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THE ARC OF RESEARCH

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Most children of my generation, or perhaps any, do not grow up saying, "I want to be a professor." The young may choose some professions because they are exciting or intriguing—"I want to play outfield for the Los Angeles Dodgers" or "I want to be a cop and chase bad guys." They also may enjoy a craft or contemplate an idea: "I like to build stuff," or "I wonder why there are earthquakes, like, what causes the earth to shake?" Most of us, however, probably do not have a very clear idea of what we want to choose as a profession until we graduate from high school. We are busy simply growing up.

Those who choose the academic life may have a few characteristics in common. We like to read. Social scientists probably like to write. We are usually good students, and we enjoy school. We may not be loners, but we need time alone. And we generally enjoy delving deeply into a topic that fascinates or puzzles us. Beyond those gross characteristics, we do not have many commonalities that mark us as likely to consider the academic profession for a career; there also are many examples of individuals who are exceptions to the rule—they do not like to be alone, they were not good students, and the like.

Some of us also do not choose the academic profession; the academic profession chooses us. Were it not for a letter that was eventually found, I may have ended up as a psychiatric social worker. If I were not gay, perhaps I would have become a politician. A few years after

I completed my doctorate at Stanford, I had the odd possibility of becoming a college president. I suppose playing outfield for the Dodgers was never a viable option, though.

Our academic identity also gets shaped not only by who we are, but also where we are, and with whom we work and live. After a brief stop as a postdoctoral scholar for 2 years in Boulder, Colorado, I have held two academic positions—one at The Pennsylvania State University and the other, where I currently reside, at the University of Southern California. Although both institutions are large research universities, as I will explain, they are remarkably different in tone, texture, and context. How I have seen myself as an academic has changed over time not only because of my own changing interests, but also because of the contexts in which I work. The result is that my research has been a mixture of constancy and change.

Thus, when I look back on the arc of my academic life, I find a great deal of consistency, regardless of the significant changes I have undergone as I have learned more, studied more, and found some issues more interesting than others to pursue. In what follows, I first offer a prelude to the core of my academic life. The prelude focuses on three points that have probably played a great deal in how I have seen myself as an academic. The core of the text talks about the various projects I have undertaken. I have divided this core into two parts—people and ideas. The text concludes

with conjecture about the arc of research and what it might portend for others who think about becoming or are academics.

PRELUDE: READING, SOCIAL ACTION, AND DIFFERENCE

Reading (and Writing)

Many of my childhood memories revolve around reading. When I was in kindergarten, the *New York Times* was too big to hold in my hands, so I read it on the floor of our kitchen as my mother made breakfast. Actually, what I first read were the scores on the sports pages. My older brothers always talked sports. I wanted to be in the swing of things, so I figured I had an advantage if I knew that the Dodgers beat the Giants before they knew. As my mother raced around the kitchen, she peppered me with questions— "Who hit a home run?" "Who was the winning pitcher?"—and I tried to make out the names so I could give her the answers. A year or two later, I started to read the page that had news in brief. Most of it was boring, but I also was able to talk to my father when he arrived at the breakfast table. Reading was fun! I was like a big kid.

In school, I not only read the books they gave us, but I also read everything my aunts sent to me for birthdays and holidays. I worked my way through *The Hardy Boys* mysteries and eventually graduated to *Sherlock Holmes.* By the time I was in high school, reading was an activity I did for fun. I never really thought about it; I just knew that I liked to read, and eventually to write.

At Tufts University, I majored in English at a time, the 1970s, when people did not worry about jobs. No one cautioned me that I would be unemployed if I *just* read literature and wrote, and I loved reading books with people who also loved reading. I also was at college during a time when we had almost no requirements and we could take whatever we wanted to study. I spent 4 years reading and not doing very much science or math.

Even people who do not like to read find the Peace Corps a time where one must read. As volunteers, we had so much time alone that we read everything we could get our hands on. The journal I started to write in college became a constant companion where I jotted down observations and tried to puzzle out what I was experiencing as a 21-year-old middle-class Peace Corps volunteer living in the Muslim country of Morocco.

Social Action (and Listening)

Neither my parents nor my brothers were particularly political. I did not grow up in one of those families where the parents were labor organizers or had joined the Communist Party in the 1950s. I do not recall my brothers being particularly outspoken against the Vietnam War and they were not Freedom Riders. We were against the war, for civil rights, in support of labor unions, but it all seemed much less of a political decision than a moral one.

