The Importance of Understanding Discourse in Social Justice Education: The Truth and Nothing But the Truth?

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Introduction

When Audre Lorde wrote that "the Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house,"[1] she was speaking from her experiences as a Black, lesbian feminist and she was critiquing white feminists for their heterosexual, white bias. In their allegedly progressive attempts to eliminate sexism, white feminists employed the logic of ignoring difference and, consequently, reinforced the very systems of oppression and privilege they claimed to want to dismantle.

Lorde's famous quote highlights the dilemma and the dangers of challenging injustice with the Master's tools - tools, however, that we might not be able to live without. The dilemma I want to address in this paper involves the role of truth in social justice education. On the one hand, I will argue that an exclusive focus on truth might be one of the Master's tools that can obscure what discourse does and, thus, protect dominance from contestation. On the other hand, truth-talk cannot be abandoned as it plays an important role in regards to the credibility of what the marginalized are trying to tell the systemically privileged about their experiences of oppression. When should questions of truth be suspended and when do they matter?

This dilemma is a noteworthy challenge for philosophers of education because, as Jose Medina and David Wood contend: "There is no topic more central to philosophy than truth."[2] While debates about the multiple meanings and complex issues that surround truth have occupied a special place in the history of philosophical inquiry, these debates will not be rehearsed here. Instead, my aim is to examine whether an *exclusive* focus on truth might make it difficult for systemically privileged subjects to hear the truth of marginalized experience. I use two stories as a canvas upon which to build my argument that an exclusive focus on truth can undermine what the systemically dominant can hear.

Story 1: Last year, the Black Lives Matter Movement asked Martin O'Malley, the white former governor of Maryland and then Democratic presidential contender, to address the issue of race, criminal justice, and police brutality in the United States. When O'Malley responded that "All lives matter," the protestors shouted him down.

Now, of course it is true that "All lives matter." But the truth of the utterance made unintelligible the rage of many people who were furious with this well-intended gesture to universal humanity. They believed it diminished the point they were trying to make about *the fact* that Black people have not yet been included in the idea of "all lives." Put differently, the truth of the statement diverts attention away from the experiences of those "who have to insist that they matter in order to matter."[3] It is only when we shift our focus away from the truth of the statement that we can appreciate that such "colorblind" pronouncements ignore whiteness or white supremacy

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION *2016* | Natasha Levinson, editor

which, as George Yancy[4] explains, is "a master of concealment," and "insidiously embedded within responses, reactions, good intentions, postural gestures, denials, and structural and material orders."[5] Moreover, the truth of the utterance "All lives matter" inhibits inquiry into the ways in which the speaker might be constituted as a good white person by this speech act, implying that he is unlike those police officers whom the Black Lives Matter activists are opposing. Instead of hearing what the protestors were saying about the pattern of violence inflicted on Black and Brown lives, O'Malley's discursive practice unwittingly reinforces the white supremacist patterns that the protestors are trying to uncover. (And by white supremacy I am not referring to the Klu Klux Klan but instead to the way the term has been appropriated in critical theories of race to refer to the continued pattern of widespread, everyday, well-intentioned practices and seemingly neutral policies, which white people, often unwittingly, carry out, and that maintain the system of racial injustice.)

Story 2: In the courses I teach about race and racism we discuss the definition of racism as a system of privilege,[6] why this definition of racism entails the claim that all white people are complicit in racism, what this claim might mean, and why it is important. As soon as these issues are raised and before they are even discussed, it is not uncommon to hear a white student pronounce "But I can't be racist. Some of my best friends are Black."

One way I have responded to such statements is to point out contradictions between the veracity of the statement and the white student's life. I might press the student for his/her meaning of friendship. Are these "Black friends" merely acquaintances, colleagues, or trophy friends? What does it mean for a white person "to have a Black friend"? Furthermore, I might inquire: Does having a Black friend automatically exculpate one from complicity in racism? I might remind the student that after neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black youth who was returning from a convenience store with some treats, Zimmerman's legal representatives made a point to mention Zimmerman's Black friend, Joe Oliver.[7] I have asked the class to discuss whether Zimmerman's having a Black friend means that we don't have to consider whether he racially profiled Trayvon Martin as dangerous. In other words, the focal point for the educator would be to address possible contradictions between the statement and the student's life.

