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Working Towards Everyday Social Justice Action: Exploring Liquid Modernity, Material Feminisms, Care of the Self, and Parrhesia

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the difficulty many critically prepared educators and leaders experience when wanting to translate their social justice knowledge into everyday social justice practices. Even though these individuals are critically conscious and want to critically act, many become overwhelmed with the enormity of the neoliberal crisis, tend to fear actually acting against or speaking up in the face of injustice, and may become cynical in terms of even believing in the possibility of any type of educational and social transformation. To address this reticence, the postmodern and posthuman concepts of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2006, 2007) material feminisms (Barad, 2007, 2008), care of the self and parrhesia (Foucault, 2001, 2005, 2011) were presented to educational leadership doctoral students as ideas to explicitly challenge their issues of fear and cynicism. Findings suggest these are important concepts that may assist critical educators in extending their critical knowledge into everyday social justice action.

Keywords: Critical Theory | Postmodernism | Posthumanism | Social Justice Action

My interest in exploring every day acts of social justice is fueled by the cynicism and fear of acting and speaking up in the face of injustice I have witnessed in my work with critically-prepared doctoral students, graduates, educators, and educational leaders. I am referring to educators who have been prepared to be critical scholars, who understand the neoliberal stranglehold on education and society, who understand issues of power, knowledge, and social control, who understand the significant differences between schooling and education, who understand the value and need for public scholarship, and who desperately want to create a different vision and future for students, families, and communities who are marginalized and essentially disposed of in society. These are educators who critically understand and identify the effects of unjust policies, laws, procedures, and practices, can suggest alternatives, and have strong arguments why the alternatives would be more equitable and just. However, even though such individuals are critically-conscious and want to critically act for social justice, many become overwhelmed with the enormity of the neoliberal crisis, tend to fear actually acting against or speaking up in the face of injustice, and may become cynical in terms of even believing in the possibility of any type of educational and social transformation. The fear they describe and their apparent lack of self-efficacy is very real to them, and though there are many reasons why they do not tend to speak up against injustice, the students I am referring to often

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discuss such things as losing their jobs, being alienated by their peers, and/or being prevented from acting by individuals of authority.

This reticence is consistent with Solórzano and Bernal's (2001) discussion of internal and external resistance. Internal resistance suggests there is a critically conscious critique and understanding of the oppression or injustice, however, for a variety of reasons the individual is not comfortable acting out visibly. This type of resistance to injustice is more subtle and inconspicuous, however, the key is that there is critical awareness of the injustice. External resistance includes both a critically conscious critique as well as some type of overt and visible behavior that challenges an unjust norm, expectation, or practice. Solórzano and Bernal suggested these forms of resistance are actually fluid, may occur simultaneously based on the particular circumstances, and remind us it is important to not overly romanticize the more overt and public forms of resistance. It should be noted that while the students I am referring to do have a critical critique and can be described as resisting internally, they have communicated their dissatisfaction with their own hesitancy or lack of public, overt resistance. They voice their concern about being complicit in the status quo by not speaking up when they know they could and should take a stand.

There are multiple reasons for one's critical awareness and social justice action and inaction. For example, Solórzano and Bernal (2001) referred to a study of Chicanas who participated in a school walkout in 1968, which indicated that personal and family background, mentors, and role models contributed significantly to their own social justice action. For some, it was their parents' community involvement and political action that appeared to be highly influential and for others it was the compassion and care expressed by their parents to care for those in need. What emerged in this study is that the value to act for social justice appeared to be based on the participants' own family and personal histories.

Karen Sullivan (2009), a graduate of the doctoral program discussed in this paper, explored the issue of White principals demonstrating social justice leadership in her unpublished dissertation entitled "I Question Whether I Can Do It:" White Principals' Beliefs about Their Ability To Do Social Justice Work. The findings revealed that participants identified racism as being present and visible in their schools in both overt and subtle forms. They also acknowledged systemic institutionalized racism in many of the practices and procedures of the district. Although they stated their willingness to work toward social justice goals, the principals in this study demonstrated they did not consistently act or speak up in the face of injustice because they did not believe in their own ability to do so and be seen as credible. Their lack of self-efficacy became a primary contributing factor for their inaction.

Both Weiner (2003) and Foster (2002, 2003) suggested Foucault's concept of governmentality as an important concept to help interrogate how dominant social institutions have the power to shut down oppositional practices and create inaction. Briefly, *governmentality* refers to disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms of control directed at individuals as well as populations of people that include such things as regimes of truth, accepted discourse, surveillance, obedience, that become embedded and accepted in daily life as a citizen (Foucault, 2010). Individuals and groups internalize these mechanisms of control to essentially discipline themselves to do what the nation, state, or institution expects. Therefore, another possible reason an individual may not actively work for social

justice is because they have been co-opted by the dominant power structure and are controlled or greatly influenced in terms of how to think and act without necessarily being conscious of the process.

