Navigating Fear & Resistance: The Path to Conscientização in Social Foundations of Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of fostering anti-oppressive education within teacher preparation programs. The paper argues that student resistance often stems from a psychological adherence to the familiar and a fear of disrupting deeply held self-concepts. It explores the instinct to defend preconceived ideas against perspectives that unsettle an established worldview - a phenomenon rooted in the ego's protective mechanisms. The paper delves into the intricate interplay between psychological defenses, societal conditioning, and the difficulties of nurturing critical consciousness within educational frameworks. It highlights how personal identities, shaped by societal norms and implicit messages, influence perceptions of reality inciting resistance to challenging narratives as a defense against identity disruption. However, these psychological barriers, while deeply entrenched, are not insurmountable. The paper argues that fostering conscientização, a critical consciousness capable of discerning and dismantling oppressive narratives, requires a journey into the subconscious. By leveraging psychoanalytic pedagogy, educators can help individuals confront and transform the internalized narratives that bind them, empowering them to reclaim agency, reimagine their identities, and contribute meaningfully to societal transformation.

Keywords: *conscientização, critical consciousness, dominant ideology, psychological resistance, identity, fear, psychoanalytic pedagogy*

Introduction

Powerful hegemons establish dominant ideologies that become ingrained in individuals through socialization, shaping their identities and societal views. Historically, this was achieved through brute force and conquest. In modern times, the control of ideas has shifted, subtly embedding these ideologies in social institutions that shape identity and worldviews. Once internalized, these ideologies are resistant to change, forming the bedrock of a person's identity, relationships, and perception of the world.

In Social Foundations of Education (SFE) courses, where critiques of oppressive ideologies are common, students often interpret teacher-led challenges to these ingrained beliefs as personal threats. This resistance is deeply rooted in fear - fear of confronting unsettling truths about oneself and society, and fear of losing the security of established identities and social connections. This psychological resistance is evident when students are reluctant to engage in the tough, painful, and

frustrating process of self-reflection. As Slusher and Anderson have found, "Once beliefs are established, they are inordinately resistant to change."[1] Yet, motivation, hard work, and dedication to growth and openness are required for self-development and social progress.

To maintain their identity and social bonds, many students unconsciously employ psychological defense mechanisms, as described by Anna Freud,[2] to protect themselves from the discomfort of ideological challenges. These mechanisms, such as denial, projection, and rationalization, serve to shield the ego from alternative perspectives that may destabilize their worldview. As Frankfurt School critical theorist and social psychologist, Erich Fromm, noted, fear of freedom and the anxieties that come with confronting new realities often keep individuals trapped in systems of false consciousness. While these defenses provide short-term relief from fear, they paradoxically contribute to greater psychological tension and anxiety in the long run, reinforcing the fear of change.

The emotional dimension of this resistance cannot be ignored. Fear, whether it is fear of losing one's identity, social connections, or sense of certainty, plays a crucial role in maintaining ideological attachments. As Paulo Freire noted in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, fear is a significant barrier to the development of *conscientização*, or critical consciousness.[3] This fear-driven resistance inhibits students from engaging in open discourse, preventing them from critically examining the internalized ideologies that obscure genuine self-understanding and societal oppression.

Many individuals are unaware of the unconscious beliefs and fears driving their resistance. Rather than engaging with the questions posed by critical pedagogy, they often prefer to avoid open discourse and seek information that confirms their existing beliefs; a phenomenon known as confirmation bias.[4] However, critical awareness and personal and societal growth depend on a willingness to reflect and change. Overcoming these ingrained ideologies and unconscious fears is essential for liberation.

Dominant ideologies, deeply embedded in our psyche, pose a formidable challenge to the development of *conscientização*. As Freire described, awakening critical consciousness requires recognizing and critically examining the beliefs and values that direct our thinking and form our sense of reality. These internalized notions often lie below our conscious awareness, making it essential to bring them to light for scrutiny and critique. After all, what is the purpose of life if not a movement towards liberation, and who can be liberated if their mind is caught in chains of illusion?

