CRITICAL REVIEW

BETWEEN YOU AND ME:
MAKING MESSES WITH CONSTRUCTIVISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

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New social science researchers often grapple with questions of scholarly identity and paradigm belongingness in a postmodern world. On one hand, there are perhaps more options than ever, in terms of philosophical orientations to research that are taken seriously across the landscape of social scholarly disciplines. On the other hand, however, these philosophical orientations (typically presented as paradigms) have solidified to such a degree in writing and teaching on qualitative inquiry that they can feel confining, leading students to feel that more than one "paradigm" resonates with their personal sensibilities, and therefore to wonder where the points of tension actually lie between different orientations to research—for indeed, what is learned in the classroom about convergences and divergences between research perspectives is sometimes not borne out in our lived experiences in the field. In this critical review article, which is meant to be both a personal reflection and an analytical methodology exploration, the author engages in an exercise of "rethinking," in which she questions earlier claims regarding the tension between two increasingly popular research approaches in her own field of tourism studies—namely, constructivism and critical theory—and attempts to interrogate what is really at stake between these perspectives. Ultimately, the author concludes that the tension between these two traditions may lie in a surprising place: it may not be ontological, and not necessarily even political, but pedagogical and care oriented. She then ponders the inherent challenge that lies in the tension between these two perspectives, in terms of the quest to forge a social research approach that is reflexive, critically and politically oriented, and respectful of participants and their lived experiences. By situating her analysis within the context of her own doctoral research project, she hopes not only to capture the analytical dimension of working at a methodological crossroads, but also to offer a window into the ways that such issues are worked through in our own respective and embodied research journeys. (Abstract by A.-M.H.)

Key words: Paradigm debate; Qualitative research; Reflexivity; Research ethics; Researcher–participant relationship; Scholarly identity

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Introduction

When I was nearing the end of my own doctoral work in 2007, I embarked on what turned out to be a rather epic job search. I was "on the market" for years—that lovely expression that makes those of us described by it feel like ham hocks hanging in a street market booth, ready for consumer inspection—and in all that time, I got pretty good at articulating a pithy "elevator description" of my research interests for anyone who would give me an ear for 3 minutes. Each time I was asked, I would explain that my work follows two primary tracks: first, I investigate the role of tourism in ideological production, and second, I explore the lived experience of tourism. I think this two-pronged description probably made search committees conclude that I was "unfocused," a charge all too readily leveled at qualitative scholars, who tend to like to go where the data lead us, in an occupational climate that prizes the Dumbo's feather of constructed transparency, in which we assure others of our value by laying out a tidy plan of what our research line will contribute—or at least by having the courtesy to bluff about it.

The truth, however, is that the relationship between my two research tracks is far from random. It arises from a basic feature of life, which I will call the paradox of self. What I mean by this is that, as humans, we exist in some sense as discrete entities, each with our own body, biography, and perspective. At the same time, however, we are not discrete: our very DNA connects us to each other across time, our ideas are the product of intersections with that which lies outside ourselves, and our behaviors create consequences that ripple well beyond our individual lives. Our thoughts and actions intrude upon each others' biographies such that we are simultaneously both many and one. Thus, whenever I approach tourism phenomena, I find that there are always stories unfolding on two different levels at the same time. The first is that of individuals, each on their own life trajectories, who share with me their experiences of being tourists or tourism service providers, or the physical manifestations of their creative energies, such as a personal scrapbook or an advertising campaign. The second is that of society—of the social consequences that arise when people from different backgrounds

encounter, represent, perform for, and make sense of one another through tourism, for pleasure, for education, or for survival. My respect for these two stories—for the magic of individual human beings (human becomings?) unspiraling on their own unique paths and for the awesome responsibility that derives from the fact that we humans have the power to affect one another's lives—has been a fundamental force in shaping my identity as a tourism scholar.