Another possibility for inaction is naïve cynicism, which is a defensive posture that reflects avoidance of dissent and a tendency to reject ambiguity, uncertainty, unpredictability, and incompleteness (Solnit, 2016). I have heard many students express a sense of hopelessness and failure without large-scale, complete reform. They do not recognize local smaller moves as very important or meaningful in the overall scheme of things. Instead, their reactions sometimes vary between healthy skepticism to outright cynicism, which seems to be paralyzing them in their desire to act critically and do the work they have academically and personally learned is the right thing to do. Whatever the reason for the students' difficulty translating their critical knowledge into action, I was committed to exploring new possibilities of study and adjustments in the program.

The doctoral program I am referring to is grounded in critical theory and social justice and explores critical educational issues related to the changing conditions youth now face as well as the degree to which they have been put at risk by social policy, institutional mismanagement, and shifting cultural attitudes. This knowledge is an ethical necessity and discourse about youth suggests educators and leaders must be prepared to address these pressing social and political issues in their neighborhood, school, community, and society. The program is committed to preparing social justice advocates from a variety of professional backgrounds who understand the complexity of the current context and who accept the challenge of creating alternative possibilities in order to educate students to live in a multicultural world and to address what it means to have a voice in shaping one's future. Every day acts of social justice practice are discussed in multiple ways given the broad spectrum of the student's professional backgrounds. For example, every day social justice practice is studied in formal terms of how it relates to policy, law, curriculum, pedagogy, organizations, culture, leadership, and research as well as the emergent interactions that occur when individuals are silenced, disrespected, excluded, or treated as invisible and disposable. The curriculum emphasizes a rich and multifaceted critical knowledge base and is highly informed by foundations of education including the study of philosophy, history, sociology, social science, curriculum theory, and transformative leadership. Students learn that theory, research, and practice are inseparable and the interaction offers a compelling vision of the transformative work so desperately needed today. Students progress through the program in a cohort of approximately 10 students and the program faculty teach using highly interactive and personalized pedagogy where relationships among the students and faculty is highly valued. Theoretically-informed dissertations with some dimension of a social justice focus are expected.

I had the opportunity to design this program in 2004 and have directed the program from its inception. I was committed to making this program unique in the sense that it would engage critical, moral, cultural, and ethical studies in education and leadership and confront critical issues of marginalization and oppression related to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and ability. In the early years of the program there was considerable push-back from education faculty and some university administrators because the program was not merely addressing technical education issues. However, over the years the program began to admit, not only students from the field of P-12 education,

but also higher education, criminal justice, business, and community and faith organizations and this seemed to help faculty and administrators understand the breath of our focus. Currently, I believe the program is well-established at the university; however, we continue to expect some level of challenge and questioning because we are not a typical or traditional educational doctoral program. This expectation requires us to be continually educative about the purpose of our work.

There have been 107 students in the doctoral program over the last ten years. 47% were students of color and the majority of the students who have been in the program have been clear about how difficult it is to translate their critical theoretical knowledge into social justice action. This is obviously a concern considering Freire (2008) considers praxis the integration of critical reflection and action. The students are honest about falling quite short on the integration of both. Therefore, as director and professor of this critical educational leadership doctoral program in a mid-sized Midwestern university, I needed to take a closer look at this important issue and during this process I have come to question two main points. The first has to do with the program in general in terms of how we engaged such a strong commitment to criticality. The issue is not about our commitment to criticalness and critical theory, but perhaps the program has been too entrenched in teaching critique and debunking and not enough about possibilities, matters of concern, and care as suggested by Latour (2004): “We need a new critical attitude rooted in new critical tools, a new definition of the critic, not as one who debunks, but as one who assembles” (p. 246).

As we adopted criticality as a foundation for the program, it is possible we offered it up as the only way to see the world or as having all of the knowledge needed for social change within that theoretical framework. It might have taken on a dogmatic tone suggesting to students this would provide all the answers, especially if we did not challenge the concepts of critical pedagogy itself. We also possibly assumed students would readily integrate the knowledge in such a way that it would produce their own meaningful action and transform their thinking and practice. However, I am not at all suggesting critique is not necessary and important. Foucault (1997) argues that critique is essential for individual freedom, avoiding a static view of situations, questioning the status quo, and analyzing what he identifies as “discourses of truth” (p. 386). Many of the doctoral students indicated that their previous preparation programs did not explicitly address critique and they found themselves too readily accepting what was taught. It became apparent to me that it would be worthwhile to explore more specifically how the program’s coursework approached critique, what critical perspectives were being taught, and what might need to change.