Yet, like Alison Bailey,[8] I find such critical thinking tools are often inadequate for negotiating comments that divert attention from engaging deeply in systemic injustice and one's complicity in it.[9] Bailey shares her experience with students' "epistemic push back" or expressions of epistemic resistance that are manifest in courses that challenge students' worldviews. Under the logic of contradiction the student becomes so focused on trying to prove the truth of the claim, that this focus fuels additional resistance rather than leading to a learning experience.

What my response to the utterance ignores is that even if this assertion is verifiably true, its truth is not the point. Such statements are discursive moves that do things, in this case the utterance functions to constitute the white student as racially innocent. Researchers have studied the plethora of discursive strategies that white people have at their disposal to distance themselves from considering their complicity

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

in racism. Alice McIntyre coined the term "white talk" to refer to discourse that serves to "insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism."[10] Similarly, Kim Case and Annette Hemmings[11] refer to distancing strategies that white people employ to avoid being positioned as racist or implicated in institutional racism. When I explain to students what discourse is, how it operates, and whom it benefits, they are better equipped to appreciate why students of color might consider such statements as "my best friend is Black" to be evasions of responsibility and why such pronouncements block the ability to listen.

During the last few decades, a new and influential paradigm has emerged that has radical implications for the understanding of truth. What has been referred to as the "linguistic turn" in various disciplines encompasses a provocative shift from comprehending language as a *representation or mirror of reality* to a conceptualization of language as *constituting our understanding of reality and even our own subjectivity*. Under this paradigm, the concept of discourse has become increasingly influential.

The concept of discourse is predicated upon the view that we can only think through our linguistic frameworks or as Heidegger put it, "we don't speak language, language speaks us."[12] The concept of discourse, then, entails a profound inversion of some of our most basic and commonsense beliefs about truth. Truth is not something that is independent of power and that is revealed through passive linguistic tools. Instead truth, i.e., the meanings we give to reality (and I am specifically concerned here with social reality), is mediated and limited by the discursive frameworks through which power circulates.[13]

Scholars who focus on discourse are primarily concerned to study how truths are produced and sustained. They have, however, often been accused of linguistic monism, relativism, and determinism.[14] There is an incompatibility, we are told, between an emphasis on discourse and an emphasis on truth because the former sacrifices the latter. In this essay I set out a *modest* and *limited* reconciliation by showing how both truth *and* discourse play an important role in social justice education. I argue that an *exclusive focus* on either truth or discourse can close down what we can think about in terms of systemic injustice.

The shift to discourse will be of interest to social justice educators. Analyses of discourse reveal the subtle ways that power works through our practices and our very being, and how even with the best of intentions we can be complicit in perpetuating unjust systems that we claim to want to challenge. Understanding how discourse operates can help to expose the limits of what we take to be true, natural, real, or given, and how such limits can make some possibilities appear and others disappear from consideration. A focus on discourse offers the possibility to disrupt normalized systems of meaning and unmask taken for granted understandings so that they become open to change.

Yet *exclusively* focusing on discourse may violently ignore or trivialize the material effects such discursive practices have on marginalized groups. A concern for truth can compel those who analyze discourse to take seriously that we are embodied agents who are in some way involved in the world. I argue that the concept of truth

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

is necessary in order to overcome the potential to ignore the truth of lived experience that can result from an overzealous emphasis on discourse. A theoretical approach that negates the materiality of the body and our social existence by reducing them exclusively to some type of linguistic substance can also obstruct the ability of the systemically privileged to hear the truth of marginalized experience.

It is important to acknowledge that the questions that animate issues of truth are different than the questions motivated by a concern with discourse.[15] Each offers a distinct approach for understanding social reality under conditions of systemic oppression and privilege. I maintain that questions that analyze discourse *and* questions about truth both have a role to play in social justice education, *and* that discourse and truth must be scrutinized *in relationship*.