Like many young scholars today, I came of age in a rather odd philosophical milieu. On one hand, I took the standard methods classes and read the standard texts, where I encountered descriptions of various social research traditions. Positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism were laid out before us, juxtaposed in neat matrices prepared by towering intellectual figures like Guba and Lincoln (1998, 2003), with tidy descriptions of the places where their core ideas were seen to converge and diverge. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that most social researchers of my generation will feel eternally indebted for these efforts. Such handy tools were great facilitators as we attempted to wrap our heads around the sea of new concepts we were encountering, and they were also convenient and reassuring aids for scholarly identity building: we could scroll through the matrix until we found the research tradition that matched our particular sensibilities, almost as though we were shopping for a breakfast cereal that met all the right criteria: high fiber, no raisins, chocolate coating—Bingo! The right selection and our dissertation methodology could be complete. More importantly, we would be able to articulate to our rapidly growing selves who we were, what we were doing, and what we believed in. On the other hand, this ease was disrupted by another prevailing intellectual force: a destabilizing postmodern sensibility that made the whole smorgasbord of research philosophy seem ripe for the taking, a set of ingredients that could be mixed and matched to customize an individual approach. Taking this latter path is not easy, though, and it inevitably forces us to rethink the ideas that have been handed to us about various research approaches and what is really at stake between them.

This critical review article—one part analytical methodology exploration, one part personal reflection—is meant to be just such an exercise in

rethinking, in this case, about the tensions between two increasingly popular philosophical approaches in tourism studies, which served, in an uneasy partnership, to anchor my own dissertation research a half decade ago: constructivism and critical theory. In this analysis, I question earlier claims regarding the places where these two traditions tend to butt heads and then attempt to interrogate what is really at stake between them. Ultimately, I conclude that the tensions between constructivism and critical theory may lie in a surprising place: they may not be ontological, and not necessarily even political, but *pedagogical* and *care oriented*, having more to do with the existence of different moral imaginaries about how people (in this case, researchers and study participants) can best do right by each other than with researchers' basic beliefs about the nature of reality or the point of the research endeavor.

There are many ways of approaching the relationship between the researcher and the study participants in social inquiry. A traditional, positivistic view would hold that research participants are there to provide data and that the researcher's goal is to extract that data; it would essentially remain silent on the issue of morality in the context of that relationship, aside from its concern that the research be conducted in line with ethical standards governing the profession, as laid down by formal bodies like research ethics boards. Many interpretivist schools of thought, however, have evinced a greater awareness of the complexities that arise in what are inevitably *human* relationships embedded in the context of the social research encounter. Feminist researchers, in particular, have been at the forefront of arguments about obligations on the part of the researcher toward his or her participants that go beyond the call of the typical research ethics approval form.

Such discussions have opened the possibility of imagining research encounters in more diverse ways than as simply forums for data transmission. Like any substantive communicative exchange, they are also potentially spaces for reflection, perspective enlargement, and personal growth, on the part of both the researcher and the participant (see Caton, 2013, for a philosophical account, and Bott, 2010, for an excellent empirical example, in the context of her work with British lap dancers in Tenerife). Thus, research encounters potentially have a pedagogical capacity. And, like all substantive

human interactions, they are spaces in which we must navigate questions of how to do right by one another—spaces in which we have a duty of care to one another.

Although the issue of the relationship between the researcher and study participants is beginning to receive more attention, as evidenced by the creation of new categories in Guba and Lincoln's (2003) updated matrix like "inquirer posture" and "ethics," it nevertheless continues to lack the level of consideration it deserves in qualitative inquiry discussions on paradigmatic conflicts and confluences—and methodological issues, in general, lack sufficient attention in tourism forums (Duval, 2006). The goal of this critical review article is thus to explore the issue of the tension between constructivism and critical theory in more depth, abstractly and analytically—debunking old myths and opening new questions about what is really at stake between these two perspectives—while also offering a window into the concrete reality of what it felt like, for one lone doctoral student, to navigate the messy space between these philosophical traditions in the practice of trying to create tourism understandings. In so doing, I seek to engage with the invocation of scholars like Gabb (2010), working in the intimate and ethically loaded area of family studies, and Brogden and Patterson (2007), working in education studies, who argue for the need to offer sustained attention to the unique kinds of ethical dilemmas that qualitative researchers face as they go about making their impacts on the social world. These scholars offer profound, empirically situated discussions of the complexity of the care ethic in qualitative research practice, and in the case of Gabb (2010), highlight the way that "commitment to participants can come into conflict with the academic need for a critical analytical mind" (p. 461)—a concern central in my exploration here of the tensions between constructivism and critical theory. Like these scholars and many others, I agree that one of the most important ways we can attend to such matters is to give deep reflexive consideration to our interactions and relationships with our research participants.