The second point that emerged related to the manner in which obtaining critical knowledge was treated as the primary way through which the doctoral students would understand their agency to engage in social justice education and leadership. Although students were encouraged to acquire self-knowledge by exploring their personal histories and narratives, analyzing what they care about, and reflecting on how they are positioned in this work, they were not guided or encouraged to explicitly reflect on their own personal growth and transformation. There is more to the process than gaining knowledge through actual commitment to working towards social change. Certainly, learning critical content and knowing herself is important, but it is becoming evident that this knowledge alone is not sufficient for many students to transform into engaging in everyday social justice practice. Knowledge took significant priority in the program in terms of critical content as

well as personal understanding, which seems to be a rather limited perspective when given the program's commitment to preparing doctoral students to become social justice advocates.

These critical insights suggested areas in which I could adjust the focus and emphasis of the program. One area is to balance the heavy emphasis on critique, debunking, and certainty about critical theoretical concepts with additional frameworks that draw on additional specific postmodern and posthuman concepts. Although this is not absent entirely in the coursework, it is minimal compared to the emphasis on critique in critical theory. It seemed we needed more perspective on ambiguity, uncertainty, and contradictions as being part of a robust discipline and practice in order to help the students move away from simplifying the issues and reducing new possibilities. Students may latch on to a way of understanding things that is not necessarily incorrect, but may be limiting. It seems as if settling on one or two perspective gives them a sense of security and knowing, but does not encourage and open up new ideas or questions. Additionally, we did not focus much on the self-work of self-transformation, despite encouraging some self-reflection in the high academic coursework. The students learned a great deal of critical knowledge, but were not necessarily connecting it to their own lives or work in terms of their transformation. Pinar (2004) refers to the importance of *currere* in education, which suggests that students explicitly focus on the contributions academic knowledge makes on his or her life and self-development. I believe this needs to occur more deliberately in this program.

For these reasons, I decided to introduce Zygmunt Bauman's (2006, 2012) conceptual frameworks of liquid modernity and liquid fear, as well as Barad's (2007, 2008) frameworks of posthumanism and material feminism to build on the perspective of ambiguity, uncertainty, and open up new perspectives about how the universe works. I also began teaching about Foucault's (2005, 2010, 2011) concepts of care of the self and parrhesia to address the self-transformative study that seems to be missing from the program. My attempt is to assemble new ideas, concepts, and ways of thinking and move away from the heavy-handed critique as discussed by Latour (2004). Although I introduced the concepts in the order of liquid modernity and liquid fear, posthumanism, care of the self and parrhesia, I am not yet sure it makes a difference, although I will be looking into the order in the future. The hope is these concepts will disrupt what seems to be a narrow or rigid view and offer up some alternatives. I have integrated these concepts into my courses for three semesters now and continually explore with students their response and understanding of the additional direction in the program. The following sections will briefly discuss these concepts as well as some very initial responses from five doctoral students who have been very open about their fear, hesitancy, and cynicism in relation to speaking up in the face of injustice.

Liquid Modernity and Liquid Fear

Zygmunt Bauman's (2012) perspective of liquid modernity and living in a liquid society seems helpful in assisting students in not only understanding fear, but also coming to understand what it means to think and live with uncertainty. *Liquid modernity*, a term he coined to replace post-modernity, is defined as the "growing conviction that change is the

only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty” (Bauman, 2012, p. viii). These *liquid conditions* contribute to living a life where social forms, institutions, and relationships do not have enough time to *solidify* and therefore do not provide a sense of control or direction in making sense of and organizing one’s life. Bauman stated that although forms of modern liquid lives may differ in many respects, what is consistent among them is their fragility, vulnerability, and inclination to constant change. There is actually no final state in mind or even desired now because of this constant state of flux. He describes this in the following way:

To put it bluntly, under conditions of “liquidity” everything could happen yet nothing can be done with confidence and certainty. Uncertainty results, combining feelings of ignorance (meaning the impossibility of knowing what is going to happen), impotence (meaning the impossibility of stopping it from happening) and an elusive and diffuse, poorly specified and difficult to locate fear; fear without an anchor and desperately seeking one. (Bauman, 2012, p. xiv)

Bauman (2006) suggested fear is what we call our uncertainty and is most intense when it is scattered, unclear, and unattached to a clear cause or reason. He refers to three overarching types of fear: (1) fear that threatens the body; (2) more generalized fear that threatens the social order in terms of security and survival; and (3) fear that threatens the social hierarchy, identity, and social exclusion. However, a process of “silent silencing” occurs whereby the fear becomes silenced and hidden and is actually a type of strategy people employ as a way to hold on to their sanity and find it bearable to live in such a fearsome world (Bauman, 2006, p. 6). Adding to the confusion, Bauman describes this process as living “in a fog” whereby it is possible to get a sense of some issues that are on the horizon (p. 11), so they are not totally hidden, but it is not possible to see beyond this more immediate view and thereby instill more fear because of lack of clarity and predictability. Not having this sense of control about what is happening or going to happen impedes our ability to act and creates a sense of impotence. Combined with living in an individualized society that is not conducive to actions of solidarity; it is somewhat more understandable how people today do not know how to cope and make sense of what is going on in his or her life.