In what follows, I first turn to Michel Foucault's work to define the notion of discourse and to highlight the questions that a concern with discourse encourages us to ask. Emphasizing Foucault's critical ethos in the second section, I argue that approaches that expose how power works through discourse do not *necessarily* abandon truth but instead seek to disclose the limits of truth. Although I advocate an approach to social justice education that emphasizes what discourse does, in the third section I qualify my position by claiming that questions of truth cannot be discarded. I turn to the feminist debates around the evidence of experience to problematize the claim that experience is discourse all the way down, which implies, I suggest, that truth talk be abandoned. Finally, I allude to an argument that highlights the epistemic understanding of the claim that experience is discourse all the way down. Such an understanding of the claim emphasizes that there is no knowledge outside of power. Acknowledging that there is no knowledge outside of power helps to articulate the type of vigilance and its development that I insist must be a key objective of social justice education.

Discourse, Systemic Ignorance, and the Limits of Truth

In his analysis of the relationship between truth and power, Michel Foucault spotlights the notion of discourse. He deploys the term "regimes of truth" to convey that idea that rather than something outside of power, truth is "a thing of this world."[16] A regime of truth is a general politics of truth that consists of discursive practices and discursive formations that structure the way we understand reality. Discourses are established frameworks of intelligibility that consist of "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak." [17] In other words, discourses do something. By actively functioning to construct and maintain particular versions of social reality, discourses constitute the limits of what we can know and who we can understand ourselves to be.

A discourse can be detected by its systematicity or recurring pattern of ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking, and practices, and by the effects of those ways of thinking and practices. As a system, discourse involves rules and practices that determine not only what can be said and by whom, but also what can be thought. The shift in the scholarship from a focus on *language* to the concept of *discourse* draws attention *not only to beliefs and ways of thinking* but also to *practices* that maintain

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

dominant conceptions of reality. Additionally, discursive practices include not only what is said but what is not said, as well. Linda Martín Alcoff[18] offers a powerful example of how the *practice* of silence or absence of speech, even when enacted under good intentions, can have injurious discursive effects.

Alcoff interrogates the "retreat position," often taken up by white feminists, where it is assumed that the only ethical stance to the problem of speaking for others is to abstain from speaking or to only speak for oneself. Alcoff maintains that this response ignores the discursive context within which *not speaking for others* might be complicit with oppression and might be an evasion of political responsibility. The retreat position, Alcoff argues, presumes a neutral place where one's social location is not implicated in the social location of others. Yet even a complete retreat from speech is not neutral; it can function to avoid responsibility because choosing not to speak can be a demonstration of privileged choice that supposes the possibility of ethical purity. Not speaking for others can easily become an excuse that allows the individual to ignore how one's discursive practices have an effect on others. This example underscores that discourse includes more than language, and that non-linguistic practices, such as silence, can also reproduce power hierarchies.

Moreover, because discourses function through exclusions that normalize intelligibility, discourses can conceal their own invention.[19] Stuart Hall explains: "Just as a discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic … it 'rules out,' limits and restricts other ways of talking."[20] Foucault's project is concerned with the processes by which truth precludes what can be thought when exclusions become normalized so that they seem self-evident, natural, and beyond challenge. When in a heterosexist context I ask my predominantly straight students to raise their hands if they know they are male or female or something else, and when I further probe them to explain how they know, most of them are often stunned by the questions. They are astonished because the framework of heterosexism inhibits alternative ways of thinking that could compete with the dominant view. Foucault's studies encourage us to ask questions about regimes of truth, such as: *Why can one version be uttered but another is unthinkable? Why this version or this utterance? What does it accomplish and in whose interests? How does it constitute subjects in a particular way?*

These questions are important because, according to Foucault, power works through discourse. Foucault has a very unique understanding of power. Power in Foucault's sense is not about sovereign agents who use power as an instrument of coercion or domination but rather is about power as pervasive (power is everywhere[21]), dispersed through knowledge and regimes of truth. Power, in this sense, discursively constitutes agents rather than being a thing that is possessed and deployed by agents.

Foucault insists that power produces: "it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production."[22] A significant point about Foucault's approach to power is that it points to the ways that norms become so embedded in our discursive practices that we reproduce power structures often without our awareness, making power even more insidious than explicit displays of force.