A Tale of Two Traditions

Both constructivism and critical theory are complex intellectual movements that can better be

imagined as skeins of ideas (to borrow a metaphor from Peters & Burbules, 2004) than as unified theories: they are each like balls of yarn, made up of strands that are individual and separate, yet twisted together and generally moving in the same direction. Thus, to characterize these two movements fully here would be impossible. Instead, I shall simply aim for the standard garden variety description of these perspectives—the type that is typically served up for doctoral students—and then, to stick with the knitting analogy, hope that (as my friend who likes to make scarves is fond of saying) my characterization "passes the galloping horse test," meaning that it looks good enough, from the perspective of someone at a distance moving quickly, to get the job done.

Thus, in short, we can say that constructivism is the term for a broad movement in social research philosophy and practice, which contends that knowledge and truth about the social world are created rather than discovered, and that what we take to be social facts are actually the product of discursive practices that have favored some perspectives over others, making them appear natural and inevitable (Schwandt, 1998). Constructivists are typically viewed as rejecting the realist ontology and objectivist notion of truth favored by postpositivists, instead subscribing to a relativist ontology, or the belief that reality is plural and exists as a set of "intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature . . . and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding [them]" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). Epistemologically speaking, constructivism operates under the belief that the "findings" of research are not actually *found*, but *created* through the investigator's interaction with the studied phenomenon. The researcher's identity and values cannot be excluded from the research process, and even if this were possible, it would not be desirable, as a researcher's humanity is precisely what endows her with the capacity for empathy, a prerequisite for understanding others' worlds (Baronov, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Furthermore, constructivists (especially feminist theorists) tend to be highly concerned with rapport in the research process. Although rapport certainly aids in a researcher's quest to understand how participants make meaning of events in their lives,

notions of respect, reciprocity, and compassion are more likely to be viewed not as simply a tool for data collection but as a moral imperative (Watson, 2009). Constructivists often view themselves as facilitators of "multivoiced reconstructions" of phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 2003, p. 260) and consciously attempt to avoid hegemonizing the perspectives of the individuals they study.

Taking a similar flyby of critical theory, we can say that this term is the signifier for a loose coalition of ideas whose origin can be traced back through the original Frankfurt School boys, to the earlier work of luminaries like Gramsci and Marx. In its most basic sense, critical theory foregrounds the existence of conflicts between social groups and attempts to work in the service of the marginalized (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). It is overtly political, arguing that all intellectual labor should proceed with the goal of trying to right some particular wrong. Early critical theory, taking its cue from Marx, considered much extant social theory to be too esoteric and lacking in power to effect material improvements in individuals' lives and instead emphasized scholarly work that produced obvious social action, and the movement still retains an activist flavor. However, critical theory has also been influenced by the work of postmodern thinkers (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Thus, an emphasis on discourse and its power in maintaining systems of dominance has emerged (Parker, 1998), and contemporary critical theorists are often engaged in projects that seek to deconstruct various cultural discourses to reveal the ways that symbolic practices operate to produce hegemony. While some would argue that the discursive turn has taken critical theory away from its activist roots, others would counter argue that deconstructing taken-for-granted notions is a necessary step in effecting social change, because altering discourse means altering the very way that people understand the world around them, which renders actions different from those taken in the status quo sensible.

