NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP AS A METHOD OF LEADERSHIP INQUIRY

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Postmodern perspectives suggest that systems of thought, knowledge, and discourse are maintained by individuals and determine bounds to knowing, being, and experiencing at societal levels (Foucault, 1980, 2001). The postmodern and critical turn has made its way into the leadership studies literature, emphasizing leadership as a social construct organized by power, identity, and systems (e.g., Alvesson & Willmot, 1992; Collinson, 2011; Flax, 1993; Ford, 2010; Gavey, 1997; Tourish, 2013). Postmodern perspectives invite those who research and practice leadership to closely interrogate how social, political, economic, and moral systems produce, regulate, and maintain meaning associated with leadership.

The purpose of the current essay is to interrogate the normative basis that configures critical and postmodern perspectives on community-engaged scholarship (CES) as a method of leadership inquiry. We acknowledge that literature distinguishes a difference between postmodernism and critical theory; in our paper, we group them for the purpose of making a distinction from traditional modes of understanding leadership. Postmodern and critical theory represents distinct fields of thought, but share a contemporary perspective that responds to the same contemporary period. Postmodernism relies on methods of genealogies and archaeologies to interrogate existing systems and structures (e.g., Foucault, Deluze), critical theory was interested in problematizing identity, power, and systems (e.g., Marcuse, Fromm, Horkheimer, Adorno). Approaching leadership studies from critical and postmodern perspectives opens pathways for leadership inquiry to account for dynamics of power and knowledge in social, political, economic, and moral systems.

Postmodernism and critical approaches provides leadership scholars and practitioners a framework to unpack the assumptions that support what is considered the object and subject of leadership study and practice (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Collins, 2009; Collinson, 2011; Ford, 2010; Harding, Lee, Ford, & Learmonth, 2011; Tourish, 2013). One way to understand assumptions that organize leadership discourse is through what Drath (2001) called *knowledge principles*. According to Ospina and Schall (2001) "knowledge principle refers to the dominant underlying, and taken-for-granted set of ideas and rules about how to best deal with the tasks of leadership, and that give social meaning to particular manifestations of leadership" (p. 12). Our knowledge principles are the lens by which we recognize certain thoughts, words, and actions as leadership

(Drath, 2001). Interest in trait-based or dominance models of leadership pivoted toward dialogic and relationship understandings. Accepted knowledge principles in leadership studies include setting the direction for shared activity, creating and maintaining a commitment to leadership work, and adapting to challenges and change along the way (Ospina & Schall, 2001). Critical and postmodern perspectives provide a framework to unpack ways leadership knowledge principles are contingent across social, political, economic, and moral context. Ospina and Schall (2001) suggested that shifting knowledge principles also invites critique of normative approaches to leadership inquiry in order to engage approaches to knowledge creation that better align form with theory. Our essay outlines the normative basis of CES as a critical and postmodern approach to leadership inquiry and practice.

Postmodern Perspectives Presume Leadership Studies and Practices to Be Inherently Contingent on Social, Political, Economic, and Moral Systems

The project of leadership inquiry works toward making meaning of systems. Social, political, economic, and moral systems are produced and maintained through complex knowledge and power relations. Peck and Dickinson (2009) suggested that leadership and positional authority is socially situated; that is, capacity to enact leadership is produced through social relations. Fine (2016); Ford, Harding, and Learmonth (2008); and Peck and Dickinson (2009) argued that power relationships norms and dominant discourses determine the boundaries of what is considered leadership and who has access to enacting leadership activity. This both intentionally and unintentionally produces dominant assumptions, approaches, and practices of leadership. CES, taking critical and postmodern perspectives, creates the capacity to trouble and complicate underlying assumptions accepted within the field, but provides a register that can interpret norms, systems, and discourses that determine the scope and boundaries of leadership. Once the operations of power and knowledge become intelligible, the project of leadership becomes more nimble to complicate social, political, economic, and moral relations that maintain the *status quo*. CES is

contextualized in community, reciprocal, participatory, and includes an exchange of knowledge and resources (see Introduction and other articles in the symposium for examples). The capacity of CES to trouble common approaches and assumptions associated with the study of leadership will be further explored later in this essay.

Critical and Postmodern Perspectives Invite Participatory, Cocreated, Relational, and Social Modes of Meaning- and Sense-Making

Practices that can make sense of values and processes of systems become central to the study of leadership. Public engagement and deliberative civic engagement allows scholars and practitioners to make sense of the capacity of a system to exercise leadership (Fairhurst & Antonakis, 2012; Hosking & Shamir, 2012; Kinney, 2012; Kliewer & Priest, 2016). Public engagement focused on communicating values and processes of change within and across systems becomes not only a method of inquiry but also a strategy to enact leadership activity at the level of systems. Public engagement creates social meaning and registers that allows leadership at the systems level to be intelligible as a social, political, economic, and moral construct.

Critical and Postmodern Perspectives Create a Space and Place to Interrogate the Context of Leadership Activity

One consequence of the shift from traditional to critical or postmodern knowledge principles is the relationship between theory and practice. Postmodern and critical perspectives require those who study, teach, and practice leadership to problematize approaches to leadership that reproduce power, authority, and expertise. Ospina and Schall (2001) suggested that the turn toward different knowledge principles will require methods that complicate binaries of knowledge, producer and consumer, and that of researched and researcher. Instead research and practice will be cocreated and the boundaries between knowledge producer and receiver of knowledge melt away. A coinquirer approach to leadership practice and research requires a community-engaged approach. Systems paradigms of leadership research and practice require explicit attention to the connection

between power and knowledge. Postmodern and critical approaches invite leadership scholarship and practice to make sense of power and knowledge in a new light. Last, a leadership research and practice that can account for power and knowledge will include a diverse set of practices and methods.

