestations of coloniality are far more difficult to identify than the ontological ones. In her book, *Decolonizing Educational Research*, Dr. Leigh Patel (2016) implicates doctoral training in the erasure of Indigenous knowledge. By refusing the validity of experiential knowledge in favor of supposedly neutral academic work, doctoral training teaches students to trust primarily in the existing canon of knowledge. Given the historical dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies (Grosfugel, 2013), such practices inherently favor White research (see also Scheurich & Young, 1997). However, because this process is epistemic, not ontological, it creates the opportunity for students of color to be accepted into the academy as long as they subscribe to academic norms. Thus, a scholar of color may be recognized as a producer of knowledge, but only if they assimilate to Eurocentric forms of research. Unfortunately, no scholars have explicitly used this framework for studying knowledge production in U.S. doctoral education. Nevertheless, there are some scholars who recognize the ways that doctoral study shuts down non-dominant forms of thinking.

Gildersleeve et al. (2011) used Critical Race Theory to frame the experiences of students of color in graduate school, making the claim that racism is inherent to doctoral study. Unlike many other studies, they actually acknowledge the existence of institutionalized racism. For example, they highlight the broad lack of academic interest in topics related to people of color. In a follow up to the Gildersleeve et al., paper, Grant (2021) compared her time in graduate school to "gaslighting," describing how she was made to feel responsible for the systemic failings of the program. In a similar vein, Taylor and Antony (2000) argue that many academic fields take a deficit-oriented approach to research on communities of color. This sort of attitude exemplifies the colonial Subject/Object binary that treats people of color as less than (Tuck, 2009). Even when not explicitly Othered, students from marginalized social groups often struggle to find theories that fit their work, or face ridicule from their professors for even attempting to do so (Espino, 2014; Golde, 2000; Olivas, 2009). Finally, Phruksachart (2017) notes the ways that universities sometimes treat diversity research differently at a bureaucratic level. At CUNY, diversity-based research is handled through the Office of Human Resource Management, as opposed to the Office of Research. Phruksachart attributes the difference to the fact that the university views diversity research as compliance oriented, not as actual research. However, all these scholars stop short of fully identifying a system of Eurocentric knowledge hegemony that creates this tension.

Espino (2012) is more explicit in using critical theory to argue that doctoral socialization is a site of Western oppression. She describes her experiences helping doctoral students recognize, confront, and ultimately challenge Eurocentric epistemologies and methodologies in Higher Education as a field. Along with her students, she struggles with the fact that Critical Race scholarship still exists within the racist boundaries of the academy. To use her words, "in

appropriating aspects of social constructionism for my epistemology, am I participating in my own colonization?" (Espino, 2012, p. 42). In contrast to many of her fellows, she also traces the origins of race-based epistemologies back to colonization. However, she does not directly draw upon theories of coloniality, despite identifying many of the same mechanisms. In addition, the study is framed from her perspective as a professor and researcher, not from the point of view of the students she teaches. As a result, the article still does not address the main issues of coloniality that I prioritize in my research questions.

There is also some indication in the literature that students of color approach doctoral study from fundamentally different perspectives (Acosta et al., 2016). McCallum (2017) suggests that students of color may be motivated to complete their PhDs by different factors than White students. Black students in her study differentiate themselves from their White peers by saying, "We look at communities' problems and we tend to have a sense of moral responsibility towards each other" (McCallum, 2017, p. 144). Likewise, Shotton (2018) argues that Native students are motivated primarily by a sense of reciprocity with their communities, as opposed to individualistic gain. Along similar lines, Espino (2014) described several Hispanic students who refused to adhere to their departments expectations and instead prioritized their own values. González (2006) underscores this point, concluding that doctoral programs in their current form are almost incompatible with Latina values. Nicol and Yee (2017) reflect on their doctoral journeys and how they learned to prioritize their own wellbeing, as opposed to simply accepting the self-destructive, homogenizing norms of the academy. Similarly, Perez et al., (2023) propose alternative, more collective approaches to research that combat Eurocentric norms. These examples illustrate a refusal to adhere to colonial norms of knowledge production by retaining a focus on community and experiential knowledge.

Indigenous Pesrpectives in Doctoral Study

Indigenous scholars, particularly women, appear most likely to draw attention to the ways that universities advance settler colonial values and epistemologies. It is worth nothing here that only one of the articles in this subsection appeared in my original literature search. I identified all others through targeted searches of Native scholars or based upon recommendations from one of my advisors. I find it concerning that such an important and relevant body of knowledge did not show up on either JSTOR or Google Scholar, two of the largest academic search engines in the world. Yet all these scholars engage more thoroughly with the university as a colonial institution than any other researchers in my database.

As previously described, Native women are often marginalized in doctoral study as a result of their identities. Beyond the ontological assumption that Native people are inherently less than, many participants in the studies I reviewed also describe being questioned by White students and professors on the bases of their knowledge. A woman in Shotton's (2017) article explained how White students in her classes would challenge her knowledge of her own community, refusing to believe anything that went against their colonial image of Native society. Other students related instances where they attempted to contest dominant narratives in education that erased or ignored Native genocide. In all cases the students were met with either passive aggressive comments or open hostility (Shotton, 2017). Another example is the fact that some doctoral programs do not allow Native language fluency to fulfill language requirements (Bhatt, 2018).

Furthermore, Native students often struggle to find support for their research topics and methodologies. One woman in Fox's (2013) study said that "Non-Indian mentors are at a loss as to how to help American Indian students complete their degrees... everything in the academy is

counter to what an American Indian person brings in" (p. 36) while another remarked that her work "did not fit the mold" (p. 33). One said that White professors "do not understand Indigenous research topics and question whether it is good scholarship" (p. 36). This skepticism is not necessarily hostile, but it still demonstrates how White faculty prefer Eurocentric scholarship, even when working with Native students. I found the following quote best summed up Fox's findings: "Nothing in the department is Indigenous" (p. 37). Masta (2018) goes so far as to argue that Native students in graduate education are engaged in a constant battle against the colonizing forces of the university.

There are also more subtle manifestations of colonial epistemologies in doctoral study. Navajo higher education scholar Amanda Tachine described how her doctoral journey was particularly isolating due to the lack of community (Keene et al., 2017). While she acknowledges that the process of completing a dissertation is lonely for many students, she argues that it was particularly so in her case because of her Navajo upbringing. The space in which she was expected to produce knowledge was not conducive to her values due to the very nature of the dissertation itself. Shotton (2018) asserts the need for doctoral education to better reflect the communitarian orientation of Native values in order to be more supportive. While this example might not reflect an issue we traditionally associate with epistemology, that very skepticism illustrates the phenomenon I am hoping to study. It is the idea that there are other ways of creating and fostering knowledge that doctoral study does not support in its current form.

Coloniality and Doctoral Study

Although it remains mostly underutilized for this topic, several scholars have begun to apply the coloniality of power or related concepts to doctoral study and socialization. Many of these have been coming from outside the United States and thus long evaded my notice, given

the initial parameters of my literature search. The most closely related of these studies was conducted by Ramson (2015) in an African university. Dr. Ramson studied how doctoral students select the theories they use for their research using a combination of psychological and decolonial frameworks. In a somewhat related vein, Nerad and Chiappa (2022), draw on decolonial theories of Quijano and his fellows to argue for the importance of social justice in doctoral study. Writing from Europe, Gobena et al., (2023) also offer recommendations for ways to decolonize educational research training. More specifically, McDowall and Ramos (2017) provide recommendations for how to incorporate decoloniality into the process of writing academic research in a PhD program. Within the U.S., Vital and Yao (2021) recently drew upon offshoots of Quijano's theories to problematize current trends in doctoral training.

While valuable, this nascent body literature does not address my research questions, primarily due to the fact that these articles come from outside of the U.S. My particular concern with U.S. doctoral education stems from both personal experience and the recognition that the U.S. maintains a hegemony over academic knowledge and expertise. Furthermore, my attempt to situate (de)coloniality itself as the topic of study differentiates my study from those of many other scholars. The excellent work occurring outside the U.S. should not be diminished, and I hope that my focus on the U.S. context will expand upon their works by shining a light upon the gears of coloniality within the most powerful colonial nation.

Conclusions

The core insight I derived from my literature review is that the very mechanisms of doctoral socialization have the potential to support coloniality. The literature is filled with examples of racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization, yet scholars mostly fail to fully interrogate the cause of these experiences. Most empirical research instead fall into the trap Patel

(2016) describes, where they continue to focus the lens of their research on oppressed peoples, as opposed to the oppressive systems themselves. Only a few begin to hint at the role of coloniality in doctoral study, particularly when it comes to epistemological issues. Of these, Native scholars are the most prominent, drawing attention to the anti-Indigeneity that pervades doctoral education. My research questions have the potential to address these gaps by utilizing decolonial theory to uncover the subtle ways that doctoral education maintains White supremacy and Eurocentrism. In the following section, I lay out how I plan to empirically approach this topic.

Here I think it is worth quoting Phruksachart (2017) at length:

> "the graduate student and future scholar learn how to become responsible for propagating and ensuring the future health of their field of knowledge. This is easier for some scholars than for others…Yet it is really only the minoritarian fields (like ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, or decolonial thought) that explicitly challenge, rather than augment, the normative onto-epistemologies of Western thought that are denied standing in the academy on the basis of not being "legitimate" knowledge in the first place" (p. 120).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Up to this point, I have drawn on decolonial theories in a conceptual way, applying their insights to the findings of other researchers. Now, the primary task is to turn theory to action, to construct an empirical study that will uphold the tenants of liberatory work. Decolonial scholars rightly note that academic research has a violent relationship with its subjects (Patel, 2016; Tuck, 2009). White academics like me have long tried to pretend that our work is somehow neutral, that we are simply observing or listening. However, European research has heavily contributed to the oppression of those considered the Other (Tuck & Yang, 2014). The academy approaches research subjects from a stance of ownership that reduces participants to objects within the study, not agentic beings (Tuck & Yang, 2014). While Critical Race Theorists focus on counter-stories to disrupt these practices (Espino, 2012), decolonial theories are less specific in their recommendations. According to Patel (2016), popular methods like interviewing, observation, or document analysis are not inherently colonial. It is more important to consider the sorts of questions being asked, the relationship between researcher and participant, the site in which the research is taking place, and other places where coloniality may affect the work.