Ontologically, critical theorists are generally argued to subscribe to a position of "historical realism" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 205), meaning a belief that individuals' understandings of reality are distorted because they have been shaped by ideological factors; thus, social structures that are taken as "real" are actually historically evolved

and are neither natural nor inevitable, but they are nevertheless real in their consequences. Epistemologically, Guba and Lincoln (1998) argue critical theorists to be in consort with constructivists in the belief that researchers and their values are inevitably intertwined with studied phenomena. Critical theorists engage their values both in their decisions about what questions to problematize and in their interactions with participants, whom they often wish to enlighten. They have been traditionally argued to subscribe to a foundationalist perspective, in the sense that they locate truth in social structures of oppression, which conceal this truth from the hapless actors who are caught in them, unable to see their oppression or perceive the misalignment between their own best interests and those of the system they have been socialized to uphold (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

Upon considering these descriptions, what has traditionally popped out as constituting the conflict between constructivism and critical theory (at least as I was taught in grad school) appears to be twofold and centers around the notions of ontology and research purpose. This simple characterization, however, raises some important questions.

First, does it really make sense to say that constructivism and critical theory have different "basic beliefs" with regard to ontology? Ontology refers to one's views about the nature of reality, and holding a realist ontology, in theory, simply means assuming that there is a reality out there, existing independently of any human who might wish to know about it. Despite descriptions of some new inquiry paradigms that would appear to argue to the contrary, it seems unlikely that many scholars of any stripe would oppose the basic notion that phenomena (broadly conceived) exist, regardless of whether we, as individual researchers, have any interaction with them or not. For example, it would seem foolish (not to mention highly egocentric) to assume that because I, as a social researcher, have never personally encountered any individuals living in Bangladesh and have no idea what they are up to in their corner of the world, that such individuals in fact do not exist and are not up to anything. Thus, most researchers would seem to be able to agree on the basic premise that there are objects, events, behaviors, and so forth going on in the world that exist external of any individual potential knower of

them. To argue that most practicing constructivists would not abide this position (whether one wants to call it an "ontologically realist" viewpoint or something else) would seem to indicate a misreading of what these scholars actually believe (Gergen, 2009). Indeed, many qualitative inquiry writers have suggested, explicitly or implicitly, that a realist ontology is not incompatible with constructivist views at all (e.g., Barkin, 2010; Burr, 1998, 2003; Crotty, 2003; Patomaki & Wright, 2000; Pernecky, 2012; Slife & Williams, 1995; Weinberg, 2008), and some have argued that adherence to a genuinely relativist ontology is not even really a marker of constructivism, but rather of solipsism (Pernecky, 2012).

Instead, what most qualitative scholars would emphasize is that what complicates social phenomena, as opposed to physical phenomena, is that the former have *meaning* (Loseke, 1999; Schwandt, 2003). If we accept symbolic interactionism's general, and not very controversial, premise that people act toward objects and situations in their world on the basis of the meanings those objects and situations hold for them, then we can easily see why both constructivists and critical theorists are interested in meaning. Constructivists are interested in understanding the way individuals and groups make sense of their world in localized, historicized moments, as they believe that consequences flow from these constructions. It is often their aim, through the research process, to help participants coconstruct new and more sophisticated understandings that will lead to courses of action that enhance their quality of life (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). One key aim of critical theorists, in turn, is to understand how social structures (e.g., class, race, gender) influence the way people make sense of their lives and choices (as, again, these constructions have consequences), and to help people to recognize the ways they unknowingly participate in systems of dominance and oppression. Thus, if we can agree that understanding meaning is central to the work of constructivists (by definition), as well as to that of many critical theorists, then what is called into question philosophically is not the nature of reality but the nature and consequences of meaning. The question of whether or not real things exist is different from the question of whether or not they have meaning and whether or not that meaning can be linked, through

compelling evidence and argumentation, to identi-fiable tangible or ideological outcomes, which may then be deemed positive or negative (although cer-tainly, all people involved may not agree on what a particular situation means, what outcomes appear to be flowing from it, or whether a given outcome is good or bad).