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Introducing the term power/knowledge, Foucault insists that knowledge and truth do not operate free from power relations but directly imply one another.[23] The point of the dyadic concept, as Alcoff[24] astutely remarks, is not that "knowledge is power," but rather that knowledge and power must always be analyzed *in relationship*. Recent efforts to study the epistemic side of systemic injustice have drawn attention to epistemologies of ignorance,[25] which although might seem incompatible with Foucault's idea of power/knowledge actually support and extend his insights. Epistemologies of ignorance highlight "the complex phenomena of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying different forms of ignorance, examining how they are produced and sustained, and what role they play in knowledge practices."[26]

Following this vein of inquiry in which ignorance is considered knowledge, Jose Medina[27] introduces the term "meta-ignorance" to name a tenacious form of active ignorance that operates at a meta-level and involves insensitivity towards one's ignorance. Power/ignorance-knowledge functions to protect privilege through systemically supported mechanisms of defense in which knowledge and ignorance are not only co-constituted but also mutually support each other.[28] Power/ignorance-knowledge is difficult to unsettle because it is protected by discursive formations.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, for Foucault, the subject is an effect of power. This is important because understanding power in a way that relies on the sovereign subject as the starting point of analysis overlooks the ways in which power relations and rationalities of government constitute subjects. Foucault explains: "The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus … on which power comes to fasten. … In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals."[29] That power works through the subject allows us to understand that our practices do not originate from some place inside the person, immune from power, but rather are repeated manifestations of discourses that have their origins in the discursive space, and its historicity, that subjects inhabit. Expanding upon Foucault, Judith Butler[30] argues that the intelligibility of the subject depends on the subject reiterating constitutive norms entrenched in discursive practices.

Foucault is not concerned with identifying which discourse is a true and accurate representation of reality, but rather with the processes that produce dominant discourses. When language is exclusively understood as representation, and when we remain focused on questions of veracity, according to Foucault, the discursive workings of power can become imperceptible. What social justice educators can learn from Foucault is that exclusively focusing on whether something is true or false might conceal the infinitesimal discursive strategies that sustain power hierarchies. Only when questions that acknowledge how discourse works are posed, can white people, for instance, begin to learn to negotiate the ways in which we/they escape, rather than tarry with,[31] the discomfort that can lead to profound learning experiences about our/their complicity in systems of privilege and oppression.

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

Addressing Discourse, Abandoning Truth?

Foucault's conception of power/knowledge has been criticized for abandoning notions of truth. Jürgen Habermas[32] famously accuses Foucault of turning against truth and jettisoning the necessary grounds of critique. If all is discourse, Habermas insists, relativism ensues, with the consequence that even Foucault's own proclamations about discourse fall into doubt. Focusing on the threat of relativism, Nancy Fraser[33] similarly discredits Foucault's normatively neutral concept of power because it prevents him from distinguishing between "good" and "bad" social practices. According to Fraser, Foucault suffers from normative confusion, since he at once relies on normative concepts like resistance and yet, at the same time, he renounces the epistemic as well as normative tools that can justify why one should resist. Fraser insists that in rejecting the truth of modernity, Foucault forfeits the basis upon which dominance can be challenged.

Foucault's ideas have no doubt been viewed by some as scandalous, and the ensuing debates have often been attributed to a clash of radically different and perhaps irreconcilable paradigms. The scholarship that has proliferated around these debates is substantial. Many of Foucault's defenders, however, contend that to dismiss Foucault's work with the claim that he does not provide criteria of truth is not only to misconstrue his project but to underestimate the insights his work offers.

Foucault's genealogical methods play a central role in the arguments of many of Foucault's defenders,[34] who insist that Foucault suggests that we turn our backs on truth, or that we judge it to be a fiction, and as nothing more than an effect of power. The point of genealogy is to expose truth's dangerous obfuscations. According to Foucault, genealogy is a type of critical history that attempts to understand "the present time, and of what we are, in this very moment," in order "to question…what is postulated as self-evident … [in order] to dissipate what is familiar and accepted."[35] A critical ontology of the present will involve an analysis of the discursive limits imposed on us and our investments in them so that a space can be created for going beyond those limits.