What I do remember are endless conversations about helping the poor and that our lives had to be dedicated to improvement and service to others. Or rather, I grew up in a typical Irish Catholic family where the parents came from poor families in Brooklyn. The point seemed to be less political action and more of a focus on individual acts toward those less fortunate. I did not have a very good understanding of the economic causes of poverty, but I did learn that I had a responsibility toward others.

In high school and then in college, I worked actively against the war. My friends and I participated constantly in speak-outs, marches, and protests. I applied to be a conscientious objector, and when drafted, my father, my eighth-grade teacher—Sister Mary Luke—and my high school American history teacher supported my application. I pointed out that both of my brothers had served in the Peace Corps and I intended to as well, but I was not going to kill people in an unjust war. I got the deferment.

Prior to entering Stanford as a PhD student, I worked in three locations that shaped my research life. I worked my way through college at a homeless shelter, first doing the graveyard shift, and then working evenings and weekends. The day I went to the Pine Street Inn for my interview was a typically bitterly cold Boston morning. I opened the front door of the decrepit building and almost ran away—the combination of the shelter's smell and the cigarette smoke revolted me. Over time, however, I enjoyed going there. Pine Street gave homeless men, who were largely alcoholics, drug addicts, or mentally unstable, a place to stay warm and get a bit of health care. The men were a mélange of White, Black, Irish, Latino, Native American, teenagers,

working class, and senior citizens. With my ponytail and bookish looks, I stood out and at first was overwhelmed. Eventually, when I came to work, one of the regulars would call out, "Look who's here. Do you know what's in front of a ponytail, Tierney?" And one of his friends would reply, "A horse's ass, that's what!" Pine Street was a subway ride and a world away from Tufts University, and I enjoyed both worlds. I didn't realize it at the time, but what I liked best about the shelter was listening to people's stories and learning that their lives were not that different from mine.

When I joined the Peace Corps, I asked to be put in a town that was far away from cities. I ended up in a Berber village in the Atlas Mountains. Many of the villagers had never seen a foreigner before, much less an American. To get to Tahala, I took the train from Fes that went to the Algerian border; the train slowed down at Sidi Abjelil, and those embarking then jumped off the moving train and raced to see who would get one of the rare spots on the dilapidated van going 30 kilometers down the dirt road to my village. I got very good at jumping and running.

The poverty that I witnessed was something I had never experienced before—children walked to school without shoes and had only bread to eat. We had running water only for a few hours in the morning. People acted differently from anything I had ever seen—women wore veils and men walked hand in hand in the center of town. My beginner's Arabic reduced me to uttering incomprehensible phrases that had children and adults laughing at me. I eventually figured out how to communicate, and I also learned a different lesson from what I thought I had discovered at the homeless shelter: People were very different from me. What I believed was correct about sexual roles—women's liberation was in full force by the time I had graduated—was anathema to my friends in Tahala. Thus, some people were very different from me after all, but I still enjoyed talking with them and learning from them.

Finally, after picking up a master's degree at Harvard, I spent 2 years on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. I saw a different kind of poverty, a different kind of desperation, and a different kind of strength. Social problems plagued us at the Native American community college where I worked, and I had to learn to listen in a way that I had not done before. "Take your time" a tribal elder once told me. "You will not solve anything if you think you have the answers to everything. Listen to us."

I did not understand what he meant at first—I had lots of youthful ideas about how to make the college better—but over time I realized that I simply could not rush in and do things "my way."

Difference (and Identity)

I grew up in an upper-middle-class suburb of New York. Virtually all of the students at Horace Greeley High School not only planned on graduating from high school, but we all intended to go to 4-year institutions. Since my older brothers had gone to college, the question for me was not "Would I go to college?" but "Where would I go?" We had one African American student and a handful of Asian Americans in my graduating class. Tufts University was a bit more diverse, but not much. Because I said I was willing, my African American roommate and I were one of 12 "experiments" in biracial rooming in 1971. At the end of the year, 11 of them had failed, but Eddie and I remained friends.

