

Confessions of a Theory Addict: Welcome Address¹

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My name's Kate and I'm an academic. You may not know that to look at me, but it's important to remember that academics come from all walks of life. I'm here to welcome all of you and to thank you for attending this meeting of Academics Anonymous: The Theory Addiction Division. This is a closed meeting, so I'm assuming that all of us here are theory-dependent or maybe considering whether or not to join this organization. Do we have any first-timers here? Don't be shy -- we're all in this together.

I want to share with you what made me realize that I am addicted to theory and what finally made me seek help for my illness. At first, there were just little things. I began to realize that the bibliographies of my papers were longer than the papers themselves. I began to realize that I couldn't speak extemporaneously in front of my colleagues. I had to read -- even when telling my own stories.

I started getting worse. I found myself reading French feminists and poststructuralists on the airplane instead of Anne Rice novels. I explored theories of the body, neglecting that I had one of my own. I dropped out of everything so I would have more time for theory. I lost my friends, lovers - my family couldn't understand anything I said.

I refused to work on my dissertation because I felt I had to trace the entire terrain of the poststructural critique of Hegel's dialectic -- How could I pretend to know anything, let alone write, before I did that? My history of education students reported me to the dean for insisting that the Founding Fathers were the Frankfurt School critical theorists and that feminist-poststructural theorists had significantly disrupted their hegemonic status.

I finally hit bottom two months ago. I had charged to my American Express account more money for books than my entire year's salary. I lost my car, my laptop computer. I had to sacrifice my entire collection of rare and priceless philosopher action figures. I know it was time to seek help.

I'd heard about the AA Theory Addiction group from a former colleague who has since moved over to Educational Psychology. And here I am -- I've been theory-free for 4 weeks now.

The AA Theory Addiction program is a simple one, but it's not easy. Coming to meetings helps, though. It keeps me out of the libraries and bookstores and away from my bookshelves and my theory-bantering buddies. I'm sure the program can help you. All you have to do is take it one step at a time.

¹ This essay was written as a stand-up comedy piece and was performed October 7, 1994, by the author at *The Journal of Curriculum Theory* Conference on Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice, Banff, Alberta, Canada. Special thanks to Gordon Buck and Henry French for providing insights into 12-steps culture.

I want to share with you the 12 steps² you can take to heal yourself of this life-consuming illness. To heal ourselves we must be ready:

1. to admit that we are powerless over theory -- that our lives have become unmanageable;
2. to come to believe that theory can never restore us to sanity -- it only leads us to questions about how sanity is discursively and normatively constructed;
3. to make a decision to turn our lives and wills over to the practical demands of our institutions and our deans;
4. to create a searching and fearless reflexive account of ourselves;
5. to admit to our deans and colleagues the exact nature of our intellectual transgressions.
6. to be entirely ready and willing to undergo psychoanalysis in order to rid ourselves of this insidious lust fo theory.

..... and should psychoanalysis fail

7. to humbly ask for the appropriate drugs and treatments that will regulate and rid us of our desires;
8. to make a list of all persons we have accused of being atheoretical and become willing to make amends to them all.
9. to do committee work, grade papers, or whatever such persons may require in order to make amends for these wrongs;
10. to continue to monitor our behavior to nip in the bud any tendencies to fly on the wings of theory -- when we know that where we belong is here -- anchored to our Foundations of Truth;
11. to seek through profession development workshops and power lunches with the dean the knowledge of what our discipline and tenure committee requires of us and the Good Common Sense to carry out what is needed.
12. Having seen the error of our disruptive ways through the diligent adherence to these steps -- to try to carry this message to other theory addicts and practice these principles in all our affairs.

And finally, there is a 13th step that is generally unspoken, but I think it's important:

13. to pledge to avoid and take all precautions to prevent becoming sexually involved with anyone else in the program -- unless, of course, this is required for tenure and promotion.

If you need more information about the Theory Addiction program feel free to speak with me after the meeting. Or just look around you. Talk to someone. Get a phone number. Get an email address. The only way to fight this addiction is through the benevolence and surveillance of our peers and those in power whom we must obey.

² The 12 steps are adapted from the *Alcoholics Anonymous Directory* (March, 1993), published by the Central Ohio Group Fellowship.