Genealogy is focused on studying the process by which "truths" emerge and how social realities and subjectivities come to be. In order to do this type of research, Foucault had to suspend determinations of truth and falsity and a search for origins. Genealogy does not inquire into *what is* but rather *how what is came into being* in order to open a space for becoming otherwise. Ladelle McWhorter emphasizes that genealogy does not simply function to point out a perspective silenced by dominant regimes of truth and thereby to offer alternatives that are equally plausible to dominant truths. Genealogy does far more because it works "not by claiming to describe a view or a set of events different from the one the dominant discourse describes but rather by redescribing the *same* set of events that the dominant discourse describes and, more importantly, *in a way that undercuts the dominant description of them*."[36] In other words, genealogies aim to disrupt and critique the hold that dominant views have.

David Halperin *explicitly* contends that Foucault does not imply that the truth content of particular discourses is irrelevant or uninteresting, but rather that: "it does

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

mean that we learn from him not to allow the truth or falsity of particular propositions *to distract us from the power-effects they produce* or the manner in which they are deployed within particular systems of discursive and institutional practice."[37] In her defense of Foucault as a normative epistemologist, Alcoff echoes the view that Foucault's point was not to claim that the difference between what is true and what is false is insignificant but rather that " … conferring an absolute status on truth claims, or characterizing truth as exempt from politics, works *to obscure the role that truth claims play in the reproduction or transformation of power relations*."[38]

Foucault's critical ethos does not aim to eliminate questions about truth value, but rather encourages us simultaneously to ask questions about how the truths we are invested in came to have such a hold on us and at what price. This suggests a mode of critique that requires a double move in which we focus not only on whether a statement is true or false but also what it does, what it obscures, and who benefits. Attention to concerns about validity and veracity matter, but we must also be cautious when such a focus allows us to evade questions about the discursive effects of truths. Rather than sacrificing truth, Foucault cautions us to develop vigilance. As Foucault sums it up, the point is: " … not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism."[39] Since, according to Foucault, there is no outside of discourse, the limits of truth must be vigilantly questioned.

Social justice educators can glean some crucial insights from an engagement with Foucault's work. First, an exclusive concern with truth can block systemically privileged students from asking questions about their complicity in social injustice. Sometimes questions about truth must be suspended in order to explore the effects of our discursive practices and in order to better hear what the systemically oppressed are trying to say. Second, Foucault's appeal to vigilance underscores that even intentionally progressive practices can hide oppressive practices. Feminists, for example, have long valued the concept of women's experience as key to resisting patriarchy. Yet, this seemingly progressive concept has been shown to be exclusionary, a point to which I will return in the next section. The effects of discursive practices must be interrogated even when, and especially when, we think we are doing the right thing. Rather than an extreme form of relativism where anything goes, Foucault's call for vigilance draws attention to questions that critique discourse and that contribute to opening up new possibilities for thought.

I have argued that analyzing discourse can lay bare the traces of power in our investments in truth. Foucault's critical ethos offers an insight into the importance of vigilance in regard to our discursive practices. Moreover, Foucault underscores that even with the best intentions we might be complicit with what we claim to want to challenge. Although I champion a focus on analyzing discourse in social justice education, I claim that this must not totally eclipse the value of truth talk. A foray into the feminist debates around the evidence of experience helps me to support this claim.

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

Truth, Discourse, and the Evidence of Experience

If truth is an effect of discourse, and if the only way that we can apprehend reality is through discursive formations, does this mean that reality is "discourse all the way down"? To explore this question I turn to the feminist debates around the evidence of experience.

Experience has traditionally been the bedrock of feminist thought and politics. Second-wave feminists appealed to "women's experience" as evidence of the existence of oppressive gender systems. A central assumption for these feminists[40] was that making visible the marginalized experience of women could disrupt male dominance and lead to social change. But since even progressive initiatives can have discursive effects that can be exclusionary, the idea of a common female experience was soon challenged by lesbians and women of color who pointed out that the prototype of women's experiences was defined by the needs, interests, and goals of white, straight, able-bodied, middle-class women. In her attempt to draw attention to a broader inquiry into the discursive conditions of foundational feminist concepts,[41] Joan Scott took this critique one step further.

