As part of the series, *Qualitative Inquiry: Critical Ethics, Justice, and Activism*, Huckaby’s edited book asks us to think about “what might become possible... with/through critical (post)qualitative inquiry” (p 28)? In the forward, series editor Cannella claims that the volume is a valuable “handbook for rethinking and reconceptualizing qualitative research as a public project,” and readers will be “inspired and encouraged to take action” (p xi). The contributors nudge us away from upholding Eurocentric disciplinary conventions in order to honor and support different epistemological approaches. Huckaby’s edited volume is therefore an important and relevant contribution to better examine, in these troubled times, how activist-scholars may partner with others in our journey to create a more socially just world.

In this book, *in-betweenness*, the co-experiencing of privileges and marginality (Diversi & Moreira, 2009), connects the authors’ - humanist and posthumanist - approaches to critical (post)qualitative inquiry as relational. Here, meaningful relationships are foregrounded in/through critical research in order to challenge the unjust structures/processes within the educational system and society. The authors are diverse both in their identities and in their approaches to a relational critical qualitative inquiry. I appreciate this inclusive diversity of identities, perspectives, and experiences, especially given that many of the authors are people of color, international scholars, community organizers, and/or female-identified. Ensuring that voices of those with diverse identities and experiences are reflected in scholar-activist work, particularly participatory action research (PAR), is important with decentering humanism and valuing indigenous knowledge and posthumanist perspectives (see Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Keifer-Boyd, Knochel, Patton, & Sweeny, 2018; Lund & Lee, 2015; MacDonald, 2014; Musgrave, 2016; Tesar & Arndt, 2018).

Despite being theoretically heavy at times with an overreliance on ethnographic methods, Huckaby’s book adds value to understanding the importance of making our scholarship public. Specifically, and particularly important to in-betweenness as relational, Huckaby’s book advances community engaged scholarship by considering cultural humility (chapter five), trauma-informed care (chapter five), and posthumanism (chapter six and eight) in PAR projects. To understand why this is a valuable “handbook,” I first review each chapter before discussing limitations and the overall contributions Huckaby’s volume makes to community engaged scholarship.

In the introduction, Huckaby contextualizes the book within current neoliberal times, noting that “it proffers ways to reset and recalculate, provides inoculations and antidotes, illustrates ways to weave and seam, encourages forms of relationally and becomingwith, and demonstrates ways to resist closure and conclusion” (p. 11). This edited volume is separated into three sections: Section 1 explores diverse pedagogical - theoretical and methodological - perspectives and (critical) teaching practices from various disciplines; Section 2 provides case studies of critical qualitative inquiry of community, academic, and activists research projects; and Section 3 is solutions-orientated and attempts to offer guidance on developing a future plan of action for critical qualitative inquiry. The book ends with an Afterword section, written by Norm Denzin, of “talking points” for “pedagogies of hope for dark days” (p. 157).

In chapter one, Koro-Ljungberg poses the question: What might become possible...if we resettle judgment of (post) qualitative research? She challenges the reader to suspend judgment of (post) qualitative research and explains that judgment needs to be resettled. She argues that (post) qualitative research should not be “judged’ through one lens or in an operationalized fashion, as this judgment tends to represent the “dominant power structures and widely distributed discourse practices and methodological hegemony” (pp. 18-19).

Throughout, 14 perspectives of resettling judgment are offered to encourage the reader to reset assumptions and judgments of (post) qualitative research. This chapter is heavily theoretically and may be difficult for community engaged practitioners or non-critically oriented or postmodern scholars to grasp, and thus, some readers may not truly appreciate the important argument Koro-Ljungber is making. However, this chapter sets the tone of the book by encouraging the reader to challenge Westernized notions of what constitutes research, knowledge, and teaching in our neoliberal, troubled, times. The chapters that follow all stem from some framework of “resettling” judgment.

Chapter two, written by Ulmer, considers *What might become possible...embracing “pedagogies
of resistance and persistence” (p. 41) instead of compliance? Ulmer reflects on her experiences as a former elementary teacher and a now tenured-track professor, and the importance of reconceptualizing the syllabi as a critical document. She explains how syllabi create a set of rules, either explicit or implicit, for students to follow, and how syllabi can reinforce pedagogies of compliance. Ulmer is thoughtful in reflecting on how she attempts to create a “sense of unruilness,” in her syllabi and classroom, since fostering unruilness allows us to “imagine what research can become” (p. 40). Ulmer’s chapter is important for activist-scholars who may teach service-learning courses, since a sense of uneasiness, of unruilness, of unknowing, and of considering the impact of our actions are all present there.