What is more, choosing a particular methodology is complicated by my own social identities. To give greater context, I identify as a White, cisgendered, heterosexual, mostly able-bodied American male. Despite Japanese heritage through my grandmother, I occupy nearly every position of privilege possible in a heteronormative, Eurocentric society. I therefore believe it would be inappropriate to directly utilize particular methods of those people whose oppression enables my privilege. Bergerson, (2003) advises that while White people should use Critical Race Theory to inform their understandings of race and privilege, we should be cautious about appropriating methods developed by people of color. For example, I could not authentically

utilize a *testimonio* designed to provide a counternarrative, as I am a colonizer, not a colonized subject. My work needs to be authentic and caring while not presuming to speak for or on behalf of people who occupy marginalized positions in society.

Nevertheless, there is still some space for colonizers to take part in the de/anticolonial project (Carlson, 2017). Taking my cues from decolonial and critical scholars (Castell et al., 2018; Manning, 2018), I emphasize the necessity of reflexivity to uncover those modes of thinking and being that we may otherwise take for granted. Coloniality is a deeply ingrained way of understanding and relating to the world, especially for those of us who most benefit from systems of exploitation. 500 years of violence have embedded colonial notions deeply into the collective thinking of most White people. Reflexivity becomes critically important as a way of allowing us as researchers to identify colonial ways of thinking and being within ourselves. It would be dangerous for me to simply type up a list of questions and start conducting interviews because I might continue the same forms of colonial epistemic violence that I hope to combat.

To this end, I chose to utilize a duoethnographic methodology that goes beyond the typical researcher/participant dynamic that pervades qualitative inquiry in the social sciences and education (Burkart, 2018; Breault, 2016; Harvey, 2014 Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Duoethnography is a relatively new research methodology that arose out of dissatisfaction with the typical relationship between researchers and their participants. The goal is to interrogate deeply held beliefs and reexamine experiences within a given phenomenon; doctoral study in this case (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Similar to autoethnography and critical theories, duoethnographic researchers take an intersubjective view of research and is well suited to the requirements of decolonial research laid out by Patel (2016). Rather than adhering to Eurocentric notions of objectivity, duoethnography embraces the subjective experiences of every researcher. The

relational nature of the inquiry blurs the traditional lines between researcher and research subject. It also adopts a holistic view of people that respects experiential knowledge in ways that standard academic research does not. As an example, duoethnographers are encouraged to pay closer attention to the space in which research takes place than traditional interviewing would.

In duoethnographic work, two researchers engage in reflexive dialogue with one another, creating a space where both may reflect on and interrogate their experiences and thinking (Carducci et al., 2011; Russell & Kelly, 2002; Way et al., 2015). Rather than a researcher interviewing a subject, both participants act as investigators, questioning, challenging, and supporting each other during the research interaction. This process gives both individuals ownership of the research process because they both occupy the space of researcher and participant simultaneously. Finally, rather than limiting themselves to a single interview, they continue to develop their thinking through repeated interaction.

This approach allows the researcher to adhere to decolonial practices of accountability and reciprocity while also disrupting the Eurocentric practice of Othering research participants (Carlson, 2017). The repeated interactions also give researchers time to build the trust necessary for a truly humanistic research project (Paris & Winn, 2014; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). Finally, it allowed me to utilize my social identities in a constructive way, comparing my experiences to others as a way of understanding how differing identities affect the way my participants and I experience doctoral education.

Method: Dialogic Interviewing

Sawyer and Norris (2013) do not place specific restrictions on the methods necessary for duoethnographic research. Nevertheless, its dialogic nature is well suited to the one-on-one environment of interviewing. Therefore, I conducted repeated (three) interviews with a small

pool of participants who are recent doctoral graduates various programs in Education. Dialogic interviewing as a method puts the relational philosophy of duoethnography into practice by emphasizing the intersubjectivity of researcher and participant (Burkart, 2018; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2015; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). "Interview" is something of a misnomer however, as dialogic methods are fairly unstructured. Instead of relying on a predetermined set of questions to guide the interaction, dialogic interviewing allows the conversation to evolve naturally (Brinkman, 2014; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The risk, of course, is that the dialogue wanders away from the primary topic and ceases to be applicable to the research questions. It is therefore the role of the primary researcher to ensure that conversation remains relevant and guide the participants back if they have strayed (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This is a difficult balance to strike, making dialogic interviewing a challenging method.

To help balance the relative lack of structure, I assigned broad themes to each discussion. For example, the first dialogic interviews focused on each participant and I getting to know one another. Through learning about each other's lives and experiences, we established greater rapport and familiarity. The second interview focused on the concept of "Knowing," exploring the kinds of knowledge that were prioritized in our education. The third interview focused on "Ways of Knowing," investigating the mechanisms by which knowledge was created and/or enforced, for example through classroom interactions, mentorship, curriculum, or professional activities. For each of these thematic discussions, I constructed a series of potential prompts (APPENDIX C) to guide our discussion or if we found ourselves struggling for direction. However, I allowed some flexibility during the discussions in order to accommodate other relevant topics that emerged. Overall, I believe this approach best fulfilled the decolonial and

duoethnographic requirement that research embrace the humanity and experiential knowledge of both participants.

Participant Recruitment and Site Selection

Due to the repeated, time intensive requirements of dialogic interviewing, I opted to work with three participants. I conducted three ninety-minute-long conversations with each, totaling almost 14 hours of data. I recruited participants who recently graduated with their doctorate, and who had a substantive understanding of decolonial theories. Because I anticipated that these criteria might limit the size of my participant population, I did not place any other demographic requirements on my participants. This choice came with risks, namely the possibility of overrepresenting White voices in my discussion and thereby reinforcing the marginalization of non-dominant perspectives. However, I was ultimately not comfortable applying colonial categories to my participants, especially given that I am a White man myself. I felt it would be arrogant to say that I am the only White man allowed to think about (de)coloniality in these ways. Furthermore, coloniality impacts many people with identities that are not always immediately visible, such as trans, neurodivergent, or disabled individuals.

Fortunately, duoethnographic methodology provides some insurance against this study being defined by White people. Sawyer and Norris (2013) emphasize that co-researchers in duoethnography are not the topics of research, but rather the sites. Applied to my study, this means I am/we are not concerned with just studying *our* relationship to coloniality. We are instead interested in studying the phenomenon of coloniality at large through the site of our own lived experiences. The goal is ultimately not our own self-actualization but instead a greater understanding of how coloniality operates in doctoral education.

Rather than distributing a random call for participants, I intentionally sought out individuals who already possessed some understanding of (de)colonial theories. Having spent the last several years refining my thinking on these topics, I was aware at the start that it takes time to comprehend and internalize the ideas advanced by decolonial scholars. I therefore doubted I would have time to both explain these concepts to an individual and then conduct the proposed series of interviews. I used professional and personal networks to identify participants whose work I had read, or who were recommended to me by those familiar with my work. This strategy yielded excellent results, with three willing and qualified participants volunteering soon after I launched the study. Our interviews took place over the course of the Spring 2023 semester.

Data Collection and Analysis

Due to the geographic diversity of my participants, I was forced to carry out our dialogic interviews over Zoom. Ideally, I would have preferred that our interactions take place in-person, as I strongly dislike digital forms of communication. Nevertheless, my physical location in a remote, rural area along with my inclusion criteria necessitated compromise regarding venue. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, at the beginning of which I asked for consent to record our interactions. Participants were reassured that they did not need to answer any questions they did not wish to and could withdraw participation at any time. I also offered my participants a choice between using a pseudonym or being identified by their real name. During the interview, I utilized subtitles in order to generate a preliminary, rough transcript of the conversation. At this stage, the traditional boundaries between data collection and analysis began to break down, and I must now take a detour in order to illustrate the challenges I faced in constructing an analytic strategy that would remain true to the project's decolonial ethos.

Coloniality and Data Analysis

The practice of analyzing data in decolonial research is challenging due to the long-standing entanglement of qualitative methods and Eurocentric worldviews. Coding is currently considered best practice in qualitative analysis, particularly for interviews (Parameswaran et al., 2019). Advocates of coding argue that it creates more reliable analyses by limiting personal bias and encouraging deep engagement with data (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). However, coding embodies particular epistemologies that run counter to those of my study. For example, Jackson (2013) argues that coding in social sciences research emerges from a Cartesian assumption that there is a singular truth that may be communicated and understood. Thus, in some ways, coding is tied to post-positivist logics that stand in direct opposition to decolonial values. Because decolonial theory cautions against the adoption of rationalistic universalities, the standard use of analytic coding was not compatible with my approach.

On the other hand, I was not able to rely on the rich body of Indigenous scholarship on research methods (see for example, Smith, 2012). These methods emerge out of traditions that are particular to certain cultures and peoples. If I attempted to utilize them as a White man, I would be engaging in the same forms of colonial violence that I am trying to oppose. I have therefore turned to scholars of post-qualitative research to inform my analytic approach.

Like decolonial scholars, post-qualitative researchers by and large reject more structured approaches to data analysis, choosing instead to embrace the messiness of social interaction. [(see for example, Johansson (2016) and Augustine (2014)]. However, these approaches lack the large-scale consensus that coding has achieved. Indeed, St. Pierre (2019) goes so far as to say that "[p]ost qualitative inquiry never is. It has no substance, no essence, no existence, no presence, no stability, no structure" (p. 9). While I am not so pessimistic as to say that there is no

real substance to my analytic strategy, I do not have as well developed an example to follow as other social science researchers.

Altogether, my analytic strategy was slightly messier and more intuitive than structured coding. In fact, my process was fairly similar to what Augustine (2014) described in her work. Specifically, Augustine adopted an iterative analytic approach relying on repeated reading and writing with a dictionary of theoretical concepts to focus both activities. Through the process of continually re-reading her transcripts and re-editing her findings, she was able to uncover increasingly rich links and insights. Fortunately, this strategy is very similar to that advocated by duoethnographic scholars, for whom writing and analyzing is much the same process (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). In keeping with this guidance, I undertook an analytic strategy of transcribing, reflecting, reading, and writing that involved repeated engagement with my participants and our shared data.

Expanding Analytic Frames

To better explain the iterative nature of my analysis, I have included a table below to demonstrate the sequence I used for each participant's data. As the table shows, my process began immediately following the first interview I conducted. After each conversation, I set aside time to write an unstructured reflection on the topics we had covered.

Table 1.

Table showing sequence of analysis

Interview 1
Reflective memo
Interview 2
Reflective Memo
Interview 3
Reflective memo
Transcription
Reflective memo
Affective review

Table 1. (cont'd)
Reflective Memo

Cognitive Review
Reflective memo

In the first reflection, I focused on those elements which seemed most important. An example of such a reflection can be seen here, as I was thinking about one of my conversations with a participant, Grace.