In her widely cited essays, Scott[42] makes two basic arguments. First, she contends that *no matter how inclusive feminists are*, it is problematic to rely on women's experience as a starting point for feminist analysis. Such positions presume that our experience of the world is a transparent, reliable window on the world. When feminists appeal to experience as if it were uncontestable, investigations into the ways in which the concept of "women's experience" is discursively constituted are precluded. Drawing on Foucault's idea of the subject as an effect of discourse, Scott maintains that appeals to women's experience sanction the concept of "women" and that itself reifies the dominant patriarchal relations that feminists claim to want to disrupt. Scott provocatively reminds us that "it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience."[43] In other words, the very selves who "have" experiences are constituted through the experiences they "have." When feminists conceive women's experience as uncritically real or true, they leave unexamined the conditions of the emergence of experience. Scott, however, goes one step further and makes a second provocative claim. She contends that experience and discourse are co-extensive, and so implies that experience is discourse all the way down. Scott concludes that because women's subjective experience is entirely a linguistic event, it should be rejected as evidence for feminist knowledge claims.

Some feminist philosophers were quick to respond to Scott's arguments, and highlighted the dangers of understanding experience to be discursive all the way down. Not only does this position risk trivializing embodied experience, but also such it makes it likely that the material effects of discursive practices for marginalized groups will be overlooked. Alcoff,[44] for example, points out that the phenomena of date rape or rape within marriage were real even before the terms to name these experiences came into common use. To tie experience too tightly to discourse may support those who dismiss these traumatic experiences by claiming that they are fictions invented by feminists. Feminist philosophers took pains to argue that it was

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the patterns of women's experience, and *the disorientation and dissatisfaction* with the ways these experiences were dismissed, that helped to give these new concepts widespread credibility.

There is a dimension of experience that has "traction"[45] on social reality. It is this traction that has subversive potential to expose the material effects of discourse that sustain marginalization. Exposing *patterns* of oppressive experience made invisible through normalization can lay bare these material effects. In his description of "boom experiences," Cornel West vividly describes how the experience of the marginalized can have "traction" on the truth of social reality. In his insistence on "the fact of blackness," West observes:

> There have been some black people in America who fundamentally believed that they were wholeheartedly, full-fledged American. They have been mistaken. They tried to pursue that option – Boom! Jim Crow hit them. They tried to press that option – Boom! Vanilla suburbs did not allow them in.[46]

Today the pattern of boom experiences in Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, New York City, and other cities across the United States draw our attention to the relationship between police brutality and racism. Although these experiences are the consequence of socially constructed concepts, their material effects must not be denied.[47]

Acknowledging the truth of social reality in this way can temper the tendency of discursive analyses to underestimate the political significance of the material effects of discursive regimes. Shari Stone-Mediatore echoes this thought when she contends that experience can be a resource for critical reflection. Coincidently, she ties this into the theme of our conference when she writes that narratives that bring to light and help publicize contradictory aspects of experience that have been silenced are:

> between past and future, in Hannah Arendt's sense: they are grounded in the world we have inherited from the past, yet by offering a new, creative perspective on that past, they enrich our experience of the present, thereby, interrupting the seeming momentum of history and enabling us to envision and work toward alternative futures.[48]

The truth of lived experiences should be critically engaged and never taken as uncontested evidence. But this is not to deny that exposing the pattern of marginalized experience has the potential to facilitate the transformation of oppressive discursive regimes.

Although I cannot argue in detail for this here, I contend that Joan Scott mistakenly assumes the ontological nature of the claim that experience and discourse are co-extensive. I would argue that it makes more sense to understand the claim as an epistemological one. The epistemological understanding of the claim underscores the acknowledgement that there is no outside of power which, as I argued in the previous section, entails a type of vigilance that can both take seriously what lived experience can reveal and also encourage an interrogation of the discursive frameworks on which appeals to experience may rely. Both are necessary.

Discourse, Truth, and What We Can Hear

I have argued that, while an exclusive focus on truth can obscure how power works through discursive practices, truth talk cannot be totally abandoned. Those who research social justice pedagogy might find that an emphasis on explaining how

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

discourse works and what discourse does can facilitate how the systemically privileged hear what the marginalized are trying to say. This parallels what Alison Bailey describes as navigating "shadow texts," or pedagogically bringing to the surface the informal, unwritten utterances or practices that "move along side of" what students often say or don't say in the classroom, and what these moves do.

I will conclude with three examples that highlight the relationship between truth, discourse, and what we can hear. Although not within the context of social justice education, these examples can also be employed as powerful pedagogical tools.