Pine Street, Morocco, and North Dakota were experiences in encountering difference, and I would not be who I am today if I had not had these experiences. The even larger issue for me, however, was about sexual identity. I am not really sure at what point I knew I was gay, but I was not out until I entered graduate school. Anyone of my age who is out will have endless stories of the processes of coming out—to one's friends, colleagues, and family. Part of the work I did in graduate school was undoubtedly shaped by my wanting not simply to understand difference and the "other," but to understand and come to terms with my own difference. Being gay, just as any marker of identity, has shaped not simply who I am, but how I see the world. Insofar as writing and research is a large part of my world, it would be specious to think that my sexual identity has not informed my work.

Indeed, my point in this admittedly personal prelude is not to glorify one or another aspect of my life prior to and during doctoral work, but to underscore how much one's identity and experiences shape the arc of one's research. I am not saying that all researchers were impacted by learning to love to read in a manner similar to myself, or that a concern for social justice is a necessary ingredient for a social scientist. But we do not enter the academic life as a blank slate, and if we are to speak of one's research career, by necessity, an

individual's past experiences and encounters are a foundational ingredient in understanding that research.

THE ACADEMIC CORE: IDEAS AND PEOPLE

Cultural Ideas, Critical Ideas

In graduate school, I became interested in the culture of an organization—specifically, an educational organization. Organization culture, as a theoretical construct, was just becoming a booming area of research in organizational theory, but there was very little written about the culture of an educational organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). I spent a great deal of time immersing myself in the anthropological literature, and of consequence, also began to write about typically anthropological concepts—rituals, rites of passage, socialization, symbolism—but I looked at them in schools, colleges and universities (Douglas, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Gluckman, 1962; Hymes, 1974; Spindler, 1982; Wax, 1986; Wolcott, 1973).

Although I still frequently use the organization as the unit of analysis, I began to turn away from a strictly cultural framework, in large part because the work did not account very well for diachronic processes—how organizations change—and was even less useful for thinking about difference—how different kinds of people experience, adapt to, and change the organization. That is, organizational culture seemed to emphasize how to marshal individuals into similar processes, outcomes, and mind-sets, but was less useful for accounting for how the organization might support a diversity of ideas and people (Tierney, 1987a, 1987b, 1988).

At the same time that I was working my way through the literature on culture, I also immersed myself in who was currently avant garde, especially amongst graduate students in the social sciences—Michel Foucault; Jacques Lacan; Jacques Derrida; and most importantly for my area of inquiry, Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Foucault, 1970, 1982, 1995). Ultimately, the post-structuralists and postmodernists did not have enough currency for me, in large part because their work seemed so divorced from everyday practices; they seemed mainly unconcerned with issues of inequality except on a strictly theoretical level, and even though I spent a great deal of time reading the anthropological literature, my major focus remained on education.

Pierre Bourdieu, however, was and remains a guiding light for me. Bourdieu wrote about culture, symbolism, and a host of other issues in a revolutionary manner that was quite different from American social scientists, such as James Coleman. I was lucky enough to read Bourdieu slightly before he became well-known, and so I became acquainted with his wealth of ideas in a way that enabled me to think about traditional concepts—socialization and the like—in a different manner from what was being written in the standard educational journals.

Perhaps the academic life is always exciting for those who encounter new literatures and are able to come up with new ideas or new ways of thinking about particular intellectual puzzles. However, academic life is also punctuated by moments of intellectual ferment, where multiple authors work on a problem, and even if one's work has just begun or is at the margins, there is a certain excitement about being part of "it." The "it" in the 1980s was a struggle over representation and the text—how the author got configured, how texts got drawn up and represented in ways that either misrepresented those under study or simply left the research subjects' views of the world out of the analysis. The work of Renato Rosaldo, Paul Rabinow, James Clifford, and—most importantly—Clifford Geertz was another intellectual explosion for me (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973, 1983; Rabinow, 1977; Rosaldo, 1989). Now I was simultaneously struggling not merely with how to theoretically analyze a research setting, but also how to write about that setting.

The literature on narrative, as well as my own investigations into educational problems, led me to critical theory and a deliberation about ultimately what kind of academic I wanted to be (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Tierney, 1991a; Tierney & Kidwell, 1991; Wright & Tierney, 1991). For many of us, academic life is always a quest, from the first day on the tenure track to the final day before retirement, about the question of what kind of academic we wish to be. Any academic I have grown to admire always seems plagued by self-doubt. The point is not that one should be crippled by doubt, but that when one reads and writes and observes, one discovers not how much we know, but how much one does *not* know. The ability to say

anything of worth with certainty seems anathema, whether one is a positivist or a social constructionist. Some of us may argue that our work should be about answering definitively this or that question, and others may charge that such proof is impossible, but surely most researchers agree how hard it is to speak about anything with absolute certainty. Our lives are dominated by doubt, and to a certain extent our research agendas are attempts to come to terms with it.