This paper examines how socio-psychological factors contribute to student resistance in SFE courses. By linking critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical psychology, it recommends a critical socio-psychoanalytic pedagogy as a means to reduce student resistance and promote liberation and critical self-awareness. To achieve this, educators must address both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of resistance, helping students confront the fears that sustain their ideological attachments, hinder growth, and impede social progress.

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1. Morgan P. Slusher and Craig A. Anderson, "Belief Perseverance and Self-Defeating Behavior," in *Self- Defeating Behaviors: Experimental Research, Clinical Impressions and Practical Implications,* ed. R.C. Curtis (New York: Plenum, 1989), 11-40.

2. Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: Karnac Books, 1993).

3. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

4. Nicholas Epley and Thomas Gilovich, "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2016): 133-140.

Bridging Sociology and Psychology to Understand Resistance to Dominant Narratives

While extensive literature exists on student resistance to SFE education,[5] addressing ingrained oppressive narratives, most studies adopt either a sociological or psychological approach. This paper aims to articulate these two perspectives in an effort to elucidate the inextricable connection that must be bridged in the quest for liberation. Understanding their interplay is essential for grasping how dominant ideologies—mere illusions crafted by hegemons - become ingrained in our psyche through socialization and ideological hegemony.

Scholars from the Frankfurt School, founded in 1923, recognized that social theory alone could not adequately explain people's ambivalence, apathy, and resistance to oppression. Prominent Frankfurt School Psychoanalytic scholar, Erich Fromm, sought to understand not only the coercive, institutional features of modern society but also the essential psychic structures and durable dispositions of individuals in the German proletariat of their time. His work provides a foundation for understanding ambivalence and resistance to counter-hegemonic notions of reality. [6]

The Frankfurt School famously combined Marxism and psychoanalysis to understand the absence of working-class opposition to fascism. In this tradition, Fromm examined the interplay of the psychological and sociological factors underlying resistance to fascism. Fromm showed how a worker's experience of capitalist society produced not only a false perception of economic interests but also a "false" sense of self.[7] His work is crucial because his effort to combine radical sociology with depth psychology was based on a firm understanding of psychoanalytic theory, providing a framework for understanding the interconnection between ideology, hegemony, sociology, and psychology. [8]

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5. Roberta Alquist, "Manifestations of Inequality: Overcoming Resistance in a Multicultural Foundations Course," in *Research & multicultural education: From the margins to the mainstream,* ed. C.A. Grant (London: Routledge, 1992), 86-101; Dan W. Butin, "Identity (Re)Construction and Student Resistance," in *Teaching social foundations of Education: Context, Theories, and Issues,* ed. D.W. Butin (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 109-126; Ricardo E. Gonsalves, "Hysterical Blindness and the Ideology of Denial: Preservice Teachers' Resistance to Multicultural Education," in *Ideologies in Education: Unmasking the Trap of Teacher Neutrality,* ed. L.I. Bartolome (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 3-27.; Nancy P. Greenman and Ellen B. Kimmel, "The Road to Multicultural Education: Potholes of Resistance," *Journal of Teacher Education* 46, no. 5 (1995): 360-368; Kathy Hytten and Amee Adkins, "Thinking Through a Pedagogy of Whiteness," *Educational Theory* 51, no. 4 (2001): 433–450; Stuart M. Keeley, Kenneth M. Shemberg, Brenda S. Cowell, and Brian J. Zinnbauer, "Coping with Student Resistance to Critical Thinking: What the Psychotherapy Literature Can Tell Us," *College Teaching* 43, no. 4 (1995): 140–45; Kevin K. Kumashiro, "Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education," *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 1 (2000): 25-53; Kevin K. Kumashiro, "Against Repetition: Addressing Resistance to Anti-Oppressive Change in the Practices of Learning, Teaching, Supervising, and Researching." *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 1 (2002): 67–93; Seymour, Susan. "Resistance." *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 (2006): 303–21; Stengel, Barbara. "Facing Fear, Releasing Resistance, Enabling Education." *Philosophical Studies in Education* 39, (2008): 66-75; Ullman, Chana. "Fear of Metamorphosis." *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 47, no. 4 (2011): 480–96.