Pierce and Moreno write chapter three, focusing on, what might become possible...if we learn and practice qualitative research as a “way of life” (p. 53)? These scholars focus on understanding how the process of qualitative research - from a humanist perspective that uses ethnographic methods - is different than the research process of quantitative research. Pierce is a scholar trained and practicing in the United States, whereas Moreno is a scholar who has studied and researched in Mexico. Reflecting on their various cultural, educational, and professional experiences, Pierce and Moreno review and problematize each step of the (traditional) research process through preliminary steps of gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, to gaining access to participants to publishing. Pierce and Moreno argue of the importance of “thinking about qualitative research beyond paradigm shifts” (p. 52) to a more humane process. They argue that through this humane process, co/participants’ experiences, humanity, and needs are centered throughout the research process. Chapter three provides an effective overview for anyone interested in understanding how to do critical qualitative inquiry, especially those interested in PAR. This chapter also provides an important introductory overview that would be beneficial for quantitative scholars to better understand critical qualitative inquiry, the importance of qualitative research, and how it differs from traditional research approaches.

Chapter four, written by Vernon, is the first of three case study chapters in Section 2. Vernon encourages the reader to think about what might become possible...if we embrace an “empathetic suspicion of culturally conditioned solution-making” (p. 76)? Vernon argues that research as solutionless participation is not only important, but also needed in neoliberal times, as scholars who conduct research and offer solutions to problems may unintentionally contribute to the continued oppression that the scholar is attempting to change. Vernon arrives at this conclusion by discussion his experience in conducting research as a part of a team that used ethnography to understand how college affordability was conceptualized and practiced across four universities in Wisconsin. What emerged, unexpectedly, was how institutionalized sexism and misogyny negatively shaped female-identified and nonmasculine, nonheteronormative students’ experiences, where these students “paid a deep personal price” (p. 69) due to the institution not meaningfully responding to the students’ reports of sexual misconduct and violence. Vernon explains the importance of listening and of stalling in qualitative research, which I found particularly meaningful.

Out of all the chapters in the book, chapter five by Rubesin and Hayes resonated with me in how they fully embraced PAR by rejecting the neoliberal demands of their higher education partner. This chapter encourages the reader to reflect on what might become possible...if we just listen? Rubesin and Hayes, who are organizational directors of two nonprofit community programs, discuss an art-based PAR case study with refugee women from Burma who resettled in North Carolina. The authors explain how the PAR project was in jeopardy of dissolving due to the university timeline of graduate students working with the PAR project graduating, and thus needed the research project to be finalized before then. The students needed “results,” which was not occurring, since the refugee women were re-negotiating the process of the art-project. The possibility of the research project being dissolved caused the anxiety level of the refugee women to rise. However, the authors write how “a dramatic shift in power occurred” (p. 88) when the project shifted to refocus the refugee group’s efforts on their own community to make the women’s group “strong and stable” (p.88), instead of focusing on the external US community members, which was what the university facilitators wanted the project to entail. Here, the Women’s Group partnered with two local community organizations, who were working in/with the refugee community already, instead of the university. This partnership resulted in a new program being created, and thus meaningful organizational change occurred at the two nonprofits and within the Burmese community, all because “the facilitators learned to listen” (p. 89) and embraced a cultural humility of “decentering of the self through constant questioning, self-reflection, and commitment to learning about others” (p. 93). The authors reflected on how the PAR process was (unintentionally) informed by “trauma-informed care, which asserts that safety and stability must be established before deeper issues can be addressed” (p. 91). Rubesin and Hayes explain that by not asking the wrong
questions, forcing the prescribed timeline of the university onto the PAR project, and being “solutionless” in their own ideas by listening to the needs and desires of the refugee women, the organizations worked alongside the refugee women to achieve their goal of creating a “strong and stable” Women’s Group. This case study illustrates how higher education participants engaging in PAR research may oppress through their structures/systems/demands, and the importance of the university to not make community partnerships beholden to university demands. This case study emphasizes how strong partnerships are needed that listen and collaborate with others, and not force our own preconceived notions or ideas onto the PAR process.

Chapter six, written by Huckaby, explores the ethnographic film project, Public Education: Participatory Democracy After Neoliberal Times, from a posthumanist perspective and asks us to consider what might become possible…through “exploring cyborg weaving as a renewed possibility for participatory democracy” (p. 99). Huckaby presents a new perspective to critical scholarship by examining how cyborg scholarship, where humanism is decentered, presents new opportunities for those interested in critical (post) qualitative inquiry. What I found most interesting (and helpful) with advancing critical qualitative inquiry, specifically PAR scholarship, is considering a posthumanist perspective that questions humanist conceptualizations of identity, subjectivity, agency, and activism, where we can move beyond the privileging of the human to embracing a cyborg human - where we better examine and understand how the human simultaneously shapes and is shaped by other living and non-living things.