Critical theory seemed like a natural outgrowth of all of the theoretical work I had done up to that point. Critical theorists had used a version of a cultural lens to study problems, and they were principally concerned with structures of power that fostered inequality (Giddens, 1982; Giroux, 2001; Gramsci, 1996; Habermas, 1975). Unlike many of those in the postmodern camp, critical theorists believed in social change. The arguments over representation and the text seemed almost naturally tied to a theoretical structure that talked about hegemony, false consciousness, and those who were rendered voiceless. And too, critical theory, like much of the other work I had concentrated on—organizational culture, symbolism, socialization, postmodernism, cultural and social capital—had not been well represented in the higher education literature. I had found areas, then, that were intellectually exciting to me and not well researched in my own field (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993).

Much of my work has been an attempt to understand social structures and the theoretical underpinnings of one or another theory and apply those frameworks to educational settings. I admit that in general I have found great intellectual excitement in disciplines other than education, in large part because too much of our work in education is theoretically vapid or a rehash of what I thought of as outdated theories.

Finally, as I discuss below, my more recent work has settled in two areas that are more directly linked to public policy—notions of the public good and privatization (Tierney, 2006; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Over time, I have become less interested in theoretical issues, although they still dominate the way I approach issues, and more concerned with enacting changes aimed at increasing educational equity and lessening inequality (Tierney & Colyar, 2009). How the state defines what are legitimate public policy concerns and what is rightly an area that should be assumed by the private sector are issues that necessitated that I utilize the literatures on the public good and privatization.

Although these admittedly diverse literatures may present an intellectual trajectory that is more helter-skelter than linear and neatly defined, the portrait I have sketched here accurately portrays how I have found my way to write about what I write about. Some individuals could have productively spent their academic lives in any one of these literatures, or even a subfield of an area, but that is not how I have configured my work. Oftentimes individuals come upon one intellectual part of me—critical theory, for example—and are unaware of those other parts. Others do not understand how I on the one hand can write about the importance of life history in order to hear the voices of the powerless (Tierney, 2010) and on the other hand utilize analytical frameworks that argue for a vibrant private sector (Hentschke, Lechuga, & Tierney, 2010).

Walt Whitman (1983), America's greatest bard, famously wrote, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself, I am large. I contain multitudes" (p. 72). A social scientist runs a risk in making such a statement, because the comment not only acknowledges contradiction, but celebrates it. I am not sure that my work contradicts itself, but the trajectory certainly is not clear to a casual observer. As I have made sense of my work, however, I find a consistency that harkens back to the points I raised in the prelude. My love of reading, a concern for social justice, and a coming to terms with diversity have guided virtually every intellectual twist and turn I have taken. What has given this intellectual arc meaning is the people that have driven it, and to this I now turn.

People, Voices

I have never done any work pertaining to prison populations. I offer this comment because perhaps if I had worked in a prison rather than a homeless shelter or an American Indian reservation, then perhaps my research would have been different. Perhaps if I had not learned so much when I lived abroad as a Peace Corps volunteer, I would not have sought out Fulbrights and scholarships in Asia for my sabbaticals, and again my interest in globalization might have been muted. I do not know. What I do know is that my personal and professional relationships have helped shape my research.

My first funded research project looked at the challenges Native American students face in college (Badwound & Tierney, 1988; Tierney, 1991b, 1992; Tierney & Kidwell, 1991; Wright & Tierney, 1991). More recently, I have looked at how homelessness impacts educational opportunity (Tierney, Gupton, & Hallett, 2008). I have spent a great deal of time investigating issues of concern to students and faculty of color (Tierney, 1993a; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996).