> *Thinking about your classmate who made the remark about cultural centers, I keep coming back to the fact that a statement like that creates such an unsafe environment for students of color. Even if there was no malice, I can't imagine feeling safe around that person again. Not just emotionally safe either, but physically safe as well.- from my reflective memo, dated 3/15/23.*

These memo entries allowed me to begin processing data by highlighting those topics that I felt deserved further attention, either in future interviews or reflections.

Following my initial reflection memo, I went back to the rough transcript generated by the Zoom recording and cleaned the document by listening to the interview again and correcting major errors. In this stage, I did not attempt to eliminate filler words or sounds or alter text to make it easier to understand, opting to focus on making sure the content was comprehensible. At that point, I completed a second reflection, in order to reinforce those topics I considered important or highlight ones which I had initially overlooked. For example:

> *I have a tendency to focus on the negative, I'm very critical, which is one of the things that originally drew me towards CRT. However, this conversation with Grace pointed my attention to a lot of the positives. Like we talked about, decoloniality is a lot about moving towards new possibilities, and I feel like I learned a lot today. – from my reflective memo, dated 4/1/23*

Revisiting the data post-transcription allowed me to notice the decolonial work already happening in doctoral programs, which I might not have noticed during the interview itself. In doing so, I generated excitement for my own work that motivated me to continue with data collection.

It was at this point that I sent the transcript and reflections to the participants, with the option that they modify or add anything they would like to either document. One of my participants chose to engage with my reflection memos, creating further space for dialogue. In one entry, I wrote:

> *In light of these thoughts about institutionalization, I'm left wondering how one addresses the coloniality of doctoral study, absent tearing it down. Would requiring methods or theory courses on decoloniality or Critical Race Theory actually help anything?- from my reflective memo, circa 3/29/23*

Avery, my second participant, responded:

> *I think about settler harm reduction and Eve Tuck's other work on avoiding "damage-centered research". I'm wary of saying that doing that would be 'decolonization' but the possibility that it might help something isn't zero. But also it can hurt--I think about how language and ideas from social justice have been co-opted to actually stop radical change (e.g., Ahmed's 'brick walls' where nonperformative diversity statements take the place of actually doing things that would make what is in those statements a reality). – from Avery's response, dated 4/11/23*

These interactions furthered my analytic process by pointing me towards ideas or readings that I may not have considered initially, such as Tuck or Ahmed's work on similar topics.

After completing the interviews and initial transcriptions, I went back through each transcript, this time with the goal of engaging my affective responses. While there is not a single definition for the term, here I use affective to refer to the emotional parts of our thinking processes. Psychologists have established that affective, emotional responses are just as important as cognitive ones for determining behavior (Markic, 2009; Pham, 2007). Yet, social science data analysis tends to prioritize the cognitive over the affective as a result of colonial European ideologies. Rational knowledge is considered more reliable or valid than emotional knowledge.

To combat this bias, I chose to first focus on the affective. In re-reading the transcripts, I paid close attention to which passages evoked an emotional response. I then flagged these passages for further review. For example, the following passage continues to provoke a strong affective reaction from me, even after having read it multiple times:

> Grace: I remember, like in that first year, I think it was like protest in this Missouri, and talking about experiences of students of color on college campuses. And then one person, you know, I think people are just where they're at and they're trying the best, but like they just ask this question of like aren't multicultural centers enough for the students.

In this passage of our transcript, Grace was sharing an event from one of her early doctoral courses where a classmate and member of her cohort expressed a rather ignorant opinion of how to address diversity issues in higher education. Once I identified all similar such passages that provoked an affective response, I produced another reflection that allowed me to think back on the entirety of my interactions with each participant.

After using an affective approach to identifying important passages, I then switched to a rational analysis. Recognizing that not all pieces of data that provoked an emotional response

would necessarily be relevant to my study, and vice-versa, I developed a theoretical guidebook (Appendix D). This guidebook contained a reference sheet for the important theoretical concepts guiding my study. In this stage, I used the guidebook to review each transcript and identify passages that were applicable to my research questions and concepts. For example, the above quoted passage is a clear indication of the colonial Othering that people of color face in doctoral education. On the other hand, the rational lens demonstrated that some passages or exchanges were not directly relevant to my topic, regardless of how interesting or moving they might be. For example, during one conversation with a participant, we got sidetracked talking about how a comedian named Bo Burnham's work related to concepts of racial awareness and critical consciousness in White people. While interesting, many elements of this conversation were not relevant to issues of coloniality in doctoral study, and I therefore removed it from analytic consideration. As with prior stages, I once again completed a reflective memo at the end of this stage in order to process my thoughts, feelings, and takeaways from the process.

At this point in the process, I had transcribed and re-read each interview, identified relevant passages from the transcripts, first with an affective then rational analytic lens, and produced a total of eight reflective memos for each participant. From these various passages and reflections, I then extracted themes based upon a holistic analysis of the data. I asked myself the question, "What is going on here?" to guide the process of making sense of the data. Some themes were immediately apparent, such as racist and sexist encounters that clearly reflect colonial ontological beliefs. However, others only emerged out of repeated reading, reflection, and analysis. For example, I only identified a pervasive sense of burnout among my participants later in the analytic process.

One notable piece of this model is that I was not solely focused on analyzing what my participants shared with me but also my own contributions. As I previously mentioned, duoethnographic methods aim to include both researchers and co-investigators in a phenomenon. Therefore, I also sought to examine my own experiences in graduate school and what the dialogues revealed. For example, here is a thought I shared during a conversation with a participant that I feel conveys important information on the topic of my study:

> Kyle: We have to remember that colonialism created all of these categories. All of these artificial divisions that then get put into all these different places.

While interviewers typically do not code their own contributions to a transcript, I chose to analyze my words as if they were those of a participant. Displaying my own contributions to the dialogues also serves the purpose of clarifying the reflexive process that is key to any good decolonial study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

I ultimately conducted interviews with three individuals, all of whom were relatively recent graduates from Education doctoral programs. In keeping with my duoethnographic approach, I have separated out each participant into their own section in order to maintain the integrity of their responses. While there are some common themes and topics that I covered with them all, I have chosen to present those in Chapter 5 instead. This choice reflects my desire to recognize my participants as true co-creators of knowledge, not people from whom I simply extracted information. All of them shared very insightful and at times personal experiences, and I want to honor their contributions. To begin this chapter, I first provide a biographical overview that reflects what I shared about myself with my participants at the start of our discussions. It is important that readers understand the lived experiences with which I approached this research, not just my academic perspective.

Kyle

I was born and raised in New Mexico in a rural community just south of Albuquerque. My family are White and although they are generally socially conscious, I was raised with the common, incomplete view of racism as an individual phenomenon. We did not discuss institutional prejudice at any length, and I was certainly unaware of my own Whiteness and the many benefits it provided. My only real understanding of racial power dynamics came from my grandmother, who was from Japan and lived through World War II. From her, I heard stories about the fire bombings and losing family to the war. However, while these stories caused me to question American imperialism more than many of my peers, they did not imbue in me a proper understanding of colonial racial politics. I was proud to claim Japanese heritage, but I suspect

this pride reflected the White impulse towards appropriation, rather than true cultural consciousness.

I attended college at the University of New Mexico, a majority-minority institution, although I mainly spent my time in the overwhelmingly White Honors College. As a result, I emerged from my formative upbringing with very little understanding of race and prejudice, and almost no recognition of the ongoing effects of coloniality. I moved to the East Coast to pursue graduate study in Political Science, specifically American Foreign Policy. However, I was lucky enough to take several courses on the history of racial and urban politics from the progressive scholar Adolph Reed, an experience that finally prompted me to recognize the ongoing reality of institutionalized White supremacy in America. I returned to the University of New Mexico as a student affairs advisor with a growing interest in social justice causes.

After four years at UNM, I chose to return to school to pursue my doctorate in Higher Education Studies. While this decision was partially motivated by a desire to better support my students, I was also attempting to improve my professional credentials with the goal of obtaining better employment. Here, as in so many places, we see the influence of colonial values on the way that I approached my work and studies. However, early on in my time at Michigan State University, I was exposed to theories and ideas that significantly altered not just my goals, but my sense of self. In the sections that follow, I will share the discussions I had with my participants and how some of these changes have manifested.

Grace

Grace (she/her) is Filipina/American currently serving as an Assistant Professor in a liberal arts college on the East Coast. I was previously acquainted with Grace and chose her as my first participant due to that prior familiarity and my knowledge that we shared a similar

understanding of (de)colonial theories. However, these commonalities also raised their own challenges, as some of our conversations included a great deal of easily identifiable information. As a result, I have either heavily edited or entirely excluded certain exchanges that, while incredibly insightful, simply raise too great a risk of Grace being identified.

The Coloniality of Being

When asked broadly about her experiences in her doctoral program, Grace shared that she had "mixed feelings." She initially chose her program due to the presence of a faculty member who focused on decolonial scholarship and was encouraged by interactions during a visiting weekend.

> Grace: [Professor] had talked to all of the women of color in the program, and so they found me, and they're like, come, sit with us, and you know we'll share with you our experiences, like the good and the bad, and I was like, wow, like I had not had that sort of intentional reach out from the other places that I had applied, and I was like, that means a lot that they did that.

However, Grace found the program less inclusive once she began taking classes. I have already previously highlighted a story Grace shared with me from early in in her program, when a student asked why multicultural centers weren't enough for minority students. In her words, this had a deep impact on how she related to her initial impressions of her cohort and how she felt being in the program:

> Grace: I just really felt disappointed when I found that the vast majority of folks hadn't given social justice much thought, and I was like, what does this mean for myself and the quality of conversations that I'm gonna be able to have in this space.

When I asked in a follow up if she ever grew to feel comfortable in the program, she shared that while she found space on campus, especially with Asian American identity-based student groups, she always felt "weird" going into the offices of her actual department.

These sorts of experiences are, unfortunately, fairly common for women of color, as I described in the literature review (see Espino, 2014; Fox 2013). They reflect colonial attitudes towards people who hold marginalized identities. A student asking why ethnic centers aren't enough, no matter their intention, sends a distinctly colonial message as to where students of color belong on campus. To me, it implies that issues affecting students of color are unimportant to the rest of the institution, which in turn applies that colleges and universities should focus their activities, discussions, and resources on White students. With a single colonial statement, that student made it harder for Grace to feel at home in her program and cohort.