6. Wolfgang Bonss, "Critical Theory and Empirical Social Research: Some Observations," F*romm E The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study, (Leamington Spa: Berg*, 1984), 1-38 quoted in Mark P. Worrell, "Authoritarianism, Critical Theory, and Political Psychology: Past, Present, Future," *Social Thought and Research* (1998): 5.

7. Ron Eyerman, "False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory," *Acta Sociologica* 24, no. 1–2 (1981): 54.

8. Neil McLaughlin, "Origin Myths in the Social Sciences: Fromm, the Frankfurt School and the Emergence of Critical Theory," *Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* 24, no. 1 (1999): 127.

The blending of Marxian political and socioeconomic theory with Freudian psychology underpins the core tenets of Critical Theory. Recent research indicates that Freudo-Marxism became a characteristic of critical theory as practiced by the Frankfurt School.[9] Marx and Freud were concerned not with superficial phenomena but with the radical (driving forces) that evoke changing and temporary phenomena.[10] Since Marxism is the only scientific form of sociology, and Freudian psychoanalysis is the only scientific form of psychology,[11] these two "scientific" (systematic, empirical, and predictive—not deterministic) systems enable us to uncover underlying forces, predict individual outcomes in societies, and explain counterintuitive phenomena.[12]

Cultural factors, behavior, and psychology have an objective cultural dimension that is not subjectively known by the individual,[13] resulting in a false consciousness. Such a false consciousness is a phenomenon influenced by psychological factors and shaped by cultural elements, warping the perception of social, psychological, and natural realities.[14] An analysis combining Marxism and psychoanalysis enables a deeper understanding of the interdependence of sociological and psychological factors leading to resistance to counter-hegemonic messages.

Critical social psychology shows that individual psychology intertwines with societal influences, highlighting how our unconscious is shaped by our social and historical context.[15] Internalization is the process by which external, sociohistorical reality is assimilated into internal and subjective reality.[16] As such, psychological processes "…cannot be divorced from their social context; even the contents of the unconscious mind, dreams, and fantasies are supplied by the social, historical, and political location of individuals."[17]

Mannheim highlights the interconnectedness of sociology and psychology, emphasizing that individual knowledge is shaped by historical-social contexts rather than isolated thought.[18] While acknowledging the internal world of the individual, Mannheim stressed that knowledge does not start with the single individual and her thinking because the individual lives in a historical-social context and thus thinks in the manner, ideas, and language of that particular context. Language shapes self-perception, culture, politics, wealth creation, and connection to nature and is integral to human identity, reflecting history and relationships.[19] Mannheim noted, "The principal thesis of the sociology of knowledge is that there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscured."[20] Individual thoughts are defined by the

9. Erich Fromm, "Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Reality" (1966). Accessed December 21, 2023. https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1966/psychoanalysis.htm.

10. Fromm, "Marxism," 5.

11. Fromm, "Marxism," 5.

12. "Scientific" here refers to In this context, "scientific" refers to a systematic, empirical, and predictive approach that explains hidden mechanisms and determines outcomes based on observable forces.

13. Carl Ratner, "False Consciousness," In *The Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology,* Springer, New York, NY., (2014): 675.

14. Eyerman, "False Consciousness," 1981.

15. Derek Hook, *"Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, 'Psychopolitics', and Critical Psychology,"* in *Critical Psychology*, eds. Derek Hook, Anthony Collins, Erica Burman, I. Parker, Peace Kiguwa, and Nhlanhla Mkhize, Nhlanhla, (UCT Press, Lansdowne, South Africa), 84-114, (*London: LSE Research Online*, 2004), 101.

16. Hook, "*Fanon,"* 101.

17. Hook, "*Fanon,"* 101.

18. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

19. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: J. Currey, 1986).