I also have written about issues of concern to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. I investigated policies that might be utilized to create more gay-friendly campuses; I also wrote about gay students and faculty, a colleague who was suffering and died from AIDS, and about my own experiences as a gay academic (Tierney, 1993a, 1993b, 1997a). Many of us who might be considered on the margins, especially in the social sciences, have a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, a great deal of the narrative literature I referred to above speaks about the importance of standpoints, and much of the research on postmodernism highlights the difficulty, if not impossibility, of understanding those who are "the other." Insofar as my work rejected positivism and worked against essentialist notions of identity, it seemed incumbent upon me to look at those with whom I identify—queer people. At the time, there was very little about gay issues in education and even less about higher education (Tierney, 1999b). On the other hand, I have struggled against being categorized as the gay delegate to a group and nothing else. Nam Le, a young Vietnamese Australian novelist, has made a similar statement in his elegant collection of short stories, *The Boat* (2008). The first story is about a young man who is Vietnamese, but he then writes stories "against the grain" that have nothing to do with his identity. In doing so, he is affirming who he is, but also pointing out the range of his interests. Simply because I am gay ought not to mean that my research and work become compartmentalized in that area and that area alone. We know that identity is a fluid construct and that individuals have multiple components to their identity. Accordingly, I have worked against simply having my own intellectual self reduced to that gay part of me and nothing else.

Again, I am not criticizing individuals who have spent their research lives studying and researching those with whom they identify—be it a queer academic who studies queer issues, a feminist who looks at women's issues, or an African American scholar focused solely on concerns for African Americans. Indeed, without those of us on the margins looking at ourselves, a case can be made that we would either have continued to be overlooked or our lives would have continued to be grossly distorted. Nevertheless, how one responds to one's background, as I suggested above, is never unidirectional, never predetermined. My interests have transcended one group or one issue. That is not to say that everyone's foci should be the same as mine, but each individual needs to decide. Such an observation is central to my purpose here, and I will return to it in the conclusion.

More recently I have become involved with low-income high school students (Tierney & Colyar, 2009; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). The interest grows out of research I have done pertaining to increasing access to college. These students also underscore an issue I have not heretofore raised, one I do not hear discussed very much, and that has to do with intellectual boredom. When I was a graduate student, I was in awe of the faculty I worked with, who seemed to have read everything, whereas I had read nothing. Most of my fellow graduate students and I found our way to a speed-reading course because it took us so long to read all the texts the professors said we needed to read, as well as the other texts we wanted to read.

Over time, I realized that I cannot read all texts or cover all subjects. Unlike many of my colleagues, however, my interests are broad, not only because I like looking for connections across various disciplines, traditions, and people, but also because I grow weary of repetition. Again, a dichotomy exists with such a statement. The challenge of the academic, in part, is not unlike that of the athlete. Repetition is important if we are to gain strength in running, weightlifting, or virtually any other sport. We also need to be able to do the routine enough that we do not make mistakes or forget what to do. However, routinized tasks rarely lead to intellectual breakthroughs. There is a very big difference between an elite athlete who goes through a routine in a conscious manner, where he or she demonstrates intense concentration, and one who sleepwalks through the routine.

High school students and undocumented students (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005) have been new groups for me to learn from in ways that gay college students, Native American faculty, or any

of the other groups with whom I have worked are not. The ethnographic eye in part demands that the observer try to make sense of situations with which he or she is not particularly accustomed. The anthropologist who returns to the research site year after year certainly affords particular constancy to his or her data but also runs the risks of "knowing" behavior simply because of familiarity. I have attempted, then, two tasks. I still read literatures with which I have been conversant for a generation, and I work with groups with whom I am deeply familiar. I also have expanded my repertoire in order to try to make sense of situations with which I am unaccustomed. I like to think that such actions have made me a better researcher.

I also mentioned in the prelude that context matters. I live in a city that is deeply divided by race and class. The schools in Los Angeles are abysmal. The fiscal situation in the schools, city, and state have made a difficult situation that much worse. Given what I have stated about a concern for social justice, it would be odd, I suppose, if I merely studied issues without attempting to change them. My work in the schools, then, has not only been as an outlet for me to sharpen my analytical skills; I also have worked with schools as a way to utilize my understanding of critical theory and to put into play the conditions for change, not simply on a larger policy level, but also on a daily level with the students with whom I come into contact.