So is there a substantive difference with regard to ontology? It would seem that each perspective clearly 1) acknowledges the real existence of mul-tiple meanings and 2) views real consequences as flowing from those meanings.[1] Perhaps it is merely the language each perspective favors that causes the confusion. Constructivists tend to refer to "multiple realities," but the idea that human real-ity is characterized by "multiple meanings," which are all equally "real" in the sense that they are all actually held by individuals, probably better cap-tures the essence of their perspective. Similarly, the concept of "false consciousness," sometimes used by critical theorists, illustrates an awareness of the existence of at least two ways of looking at a given situation: an unenlightened view, in which people accept their circumstances as natural and inevitable, and an enlightened view in which peo-ple recognize the socially constructed nature of the system that constrains their life chances and make choices to oppose injustice. Both of these perspec-tives are clearly viewed as "real," in the sense that people actually subscribe to them, and they are also viewed as resulting in actual consequences, or there would be no purpose in attempting to rid people of "false consciousness." Again, it seems to be the expression that is problematic, as the term "false" is not being used to express the idea of "not real," but rather of "misinformed" or "failing to recognize one's own best interests." And constructivists must believe that there is some way to logically link indi-viduals' meaning-making activities with personal and social consequences. Otherwise, there would be no purpose in encouraging people to develop more informed and sophisticated constructions, as no positive consequences (not even internal ones in the minds of research participants) would ensue. Thus, both perspectives recognize the exis-tence of multiple constructions, and neither tends to be concerned with judging these constructions as "true or false," but rather as "better or worse," depending on the nature of the outcomes produced.

Both perspectives are less invested in truth than in consequences.[2]

The view that critical theory and constructivism differ radically with regard to research aims seems to be similarly overstated. As noted, critical theory focuses overtly on the critique and transformation of exploitative social structures whereas construc-tivism has traditionally claimed the more modest ground of seeking to understand people's inter-pretations of given phenomena and life situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), a position that has led it to garner criticism for "lacking a critical purchase" (Chambers, 2007, see also Schwandt, 1998). But such a cursory summation of this difference fails to capture the complexity of these two research approaches in practice. Although space does not permit an empirical analysis of recent acts of "doing" constructivism or critical theory, research philosophers have argued convincingly that current reasoning has brought the two perspectives closer together on this front. As Schwandt (2003) argues, today's practicing constructivists are far from apo-litical. Even prominent scholars hailing from the most extreme corners of the modern constructivist movement (say, Gergen or Denzin), who speak most vociferously about the lack of any foundations on which humans can securely base knowledge claims, often link their work to agendas of democracy or moral empowerment (Schwandt, 2003). Similarly, Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) argue that the influ-ence of the "postdiscourses" (i.e., postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other perspectives that have encouraged scholars to radically question and move beyond received views of knowledge production) has brought critical theory closer to constructivism because researchers have come to recognize even the act of research as being power driven and to be more reflexive about their role in the social web as constructers and evaluators of knowledge and as voices of authority. In most cases, this has not led them to slide down the slippery slope into moral abandon, as awakening to antifoundationalist rec-ognitions could theoretically lead some humans to do (McGettigan, 2000). Instead, most critical theo-rists have gracefully picked themselves up from the dust that fell when antifoundationalism brought the walls down, and have come to the conclusion that they need not embrace foundationalist thinking in order to pursue a liberatory agenda. This position

is given perhaps its most powerful philosophical explication in the work of Rorty (1989, 1999), who concluded, at the end of his life and after decades of deep thought about the matter, that social hope can be located not in God nor in science nor an any other foundational doctrine, but only in the pragmatic human urge to reach out to each other and to aid and comfort each other, in the best—if still bumbling—way we currently know how. Indeed, the new generation of antifoundationalist critical theorists has been active in creating a burgeoning literature on the need to relink knowledge production and moral reasoning (Belhassen, 2007; Caton, 2012; House & Howe, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003; Schwandt, 1996) because the absence of secure foundations for truth renders the human moral compass more important than ever.