20. Mannheim, *Ideology*, p. 19.

words and meanings of a particular culture and language.[21] "In every concept, in every concrete meaning, there is contained a crystallization of the experiences of a certain group" that animates our understandings. [22]

Martín-Barò concurs that individual and social psychology are necessarily intertwined; the psyche always operates in a social context.[23] Our understanding of the world is inherently limited by the reality we live in. Our perception and interpretation of history is influenced not only by our own perspective but also by the very nature of reality itself as it has been presented to us. In other words, identity is formed by ideologies learned within a particular social-historical context. Individuals are a constituent part of the social fabric, and their experiences are as much a consequence of material, social, and environmental determinants as they are of their own psychic apparatus.[24]

It is easy to fall prey to hegemonic ideologies, but difficult to expel them. Social concepts organize psychological functions, and our identities have been fashioned around those ideologies, forming patterned ways of thinking about the world. [25] We generally do not know that we symbolize incoming stimulation and match it against stored representations as we perceive, feel, need, desire, dream, create, solve problems, or remember.[26] Therefore, it is crucial to become conscious of the underlying ideologies shaping our thoughts so that we can scrutinize them.

The widespread acceptance of certain ingrained ideas can mask their toxicity, making it challenging to identify them as harmful. Just because millions share a flawed mindset does not make it virtuous, just as shared misconceptions do not make them truths, and a widespread mental pathology does not equate to sanity.[27] The inability to attain freedom, spontaneity, and genuine self-realization is indicative of a significant social deficiency, which Fromm terms the socially patterned defect.[28] This defect is insidious and pernicious as it provides a deceptive sense of safety in conformity. These flaws are often mistakenly regarded as virtues, reinforcing them as achievements and hiding their dangers.[29] Consequently, collective thinking errors that go unscrutinized can lead to extensive harm and suffering, as happened when the German proletariat failed to resist fascism in the 1930s.

The Intersection of Identity, Fear, and Resistance in Shaping Human Behavior

Identity theory posits that distress arises when feedback from others, through reflected appraisals or perceptions suggested by others' behavior, does not align with one's self-identity.[30] The theory also suggests that the salience of a particular identity is determined by one's commitment

21. Mannheim, *Ideology*, 1960; Thiong'o, *Decolonizing*, 1986.

22. Mannheim, *Ideology*, p. 19.

23. Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 51.

24. David J. Nightingale and John Cromby, "Critical Psychology and the Ideology of Individualism," *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling, and Psychotherapy* 1, no. 2 (2001): 6.

25. Carl Ratner, "The Unconscious: A Perspective from Sociohistorical Psychology," *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 15, no. 4 (1994): 328.

26. Ratner, "The Unconscious," 330.

27 Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: H. Holt, 1990).

28. Fromm, *Sane,* 1990.

29. Fromm, *Sane,* 1990.

30. Michael A. Hogg, Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White, "A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1995): 257; Tajfel, Henri, & John C. Turner. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." In *Political Psychology: Key Readings*, 276–293. Psychology Press, 2004. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505984-16

to that role.[31] Commitment to a role identity is high when people perceive that many of their important social relationships depend on their occupancy of that role.

Consequently, changing personal beliefs can threaten both self-identity and one's social network simultaneously, as relationships are often formed with others who hold similar views. Social identity theory and social psychology have different foci, with the former emphasizing the former emphasizes individual psychology and interpersonal relationships, while the latter is more concerned with group behaviors.[32] However, understanding illusory thinking requires acknowledging the interrelation between individuals and groups. Carl Jung emphasized the need for psychological understanding to identify biases and illusions, advocating for questioning assumptions to align with reality.[33] This task, however, is challenging for most people.

As the dissonance literature reveals, people have a need to protect the self and will go to great lengths to resist information that does not align with their identity. Writing about student resistance, Stengel states that the prime mover is fear motivated by a loss of self.[34] Thus, the underlying psychological desire for consistency is driven by fear.

Krishnamurti explains that fear, triggered by the transition from certainty to uncertainty, animates us insidiously as it lurks below the surface, drives our motivations, and can override reasoning.[35] One of the major causes of fear is the reluctance to face oneself as one truly is. Overcoming fears requires examining them and the network of escapes developed to rid oneself of them.[36] However, this is an extremely difficult task since fear often overrides reasoning.[37]

Fear is hardwired into the amygdala region of the brain, with its connections to higher regions often overpowering logical thought from the cortex. This makes fear more dominant in decision-making and harder to overcome with reason, requiring substantial effort to counteract it.[38] When driven by fear, people tend to act illogically and irrationally. Williams notes that living in illusions about one aspect of life restricts one's capacity for reason in all other aspects.[39] Freedom and independence can be achieved only when the chains of illusion are broken.[40]