I have delayed a discussion about method until now, in large part because I have long believed that one's ontological and epistemological views of the world shape the method one chooses to employ in a research investigation, and not vice versa. I am frequently troubled when a graduate student, for example, tells me he or she wants "to do an ethnography," as if the method is preeminent, and all else falls into one's methodological framework. Regardless of the method one chooses to use, it must follow from the theoretical framework from which one works. Even my colleagues who say they simply want to solve a problem by using the newest quantitative measures are implicitly working from a theoretical framework. No research is atheoretical. The literature that I read led me to qualitative research (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1959, 1974; Heath, 1983; Spindler, 1997; Wolcott, 1970). If one spends his or her time in anthropology, for example, the

presumption is that when one studies culture, the method one will employ is some version of qualitative inquiry, in large part because we base our understandings of the world on social constructionist frameworks. The work of Geertz and the others questioned how a researcher represented data, but there was never a question that qualitative methods were the tools at one's disposal. Postmodernism and critical theory also support qualitative inquiry. Thus, it would have been odd, though not impossible, if I had used quantitative measures to understand phenomena, based on my theoretical presuppositions.

Throughout much of my academic life, we have had a methodological cold war between quantitative and qualitative scholars (Rist, 1977). This argument has not been of much interest to me, although I have been impacted by the debates. There are so many problems in the world, and I have had so much trouble simply understanding my own theoretical and methodological notions, I have not found critiquing those who do other forms of research very useful. I certainly believe the U.S. Department of Education's strategy is flawed to only countenance quantitative research, but I cannot be troubled if one or another agency chooses a particular doctrinaire path to go down. Methodological purists of either persuasion have intellectual interests different from mine. My time has been taken up more with using a method to understand a problem based on a theoretical formulation, rather than writing about method as an end unto itself. More recently, I have written with a colleague about the utility of qualitative research for public policy (Tierney & Clemens, in press), as I have tried to demonstrate the need for understanding the contexts and deep meanings of social situations, whether they be in high schools or about particular issues, such as homelessness.

Qualitative research also reflects those characteristics I pointed out in the prelude. I grew up in an Irish Catholic family where talk—a lot of it—was the norm. In Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996), he comments at one point how he and his brother found it amazing how much of their lives were consumed by talk. My brothers and I make the same point about our family. Conversation, whether it was about the morning's news or at the dinner table about what happened at school that day, formed a large part of my childhood. And too, the experiences

I mentioned that helped shape my life were informed by a fascination with the stories that people told to me—whether they were homeless men at Pine Street, Muslin schoolteachers in Tahala, or tribal elders in North Dakota.

Perhaps because reading was so central in my formative years, trying to figure out not only how to listen correctly, but also how to craft a text, became paramount. Thus, I have written a fair amount about the role of the author in a text, and I have experimented with various texts (Tierney, 1997b, 1999a, 2002). In order to experiment, I have had to develop ideas about the role of the author and how narrative issues such as the temporal nature of the text and the use of the first person or third person changes a text. I also have focused on underutilized methods, such as life history and cultural biography, to explore their utility in helping us understand a particular problem (Tierney & Colyar, 2009).

Although by the time I was in graduate school we used the computer to write our papers and dissertations, the revolution in technology had not yet taken hold. The technological contexts of the academic lives of my colleagues and me have probably been more transformative than at any other time in the last century. How we communicate and to whom we communicate have gone through a revolution. Those scholars who wrote about narrative in the 1980s were more concerned with how we presented texts, but the manner of presentation was relatively clear. Texts appeared in paper versions of books in university presses and scholarly journals. If one wrote a blog (perhaps then known as a journal), the impression would likely have been that the writer was a narcissist and not a serious scholar. Scholars concentrated on writing academic prose, and there was very little concern for writing to groups different from other academics.

I have become increasingly disenchanted with writing in only one register—academic prose. Accordingly, I have penned a fair number of texts intended to aid high school counselors and teachers in improving college-going rates for low-income youth (e.g., Luna De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003; Tierney & Kezar, 2006). I also have developed newsletters and a website (http://www.usc.edu/dept/chepa) concerned more with providing immediate information to individuals who are on the "front lines" of academic work, rather than those who are my academic colleagues. Some of my books are in more popular presses in order to reach a different audience from my academic confreres, and more recently I have written op-eds for national news outlets as a way to engage with larger publics. Over the last year or two, a blog (www.21stcenturyscholar.org) also has enabled me to write for individuals on a number of topics that have not warranted full-scale research articles but hopefully are provocative.