When Grace asked me what my own experiences were like in my program, I shared that while my cohort and instructors were far more interested in social justice, I still observed an odd resistance to decolonial ideas. Instead of reading the popular history of higher education by Thelin (2011), our introductory course featured selections from Craig Wilder's (2013) *Ebony and Ivy*. This text focuses on the deep relationship between slavery and early American higher education. However, despite highlighting what I viewed as a critically important facet of our history, I heard a number of students express unhappiness with the fact that we were not reading the "standard" history by Thelin. It seemed to me that while some found Wilder's work interesting, they did not view it as particularly relevant to our current positions as scholars and practitioners. I continue to be disturbed by my program's lack of engagement with higher education's colonial legacy, particularly given that Michigan State University only exists as an institution thanks to the theft of Native land.

Perhaps as a result of my discomfort, I became especially outspoken in my program, to the point that it became something of a joke with some of my peers and even a few of the faculty, but even in that we see the underpinnings of coloniality. I was able to choose where and when I would engage with issues of inequity, whereas other students' entire existences involved fighting colonial systems. When I shared anecdotes with Grace, she shared that she was not always comfortable challenging the status quo in the department. I wonder sometimes if students of color, women, or LGBTQ students would have faced ostracization or retaliation if they had engaged the kind of rhetoric and practice as me. While my stances were sometimes brushed aside, they did not impact my standing in the program. I got good grades, maintained good relationships with the faculty, and received plenty of opportunities. Could the same be said for students who are not White, cisgendered men? I do not think I am exaggerating when I say it was easier for me to simply *be* in my program due to colonial ontologies that work in my favor.

Colonial Knowledge Spaces

If graduate school was ontologically uncomfortable for Grace, it seems as though it was also epistemologically limited. Both Grace and I were required to take several methods courses as part of our program requirements, and we both focused mainly on qualitative options. My first methods course, taken with a long serving professor in the College of Education, was extremely unpleasant. As I shared with Grace:

> Kyle: He sat there every week and just talked at us for 3 hours. He would make comments about how lecturing isn't in vogue, or how people don't like it anymore. But how he thinks basically he knows better cause he's done so many decades of work. And so we should just sit there and listen to him, you know? Not like out and out saying it, but basically implying that we had nothing to contribute to these conversations.

While I subsequently sought out more advanced methods courses, I did not feel as though they contributed to my ability to do decolonial research. Grace found most of her methods courses similarly unhelpful.

> Grace: The classes reinforce the idea that "Here's the 5 methods, like you can do case study, you can do narrative, and you can do whatever the rest of the 5 Cresswell things are." And that reinforced what I got from my master's program. So I didn't think of trying to do anything beyond that, and I think that's why, when I went into the dissertation proposal, I'm like here I'll do narrative and this is what's gonna look like. This is what I've been taught.

She eventually attempted to conduct a decolonial pilot study in a methods course with some of her classmates, ultimately without success.

> Grace: And our research question started off as like, how does colonialism show up in the undergraduate classroom, or something like that. We were like gonna observe and interview, and things like that. And then what happened was, I had already read it, and I had the others read the other read Tuck and Yang (2012). And they're like we can't do that.

While her classmates were willing to engage with decolonial ideas, they were ultimately too intimidated by the work of authors like Tuck and Yang to feel comfortable pursuing it themselves.

Epistemologies of Resistance

While Grace's experiences with her cohort and classes may not have been the most pleasant, she was far happier with her relationship with her advisor, who recruited her into the

program. When constructing her dissertation, he encouraged her to expand her thinking beyond the common methodologies and formats.

> Grace: He was really helpful in showing me ways that I could try to break out of the traditional dissertation structure. His input was incredibly helpful for me in expanding my thinking. And so he would ask me questions like, 'Your topic is decolonizing, and you wanna do narrative. So like, where's the story and the storytelling in your dissertation?' And I was like, 'Oh, yeah, that makes sense.' So he really like drove home for me like if I say I'm gonna do this thing like decolonizing narrative, how do I make the entire dissertation like that? But unless you have an advisor who is going to also interrupt that for you, you're just gonna proceed thinking, like, yeah this is the way that research looks.

The encouragement Grace received from her advisor allowed her to construct a dissertation that better reflected her values and aims, but we were both aware that without this kind of advisor, it is very easy to simply replicate the existing structures of knowledge production.

Eventually our conversation turned towards academic conferences as a significant site of doctoral socialization and potential colonial practice. We both began submitting proposals to conferences early in our graduate careers, not out of a genuine desire to attend these events, but because our advisors and faculty heavily emphasized their importance. However, we found academic conferences to be unpleasant and elitist, spaces where reputation, position, and name recognition take on far more importance than the actual work being done.

> Grace: I've thought about the hierarchies that exist, especially like, if you know people, or if you don't know people. And like what institution you're at, or which institution you went to. Not always, but like, if you are at a tier one, or if you're at a research institution, that's gonna make it a little bit easier for you at conferences, because you don't have to

> explain where are you are, or if you name your advisor, people are probably gonna know who your advisor is, and be able to have a conversation about that. They're gonna have positive assumptions about your scholarly ability in general.

In the end, neither of us particularly enjoyed attending conferences, and indeed I stopped submitting proposals after my second year in the program.

Ironically, the space that helped Grace direct and refine her thinking was not an academic conference at all, but a retreat of sorts centering on decolonizing Filipino identities.

> Grace: So, something that I remember that stuck with me for instance, one of the workshops was how to talk to trees. It wasn't like, 'let's learn theoretical framework.' It's like, let's think about our spirit, and rejuvenating and what our identities really mean in a completely non-academic way although there's like a tiny bit of that of academics, only because there were some professors there who are interested in that type of thinking. And sort of like the tensions in the meeting of different knowledges. That was a lot of what my dissertation came to be eventually.

Through this experience, Grace was able to better understand herself and what she hoped to accomplish with her dissertation. Yet these kinds of spaces are largely ignored or derided by traditional academics. They are not considered important sites of knowledge production, despite having served that very purpose for Grace and others. Nevertheless, they show ways that people within the academy can resist colonizing practice and reinforce their own values.

The Limits of Resistance

Today, as a full-time professor, Grace feels as if she has much more control over the kind of research she conducts but is nevertheless still constrained by the colonial expectations of the

academy and her field of study. Her position still requires her to submit proposals to conferences and publish articles, a pressure she feels keenly.

> Grace: The division that I'm in has doctoral programs. So I'm also getting the messaging that I should be publishing and continue doing what I've been doing, and I think that's part of the reason why they hired me, because they saw like, Oh, you have publications. I really don't like feeling that tension, because part of why I liked the job was that I wouldn't have the R1 expectations, but then it's like, Oh, wait! We're in a doctoral program. So we need to like, have a good reputation, and we can do that through publication. And I really don't like that.

I have experienced a similar pressure in my time as a doctoral student. Having spent several years planning to pursue a faculty career, I am constantly hyper-aware of the need to publish as much as possible. However, Amutuhaire (2022) argues that the "publish or perish" mantra represents a Eurocentric, colonial form of knowledge production that erases Indigenous ways of knowing. In addition, my time has been marked by near continuous anxiety stemming from the knowledge that I am deliberately attempting to upset the regular order in my field. The extent to which I am allowed to pursue a decolonial agenda depends greatly upon the goodwill of my committee, several of whom I have openly disagreed with on a variety of topics. In an institutional structure where power is largely top down (Feldon et al., 2023), it makes these kinds of activities distinctly uncomfortable.

In our last conversation, Grace shared with me that she is feeling burnt out and is uncertain how much longer she can remain in her current role: "I feel like I'm gonna give it one more year. Up to one more year and see how it goes." I was unsurprised and shared that I had also struggled with similar feelings of discontent with higher education. While we both have

tried to resist coloniality as much as we can, in both our doctoral programs and subsequently, neither of us believe our efforts have made much difference. We wondered whether it is possible to accomplish anything truly decolonial in such a power laden system.

Nevertheless, our conversation ended on a hopeful note. When I asked Grace whether she considers herself a decolonial scholar, she reflected that she prefers the term healer.

> Grace: I keep coming back to the idea of healing and whether that's like bringing healing to myself or others, and recognizing the ways that people have been harmed by well, I guess mostly academic practices. But other things, and trying to. Like encourage ways to bring healing to themselves. And even if I leave the Academy, I think that's what I'm gonna continue to do. That's like what I wanna do for others. Because there's so much harm that has happened because of colonization.

I take a great deal of comfort from the notion that regardless the role Grace occupies, she will be working towards the good of others. And I was humbled when she shared the following,

> Grace: Thanks for asking me to be a part of this project. I feel like it's like part healing part, like I don't care what else is going on like this is important. And I'm going to choose this today. And I'm gonna choose, not the other thing today. And I gotta make space for this. Yeah, so this is really good. Yeah, thankful to be part of it.

Avery

Avery (they/them) is a White Student Affairs practitioner and very recent PhD graduate. They currently work in higher education as a staff member, although they shared with me that they would be interested in a tenure-track position, if one existed in the fields of their interest. Avery is a graduate of a Cultural Foundations of Education PhD program, which is structured with a combined Higher Ed/K-12 focus.

> Avery: We had folks like me who had a Higher Ed/Student Affairs kind of background. We had folks who were really interested in informal and non-formal education. We had some folks who came from a K-12 background, who were thinking about issues related to K-12.

I was interested in bringing their perspective to the study, as I know them to be a passionate advocate of social justice and decolonial practice within our field.

Curricular Coloniality

Avery chose to attend a Cultural Foundations program despite the presence of a Higher Education doctoral program at their university. This choice resulted from early encounters with coloniality in the Higher Ed program that discouraged them.

> Avery: I actually started a non-degree certificate program to be able to take some of the Higher Ed administration courses and just was so bored. I remember taking a course on private Liberal Arts colleges, and the whole time all the conversations were about like, how do you not get in the newspaper over free speech issues? How do you enforce policy? How do you maximize your tuition to gift aid? Blah blah blah. And I was like, I am not interested in these conversations at all.

These programmatic focuses demonstrate highly colonial attitudes towards the profession of Higher Education administrators, in that they prioritize financial and institutional interests. Such manifestations are not necessarily malicious; most institutions are simply attempting to survive in modern society. However, they are unintentionally advancing colonial agendas through their acquiescence to larger societal pressures in the form of neoliberalism and academic capitalism. Quijano (2000) describes capitalism as an outgrowth of coloniality, in that it prioritizes the accumulation and exploitation of resources at the expense of people. Unsurprisingly, then, the

courses Avery took in the Higher Education program were not interested in the actual practice of education, but in maintaining the institution of higher education itself.