In one of the courses, the students studied liquid modernity and discussed how it applied to their lives. The introduction of liquid modernity and liquid fear is intended to offer students an additional critical perspective about society and contemporary life. Learning about uncertainty and ambiguity in their life and how this influences their fear, views, and experiences might broaden their perspectives and open up new ideas about their life and work. It provides them with some type of conceptual grounding for understanding their fear, which may help them cope just a bit when facing their desire to speak up and act for social justice.

Posthumanism and Material Feminisms

The work of Karen Barad (2007, 2008), a physicist and feminist theorist, provides another important paradigm for our students to consider as they strive for everyday social justice

practice. *Posthumanism* and *material feminism* frameworks question our humanist assumptions about the idea that human beings have the ability to not only act on the world, but to do so in a unidirectional manner with the material in the world (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). One of the major points is that there is great power given to language, discourse, and cultural representation, while the concrete matter and materials in our surroundings are treated merely as context. This work moves beyond the privileging of representationalism and using language to determine what is real by including and simultaneously recognizing the material and non-human into our thinking about how the universe functions.

Barad (2008) challenged the notion that language and materiality are separate entities and uses Niels Bohr's quantum theory that propose, "things do not have inherently determinate boundaries of properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings" (p. 131). Bohr's view of the world was one of an ongoing open process where there is "intra-action" and re-configuring of meaning, properties, patterns, and boundaries producing new and multiple possibilities. The universe is seen as in a constant state of "becoming;" phenomena that are entangled, reconfigured, and rearticulated (Barad, 2008). Therefore, the concept of agency is broadened beyond the traditional humanistic notion that suggests acting on the world is entirely based on the actions of human beings. Agency within posthumanism and material feminist thinking is an "enactment, not something that someone has" (Barad, 2007, p.224). Agency is considered dynamic and involves an intra-action among the discursive and the material, assuring the material is now also seen as active in the reconfiguring of the world.

These concepts offer students a way to extend their thinking and understanding of the complexity of the universe, notions about agency, and recognition that the environment is much more than context but is actually equal to the influence of language and culture. Agency becomes something more than their own human actions and possibilities for transformation open up in all kinds of ways. The students may come to see so much more is going on in the world than their own humanistic ideas and actions. This might offer some relief from their fear and cynicism about the enormity of the problems in which they may feel solely responsible for having the answers. They might learn to look beyond their own humanistic ways and grapple with the power of other concrete forces all around them, which may offer a more robust view of their life and work. Although it is certainly possible this new perspective could add to their anxiety, it is also possible it may assist them in thinking more broadly, more creatively, and engage more possibilities and imagination when they face injustice and the need to act and speak up.

Care of the Self and Parrhesia

Foucault's (2005, 2011) scholarship on care of the self and parrhesia is extremely relevant to the issue being explored with the doctoral students about their ability and willingness to act for social justice. Foucault (2005) discussed the history and difference between the concepts of "know thyself" (p. 3) and "care of the self." (p. 2). Briefly, the concept of "know thyself" in the Greek and Roman cultures in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. actually fell under the broader principle of care of the self," which indicated individuals should attend to, not forgot, to care for oneself. However, over the course of centuries and in Western thought, "know thyself" became more privileged and care of the self was less

valued and excluded from modern philosophical thought (Foucault, 2005). However, the ideas in care of the self appear quite important to review, especially because of the fear and cynicism felt and expressed by the students.

Rather than self-knowledge being the goal, care of the self emphasizes an individual's transformation, the transformation of others, and the transformation of the world (Foucault, 2005). Care of the self is not conceptualized as a quick technical event, but as a continual process over one's lifetime that occurs in relationship with people one knows and trusts. It is to be practiced by anyone, integrated into life, and not to be engaged solely for professional reasons. The individuals in the relationship guide one another, while not establishing one person to be in a dominant role. There is a critical tone involved such that it is more like questioning and correcting, but not like teaching or training. This critical reflection of our actions is a way of living, which involves constant attention to how our lives are lived.

The guidance necessary for care of the self requires what Foucault (2005, 2011) referred to as parrhesia. *Parrhesia* is "opening the heart, the need for the two partners to conceal nothing of what they think from each other, and to speak to each other frankly" (Foucault, 2005, p. 137). Foucault explained parrhesia in the following example:

Well, he must be shown that in actual fact he is doing what he does not wish and is not doing what he wishes. He is doing what he does not wish, that is to say he is doing something harmful. And he is not doing what he wishes, that is to say he is not advancing his interest as he thinks he is. (p. 140)

Foucault (2001) was not so much concerned about problems of truth, but rather with the problem of the truth-teller or of truth-telling. Although the concept of parrhesia is rooted in political practice and democracy, Foucault (2008) extended the idea to include how individuals govern their own lives. Parrhesia is considered a key component for the individuals in the relationship described above to speak the truth to and about each other.