Chapter seven, written by Davies, is the first chapter in Section 3. Here, Davies asks us to consider what might become possible…by examining “our own vulnerabilities and seduction…to neoliberal thought” (p. 135). Davies offers a nuanced understanding of how neoliberalism enabled Trump’s rise to power through seduction and claims that we are all “neoliberal subjects” (p. 135). She argues that “to counter seduction, we need to examine our own vulnerability to seduction – and not blame others for being duped” (p.135). Although this chapter provided a unique and important analysis of Trump’s rise to the presidency, it felt out of place with the rest of the book. The chapter ended abruptly and anticlimactically, where I yearned for more; Davies could have expanded on the implications of qualitative inquiry, especially since this section of the book focuses on “strategic next steps” (p.121). For instance, as neoliberal subjects, how could/can we examine our vulnerabilities to seduction? What would this look and feel like in critical qualitative inquiry? What might we do once our vulnerabilities to seduction are examined? How are we to understand seduction in our own pedagogy?

The final chapter by Cannella encourages readers to consider what might become possible… “as partners in becomingswith each other” (p. 150). Cannella synthesizes the previous chapters and provides a historical overview of critical qualitative scholarship, the contributions critical scholarship has had on society, and its limitations to create a strategic call to action from a posthumanist framework, where environmental justice is intersected – an in-betweenness as relational focused on “becomingswith” is embodied and practiced. Cannella proposes that critical qualitative scholars “nurture our present and future connections and relations with the multiplicities of critical histories…[to] becomingswith” (p. 138).

To create a more socially just world, Cannella argues that in our inquiry, human actions need to intersect with a concern for nonliving and living entities – to literally intersect with the environment and environmental concerns. She explains how scholars must challenge human privilege in our conceptualizations of research and practices of education and care, so that capital is no longer centered. Given the seriousness of climate change – with the rise of environmental injustice – and colonization’s devastating impact to indigenous communities (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008), I found posthumanism particularly important (and relevant) with considering how critical qualitative inquiry can offer an antidote in our neoliberal times, particularly with scholars interested in PAR. Cannella’s chapter left me motivated to consider environmental injustice in my own PAR work from a posthumanism approach - to examine and create a call to action for a more socially just world for not just humans, but for our environment. I would have to agree with Cannella that not considering posthumanism, specifically environmental justice, in our scholar-activist work, may further marginalize and perpetuate injustices that harm our communities, particularly indigenous communities and historically marginalized communities of color.

The Afterword, written by Denzin, centers around What might become possible… “to return to the beginning …[to] advance a pedagogy of freedom and hope in the 21st century” (p. 157)? Denzin offers a list of 19 talking points – commitments - for “pedagogies of hope for dark days…[that]… “demand a performative politics that leads the way to radical social change” (p. 157). The list of talking points summarizes key points from the previous chapters and things to consider going forward, focusing on dismantling the hold of neoliberal thought in our public pedagogy, teaching, scholarship, and ourselves.
and embracing a “community-centered democracy” (p. 157). Although, I found this short, three-page list insightful with recapping important “talking points” of critical qualitative inquiry, I was underwhelmed by the numerous and over reliance of citations of Giroux and other white male critical scholars, where scholars of indigenous and people of color perspectives/identities were missing. Additionally, the list seemed to privilege a humanist perspective to critical inquiry, which diminished the contributions of those who wrote from a posthumanist framework.

This book is an important and relevant read for any activist-scholar engaging in critical or postmodern scholarship and even beneficial for critics of qualitative research to better understand how qualitative inquiry may shed light on today’s dynamic, complex, and diverse society. However, the book is theoretically heavy at times and may be difficult for some to fully grasp and appreciate what is being discussed. Additionally, the chapters mostly use ethnographic methods in their approaches to critical qualitative inquiry. Those interested in mixed methodologies or different methods beyond ethnography, may find this book disappointing. Despite these limitations, Huckaby’s edited volume advances critical (post)qualitative inquiry, and deepens our understanding of the importance of PAR, by showcasing how the limitations of higher education research, structure, processes, and demands may oppress, while highlighting how university demands must evolve and allow for flexibility, and center co-participants experiences/voices, and not ourselves/themselves in the research process. Here, community partnerships outside of the university must be developed as a part of any PAR project for meaningful change to take hold and last beyond the (traditional) research process – an in-betweenness as relational (Diversi & Moreira, 2009) must be embodied. These authors provide instrumental critiques and offer hope for the future of critical qualitative inquiry. What I find most interesting for further exploration to advance critical (post)qualitative inquiry in our troubled – neoliberal – times, is considering how cultural humility (Jisrawi & Arnold, 2018; Lund & Lee, 2015), trauma-informed care (Aviles & Grigalunas, 2018), and posthumanism (Keifer-Boyd, Knochel, Patton, & Sweeny, 2018; MacDonald, 2014; Musgrave, 2016) might be incorporated into scholar-activist work, so that we do not “wind up diagnosing the wrong problem or asking the wrong questions” (p. 92). Imagine, then... What might become possible? ... Making Research Public in Troubled Times encourages us all to do just that.

References


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