By contrast, the Cultural Foundations of Education program offered more space in which to consider the role of Education in society.

> Avery: I wasn't totally clear on the direction for my research, which is pretty typical in that department. So it's like, I'm sort of thinking about this like whiteness and racial justice thing. I'm also sort of thinking about trans college students, and they were very receptive to the idea that either one of those could be part of my research trajectory.

Despite the openness of the Cultural Foundations program to more philosophical ideas, however, their curriculum still relied overwhelmingly on colonial sources of knowledge and training.

> Avery: I would say ninety-five to one hundred percent of our readings were white people, most of them like white male classical philosophers and philosophers of education, many of whom are people who are like sort of irrelevant to most of today's conversations but are good examples of a particular style of analytical arguments. We really did not engage with any sort of indigenous epistemologies, or even you know, like black political thoughts, or basically anything else. We certainly had some time and space around feminist methodologies. But again, mostly white women.

In response to these anecdotes, I shared with Avery my experiences with the "canon" of Higher Education Studies, such as the instance in an introductory course where students expressed dissatisfaction with not reading Thelin. We both shared frustration that many authors or theories are so heavily emphasized because of their supposed "foundational" importance in a field of study, despite being steeped in colonial thought and practice.

> Avery: We're reading stuff that's 10 years old that you're like, Okay, are we reading this thing because it's a good perspective on historically what's up with multicultural education? Or are we reading this because you haven't read anything since 2010? So, yeah, the same sort of thing of like, these are the classics, and that's what you need for this sort of foundation as opposed to things that are a little more current, a little more relevant, and a little more challenging.

Nevertheless, Avery was able to convince some of their teachers to include material from less colonial perspectives in future iterations of their courses.

> Avery: I had a professor three semesters in a row for a philosophy or theory related courses, and by the third one it was like, Wow, we're really like reading all these white men. And I think she did try to be a little more intentional in bringing in some supplementary kinds of reading. But it's sort of like building from the main canon to say, maybe we need a little bit more, but it's certainly not a major shift in any sort of way. I don't know of anybody who really was like, yeah, we really need to overhaul this curriculum.

While it is certainly commendable that the professors were open to including more perspectives in their future classes, Avery's statement shows that coloniality still dominates. Eurocentric perspectives are still central to the curriculum, with other ideas being presented as supplementary and not necessary. This approach is deeply concerning, especially considering the role of Western philosophy in creating, advancing, and maintaining coloniality.

Mixed Mentorship

To the program's credit, Avery shared that their professors encouraged students to pursue whatever lines of inquiry they wish. As they were beginning to think about their dissertation,

Avery's advisor, despite not being familiar with theories of colonialism, was very open to them pursuing such avenues of inquiry.

> Avery: She's White and was trained in a sort of classical philosophy of education program run by philosophers. So her dissertation was very much steeped in this sort of like Western philosophical tradition. And so I think that she was sort of open to thinking about some of those ideas, but it just was not her expertise or her primary focus. When I started to work on my dissertation proposal, because we hadn't really taken up any of that work in my coursework, she was like, 'Where is this coming from?' and also, 'How have you read all of this stuff because we never read any of this for courses.' So I think she was sort of cautious but open-minded.

Later, Avery told me how their advisor began reading George Yancey after learning more about his work through Avery's scholarship. However, this interest did not translate into a larger alteration of the professor's pedagogy or thinking.

> Avery: Maybe I'm sort of back-rationalizing because I like my advisor, but I feel like certainly it could have been worse, at could have been sort of an outright dismissal. It's not the total closed offness that it was with the Higher Ed department was where it was just like, that's just not our thing like we have just dismissed that as being sort of out of bounds. But at the same time I'm not feeling any sense of urgency. Certainly, she's not like clamoring to quote unquote, decolonize the curriculum or anything like that.

In discussing the juxtaposition between a mentor who is open to decolonial work from her students, but is not interested in pursuing it herself, we found a significant issue with decoloniality. How do we decolonize a field which does not want to be decolonized? While

neither Avery nor I believe it is productive to force people to participate in decoloniality if they do not wish to, we hope they would still be motivated to decenter harmful colonial practices.

The Limits of Decoloniality

I do not think it unreasonable to state that I am one of the most radical students to pass through my doctoral program. Ever since I began learning about decoloniality, I have openly advocated the abolition of higher education as an institution and the redistribution of college land to Native communities. In one class, when prompted by a professor to provide a visual that summed up our opinion of higher education, I selected a bomb going off to illustrate the need to metaphorically "blow up" the university. While it was, perhaps, an unnecessarily violent metaphor, it encapsulated my belief that higher education cannot be salvaged from within. In Avery, I found a kindred spirit who had come to similar conclusions and was wrestling with a similar question: What do we do now?" Like the rest of my participants, Avery and I discussed our work as it relates to the decolonial dream of liberation. As with Grace, Avery and I struggled with our positions in institutions that we see as inherently unjust.

An important element of the professional socialization process is helping people understand the expectations, practices, and possibilities of a given field of work. For many doctoral programs in HES, this process teaches us how to be academics, practitioners, or policymakers, all professions that are geared towards supporting higher education institutions. However, Avery and I questioned whether decolonial work can take place within any of these positions. Here I think it worthwhile to show a larger portion of our conversation to demonstrate our thinking:

> Avery: Our positioning as doctoral students, makes it so easy for us to hyper intellectualize some of these discussions where it's very easy for us to become detached

from the things that we're talking about. And especially for me, something that I'm really grappling with now, and did through my dissertation, was like what does it mean if I truly believe that the University writ large is a colonial institution that is every day perpetuating harm against students? And I get my paycheck from that institution. And specifically, I do things that are really at their core today about keeping students at the institution. Like, you're part of the thing that makes the machine work. And so part of it for me was like trying to figure out how to make that shift to like, where do I fit within this system, if, like my deepest, darkest hope is that maybe someday that system is going to fall apart. And so like, that's the kind of conversation that it's like. It's really challenging to have.

Kyle: I mean, I think also that colleges and universities have almost fully given up any kind of attempt to oppose capitalist systems and ways of being. We run ourselves very much like corporations now, and one of, I think, the most prevalent tactics of keeping your workers in line is trying to convince them that somehow they are part of the organization, you know that they matter as much as the organization, or the whole line of like, we're family here, and the appeal to service for sure with student affairs. I wrestle a lot with those questions you were talking about too. It was kind of paralyzing for a couple of years in my grad program of like, how in the world can I continue this program, continue this career path, knowing that I'm part of this institution that perpetuates harm?

The purpose in showing these passages is to demonstrate the depth of the problem that coloniality presents to both Higher Education Studies and higher education as a social institution. Both Avery and I tried very hard to incorporate as much decolonial thought and practice as possible into our research, only to find that there is minimal interest in such things in the

professions for which we were prepared. Avery has considered pursuing a faculty position, but they do not think they can handle the grind required of tenure-track professors. In this way, one of perhaps the greatest manifestations of coloniality is inferred by its absence. There is no alternative to the university as a social institution, and very few people seem to be interested in finding one.

> Avery: I took as an elective a course from the Higher Ed department called Equity and Justice in US Higher Education. I can remember we had a conversation about legacies of slavery around the time that the project with Georgetown was just starting to be publicly shared, and I can remember we had a discussion in class about whether or not the institution should pay reparations. And other folks are like, well, it would bankrupt the institution if they paid reparations to which my response was like, so then maybe Georgetown shouldn't exist. And it was like all the air got sucked out of the room. And so, yeah, it's just like when we get into some of these questions that move beyond sort of our individual role and start to think about systems and structures and the institution as like a social institution, then, you know, it gets much more challenging to have these conversations, even among the people who took that class who are espousing a commitment to social justice, who want to make you know structural change in some ways. But there's always this sort of underlying thing of you know. We all work here or want to work a place like here, and so some of what we do is also about making sure that that place is still here at the end of the day.

In wrestling with this dilemma, Avery recommended I read the book *A Third University is Possible* by la paperson (2017). In it, paperson cautions against thinking of the university as a monolith, and instead as an assemblage of technologies with unique properties and potentials. He

advocates for becoming a “scyborg,” one who assembles scraps and technologies of the university to become something different than what the university would make of us. A scyborg supports the university in some ways but undermines it in others because it harbors decolonial hopes. In thinking about whether this idea is a possibility, Avery and I shared the following:

> Aver: I do buy into that idea of the scyborg, that there is an opportunity for the people within the colonizing machine to make different choices. However, I also think that as you remain in there, the machine also grinds your bones to dust, and so if you’re okay with that, and you wanna stay in it and try and do that forever and ever, like power to you. But I think that over time it's just not sustainable for me personally.
>
> Kyle: I really wanted to work in a career center, because to my mind, knowing how extraordinarily expensive, higher ed is, knowing the cost for students to be here, for me like the only possible thing you can maybe get out of this is some measure of economic stability in the future. I don't believe in education, as like the great equalizer in the way that so many people do. It's more like you're here now, so can I help you get out of here somewhat intact, and with some options ahead of you. But again, like you said, is that just what I tell myself to like sleep at night? It's hard for me to think that Higher Ed is a sustainable long-term thing for me. But then, in the colonial society, what is a sustainable long-term thing?

Casey

While Grace, Avery, and I struggled to imagine what our lives might look like in the academy, my final participant, Casey, demonstrated a drive that I found invigorating. Casey (they/them) is a White, recent graduate and a newly hired tenure-track faculty member in Education. Unlike me and the rest of my participants, Casey attended a program designed

exclusively for full-time students interested in becoming faculty for both their master's and doctorate. Their program also had far more students who had gone straight from undergraduate to graduate school, making the cohorts much younger than those of any of my other participants. Indeed, Casey could recall only two members of their cohort, aside from themselves, who had any higher ed work experience. As a result of these differences, they brought experiences and insights to the study that were much different from the rest of us.

Decolonial Curricula

A large part of what drew both Casey to their program was its supposed interest in issues of social justice. As Casey told me, "I think they market themselves as a social justice program." By Casey's estimation, about half of the faculty were engaged in some form of DEI work, and the students reflected this priority. The presence of several high-profile diversity scholars among both the graduates and the faculty boosted the program's reputation as one that cared deeply about social justice. By contrast, Casey was offered entrance into several other prestigious programs who appeared far less committed to equity. We both considered ourselves lucky to avoid working for a well-respected professor who became the subject of a number of serious Title IX accusations several years ago.

Indeed, Casey experienced a great deal of support from their advisors and committee members during a number of personal and professional difficulties.