The first example is derived from the work of Kelly Oliver[49] who, in her critique of the politics of recognition, advances the metaphor of bearing witness to that which cannot be seen and is beyond recognition. Oliver contends that what victims of oppression seek is not, or not only, recognition from someone who has the power to recognize, but also for others to bear witness to the horrors of what is beyond their recognition. In order to articulate the type of listening that bearing witness requires, Oliver offers a story reported by Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst whose research focuses on the testimony of Holocaust survivors.

Laub describes a debate that took place between historians and psychoanalysts on the testimony of a woman who claimed to be an eyewitness to the Auschwitz uprising. In her interview, the woman discusses the fires set by the Jewish prisoners and she mentions that four chimneys were destroyed. Laub notes how this woman's testimony was dismissed and discredited by the historians because she reported that four chimneys were set ablaze, when historical evidence indicates that there was only one chimney destroyed. In contrast, the psychoanalysts responded very differently to the woman's testimony. They understood that she was not reporting on historical facts but rather about another level of truth that involved something so radical and unimaginable, something beyond recognition: the occurrence of resistance at Auschwitz. Oliver writes, quoting Laub: "what the historians could not hear, listening for empirical facts, was the 'very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination.'"[50]

Does this story imply that historical accuracy is irrelevant or that such witnessing cannot be contested? To assume so would be to miss Oliver's point that the only way that the psychoanalysts could hear something new, something yet beyond their comprehension, was if they suspended a focus on truth.

Second example: As I was writing this section, David Brooks,[51] a white columnist for the *New York Times*, published a much maligned op-ed piece written in the form of a letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates about his new book, *Between the World and Me*. In his book, Coates argues that the American Dream does not exist for him and other Black Americans. Brooks insists on telling Coates where he goes wrong. Coates writes that, watching the smoldering towers on September 11, 2001 (9/11), he could not help but see the police and firefighters who died as "menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could – with no justification – shatter my body." To this, Brooks responds: "You obviously do not mean that literally today … I think you distort American history." Brooks considers whether he could be accused of "listening while white," but then he dismisses his obligation to "sit with

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

it, to make sure the testimony is respected and sinks in," by claiming a standing to respond and a right to disagree. In doing so, Brooks forfeits the opportunity to learn what it might mean to live in a Black body.

Finally, I offer one more story and hope that these stories can makes us more aware of the type of listening we do. In her analysis of the reaction in the United States to the attacks that occurred on 9/11, Judith Butler shines some light on the relationship between questions of truth and questions about discourse. Butler argues that the binary that President George W. Bush created when he proclaimed "either you are for us or you're with the terrorists," functioned as a discursive force that constrained public debate. This binary made it impossible to ask about the complicity of the United States in the conditions that led up to the attacks. Those that sought to answer the question, "Why do they hate us so much?," were accused in the media of legitimizing the horrific acts and those who committed them. The mere asking for explanation was interpreted as entailing exoneration.

Butler contends that to focus exclusively on our position as a victim precludes certain kinds of questions. She exhorts us to pay attention to this discursive move because: "it decides, in a forceful way, what we can hear, whether a view will be taken as an explanation or as an exoneration, (and) whether we can hear the difference, and abide by it."[52] In other words, this discursive tactic safeguards the belief that the United States is innocent and justifies retaliation.

Butler does not deny the painful truth that on September 11, 2001, 19 al-Queda members perpetrated a series of four coordinated attacks against U.S. targets that resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 people. She grieves over the lives lost. But she insists that we need to emerge from this focus to "consider the ways in which our lives are profoundly implicated in the lives of others,"[53] because perhaps then we might be able to improve the conditions that led them to think this way in the first place. Butler distinguishes between an exclusive focus on the causes of an event, and an examination of the broader conditions that contributed to the event. She cautions that we do not let a concern for causes obscure the need to also make inquiries into conditions. She insists that we need to interrogate *both* causes *and* conditions.