For many of us working within the current "new paradigm" milieu, then, regardless of which particular badge of scholarly identity we may choose to bear, there is both a craving for justice, to bring about positive social change through our research activities, and also a recognition of our own limits and a drive for connection—the desire to reach out to others in our world, to respect their views and ways of making sense of the world, and to refuse the arrogant position of attempting to perform absolute adjudication between conflicting constructions of reality. These impulses exist in tension with one another, and therein, in my view, lies the rub.

But before I go any further, let me tell you the story of Jim.

Encountering Jim

In the spring of 2007, I set out to collect the final pieces of data for my doctoral project. As noted, my work focuses on the role of tourism in ideological production, and for my dissertation research, I was studying Semester at Sea (SAS, an American university study abroad program) in an attempt to understand how educational tourism might serve as a site of perpetuation or resistance to the hegemonic Western discourses identified by so many tourism media scholars that continue to position the non-Western world in colonialist terms, as exotic, sensual, servile, backward, dependent, and morally inferior. I considered several sources of data for my project, and my final task was to gather the

perspectives of SAS alumni through personal interviews. I wanted to understand how these individuals were making sense of the people, spaces, and cultures they had encountered while traveling.

Jim (a pseudonym) was one of several SAS alumni who was kind enough to share his story with me. I had scheduled to meet him on a sunny Saturday morning at a corner coffee shop near DePaul University. When I showed up there, I was greeted by a lanky, t-shirted guy in his mid-twenties who met me with a huge grin. Jim was immediately endearing. He told me about how Semester at Sea had completely changed his life: how meeting people all over the world had shaken up his white, middle class existence and made him realize racist assumptions he never knew he had harbored. He spoke of the kindness he encountered, as complete strangers offered to show him around their hometowns and share their cultures, inviting his group of friends home for dinner and sometimes even for overnight stays. Especially, he discussed how the trip had made him change directions in life and realize what, for him, would make for a meaningful existence. As he explained,

> Before the trip, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life. I guess I thought I'd travel, maybe get a job in Vail [the Colorado Rockies resort] and be a ski bum and then eventually buy a big house in the suburbs. But seeing families all over the world . . . really made me gain focus. . . . Looking back on my first stop, which was Cuba, [I got] invited into these people's home, and it was a one room place with a sink, and a toilet, with no shower, and I sat down in a room that just had these blankets piled up in the corner, and there were 20 people who lived there, in one room, and you have never seen such happy people. Their smiles were from ear to ear, and these kids—you could tell they were just thrilled, happy kids, and I wanted that. There's something about having that feeling in that room, and I thought, if I could somehow get to that point, then that's all I would really want.

Jim told me that now that he was finished with college he could not wait to meet the love of his life and start a family. I immediately begin mentally scrolling through the list of nice single girls I knew, wishing I could think of someone to set him up with. He was just that great: open, sincere—quite simply, the kind of guy anyone would want her best friend to end up with.

The problem, however, was that in some ways, Jim's reasoning patterns fell in line with just the sort of discourses I was hoping programs like Semester at Sea would upend. Although his opinions could never be characterized as obnoxious, he did tend to engage in certain problematic reasoning patterns, like romanticizing poverty. Although it was great that he recognized that poverty and misery are not the same thing, he seemed not to grasp the distinction between poverty and voluntary simplicity, the salient point being that the latter is a choice. Also, because of his strong views that traveling with organized programs while the ship was in port was "not what Semester at Sea is about" and that such workshops merely served as a crutch for the "less adventurous who can't open up," mediating what would otherwise be a direct cross-cultural experience, he seemed to miss out on a lot of the intellectual content of the trip, which would have served to frame the experience and help him to make sense of some of what he was witnessing. For example, Jim commented that it was hard to see the challenges that many residents of poorer nations face, but when I asked him how he made sense of such vast inequality, he answered that he supposed it was due to a lack of natural resources in these countries, combined with mismanagement and corruption on the part of their governments. Past colonial projects and current hegemonies were lost on him, despite the foregrounding of such issues in SAS's curriculum.