> Casey: When I said before that I would do the program all over again, it was because of the faculty. The faculty of the program rallied around me when my first advisor became unavailable, like I had two faculty members fighting to be my advisor at one point. I had people who were willing to do what they needed to support me.

This support continued later when Casey experienced several deaths in their family and eventually came out as a non-binary transgender person. Similarly, the faculty supported Casey's decolonial research agenda, despite not having much experience themselves in such approaches.

Casey also benefited from decolonial curricula to which the rest of us in this study did not have access. They were fortunate enough, for example, to take several methods classes both of which explicitly used a decolonial lens.

> Casey: There were only two tenure track qual methods instructors, both of them were either indigenous themselves or heavily centered indigeneity in their research. So, you were getting as decolonial of an approach to ethnography that you could probably get in the College of Education. The approach to methods I learned were pretty rooted in like indigenous epistemologies, indigenous ways of knowing. And then another methods class that I took was literally decolonizing qualitative research methods. It was like an advanced elective that the professor who is the indigenous faculty member taught. So I got really lucky with that side of my training.

When I inquired further, Casey shared that these courses still also taught students about "standard" research practices, such as interviewing, observation, coding, etc. I asked whether such a class was truly decolonial, or if it was just paying lip service to decoloniality while reinforcing colonial practices. To this, Casey provided an extremely insightful response.

> Casey: It was more than that. It was definitely like, let's go through the history of it, which again, not a lot of classes do, not a lot of fields do. I think you should start the conversation by reckoning with colonialism. So it was a little bit deeper because it also extended into ethics and into conversations about relationality and all of those different things much more than the average introduction to qualitative methods classes would. We

> spent a lot of time on the ethics pieces, we spent a lot of time on the person hood of engaging with people in the field in our work. And I think the tools that we were given were given to us largely with the sad but accurate understanding that we were going to be writing and publishing, and we're going to face journal reviewers that want these things cited, and we're gonna face a peer review process or a dissertation process where people are going to want to see coding.

Casey's perspective pushed me to consider decolonial curriculum in a different way than I had before. While both la paperson (2017) and Casey mentioned Audrey Lorde's (1984) famous writing "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," they also showed how the tools of the academy can be used to further the survival or even success of those with decolonial aims. Indeed, one of the first steps in decolonizing must be survival.

Nevertheless, we were both still able to commiserate on the difficulty of creating new methodological approaches that would advance our decolonial desires while also satisfying our mentors.

> Casey: A lot of the methods that I used in my dissertation, I came up with them. Or adapted them from things that were not in education or not in traditional qualitative research. I prioritize creative writing in a way that's not prioritized as knowledge in academic spaces, right? It all it all is interconnected to how we're trained, right? Like, my advisor, for as critical and as amazing as she is, she was not down with the method at first. She was like, I don't know how I feel about this. And then I showed her the writings from the pilot study and she's like, okay, I get it now. But yeah, it's interesting how we have to do these things and how we have to come up with these things, right?

I put some of this difficulty down to the Catch-22 of decolonial research. In most cases, reviewers and mentors want us to cite prior authors to demonstrate the academic history and reliability of an idea. However, decolonial research has been historically marginalized in academic spaces, making it challenging to fulfill the expectations placed upon us. Despite some important overlap with the increasingly popular Critical Theories, decolonial research has yet to breach the broader academic discourse.

Casey found an excellent solution to this dilemma. They submitted their first article for publication at a smaller impact journal where a friend served on the board. In subsequent articles, they were able to cite their methodological approach based upon their initial publication and submit to higher impact journals. Their tactical approach to publication produced excellent results, although Casey is still quick to admit that their success might also be due to their Whiteness.

> Casey: I wonder how much of my success is related to my whiteness because anytime I submit a proposal that's decolonial in nature, I will always include a positionality section. I always lead with the fact that I'm a settler, that I'm White, especially in the pieces that are more decolonial in nature. I wonder if there is a subconscious way in which my work has been privileged because of my Whiteness.

Such questions are, of course, impossible to answer definitively, and at the end of the day, Casey and I can only hope to leverage whatever privileges we have to move the academic conversation in a more decolonial direction.

Colonial Racism and Sexism

Despite these encouraging and positive elements of the program, Casey was quick to share with me some of the "colonial bullshit" they encountered. While they found supportive and progressive faculty, they also encountered faculty whose behavior was problematic at best.

> Casey: One professor didn't do a good job of establishing a good dynamic in the class, when, in like week 2, he was calling the Asian women the wrong name. Mind you, this is a white man that's married to a Black woman, so he prides himself on saying "I'm not racist, my wife is Black and I have Black children," you know, one of those people. And it fell on a master's student to be the one who went to him at the end of that class and like forced him to apologize.

This example is perhaps the most overtly racist experience that any of my participants shared with me, showing that even a program with a supposed commitment to social justice may still be infected with coloniality. That same professor later approached Casey at their very first academic conference while intoxicated and initiated a conversation about the sexual activities of graduate students. Despite these and other infractions, the professor was still granted tenure, presumably because of his success in funding and publishing research.

Casey also shared their experiences coming out as a non-binary trans person and pursuing a trans-centered research agenda in graduate school.

> Casey: I was the only person who was doing LGBTQ related research in my cohort. I was the only person talking about trans students. I then became the only trans student. So there was one person in a cohort below me who was a transwoman, but she left both the university and the field of Higher Ed largely because of the institutional transphobia within the university.

Being trans, and one of the only students conducting LGBTQ research, had several impacts on the way Casey was treated. They told me, for example, that “There were a lot of people that I worked with that after I came out as nonbinary, after I took on they/them pronouns, never gendered me correctly.” They also admitted to feeling “tokenized” as a trans person by the program and struggling to make connections within their cohort.

This marginalization was not limited to interpersonal relationships. Despite the program’s interest in topics of racial justice, there appeared to be very little engagement with issues of gender.

> Casey: I think that people didn't know what to do with the few people whose work straddled other lines that weren't just race. So like people didn't know what to do with my work, because the primary focus was transness. I always felt like faculty didn't know what to say to me, and I never really got much feedback. I’m proud of the work I did as a grad student, but I think more of why I didn't get feedback on a lot of things was because people just didn't know what to say and didn't know what to do with it.

They also told me about how, when they presented their work in classes, there would be “crickets.” Even students and faculty invested in social justice research apparently had no idea how to engage with work that crossed identity boundaries, despite the rise of theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017).

The lack of focus on gender is extremely important because heteronormativity and sexism are two huge manifestations of coloniality.

> Casey: the cisgender binary is a project of colonialism we can't be doing decolonial work if we're not also including transness in that conversation just in the same way we can't do

it if we're not including indigenous perspectives, Black perspectives. Continuing to erase transness is colonial.

Kyle: We have to remember that colonialism created all of these categories. All of these artificial divisions that then get put into all these different places.

Casey: Yeah, like, 100% agree. All of those have to be brought back together if you're gonna actually do decolonial work. We need a total destruction and recreation of systems that don't perpetuate power imbalances that are caused by colonialism. And if transness does not factor into your operationalization of that, then it's not going to actually achieve decoloniality at the end of the day.

I find this insight into Casey's graduate experience particularly important because it demonstrates how, despite their attempts to combat injustice, many of Casey's classmates and teachers are still strongly tied into the artificial colonial ontology of gender. Nor was gender their only blind spot.

Casey: One of my closest friends during grad school, for example, was in a different program in the College of Education. She's an indigenous woman who was in the same boat as me and was the only person that was talking about indigeneity and coloniality in most of her classes. So when she would talk it would be crickets, and when I would talk it would be crickets, and we worked together on a project within the first week or 2 of one term together, and we just like immediately were there for each other. Like she would step up when people were saying things that didn't think about gender in a certain way. I would speak up when people were saying like White colonial bullshit.

Indeed, the lack of understanding or reflection upon the relationship between Higher Education and indigeneity is one of the greatest flaws in our programs. Many of us, myself included, are

uncomfortable thinking about what it means to truly decolonize, and our current training is not sufficient to navigate those conversations. I was fortunate to meet Casey, because I believe their perspective on decolonial work was perhaps the most valuable for me in thinking about my future.

Charting a Decolonial Course

As I did with Grace and Avery, I asked Casey about how they saw their future in the academy, especially as a new tenure-track professor who is expected to conduct research, teach, and mentor new graduate students. After sharing my frustrations with the coloniality of the academy, Casey provided an insight that helped shake me out of my solipsism.

> Casey: I think it's very easy and I think it's comfortable for White settlers in particular to get caught up in the futility of feeling like we can never do enough. And I've stopped having that conversation with myself, because you need to do something in order for anything you do to be enough. But I also think that without fully just pumping the brakes on colonialism all together and fully giving the land back to the care and guidance of indigenous peoples, until we as a society do that, we're still in a capitalist colonial system and we have to then find ways to push the boundaries. So I think supporting and working towards building counter spaces within the academy is important. Places where scholars of color can come together, where queer and trans people can come together, where indigenous scholars can come together, and define on their own terms what resistance and collective organizing collective action looks like for them. And for us, as people who may or may not fall into any of those communities and categorizations it's about finding ways to get the support to do that at an institutional level. What does it look like to have that type of work reflected in a tenure file or as grounds for promotion? How do we get

> funding from a university to start creating that space to help start building and housing that journal to help start making that conference, right? It's leveraging the interest convergence that comes with wanting decolonial things to happen in a time where colleges in a lot of states still need to perform to fit into a model of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

Like many other liberal White folk, I allowed myself to get trapped in that comfortable futility that Casey described; worrying more about my inability to reach some decolonial utopian future than dealing with the reality of the world around me. I thus recentered myself, instead of focusing on those around me with whom I hope to share community. Casey expressed their approach to the work quite eloquently.

> Casey: I always say I will not be free until Black, trans women and two spirit trans people are free. I'm sure other people would be like, 'You're a White person and you're making this about yourself.' And I'm like, no, I'm thinking about the Black trans people and indigenous trans people and how just solving the immediate racism that they experience still does not solve all of the trauma and all of the histories of power and domination that colonialism has impacted upon myself and those people. My motivation for doing this work is an understanding that the world is fucked unless we address why we're fucking people over, and the people who are forgotten about are Black people, indigenous people, and trans people.

For Casey, this kind of work is not something to be put off for some abstract future time, but something with which to engage immediately. Even as a graduate student, Casey was doing everything they could to advance decoloniality in their program.