The normative basis of the study and practice becomes socially contingent on social, political, economic, and moral forms and structures. There are examples of postindustrial theories of leadership that speak of leadership as a collective activity, but still maintain default assumptions that hold the individual, maleness, whiteness, and heteronormativity as the unspoken standard (see Burns, 2010). Moving toward critical and postmodern understandings of knowledge and power is significant for leadership studies because justice and democratic aims, without proper intentionality, might reinforce the very same systems of oppression they attempt to dismantle (Kliewer, 2013). The move toward emergent methods of critique and poststructuralism requires our field to constantly interrogate the normative basis of leadership activity. Constructs of power and shared meaning- and decision-making are places to begin. Once we move to a leadership practice and research agenda that is cocreated, contextualized with and within community, and includes a larger register for understanding knowledge and power, our field can capture leadership as the capacity of a system.

Critical and Postmodern Perspectives Elevate the Relationship Between Power and Knowledge in Leadership Research and Practice

The humanist knowledge tradition has historically had an uneasy relationship with understanding and accounting for power, as Foucault (1980) said, "Power makes men mad, and those who govern are blind; only those who keep their distance from power…can discover truth" (p. 51). Within the leadership literature, power is often conceptualized and considered essential to leadership (e.g., Komives & Wagner, 2017; Northouse, 2016). Traditional approaches to leadership assume that people have or do not have power, and the interest of leadership is locating sources of power

(i.e., referent power, expert power). This lends itself in practice to an over reliance on *power over*.

What is missed is how power operates and the mechanism of power in the context of leadership activity. It does not provide a lens to unpack how power operates and the mechanisms of power function. Postmodern and critical perspectives provide a better framework to understand *power within*, *power to*, and *power with*. Accounting for the multiple ways, power operates within systems expands the possibilities of what "counts" as leadership knowledge, who can possess leadership knowledge, and how leadership knowledge is mobilized in practice. Creating a register to determine how systems cocreate meaning, shape the trajectory of what is considered possible, assign identities, and create the capacity to imagine new ways of being are essential to critical and postmodern approaches to change. Mechanisms and operations of power shape not only the systems that contextualize leadership but also the bounds, scope, and breadth of leadership knowing.

The structure of systems in social, political, economic, and moral realms are inextricably linked to the interplay of power and knowledge. Foucault (1980) asserted "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge, and conversely knowledge constantly induces the effects of power" (p. 52). This line of thought is furthered when Foucault suggested, "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (1980, p. 52). The relationship between knowledge and power raise serious questions for the study of leadership studies.

When the study and practice of leadership is operationalized with and within community, the relationship between knowledge and power is constituted in a new way, redefining the project of knowledge creation, dissemination, and practice in leadership. CES, in the context of leadership studies and practice, shifts inquiry to consider how systems frame oppression and the potential of liberation. The practice of leadership studies, from a critical and postmodern perspective, is not only concerned with understanding how knowledge and power produce and maintain systems, but also interested the project of devising modes of knowing, being, and enacting leadership that can intervene and remake systems. The knowledge creation method and process is remade as a leadership practice is accessed by a larger cross section of people.

To understand the potential of leadership is to manage and account for the relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault (2001) suggested the exercise of power:

> … operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible action; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it relates or contrives; makes more probable or less; in the extremes it constrains or forbids absolute, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting on being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (p. 341)

Leadership as a distinct category of study ascribes and creates spaces that determines the depth and boundaries of practice and knowledge. Critical and postmodern approaches complicate default assumptions of what leadership looks like and who possess leadership knowledge. Not only are traditional assumptions questioned, postmodern and critical approaches to leadership field complicate operations of power that invariably favor the *status quo*. The critical and postmodern turn awakens the political nature of leadership education, studies, and development.

CES Allows Leadership Studies Practice and Research to Account for the Relationship Between Knowledge and Power

CES does not remove power from knowledge creation and dissemination processes, instead it invites individuals and groups to cocreate frameworks that make meaning and account for the ways power intersects knowledge creation and mobilization. Accounting for the relationship between power and knowledge is significant for many reasons, we will briefly name a few.

First, change requires new learning, shifts in paradigms, and values. CES integrates leadership learning and development across and within systems to create the necessary conditions for change that is focused on the structure of systems. When assumptions that inform leadership and change are openly interrogated in ways that are participatory and cocreated, learning becomes an act of leadership. Learning how systems produce sense of self as an intelligible subject, and repress indi-

viduals as objects is what creates the potential to imagine the types of critical interventions necessary to imagine new systems and a material reality that does not quite exist.

Second, CES moves from leader-centric models of change in cultivating the shared capacity of a system to identify and renegotiate relations of power and knowledge. Robust CES engages entire systems and begins generating meaning and understanding relevant to all factions involved with change. Methods of CES intentionally negotiate and account for power in an effort to generate, disseminate, and apply knowledge that is cocreated and has multiple levels of shared meaning.

Finally, CES that accounts for power and knowledge can speak to multiple dimensions of theory and practice. First, the practice of CES becomes a method of leadership activity that can mobilize groups of people. Second, CES as a leadership inquiry practice creates shared frameworks that can register the ways systems exist, operate, and reproduce themselves. Knowledge becomes a shared experience of *knowing*. This is opposed to expertise models in which the expert knows and confers knowledge upon others. Developing a shared capacity of systems to interrogate the ways values and processes are produced is what creates the potential for systemic change.

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