Fromm and Krishnamurti suggest that to overcome fear, one must tolerate insecurity without panic or undue fear.[41] Fear leads people to resist opposing viewpoints while psychological defense mechanisms justify existing beliefs leading to dismissal of conflicting information. Fromm writes that humans have an insuperable urge to rationalize their actions, even if they are unreasonable or immoral, to prove that their actions are determined by reason, common sense, or conventional morality.[42]

Resistance to opposing evidence results in a firmer attachment to current beliefs, reducing fear of identity change. Moreover, associating with like-minded individuals reinforces resistance to alternative views, as it threatens their social connections. Therefore, it is crucial in SFE courses

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31. Hogg, *Tale*, 1995.
32. Hogg, *Tale,* 258.
33. Jung, C. G. (1958; 2005). The undiscovered self. Taylor and Francis e-library.
34. Barbara Stengel, "Facing Fear, Releasing Resistance, Enabling Education," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 39, (2008): 66-75.
35. Jiddu Krishnamurti, *On Fear* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 7.
36. Krishnamurti, *On Fear*, 7.
37. Williams, Kaylene C. "Fear Appeal Theory." *International Journal of Economics and Business Research* 5, no. 1, (2012): 1-21.
38. Williams, *Fear*, 2012.
39. Williams, Fear, 2012.
40. Fromm, *Sane,* 64.
41. Fromm, *Sane,* 64: Krishnamurti, *On Fear*, 7.
42. Fromm, *Sane,* 64.

to address both hegemonic ideology and psychic resistance, that operate as defense mechanisms that serve to justify beliefs and preserve identity.

The Deep Psychological Roots of Belief Perseverance: Understanding Resistance to Change

Humans have an innate tendency to seek patterns and form connections between events. We naturally generalize and draw analogies to create a unified understanding of the world while using defense mechanisms to protect our beliefs and self-esteem. These processes help us anticipate future events, efficiently process information, and bring order to seemingly random occurrences by building complex mental models.[43] Throughout life, we develop intuitive theories to comprehend our surroundings, but these theories often harbor simplistic errors. These errors are stubbornly held, even when we know better, especially when applying learned concepts to real-world situations.[44]

Belief perseverance, the phenomenon of clinging to one's initial beliefs despite evidence to the contrary, occurs when people maintain misconceptions despite being aware of their inaccuracy.[45] Slusher and Anderson highlight that new evidence does not always dispel unfounded beliefs.[46] Most learning theories operate on the assumption that organisms continue to respond in their accustomed way unless the situation changes noticeably. Once a habit or attitude is established, its operation often becomes satisfying to the organism, making it resistant to change.[47]

Lecky's theory of self-consistency emphasizes the importance of self-protection in maintaining beliefs as people seek experiences that affirm their values and avoid those that challenge them.[48] Self-consistency theory posits that the consistent and stable traits of personality serve to resist change to maintain fundamental integration and unity. Similarly, Lord, Ross, and Lepper's biased assimilation model suggests that individuals perceive information that aligns with their self-benefiting conclusions as more credible than information that does not.[49] This inclination to favor certain types of information enables people to uphold self-serving beliefs while preserving logical coherence between their conclusions and the evidence at hand, but does so at the expense of identity development.

Tailifar and Swann's self-verification theory supports the self-protective function of belief perseverance demonstrating that people act according to the preference for evaluations that verify their self-views by ensuring that their experiences confirm and reinforce these self-views.[50] This social-psychological theory also asserts that people want others to see them as they see themselves and will take active steps to ensure that others perceive them in ways that confirm their stable self-views.[51]

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43. Leah Savion, "Clinging to Discredited Beliefs: The Larger Cognitive Story," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 9, no. 1 (2009): 81–92.