> Casey: If there is a reading about transness in a syllabus at my program, it is legitimately because of me. In the qual methods course, I was like, you should have them do a Z Niccolazzo piece because it's like one of the best modern ethnographies in education and for three or four years after, that was the ethnography that they used in that class. Same for same for one of the theory classes, that class would not have indigenous feminism on the syllabus if I did not put them there when I was a TA for that class.

By leveraging their positionality wherever possible, Casey has managed to change the way that courses are taught in their program. While I still believe that doctoral training and socialization have a long way to go in preparing doctoral students for decolonial work, I think Casey provides an excellent example to follow.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

I am confident and terrified in stating that coloniality, the legacy of European colonization of the world, is one of the greatest threats to human existence. The logics that allowed European philosophers to separate man from woman, Black from White, reason from emotion are fundamentally damaging. Coloniality encourages us to think ourselves separate from the world and each other. It dehumanizes and excuses the murder and enslavement of other human beings in the name of some vague sense of "progress." It encourages the exploitation of the Earth and prioritizes the accumulation of abstract wealth over the future of our species. While these attitudes are not exclusive to coloniality, European military, cultural, and economic doctrine ensured that any other ways of being were silenced and marginalized.

When I first began this project, it was a challenge to decide where I would focus my attention. Using theories of (de)coloniality, I could have investigated any number of problems in higher education. I ultimately chose to focus upon doctoral training in recognition of the fact that the time spent in graduate school is critical to the development of knowledge producers. Notwithstanding the current cultural divide regarding the importance of higher education, people with the title "Dr." are critical in shaping the future of society (Halse & Mowbray, 2011). Yet we know far too little about how these individuals are socialized to think about the colonial world. In this project, I have attempted to fill in that gap, if only a little bit, while also challenging the academy to consider how we produce knowledge.

The experiences and insights my participants shared with me have been invaluable in advancing my goal of understanding (de)coloniality in doctoral study. In this section, I provide an overview of some of the most important themes I identified through these conversations. After, I turn towards a discussion of the scholarly and practical implications of this work,

providing my recommendations for both future researchers and practitioners. I then conclude with some thoughts regarding the place of decoloniality in HES.

Key Themes

There are many different insights I could pull from my interactions with my participants. However, I identified four overarching themes across the experiences of my participants that best answered my research questions. As a reminder, my questions were as follows:

1. How do doctoral students pursuing decolonial research experience coloniality in both the formal and informal elements of their doctoral training and socialization?
    a. How does their theoretical and methodological training constrain them as scholars, practitioners, thinkers, etc.?
    b. How do professors either reinforce or oppose colonial practices through their mentorship?
    c. How do they resist coloniality and advance decolonial work?

The first theme that addresses these questions is the continued manifestation of coloniality in the form of racism and heterosexism. The second is the flawed structure of doctoral programs that makes teaching and supporting decoloniality extremely challenging. The third is the importance of mentorship in allowing a student to develop a decolonial research agenda. Finally, the fourth is the impossibility of true decoloniality in the current higher education environment.

Racism and Sexism

As I described in the beginning of this paper, racism and heterosexism are two of the oldest forms of coloniality, emerging out of a desire to consolidate power in the hands of European men. In modern times, racism and heterosexism are used primarily to shut down non-Eurocentric people and points of view (see also Dotson, 2011; 2012; 2014 and Fricker, 2017) It

should therefore come as no surprise that my participants all observed or experienced racism and sexism in some form or fashion. For Grace, as a woman of color, they came in the form of ignorant comments from other students, and a sense of discomfort around many of her teachers and peers. While she was able to find community, it was generally not within her program, because the people within the program did not foster a truly safe environment for her. As previously discussed, such experiences are sadly common and often go unaddressed by faculty or staff. As a result, Grace did not necessarily develop a strong connection to her cohort, department, or field. The field is thus at risk of losing her as a knowledge producer because of the coloniality she experienced in her graduate program.

Casey similarly experienced various forms of heteronormative sexism when they came out as a non-binary trans person during their doctoral program. The transphobia they faced took on several forms, the most obvious being misgendered repeatedly by faculty, staff, and students. However, the fact that their research was ignored or demeaned by many of their faculty and peers indicates that their program maintained a more insidious form of colonial heterosexism. By not recognizing the importance of trans-centered research in the pursuit of social justice, the program revealed an enormous blind spot that undoubtedly hinders their stated objective of advancing equity. Intentionally or not, the program sent the message that trans topics did not constitute valuable knowledge, nor was a trans person welcome as a knowledge producer. While the fact that Casey persevered is heartening, it is also true that other trans students have been driven out of the program because of these manifestations of coloniality.

Finally, while Avery did not share any experiences of overt racism or heterosexism with me, their curriculum itself was its own form of racialized and gendered coloniality. Nearly all the authors that Avery read in classes were White men, with some White women included. There

was practically no engagement with Black, Indigenous, or trans scholarship. As a Foundations of Education program, this curriculum signals to the students whose knowledge counts. By maintaining the status quo of a Eurocentric canon of authors, the program unintentionally codifies coloniality into the way they train doctoral students. Thus, while the faculty may not be openly racist, their curriculum is inadvertently epistemologically racist (Kubota, 2020). It is inevitable that a curriculum that fails to include Indigenous, Black, and trans philosophy will signal to some students that only colonial scholarship is worth exploring. Their support of Avery's decolonial interests notwithstanding, this practice has the potential to be just as harmful as more recognized forms of racism and sexism.

Mentorship

It should come as no surprise that good mentorship was critical in allowing my participants the space to develop their decolonial interests. As I previously discussed in my literature review, many prior studies have highlighted the importance of good mentorship in doctoral training. While the beginning of doctoral programs usually focus on coursework with a variety of professors, the dissertation requires a great deal of individual guidance from a student's advisor. This is especially true in fields such as HES, which do not have cooperative lab settings where students at different stages may interact frequently with one another. Mentorship thus has an incredibly important role in the training of new knowledge producers.

Out of all of us, Grace may have had the best mentorship with regards to developing a decolonial perspective. While Avery, Casey, and I all had fantastic, supportive advisors, Grace was the only one whose advisor had prior experience with decolonial theory and research. Her advisor was able to provide feedback and suggestions for her dissertation that allowed her to craft a more decolonial project. The rest of us, by contrast, mostly had to guide ourselves through

the process of learning decolonial theory and creating appropriate methods. While Avery was able to rely upon preexisting phenomenological methods that aligned with their work, Casey and I had to search more broadly to create methods that would satisfy our decolonial goals.

The fact that all of my participants were able to complete their doctorates speaks well to their mentors' willingness to explore avenues of research that have not traditionally been prioritized in academia. However, we all recognized that with less flexible and supportive mentors, we would have struggled to accomplish our goals. All of our mentors ultimately demonstrated an enthusiasm for exploring new topics and spaces that enabled us to expand our decolonial horizons. In doing so, they showed that good mentorship is not solely predicated upon knowledge and expertise within a narrow subject area, but also upon a willingness to learn and encourage growth.

Towards Decoloniality

The final theme I identified in my discussions is the mistake of thinking about decoloniality in HES as an end point, rather than a process. Others might find it intuitive, but I have struggled with the realization that presence of coloniality in doctoral study means that we cannot yet achieve pure decoloniality. When I began this project, I was hoping to find unambiguous examples of coloniality and decoloniality in the experiences of my participants. I certainly found some, such as the racist comments of Grace's peers or the transphobia in Casey's program. However, most of what I found was far more ambiguous, for example, the fact that Avery's mentor supported a decolonial dissertation, but did not recognize the coloniality in her own teaching and practice. Or the fact that Casey has worked to carve out a space in which to do decolonial work by prioritizing which colonial practices they will follow and which they will resist.

While these more ambiguous findings might not be as personally satisfying as I had originally hoped, they do provide a much more practical understanding of modern decoloniality. As several of my participants pointed out, it is very unlikely that the U.S. will truly decolonize in the near future, which means that coloniality is the reality of our situation. Decoloniality must therefore move beyond the somewhat simple terms in which I viewed it, to something more complex. The strides that my participants made towards decoloniality should be celebrated as important steps. Grace was able to represent herself and her community in a way that felt genuine and meaningful. Avery developed positive relationships with their faculty and expanded their horizons. Casey broadened the curriculum of their program through their advocacy. These are all potent examples of paperson's (2017) pscyborg; people who have managed to coopt the colonial tools of the academy and advance other ways of thinking and being.

This path is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Several of us in this study shared a sense of fatigue at the seemingly impossible task of decolonizing higher education, regardless of our position. However, if this work has shown me anything, it is that such fatigue is likely to follow me anywhere. If the root problem is coloniality, then there are no spaces in modern society free from its influence. Therefore, I emerge with a greater appreciation for Casey's perspective, that absent an alternatives, we must continue doing what we can in whatever spaces we occupy to fight coloniality.

Implications for Future Research

There are many questions left unanswered by this study. In seeking to understand coloniality in doctoral training, I kept the scope of my inquiry narrow. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first such study of its kind, and there are a number of ways in which future researchers might expand on it. To begin, I think it would be valuable to focus on specific

academic disciplines as sites of study. Academic disciplines create their own norms and practices that differentiate them from each other, even when topics of interest may overlap (Jacobs, 2013). It would be helpful to know the extent to which my findings might be replicated or differentiated in other areas of study. For example, social science disciplines such as Political Science or Sociology are older than Education and thus might have their own particular manifestations of coloniality. A comparison of other interdisciplinary fields might also be useful, given that Education draws from many different disciplines. I also think that an exploration of coloniality in STEM doctoral training would be fascinating, but I cannot necessarily suggest how such a study would be conducted, as I am not familiar with research practice in those areas.

In addition to expanding the disciplinary coverage of this study, I would also recommend that future researchers consider expanding its geographical boundaries. The United States is by no means the only country in which doctorates are granted, and it would be very valuable to understand how coloniality manifests in programs around the world. I am particularly curious about how findings might differ between programs that aspire to international prestige (Kim et al., 2018), versus those which have expressed a desire to decolonize. It would also be interesting to contrast so-called First and Third World universities, to see how colonized versus colonizer programs deal with coloniality.

Finally, I would like to see future research explore how students with decolonial goals deal with less supportive mentorship. Since my study has supported previous findings regarding the importance of doctoral mentorship, I am now concerned about how students navigate poor mentorship. Is it possible to pursue a decolonial research agenda with a disinterested or hostile advisor? If so, what are the tools that students use to advance their work and navigate the relationship with their mentor? If not, do they continue doctoral study with a compromised topic

or leave altogether. These questions are extremely important because decoloniality is not widespread in the academy, and I worry that there is inadequate room to explore important new topics and methods.