The critical theorist in me wanted to speak up when Jim offered his analysis of the state of the world—to fill in some of the gaps in his Swiss-cheesed shipboard education. I wanted to argue with him about the value of educator narratives in helping to frame international travel. I wanted to offer him a different view that might broaden his perspective. But I was loathe to scare him away. The constructivist in me feared he would think I did not find his perspective valid or valuable. I didn't want him to think I thought he was a bad person—which I didn't.[3] I sat there frozen. I took in all he had to say and told him how much I had enjoyed talking with him and how much I appreciated his participation in my study. And that was that.

Rethinking the Tension Between Constructivism and Critical Theory

My encounters with Jim and with the other participants in my study, as well as my engagement with the research philosophy literature regarding the evolving trajectories of constructivism and critical theory, have led me to an interesting realization about what is at stake between these two perspectives. Clearly, practitioners coming from both angles typically want to extend themselves in the service of others. The difference seems to lie in each's orientation regarding *how* to help.

Constructivism seems to approach caring as a matter of respecting autonomy. Emphasis is placed on respecting the conclusions that individuals' own experiences have led them to reach. There is also an emphasis on showing respect for the diverse *processes* through which people come to know the world. Constructivism's orientation toward care as respect for individuality and autonomy makes sense, given its close relationship with standpoint theories like feminism and critical race theory, which struggle against patriarchy, racism, and other forms of oppression. It is easy to imagine why, upon entrance to the academy, members of marginalized groups, whose ways of knowing had not previously been valued, would consider listening, exercising tolerance, and acknowledging the validity of others' perspectives to be key components of respect and caring.

Alternatively, critical theory seems to approach caring more as a matter of nurturing growth through information sharing. Communication on the part of the researcher is emphasized to enable individuals to begin to see their lives from perspectives they may not previously have been able to access. While critical theorists have historically had the troubling reputation of viewing social structures somewhat deterministically and believing themselves to hold the true knowledge of the inner workings of the world, which they must use to enlighten others, contemporary critical theory has, as noted, been very much influenced by the currents of postmodernism, which emphasize the endless interpretive possibilities that exist in the space where individual agents and structures collide. Thus, postmodern critical theorists are logically more likely to view working for social change as a dialogue, in which researchers, participants, and even readers of the written research report bring their own understandings to the encounter and deliberate with one another to encourage the development of perspectives that produce better (typically more just,

democratic, and compassionate) outcomes. This tendency toward viewing the research encounter as a dialogue between evolving perspectives is nicely encapsulated by a recently emergent series of approaches to social research, known variously as the participatory, participatory action, or deliberative democratic paradigms (see Heron & Reason, 1997; House & Howe, 1999; Howe, 2005), which represent a wedding of the constructivist commitment to noncoercive research practice to a growth- and action-oriented framework derived, in large measure, from the legacy of critical theory. Thus, the goal from both sides seems increasingly to be the forging of a social research approach that is reflexive, critically and politically oriented, and respectful of participants and their lived experiences.

Of course this is sticky in practice. I am reminded of a story from my childhood, from a book that I loved to read when I was around 11 or 12 by Barthe DeClements (1984), called *Seventeen and In Between*. In the book, one of the characters, Jack, who has dropped out of high school to work in the logging industry, relates a story to his best friend Elsie about a profound exchange he has had with a local shaman. The exchange occurred when Jack and the shaman went walking in the woods, and upon approaching a tree, the shaman asked Jack which way he planned to go around it. Jack, confused, replied that he supposed he would go to the right. The shaman suggested he go to the left and then asked Jack if Jack thought the shaman had any right to be telling him which way to go around the tree. Jack concluded that he did not, an answer that pleased the shaman, although the two pondered the idea that perhaps the shaman had special knowledge and was trying to prevent Jack from harming himself by going the wrong way. Elsie recalls the story later when she catches herself about to pass judgment on one of her classmate's behaviors, and as such, the story provides a nice message for young readers about tolerance and the importance of allowing others to live their lives as they see fit. It still resonates with me so many years later, though, because in truth, I can see both sides of the story. I prize my autonomy, but I am not sure I would like to break my ankle tripping over a tree root if someone could have foreseen my fall and suggested I take a different route around the tree. One person's savior is another's imperialist.