Parrhesia is not considered a skill or technique, but is thought of as a stance, a virtue, and a modality of truth-telling. Foucault (2001) characterized parrhesia with the following descriptors: frankness, truth, risk/danger, criticism, and duty. Frankness means to say everything and not to hide anything. Truth refers to what the individual thinks is true and is to speak their own thoughts and opinions. Risk and danger occur when someone speaks the truth and faces consequences and requires courage to place oneself in such a position. Related is the notion of criticism that is directed either towards oneself or another where the speaker is in a less powerful position than the other. Finally, parrhesia is seen as a duty to improve or help oneself and others despite the possible risks and danger.

These ideas provide a framework for the doctoral students to not only reflect on and understand their fear and cynicism, but also actually act on transforming themselves to be and do more of what they say they believe in about their life and work. Although this may be very difficult given the frenzied pace of life many live in today, the concepts are compelling enough to explore. Contemporary relationships are often reduced to sound bites through social media, but it is possible the focus on transforming oneself through the care of the self and the truth required will be a highly valued and refreshing way of experiencing life.

The following section will discuss how five doctoral students responded after learning about these concepts. Their responses were interesting and potentially powerful in regards to their social justice action. However, I am not making any sweeping claims about a direct causal link between learning the concepts and transforming their actions. I believe their emerging responses and insights are worthy of discussion and further inquiry.

Students' Responses and Insights

This type of inquiry is considered a critical case study, that is, “an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 2). In other words, case study inquiry involves investigating in order to understand a real-world case within its context. Specifically, Yin (2014) stated that “a case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ . . . such as in studying individual life cycles, small group behaviors, organizational processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (p. 4). Yin highlighted six commonly used sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. This inquiry incorporated student generated essays, blogs, observations, and dialogue. The overarching purpose for this case study was to gain the students' insights and thinking about acting in the face of injustice when interacting with critical, postmodern, and posthuman concepts.

This inquiry captured some initial responses from five doctoral students who are in different phases of the program. Students were selected through purposive sampling because they expressed interest in the topics and wanted to engage in further dialogue beyond the course, and because the participants represent some form of knowledge regarding what is being studied (Patton, 1990). Four of the students are completing their coursework; two are in their final year of coursework, one is in her second year, one is in his first year, while one student is at the beginning phases of his dissertation. The first and second year students are just beginning to explore these topics and recently emerged as interested study participants. Student names are replaced with pseudonyms. Their insights and voices are extremely valuable to help inform and guide the critical nature of the program.

Steve

Steve is a White male who has been in education for 19 years. He has been a teacher, assistant principal and principal, and over the years he has become more dissatisfied with education. He began his doctoral studies in 2005 and became stalled along the way with job changes and personal upheavals and never nailed down a topic he was passionate about for his dissertation. I reached out to him one more time knowing our timeline was up this year and when we met it was clear he continued to be frustrated and disillusioned with the focus of his role as principal in a public high school. However, this time he said he was at a turning point and could no longer support the status quo, especially the over-emphasis on accountability and standardized testing. We discussed the concepts of care of the self and parrhesia because he communicated with great clarity his confusion with how he has

personally supported school policies and practices that were actually quite harmful for students even after learning so much about critical theory and critical pedagogy. After discussion and reading about the concepts, he decided to do an autoethnography for his dissertation with a focus on his truth-telling and his journey in becoming the critical educational leader he so believes in. Following is a brief selected excerpt from his dissertation proposal:

I can confidently say that 99 percent of the time, educators feel trapped and don't know how to escape the imprisonment of accountability. In other words, people don't know how to tell the truth about their surroundings, and keep a career in a system where submission to authority and inhumanness are keys to success. Michel Foucault in, *Fearless Speech* (2001), addresses the idea of parrhesia. The attempt within this article is to give educators a way to reach truth telling in a system where the truth is buried under data, and curricular practices that ban free speech and thought. In the world of education, it is commonplace for teachers and administrators to work within a system of policies and practices that counter their true beliefs about teaching students. The idea of parrhesia gives educators a courageous path to address a society with truth. Speaking the truth leads to self-care, where a person is able to be introspective, and develop an internal and external awareness of society. The finality of this autoethnography is to reach a moment of self-care. Self-care for me is measured on many different levels. First, I want my work as an educator to be directed toward efforts that respect the whole child, and evaluations of children are based on more than just test scores. Second, I have to gain the courage to communicate about the damages inflicted on students by standardized tests to people in positions of authority. Third, I accumulate the power to shape my educational existence through the details listed within this autoethnography, and use my knowledge to critique society and its power structures. Fourth, I align with other truth seekers to transform education into a process that values diversity and connects curriculum to the lived realities of the community served.

Steve ends the proposal with the following: "I hope that my story is a revelation of the truth, and a path to a better existence."