44. Savion, "Clinging," 2009.

45. Savion, "Clinging," 2009.

46. Slusher, "Belief," 11-40.

47. Watson, "Resistance to Change," *American Behavioral Scientist* 14, no. 5 (1971): 749.

48. Prescott Lecky and Frederick C. Thorne, *Self-Consistency: A Theory of Personality*, (New York: Island Press, 1951).

49. Lord, "Biased Assimilation," 1979 quoted in Tom Pyszczynski, Jeff Greenberg, and Kathleen Holt, "Maintaining Consistency Between Self-Serving Beliefs and Available Data," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 11, no. 2 (1985): 179–90.

50. Sanaz Tailifar and William B. Swann, Jr. "Self-Verification Theory," *In Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, 1-9, Springer, Cham. (2017): 1.

51. Talaifar, "Self-Verification," 1.

When faced with opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that are inconsistent with their own, people experience psychological discomfort, or dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory revolves around the notion that when an individual is aware of different things that do not align psychologically, they will attempt to bring them into greater harmony.[52] This theory suggests that humans are not inherently rational animals but rationalizing ones, attempting to appear rational to both others and themselves.[53]

Most of our internalized opinions, beliefs, and attitudes are consonant with each other, resulting in a patterned way of thinking that allows us to maintain a cohesive view of ourselves and our world. These patterned ways of thinking are deeply integrated into our cognitive schemata after being repeatedly transmitted through social institutions. The repetition of one narrative over another reinforces its perceived truth and accuracy. New messages override rationality or logical consistency as they violate an expectation for psychological consistency with beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that one has accepted as "true."[54]

Motivated reasoning helps maintain psychological consistency. Motivation can provoke the suppression of knowledge structures that might interfere with one's ability to draw a desired conclusion.[55] This happens, for instance, to support a positive view of oneself in order to maintain psychological consistency. Because people are motivated to reason in a way that reaffirms their identity, they are especially likely to activate and apply stereotypes that lend support to their desired impression of an individual. Kundra and Sinclair found that people may pick and choose among the stereotypes applicable to a given individual, inhibiting those that conflict with their desired impression and activating those that lend support to this impression.[56] This supports Aronson's proposition that people often justify beliefs rather than act rationally, aligning perceptions with desired truths.[57]

Aronson's advancement of the theory that dissonance can be caused by threats to an individual's self-concept[58] is supported by Steele and Liu's suggestion that individuals could relieve dissonance-induced arousal by simply reaffirming a valued aspect of the self, even if the aspect is unrelated to dissonant cognitions.[59] Consequently concluding that "…interpretations of cognitive dissonance place greater emphasis on a desire to maintain positive self-perceptions rather than cognitive consistency."[60] Both positions agree that cognitive dissonance is a psychological resistance triggered when counter-narratives challenge deeply held beliefs, serving as a defense mechanism, and stifling critical consciousness.

When considering how students process information in SFE courses, their internal dialogue could go could something like this: "You're presenting me with alternative perspectives that clash with my existing beliefs. Embracing these new ideas would mean abandoning my current worldview, severing ties with my community, and reshaping my identity. This is a risk too great

52. Leon Festinger, "Cognitive Dissonance," *Scientific American* 207, no. 4 (1962): 93.

53. Elliot Aronson, "The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance: A Current Perspective," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (1969): 1–34.

54. Aronson, "The Theory," 1969.

55. Ziva Kundra and Lisa Sinclair, "Motivated Reasoning with Stereotypes: Activation, Application, and Inhibition," *Psychological Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (1999): 13.

56. Kundra, "Motivated," 17.

57. Aronson, "The Theory," 1969.

58. Aronson, "The Theory," 1969.

59. Claude M. Steele and Thomas J. Liu, "Dissonance Processes as Self-Affirmation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45,* no. 1 (1983): 5–19 quoted in Miller, "Cognitive Dissonance," 2015.

60. Monica K. Miller, Jordan D. Clark, and Alayna Jehle, "Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger)," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 1-5, (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2015).

to take, preventing me from accepting this new information." Thereby the rejection of new information is likely to occur without due consideration.