So where does this leave Jim and me? Was I showing good, constructivist respect for his perspective by keeping quiet when I found his reasoning problematic? Was I merely weaseling out of creating conflict with someone I could tell was a kind human being? Was the weaseling worth it to maintain rapport? I am reminded here of Shuman's (2006) warning (cited in Watson, 2009) that an empathetic approach can end up "serving the interests of the empathizer rather than the empathized" (p. 153).

How would Jim have reacted for the rest of the interview if I had suggested, however gently, that his way of interpreting his travel experiences was in some way linked to oppression? Would he have become defensive and closed himself off to me? How would he have felt if I had "saved up" my feelings in this regard and then, after listening supportively for 2 hours to his analysis of his experiences, hit him up with my take on things. Would he have felt betrayed?

I firmly believe that critical analyses of travel like those I attempt, which include deconstructing the ways tourists make sense of what they encounter, are important for the world—that they can be vital contributions to a broader discourse that seeks to advance equality and compassion. But if, in pursuit of this goal, I prioritized rapport in order to access Jim's perspective, validating it with my silence, without also creating an opportunity through which Jim could individually grow with regard to his own views of the world, then was I using him unfairly? Are the students who give their time and energy to talk to me about their experiences merely the eggs that must be cracked to create the greater omelet of social change?

What's even worse is that I benefit individually from the situation: I get to have a smooth, enjoyable, conflict-free interview exchange about a topic of interest to me, and I get to make a living writing up the research report. In this regard, I am reminded of Bono's wise words from U2's Zoo TV era in the early 1990s: "Every artist is a cannibal, every poet is a thief. They all kill their inspiration and then sing about their grief." I publish my report, society is a smidge better off, and I get a paycheck (at last, now that a university has finally "bought me" from the ham hock booth), but is all of this in some way at Jim's expense—at the cost of his own

growth because, in wanting to validate him and his perspective, and in wanting to gather data successfully, I failed to tell him what *my* experience has led *me* to know about the world? Should the research encounter be pedagogical?

A supportive colleague, older and wiser than me, once made the comment upon hearing this story that it is important to remember that personal growth takes a long time. Sometimes simply planting the seed through an interview conversation can cause individuals to reflect on their own over time. After all, as Bruner (2005) tells us, we are always making sense of what has happened to us over and over throughout the course of our lives, always in new contexts as we mature and our situations change. Thus, there is cause to champion a subtle approach in which gentle prodding, which may be hardly noticeable at the time, can have wonderful effects in the long run. I worry about such reasoning becoming an excuse in my own research or teaching, however—an opportunity for me to be lazy or to hide from conflicts and uncomfortable situations in the name of wanting to "respect" others by letting them figure things out for themselves.[4] Finding the line between being a pedagogical slacker and an overbearing zealot can be harder than it seems. Did I do right by Jim? By the world, for its greater good? I wish I knew, but years later, I still have no answers.

Notes

[1]These ideas are key elements in a perspective that has been expressed by some scholars as "critical realism" (see Patomaki & Wright, 2000), and they also bear affinities with pragmatism (see Rorty, 1989, 1999), but in the interest of preventing confusion, I am opting not to open these cans of worms in the present discussion.

[2]Again, some readers may recognize this as a classic pragmatist position, but again, fully contextualizing this argument in pragmatism would go well beyond the space available here.

[3]See Bott (2010), for an excellent account of how our like or dislike of research participants can shape data collection outcomes.

[4]See Brogden and Patterson (2007) for an excellent discussion on this tension.

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