Thus, people and their voices have shaped my voice and writing. I have undertaken research on groups and individuals that either predated my life as an academic or somehow fit within a specific intellectual concern. I have learned from them, and I have tried to enable my work to contribute to change that helps create a more equitable world. I have come to realize that the conclusions I develop need to be crafted in multiple ways. I still write research articles that will be blind-reviewed by colleagues to help me sort through where my intellectual or methodological weaknesses lie. But I also write for mainstream media and popular outlets in order to make my work broadly available to practitioners, policy makers, and the larger public. Such attempts have forced me to learn and speak in a language other than that which is popular in the rarefied atmosphere of the academy. To be sure, the attempts are not always successful, but as with other new challenges, I learn from trying to undertake new assignments, rather than simply continuing to repeat what I know.

EPILOGUE: THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

A prelude for this essay was easy enough to write because I lived it. The same is true with the core. But what can I say in an epilogue in a paper about the arc of research when that arc is not near completion? I also run the risk of academic idiosyncrasy. If the reader has responded to this text as if the points I have made are to be followed by all researchers, then I have failed. I am not suggesting, for example, that all researchers need to have grown up in a family of readers or that everyone needs to have an overt concern with social justice in a manner that I have tried to do. Neither am I suggesting that the paths I have chosen for publishing, nor the multiple literatures that I have read, are the necessary model for

aspiring academics. Rather than prescriptions for academic work based on an "n" of 1, I have offered these autobiographical comments in large part to provoke reflection on the part of the reader, to ask him or her four questions:

1. How Do You Feel About Learning?

I have phrased this question in a manner to avoid a simplistic dichotomy—I like or don't like learning. My presumption is that most, if not all, researchers enjoy scholarship and learning. But not everyone will approach learning as I have over the course of my career. I have read in multiple areas that span multiple disciplines. Obviously, not everyone has, or needs to, focus in such a manner. Vincent Tinto, for example, has spent the larger part of his scholarly career focused on sociologically driven theories of student retention in higher education (Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1987, 2010). Narrative structure, postmodernism, or a more diverse array of organizational topics has not been of paramount importance to him. Similarly, Yvonna Lincoln has spent a large part of her academic life thinking about theory and its implications for qualitative methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Practical concerns about a particular topic have not been her primary focus. Linda Hagedorn, however, has done the reverse: Her work has been concerned with how to improve various aspects of community colleges and she has been less involved with theoretical issues or topics related to knowledge production in research universities (Hagedorn, 2005, 2010).

My point here is not to suggest that any of these scholars are in any way deficient or somehow come up short because they did not choose a path similar to mine. Indeed, they are not only colleagues and friends, they are also well-respected academics at the top of their fields. I mention these colleagues because their choices have been different from mine. Regardless of the path one chooses, a scholar needs to ferret out his or her relationship to learning. Some individuals will prefer to stick with one topic and analyze every aspect of it throughout their academic career. Others will be more concerned with theory, policy, or practice. And still others will have interests that range over multiple fields. The choice, obviously, is up to the individual, but I am highlighting here that what one decides about how one feels about learning is a choice. The answer will impact the scholarship he or she produces.

Individuals need to choose the manner in which they conduct their scholarship, rather than have it thrust upon them or accept topics at random. Without a well-conceived idea about one's attitude toward learning, an individual runs the risk of lacking definition and writing texts that, over the course of a career, fail to make an impact. A scholar's work is successful in part due to the elegance of the formulation of the idea and design, but a single text generally is not what changes a field or makes for successful scholarship. Rather, the arc of one's research extends for a great deal of time, and how one defines that learning arc enables individuals to at least have a chance at making an impact in a manner that he or she desires.

2. How Do You Feel About Difference?

As in the late 20th century, for the foreseeable future, diversity will remain an issue in social science in general and education in particular. Such an observation does not imply that everyone needs to focus on issues of diversity, although that is certainly one possibility. But because issues of diversity are so fundamental, one needs to come to grips with the topic. Again, I am not saying that because I lived in Morocco or because I am gay that I have a step up on others or that because a scholar holds a particular identity, he or she has a better understanding of a topic than another.

I do, however, subscribe to the notion that one's standpoint is important to acknowledge and that that standpoint has the potential to shape the way one conducts research. Obviously, there are scholars who reject the idea that the subject position of the author should in any way influence either the choice of topic or the manner in which research gets conducted. My point here is not to make an ardent defense of standpoint theory, but instead, to suggest that regardless of one's position, individuals need to be clear about their positions. What concerns me is not the positivist who may well reject the idea that an African American scholar has particular insights into the challenges African American students face, but rather the scholar who simply avoids such issues altogether and never answers the question for him- or herself.