Understanding Resistance: The Interplay of Identity, Beliefs, and Societal Imprints

Resistance is a multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in identity, beliefs, and societal influences. Butin discussed resistance as a reaction to failure, unknowing, alienation, and uncaring.[61] Following Foucault's concept of the 'subjectification' of the self, Butin describes resistance as identity reconstruction, where students resist new cognitions to maintain their existing identity, rejecting new identities and masking their identity's continual change and reconstruction. He suggests that social justice pedagogy should focus on students' identity construction and reconstruction rather than content knowledge because resistance to contested content knowledge can be viewed as a proxy for students' desire for stability and certainty.[62]

In the context of multicultural education, Gonsalves states that "…preservice teachers resist multicultural education because they need to defend dominant social values integral to their sense of self."[63] For Gonsalves, dominant culture enacts a form of psychological warfare upon the citizenry, ensuring that public consciousness, manufactured by social institutions, supplants individual awareness and negates the possibility of spontaneous critical thought. Through socialization, individuals experience societal rules as personally authored beliefs. Consequently, they may feel they have independently acquired these standards when, in fact, the beliefs and values are imposed upon them to maintain and reproduce the social order.[64] To overcome resistance to SFE instruction, teachers must take a dynamic approach acknowledging student resistance as both a psychological defense of the individual ego and the ideological values of the dominant culture.[65] However, there is a lack of research on the nature and dynamics of students' fear-driven, self-reinforcing cycles of resistance in SFE classrooms.

Seymour laments the lack of attention to psychological conditions regarding resistance in cultural anthropology.[66] She criticizes the field's general dismissal of psychological perspectives, noting its detrimental impact on understanding resistance. Most research on resistance overlooks how individuals absorb and utilize cultural meanings. While there is an implicit understanding of psychological factors driving resistance, these are not sufficiently detailed in existing literature. Additionally, the lack of in-depth exploration of psychological processes in the context of student resistance persists despite recognizing psychological motivations to resist new information.

Research has demonstrated that a self-protective mechanism underlies the psychological drive to justify resistance to counter-information in order to maintain one's view of their identity. It is imperative that education for critical consciousness must consider this.[67] As Britzman states,

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61. Dan W. Butin, "Identity (Re)Construction and Student Resistance," in *Teaching Social Foundations of Education: Context, Theories, and Issues,* edited by D.W. Butin, (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 109-126.

62. Butin, "Identity," 119.

63. Ricardo E. Gonsalves, "Hysterical Blindness and The Ideology of Denial: Preservice Teachers' Resistance to Multicultural Education," on *Ideologies in education: Unmasking the trap of teacher neutrality,* ed. L.I. Bartolome, 3-27 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 8.

64. Gonsalves, "Hysterical," 15.

65. Gonsalves, "Hysterical," 4.

66. Seymour, "Resistance," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 (2006): 303–21.

67. Dan M. Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," *Judgment and Decision Making* 8, no. 4 (2013): 407–24; Dan M. Kahan, "The Politically Motivated Reasoning Paradigm, Part 1: What Politically

developing a critical consciousness involves learning about the processes of privileging/normalizing and marginalizing/othering, but also unlearning what one has learned as "normal" and normative.[68] Unlearning necessitates that education for critical consciousness address the unconscious/psychic resistance to change.

While a rationalist approach to consciousness-raising assumes that pure reason leads to understanding, it disregards the inherent influence of one's identities, experiences, and privileges, perpetuating the idea of an unattainable rational detachment.[69] In reality, people are driven by a strong desire to affirm their existing beliefs, often seeking out information that supports them, known as confirmation bias.[70] Strong emotional reactions to new ideas often signal a deep personal attachment to those beliefs. When individuals perceive a threat to their identity, fear sets in, causing cognitive dissonance and leading them to reject conflicting ideas. This fear acts as a psychological defense mechanism to protect the self.

Psychological research highlights that beliefs are shaped by motivated reasoning, where reasoning serves self-interest while still functioning as a form of logic.[71] According to Ernest Becker's theory of fear management, this fear often stems from an awareness of mortality and the vulnerability of human existence. To cope, individuals turn to cultural worldviews, belief systems, or heroic projects that provide meaning, security, and a sense of permanence. These systems act as psychological buffers against existential anxiety, reinforcing self-esteem within a larger symbolic framework. When these worldviews are challenged, the fear intensifies, leading to defensive reactions such as denial, resistance, or clinging to ideologies to protect one's identity and avoid feelings of helplessness.[72]

In sum, addressing resistance in educational contexts necessitates recognizing the intricate relationship between identity, psychological defenses, rationalizations, and cultural influences. Educators must consider these dynamics when shaping pedagogy, focusing not only on content knowledge but also on the ways in which students' identities are constructed and defended. By acknowledging the psychological and emotional underpinnings of resistance, such as fear, confirmation bias, and attachment to dominant cultural values, educators can more effectively foster critical consciousness and engage students in meaningful, transformative learning experiences.