Implications for Methodology

My goal in this project was not only to break new ground in the topic of my study but also to experiment with methods that are less common in modern qualitative research. Because it would be inappropriate for White researchers like myself to appropriate Black, Indigenous, or trans methods, we have an opportunity to form our own approaches that are still informed by decoloniality. I attempted to do so here by designing a method that would be more relational and intersubjective. I found this humanistic approach yielded richer data than any previous empirical study that I have pursued. More importantly, I felt as though I developed a deeper connection to my participants than that of a researcher and subject. This connection is important because decolonial practice requires community building for the purposes of collective liberation. I do not consider this dissertation to be solely mine; it was created with the kind people who shared their time and insights with me.

There is a great deal of potential in such approaches to research, yet I feel that many White researchers, especially cishet men, are often hesitant to consider them. Many scholars have drawn attention to how modern heterosexism suppresses many male emotions except aggression (see Connell, 1984; 1989; Gamlin, 2022). I suspect that many White men are afraid, perhaps subconsciously, of embracing more emotional, relationally motivated research methodologies. However, these types of methods have the potential to subvert the colonial gender norms that have dominated modern society at the expense of women, trans and non-binary people, and many others.

Implications for Practice

When I first began this project, I did not anticipate finding many practical implications, given its highly theoretical focus. However, the conversations with my participants illuminated several important recommendations for both individual faculty and entire programs. Given the demonstrated importance of mentorship, the first implication has to be around doctoral advising practices. On a simpler side of things, it is clearly important for faculty to keep an open mind and encourage their students to explore non-traditional avenues of research, even if the faculty member is skeptical or unfamiliar. This is not to say that faculty should lower their standards or be less rigorous when evaluating their students' work, merely that they take an expanded view of the mechanisms of knowledge production. Even if an advisor does not utilize decolonial methods or theories, it is important to recognize the colonial origins of many academic practices and be willing to support students should they wish to explore alternatives.

Along this same line of thinking, faculty mentors must also be prepared to push and expand the boundaries of their disciplines. As I previously noted, academic disciplines and fields provide structure to academic inquiry. While this structure can be helpful, it can also be limiting if it does not include decolonial theory, research, and practice. Mentors of future decolonial scholars therefore have a responsibility to support their students, not just through encouragement, but also by helping defend their mentees from the attacks and skepticism they are sure to face. Hostile professors and peers have the potential to derail a budding decolonial scholar, and mentors are uniquely positioned to act in solidarity to prevent this from happening.

In addition, my study has demonstrated the benefits that students may derive from formal introductions to decolonial methods and theories. Both Casey and I were fortunate enough to take courses that centered Indigenous, decolonial perspectives and ideas. Speaking for myself, I

doubt I would have thought to pursue decolonial studies had I not been given the opportunity through a formal class offering. Given how much of history is influenced by Western colonialism, it is important that doctoral students be given the opportunity to deconstruct some of the false narratives that coloniality has built. For example, the usage of Craig Wilder's (2013) *Ebony and Ivy* gave my cohort an opportunity to understand a formerly hidden part of the history of higher education, something we would have missed if we had stuck to the standard Thelin (2011) text. I firmly believe that in order to study higher education, we must first understand it without the colonial whitewashing of the past.

Finally, the experiences shared by several of my participants demonstrate the inadequacy of current pedagogical training for future professors. While classrooms are spaces in which students may often find themselves intellectually uncomfortable or challenged, they should not feel personally unsafe or marginalized based purely on identity. The fact that both Grace and Casey experienced instances of racism, sexism, and transphobia show that even inclusive programs are not free from bias. It is critical that professors have the training to both recognize problems with their own behavior or thoughts and be able to deal with problematic statements or interactions that occur in the course of teaching. One easy step towards this goal would be to modify the tenure process, especially at R1 institutions, to give greater recognition to excellence in teaching. While it is a professor's job to publish, teaching should be equally valued, especially if we truly believe in creating more equitable programs.

Limitations

No study is perfect, and this project is no exception. The small sample size rules out the possibility of generalizability, trading high quantities of personal detail for broader applicability. As a tradeoff, I consider this worthwhile to have delved so deep into the experiences of my

participants, but an expansion of this study would certainly be welcome. Furthermore, the theories of (de)coloniality I rely upon say very little about coloniality in other parts of the world, most notably Asia and the Pacific. Quijano and his compatriots are mostly concerned with how colonization affected knowledge creation and power relations in the Americas, but the entire world has been affected by European colonization in some form or another. Furthermore, there are countries who have experienced other forms of colonization, such as Japanese expansionism in the Pacific, China, and Korea. Such histories have undoubtedly created their own dynamics that affect knowledge creation that are unfortunately beyond the scope of my research.

On the other hand, my study also failed to touch on the complex ways in which coloniality impact international students who are working towards their doctorates in the U.S. Globalization deeply complicates the questions surrounded colonization. For example, a Japanese citizen studying in the U.S. occupies a strange space as both an historical colonizer of Eastern and Pacific Asia, but also arguably a victim of colonization through U.S. imperialism. These complexities would undoubtedly reveal much about the nature of coloniality and deserve further inquiry. They may also require new theories of colonization that are better suited to understanding Western domination in other contexts. Such avenues open up exciting possibilities for new research and study into this vital topic.

Concluding Thoughts

The task of decolonizing doctoral programs is not an easy one. Like all of Western society, coloniality is deeply embedded in the structure and practices of the doctoral training and socialization process. I have sought with this project to take a small step towards understanding how coloniality is present in doctoral study and how some folks are finding ways to resist it. As my participants have shown, it is a challenging and often uncertain process. I have struggled in

recognizing that there is no single, unambiguous path towards a decolonial future. Yet this uncertainty cannot us from doing our best to address the wrongs of modern society. Those of us in Higher Education programs, whether faculty, staff, or policy makers, are perhaps uniquely positioned to advance this goal. Our understanding of higher education can be applied towards the goal of decoloniality and move us towards a better future.

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APPENDIX A: LITERATURE SEARCH TERMS

graduate education *and* doctoral student *and*
dissertation
research training
socialization
decoloniality
settler colonialism
faculty *and* student interactions
faculty *and* student relationships

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear (NAME),

My name is Kyle Farris (he/him), I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University. I am contacting you as a potential participant for my dissertation research, which focuses on coloniality in Higher Education Studies doctoral programs.

You were referred to be by (NAME) as someone who might be interest in this kind of work, and I would like to see if you are willing to serve as a participant?

To give you a sense of the structure of my study: I am planning to conduct 3 consecutive 60-90 minute, conversational interviews with each of my participants. In these conversations, we would discuss our experiences as doctoral students through the lens of historical White supremacy, racism, and coloniality. I would like these sessions to be less formal than many traditional academic interviews, so that we can get to know each other, build trust, and help each other explore our experiences as doctoral students.

Each of these conversations would be recorded and transcribed by me, after which I would share the transcript and my reflections with you. Your identity will be thoroughly masked, and any information you did not want included in the final write up will be removed.

If you are interested in participating, please let me know at your earliest convenience and we can begin scheduling times for our conversations. If you have any questions, clarifications or concerns about this project, please feel free to contact myself, my advisor Dr. Leslie Gonzales (gonza645@msu.edu), or the Office of Research Regulatory Support at MSU (irb@ora.msu.edu).

Thank you very much for your time and I hope to hear back from you soon!

Sincerely,

Kyle Farris (he/him)
Doctoral Candidate
Higher, Adult, and Lifelong, Education
Michigan State University
farrisky@msu.edu

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

As previously stated, these interviews will be informal and conversational. The prompts included below will serve as potential guides for the conversation, but will not be followed rigidly, nor in any particular order.

Interview 1: Getting to know one another

Potential Prompts:
Where did you grow up?
What was your undergraduate education like?
Why did you decided to get a doctorate? Why HES? What did your family think about you going to graduate school?
Where all did you apply? Why did you choose the school you're at?
What has your doctoral program been like? Anything surprise you?
What are your research interests?
Who is your mentor? Are they supportive?
How have you gotten along with your peers?
What are your career plans? Have they changed over time?

Interview 2: Knowing

What was your early theoretical and methodological training like? What classes were required in your program?
When were you first exposed to theories of coloniality/colonialism/White supremacy, etc.? If it was in class, was it a required course? How did other students respond to these ideas?
How did you decide what methodologies and theories to use for your dissertation?
Do you feel your dissertation represented your values as a scholar and a person? Did you have to compromise to meet the requirements?

Interview 2: Ways of Knowing

What guidance did you receive about the creation of your dissertation, especially theory and methodology? Was there any conflict or pushback? How did it resolve?
How have your peers and/or other professors responded to your ideas in class? Informally? At conferences? Job talks?
Have you published research using a decolonial/critical/etc. lens? What was the response of the journal? The reviewers?
(If graduated and in a tenure-track position): What was the application process like? How was your research received by your future colleagues? How did other departments respond?
(If graduated and NOT in a tenure-track position): Did you apply to academic jobs? How did they go? What did people say about your research? Are you still planning to go into academia? If not, why?

APPENDIX D: THEORETICAL GUIDEBOOK

Research Questions

1. How do students in the field of Higher Education Studies (HES) experience coloniality in both the formal and informal elements of their doctoral training and socialization?
    a. How does their theoretical and methodological training constrain them as scholars, practitioners, thinkers, etc.?
    b. How do professors either reinforce or oppose colonial practices through their mentorship?
    c. How do they resist coloniality and advance decolonial work?

- **Doctoral Socialization**: The process through which doctoral students are introduced to the professional and personal expectations of their field of study.
    - **Formal Mechanisms**: Classes, research and teaching assistantships, participation in conferences, academic publishing.
    - **Informal Mechanisms**: Unofficial meetings and interactions, participation in social events, discussions with mentors and/or peers.

- **Coloniality (of power)**: An overarching system of power relations that serve to reinforce the economic, military, epistemic, and ontological hegemony of Western peoples and institutions.
    - **Ontological**: The privileging of certain bodies over others, specifically White, cisgendered, heterosexual males. Outgrowths of ontological coloniality include racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and preference for aggressive, competitive forms of social interactions.
    - **Epistemic**: The privileging of Western systems of knowledge production and evaluation over those of other cultures and backgrounds. The most obvious manifestation is the preference for rational, empirical forms of knowledge, at the expense of affective and embodied knowledges. Assumes White men as primary knowers and is suspicious of knowledge produced by women, people of color, or through alternative methodologies.