Similarly, I am not advocating that individuals—as scholars—need to go through a checklist of positions as if they are preparing a voter's guide: what is your position on gay marriage, what is your position on affirmative action, and the like. Rather, scholars need to grapple with issues such as difference on epistemological and ontological levels, to determine the shape their research will take and what they will not focus on over the course of their careers. Their ideas also may evolve; these are not simply questions we ask ourselves at the start of our careers, but instead, they are questions we continually need to return to and answer based on new knowledge and contexts. To be sure, as I have suggested in my own background, how one lives one's life and one's experiences in growing up have the potential to play a role in shaping one's approach to difference. How we think about diversity and difference on a theoretical level also will influence how we live our lives on a daily level, both as scholars as well as citizens. But I am less concerned with the daily position that one chooses to take and am more concerned that scholars think about their theoretical perspectives on these issues.

3. How Do You Feel About Writing?

Academic writing is a particular brand of discourse that does not come naturally to a young scholar. One learns the craft just as any craft is learned—through practice; trial and error; and a version of an apprenticeship, where a younger scholar works with a more senior scholar and eventually embarks on his or her own. Commonsensically, writing is an essential part of the academic life, and every individual comes to the profession with a unique perspective. Writing is fun for some and a struggle for others; some may be more comfortable writing in an informal register, but heretofore, academic scholarship needed to reflect particular rules about what counts as scholarly writing.

The challenge today is both exciting and daunting. On the one hand, as I suggested above, many more possibilities exist than in the past with regard to how one chooses to communicate. Individuals are no longer limited to strictly academic texts if they want to have people read their work. On the other hand, academic writing adheres to particular rules, and to learn those rules takes time and effort. To be told that one ought to learn not simply one form of writing

but many forms can overwhelm an individual, such that writing takes on increased importance at the cost of one's research.

Just as with the other questions I have raised here, the specific answer one develops is less important than the ability to grapple with the question and arrive at an answer. Some individuals may have no desire to expand their communicative repertoire and instead will spend their effort mastering the academic craft. Although academic scholarship will remain at the core of scholarly work, others may wish to work more closely with practitioners and develop what has come to be known in medicine as translational research. Once one decides how he or she wants to proceed, then there will be a trajectory of some sort. However, without struggling to deal with the question, an individual will miss an opportunity to come to terms with who the intended audience should be for the work that will be produced.

4. How Do You Feel About Doing Research?

My final question is perhaps the most important, for the question is not only personal but also foundational. On a personal level, if someone does not enjoy what he or she does, then the work is likely to lack meaning. Many individuals like the idea of academic work or being a professor, but their idea of what that means lacks substance. We may be enamored, for example, with the idea of publishing a breakthrough paper on this or that topic and winning accolades from our peers and the academic community. Scholarship, however, is not really about the end result—the publication of a paper and the results that derive from the text. Scholarship is a process that extends not merely for one paper or book, but for an entire career. If one does not enjoy, indeed if one is not excited by, the process, then the person needs to reconsider whether the academic life is the right career. Scholarship is a calling, a vocation, and if an individual has not reflected on this calling and decided that he or she is called to it, then one's relationship to the essential work of scholarship is at risk.

The question is also foundational. If one question pertains to whether one wants to focus on theoretical issues or policy issues, on a related level, this question asks what the intent of one's scholarship is. Those who subscribe to

critical theory will link scholarship to praxis. Others will be less concerned with change but simply intend to focus on a level that has little to do with societal issues. The scholar who writes about the history of a particular period, for example, may have little more intent than to write a history that is as accurate as possible, whereas another individual's purpose in writing such a history may be to provoke a new understanding of a neglected topic or people, which in turn may have parallels to today. Similarly, student retention theories may be focused on understanding a theoretical model, or undertaken to improve retention of a particular group, or some combination thereof. To ask a question about how one feels about research helps clarify for the individual the purpose not only of research, but in part, the purpose of his or her career.

As with any construction, then, the arc of one's research is constructed over time and built on several assumptions. Contexts and situations change, and the scholar adapts to new insights or more compelling ways to answer a question now that his or her perspective may have changed. Few of us can look at the outset of a career and accurately predict or determine where our work will go. Hopefully, we begin and continue that creation with a sense of excitement and purpose. The result is often unclear, but the processes involved in undertaking the work ought to be a challenge that elicits the best in a scholar.

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