Steve definitely resonated with the concepts of care of the self and parrhesia as they seemed to capture exactly what he needed at that particular moment in order to move forward not only on his dissertation, but also in his career as an educator. He stated he was in a more stable place personally, which is likely to be a significant contributing factor for his focus, enthusiasm, and courage to explore his personal and professional journey. However, care of the self and parrhesia seem to have given him a sense of urgency to stop the cover up he has engaged in for too many years and begin uncovering the myths he sees governing the discourse and unjust practices in education.

Karen

Karen is a White educator who has worked primarily in private schools for approximately 15 years. She is in her final year of doctoral coursework and was introduced to the concepts discussed in the above sections in one of her recent courses. Although not as developed as

Steve's dissertation topic, Karen is also leaning in a similar direction. She is dissatisfied with her own silence when she should have spoken up as well as her own cynicism and cynicism of many of her colleagues. At this point in time, she is extremely interested in integrating liquid modernity, parrhesia, and care of the self as a frame for her dissertation. It is a possibility she may work with a few educators who are interested in exploring their commitment to their personal and professional transformation as she also explores her own critical practice and transformation. Although the study may take a different direction as she continues to read the literature, Karen's study will definitely include these concepts and focus on some aspect of transformation and resistance.

Karen was also influenced by Barad's (2003) posthuman views about being a part of the world and not just removed observers of the world. She began to see herself in the world able to make a difference, rather than a cynical bystander. The concept of human and non-human intra-actions appeared to open new possibilities and as well as relieve her of the "pressure" of it all falling on the shoulders of the individual. She identifies herself as a highly cynical person and found the posthuman notions of complexity, openness, and incompleteness helpful when trying to live a life of transformative social justice work. She noted her cynicism tends to be informed by oversimplification, clear-cut binaries, and immediate results, which are often paralyzing and narrowing when attempting to engage in social justice action. Posthumanism appears to offer Karen a way to reflect on and hopefully move beyond her cynicism. In addition, the concept of liquid modernity was also intriguing for Karen. She felt it helped her understand why relationships are often so fleeting and superficial and how seeking predictability and certainty may be a losing battle. She indicated she is often cynical about these kinds of things and liquid modernity offered a different way of seeing how society works. I am again not making any sweeping claims about how these concepts will influence Karen's future everyday social justice action, however, it is obvious Karen is addressing her silence and cynicism in new ways and is committed to no longer standing by without doing something about unjust policies, practices, and behavior.

Maxine

Maxine is a Black educator who has taught in public education for approximately 10 years. She is also in her final year of doctoral coursework and, like Karen, was introduced to the concepts discussed in this paper in one of her recent courses. Throughout her time in the doctoral program she has shared great frustration about the unjust practices and the lack of leadership in her school. Although she has attempted to question and challenge marginalizing policies, her ideas were seen as threats to the status quo. Therefore, she found herself retreating and shutting down because she could not stand to lose her job and didn't see any other option. When asked about the concepts in terms of influence on her thinking or behavior, she responded in the following way:

I think out of the three concepts I actually got the most from parrhesia. However, the self-care and the becoming idea helped me unpack things personally to help me feel like I am not drowning in a sea of sharks and that there are ways that I can stand up to those unjust practices. After reading about care of the self, at this point I know that I

can no longer walk around angry and feeling defeated. I know that I have a duty to myself first, students, the community, and society and I fully became aware of what I did not want to be. In beginning to care for myself, I have started to carve out my own lines, my own boundaries, and my own goals. By looking at the power structures present I began to realize it was time to start putting power back in the hands I which it should have always been, the students.

It should be noted Maxine has already established and achieved some of her newly created goals including removing herself from some highly toxic work situations and expanding her educational work possibilities with creative options that speak to her core value of social justice. She seems to have responded with great depth to the idea of being honest with herself and living a life more aligned with what she wants to be and do. Again, no sweeping claims about exactly where this will take Maxine, however, it is clear she is taking charge of her decisions and moving in a new direction.

Annette

Annette is a White educator who has been in education for fifteen years and has served as a teacher and World Language Department Chair. As an administrator, she has seen first-hand how policies and practices that marginalize and oppress certain groups of students are often accepted without question. She has come to realize she is frequently complicit in promoting unjust practices because she also didn't question the purpose or meaning of some of the mandates or policies. When Annette read about parrhesia, she said it gave her grounding for needing to speak up as well as confidence this is the right thing to do. She indicated she actually started rehearsing in her mind how to question and challenge and then did so when the opportunity arose. Annette actually stated that this has been the most helpful and interesting concept she has studied during her two years in the program. She is definitely speaking up and sharing different perspectives that in the past she said she would not have done. Annette also shared the concept of parrhesia with a teacher and received the following email expressing her gratitude for the information:

I have given a lot of thought to our conversations and your feedback this year, and, honestly, it has helped change my perspective SO much on my voice and leadership role within my team, my department, and the school. Your memo about parrhesia prompted a lot of reflection and I thank you for your inspiration. Not to get too mooshy-gooshy, but you being my evaluator this year was seemingly meant to be! Thanks for any info you can share my way!