Similarly, I have argued here that social justice educators must foster *both* an understanding of how discourse works and an openness to experiences that can help reveal patterns of social truth. Such openness can be encouraged when students who are invested in dominant truths make a double move: invoking dominant truths but perpetually interrogating their hidden exclusions. Both discourse and truth are indispensable tools that can help both to disrupt systemic ignorance and to facilitate the development of the type of vigilance necessary to understand how even progressive intentions can hide complicity. Social justice educators might help students to critique vigilantly their investments in truth and to expose truth's dangerous entanglements with power, but at the same time to resist the temptation to reject or refuse truth altogether. The concepts of truth and discourse must be examined in relationship so that we can better hear beyond what we are able to hear.

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

1. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 110.

2. José Medina, David Wood, ed., *Truth: Engagements across Philosophical Traditions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 1.

3. http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/ (accessed October 4, 2015).

4. George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

5. Ibid., 229.

6. Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Defining Racism: 'Can We Talk?'," in *"Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" And Other Conversations about Race* (NY: Basic Books, 1997), 3-17.

7. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/25/joe-oliver-george-zimmerman-trayvon-martin_n_1378390.html (accessed October 4, 2015).

8. Alison Bailey, "Navigating Epistemic Pushback in Feminist and Critical Race Philosophy Classes," APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy 14, no. 1 (2007): 3-7.

9. A growing body of scholarship examines why reason alone is an inadequate tool with which to disrupt systemic injustice. See Phyllis Rooney, "When Philosophical Argumentation Impedes Social and Political Process,' *Journal of Social Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (2012): 317-333; Denise Taliaferro Baszile, "Beyond All Reason Indeed: the Pedagogical Promise of Critical Race Testimony," *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 11, no. 3 (2008): 251-265.

10. Alice McIntyre, *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 45.

11. Kim Case and Annette Hemmings, "Distancing Strategies: White Women Preservice Teachers and Antiracist Curriculum," *Urban Education* 40, no. 6 (2005): 606-626.

12. Martin Heidegger, "Way to Language," in *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2008), 413.

13. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

14. See, for example, the debates in Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

15. Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk, "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits," in Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler, ed., *Critical Theories in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 45-65.

16. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," 131.

17. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 49.

18. Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991): 5-32.

19. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 49.

20. Stuart Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse," in Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, Simeon J. Yates, ed., *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2001), 72.

21. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), 63.

22. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 194.

23. Ibid., 27.

24. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Foucault's Normative Epistemology," in Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki, ed., *A Companion to Foucault* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013), 208.

25. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, ed., *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (Albany, New York: State of New York University Press, 2007).

26. Ibid., 1.

27. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

doi: 10.47925/2016.001

28. Jose Medina, "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism," *Foucault Studies*, 12 (2011): 9-35.

29. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 98.

30. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

31. George Yancy, *Look A White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012).

32. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990).

33. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

34. My point is not to defend Foucault per se or to specifically argue that those who critique him misunderstand his work. Although I place myself solidly in the Foucaultian camp, I take these debates seriously and believe that they can be productive for both sides.

35. Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," in L. Kritzman, ed., *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (London: Routledge, 1988), 265.

36. Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 42.

37. David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31 (emphasis added).

38. Alcoff, "Foucault's Normative Epistemology," 218-19 (emphasis added).

39. Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, ed., 2nd edition, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 231-32.

40. See Linda Nicholson, ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

41. Johanna Oksala, "In Defense of Experience," *Hypatia* 29, no. 2 (2014): 388-403, 388.

42. Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773-797; "Experience," in Judith Butler and Joan Scott, ed., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), 22-40.

43. Joan Scott, "Experience," 25-26.

44. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Phenomenology, Post-structuralist, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience," in Linda Fisher and Lester Embree, ed., *Feminist Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 39-56.

45. Johanna Oksala, "In Defense of Experience," 394.

46. Cornel West, "Our Next Race Question: the Uneasiness between Blacks and Latinos," *Harpers* (April 1996): 57.

47. Similar patterns can be found in Canada and in other Western countries, although the histories may differ.

48. Shari Stone-Mediatore, "Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of 'Experience," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 116-133, 128.

49. Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

50. Ibid., 41.

51. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/opinion/listening-to-ta-nehisi-coates-while-white.html?_r=0 (accessed October 4, 2015).

52. Judith Butler, "Explanation and Exoneration, or What We Can Hear," in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 4-5.

53. Ibid., 7.

doi: 10.47925/2016.001