The concept of parrhesia has been extremely influential for Annette in her desire to become a social justice advocate and not turn away from conflict or controversy. She said she sees how she has changed in her leadership and is becoming more satisfied with her emerging social justice practice.

Mark

Mark is a White male who has been a teacher for eight years. He is highly critical of various unjust policies in his school; however, he has the freedom to teach critically in his classroom if he stays off the radar. Although he does engage social justice in his classroom, he has not visibly challenged school wide concerns until his enrollment in the program. Even though he is in the first year of the first semester of the program, he has devoured the content and consistently applies the ideas to his life and work. Due to his interest, he has read beyond the course readings on liquid modernity and liquid fear and has indicated he is going to use these concepts for his further studies. Mark is highly concerned about the ways students are often mistreated in schools and society and has a strong desire and commitment to being a social justice advocate. Although he is at the beginning of the program, he is already internalizing and applying his learning as noted in the following reflection that occurred regarding a school meeting the day after the presidential election:

So we had a meeting this morning to “discuss” the election and student reactions to it and what we should do as a faculty. It was led by the president. Most of the faculty didn't speak up... I found myself vocalizing that nothing we do in the classroom is neutral and there is no reason to pretend it is and that as teachers we are activists by nature and we need to fight the normalization of racism and sexism that are dominant in our society by checking the language and actions we hear/see from our students as well as from ourselves. I think I would have felt maybe 50% of those things back in July, but I would not have spoken up. I like the way the program is changing me. Thanks for that.

Mark is committed to connecting his learning to his life and work and this is emerging very early in the program for him. He is actually excited about his new insights and ideas and is confident that challenging the status quo is the right and only thing to do.

Learnings and Thoughts

These five students are developing a strong critical theoretical foundation and believe in the need for significant social and educational transformation, however, during their time in the doctoral program they identified how their fear, hesitancy, and cynicism have held them back from acting in the face of injustice. Having observed this pattern develop over the 10 years of directing the critically based educational leadership doctoral program, I decided this issue needed to be explicitly addressed. As discussed, several additional critical perspectives were introduced to the students with the goal of bridging the gap between critical theory and social justice practice. The emerging narratives of these five students provide a snapshot of some beginning inroads into their becoming the social justice advocates they envision.

Steve responded strongly to Foucault's concepts of parrhesia and care of the self by actually using them to frame and inform his dissertation. The time is now right for him and he feels a sense of duty to be honest to himself, students, and other educators and leaders. He has a great deal of critical knowledge and content and now will hopefully gain a sense

of his personal transformation. Karen was enthusiastic about all of the new concepts and how they challenged her identified cynicism. Liquid modernity reminded her of the uncertainty and unpredictability in today's world and the fear associated with this type of living. Posthumanism and material feminisms seemed to alleviate her of the pressure to assume individual responsibility for "having the answers and plans" to know how to intervene in the injustices. This knowledge worked together with her interest and need to not only focus on transforming practices, but to take time to take care of and transform herself, especially in the area of her cynicism. Maxine came to realize she needed to be honest to herself and figure out what is needed for her to act more fully as a social justice educator. Parrhesia and care of the self seemed to give her permission to take steps that would work toward her complete commitment to social justice and she has done just this already. Annette found parrhesia extremely powerful and has begun to change her practice of being silent to questioning and speaking up. She has also shared the concept with a teacher she supervises who also indicated the concept has caused her to rethink her own practices. Mark is extremely interested in liquid modernity and liquid fear and is connecting his new learnings to his life and work and bringing up topics and questions he would not have previously addressed.

As I have said before, I am not making any overgeneralizations or sweeping claims about the power of these particular concepts, but the conversations are definitely different and students are approaching their critical reflections in a different way. They are not just focused on knowing critical content or their own personal knowledge, but they now see themselves as a work in progress in a complex universe and have the desire and commitment to transform themselves in the process to more fully work toward social justice ends. Students are engaging in praxis as defined by Freire (2008), which requires the integration of critical reflection and action. Although this was not totally absent previously, there is more explicit and focused attention to their action and connection to their critical academic learning. In addition, even though there continues to be a significant amount of critical critique and analysis because that is still needed and valued (Foucault, 1997), there is definitely increased dialogue and openness to interrogating new ideas about new possibilities and integrating concepts and assembling new perspectives as discussed by Latour (2004).

I suggest there are several important points to be made about this additional emphasis in the doctoral program. First, while providing depth in content of critical theory, with all of the critique and discussion of possibilities to make it robust is absolutely necessary and will continue, it was not sufficient for these five students to translate their critical knowledge and ability to publicly act on social justice issues into everyday social justice practice. The additional critical postmodern and posthuman perspectives enhanced the views they have of the world, with all of its uncertainty, unpredictability and complexity, as well as their place in the world in terms of their own transformation. The students loosened up on their tight grip of believing there are certain standard, universal ways of knowing and predicting what to do. Liquid modernity and liquid fear exposed them to the reality and difficulty living in an uncertain, ambiguous, and unpredictable world, while at the same time relieved them from the myth that they should know exactly how to work and live. Although they should be thoughtful and informed in their decisions and actions, they

know they cannot truly predict what will happen, so the idea of risk becomes a bit less frightening because we never know everything anyway.

There are too many possibilities that *intr-act*, as Barad (2007, 2008) would say, that we just cannot see or know with certainty. The concept of agency takes on new meaning by moving beyond humanistic assumptions, where humans act in a unidirectional manner on the world, to posthuman notions where there is reciprocity and “intra-actions” among various properties and people. This pushed the students to reframe the idea that there should be some type of universal plan for addressing these serious issues and look beyond simple solutions. For example, Steve recalls a situation several years ago, when he went against the grain in a school community meeting and was certain he would be reprimanded by the principal or possibly even released. However, what actually happened is the community members applauded Steve for his perspective and insights and came to further recognize Steven’s depth of commitment to the school, community, and students. Steve did not recognize the power of that experience until now when he has come to deeply understand the nature of living in a “liquid modern world” and realizing how our universe acts in non-passive ways to create endless possibilities. Steve was certain there would be horrible fallout and thought he just caught a random break for once in his life. He now understands that even though not everything may work out like it did in that scenario, he absolutely cannot be held back by what awful things he has in his mind that he thinks are certain to happen. Even though the fear of acting and taking risks may not disappear totally, the students are no longer totally paralyzed in acting, even if it is in small ways, for what they believe is right to do.

Second, these students resonated greatly with the need to address their own truths and honesty and work on their own personal transformation. Though doctoral students are appropriately expected to study scholarly texts, write scholarly papers, and engage in scholarly studies, there is a need for a more prominent place for personal transformative work as well in order to address the critical reflection and social action gap. While the current emphasis in the program focusing mostly on self-knowledge is absolutely necessary and meaningful, it is not sufficient; self-transformation needs to be explicitly incorporated. Even though they may feel as if they do know themselves, it is not the same as exploring how to transform and become. There was a sense of liberation when the students studied care of the self and parrhesia when they recalled how often they silenced themselves in fear of retribution. These were powerful moments for the students because when they discussed their tendency to be complicit and silent, it was not how they wanted to view themselves or their work. This work on self-transformation is striking a chord with these students and is more powerful now than ever before given the uncertain and divisive world we live in today. Focusing on oneself in dialogue with others who are honest and trustworthy and committed is not a common occurrence these days and it will be interesting to see how this process progresses.

Third, I am convinced now more than ever before this expanded focus in the program is necessary. Incidents of hateful harassment now number 701 since November 8, 2016, Election Day, as reported by The Southern Poverty Law Center (2016). The report indicated the following: anti-immigration incidents remain the top type of harassment reported and that nearly 40 percent of all incidents occurred in educational (K-12 schools and university/college settings). Incidents by type ranked by number include: anti-

immigration (206), anti-Black (151), anti-LGBT (80), swastika vandalism (60), anti-Muslim (51), and anti-woman (36). We live in a society now where facts do not hold much value, knowledge has become to mean almost anything, and the rhetoric of the reportedly named alt-right movement is explicit about their bigotry and xenophobia. It is imperative to be informed and act and the following quote from Freire (1970) is highly instructive given the complexity of our current socio-political context:

Curiosity about the object of knowledge and the willingness and openness to engage theoretical readings and discussions is fundamental. However, I am not suggesting an over-celebration of theory. We must not negate practice for the sake of theory. To do so would reduce theory to a pure verbalism or intellectualism. But the same token, to negate theory for the sake of practice, as to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice. It is for this reason that I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice. (pp. 18-19)

Conclusion

Over the years, students in the program have been frustrated with their limited social action and one student even said it would be a tragedy to graduate from this program with such depth of critical knowledge and not make a difference for the public good. This realization has not only expanded the emphasis in the program, but it has also shifted my own confidence in knowing this is an academic necessity. I now see how the program can continue to be highly theoretical and at the same time be extremely personal. I believe it will not only be informative for the students, but I am also hopeful it will be fulfilling and nourishing so they find their way to become the social justice advocates they strive to become. I believe everyday acts of social justice will take on a broader and deeper meaning and become internalized in how our students, and of course myself as well, live our lives.

In conclusion, this exploration has been very meaningful and important for me as the director of a program that has prided itself on its strong and comprehensive critical theoretical foundation. While the deep critical theoretical foundation will not change, what I have learned is the importance of enhancing the preparation for students to address their fear, hesitancy, and cynicism through different, but complimentary, postmodern and posthuman critical theoretical frameworks and concepts. The doctoral students want to act on everyday social justice issues and do what they believe is right and this programmatic expansion and focus offers hope for bringing this to fruition.

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Author Notes

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