Motivated Reasoning Is and How to Measure It," *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2016, 1-16; Kundra, "The Case, "1990; Kundra, "Motivated," 1999; Miller, "Cognitive," 2015; Talaifar, "Self-Verification," 2017; Savion, "Clinging," 2009; Kris Vasquez, Debra Oswald, and Angela Hammer, "Being Dishonest About Our Prejudices: Moral Dissonance and Self-Justification," *Psychology Faculty and Research Publications*, (2019): 382-404.

68. Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning*, (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1998) quoted in Kumashiro, "Toward," 2000.

69. Kumashiro, "Toward," 2000.

70. Nicholas Epley and Thomas Gilovich, "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2016): 133-140.

71. Nicholas Epley and Thomas Gilovich, "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2016): 133-140.

72. Ernest Becker. *The Denial of Death*, (New York: Free Press, 1973).

Navigating the "Fear of Metamorphosis": Psychoanalytic Insights and Educational Processes

Fear is described as a "complete alteration of valued aspects of selfhood, experienced as an imminent catastrophe," reflecting an attempt to protect aspects of one's identity from transformation.[73] Like Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and the ancient myths in Ovid's Metamorphosis, the term "metamorphosis" signifies a transformation of identity, a change from one life form into another. Humans, whether in clinical settings, educational environments, or everyday life, inherently fear metamorphosis.[74] This fear of change, an extreme form of fear rooted in loss of self and social relations, manifests during confrontations with "otherness" that are inevitable in our relational world and must be negotiated within the dynamics of transference and countertransference to reduce the threat of "not me."[75]

In psychoanalysis, addressing this fear involves a complex negotiation between analyst and patient on multiple levels—intrapsychic, interpersonal, relational, cultural, and political. Through these negotiations, a self may be transformed without losing its form and expanded without losing its boundaries.[76] Given the notable parallels between psychotherapist-patient dynamics and instructor-student relationships, educators in SFE classrooms could benefit from adopting a psychodynamic approach to teaching.[77]

Sociology and psychology are inescapably intertwined, as the psyche operates within a social context. The individual's personal identity emerges from the combined social influences of their particular historical situation.[78] People can recognize discrepancies between what they are told and their lived experiences. However, when their realities are not reflected back to them, the growth of their personal and collective identities is impeded. Therefore, SFE educators should heed Martín-Baró's call for "de-ideologizing" consciousness, which involves uncovering unconscious drives at both the psychic and social levels.

Understanding and addressing the fear of metamorphosis in educational settings requires recognizing the intersections of psychoanalytic insights and educational processes. By adopting a socio-psychodynamic approach, educators can help students navigate the complex negotiations necessary for identity transformation and growth.

The Psychological Foundations of Critical Consciousness: Unraveling Freire's Conscientização

In SFE courses, a primary objective is to cultivate critical consciousness as expounded by Freire.[79] This process involves fostering a dialogical education that emphasizes social and political responsibility. Critical consciousness requires deep, reasoned analysis based on cause and effect, critical evaluation of evidence, openness to changing views, bias avoidance, personal responsibility, and active engagement rather than passivity. It emphasizes forming strong arguments, engaging in constructive dialogue, and appreciating both traditional and modern views. It also demands

73. Chana Ullman, "Fear of Metamorphosis," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 47, no. 4 (2011): 480–96.
74. Ullman, "Metamorphosis," 480.
75. Ullman, "Metamorphosis," 480.
76. Ullman, "Metamorphosis," 495.
77. Keeley, "Coping," 1995.
78. Martín-Baró, *Writings*, 1994; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003)
79. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 2003.

receptivity to new information and the discarding of unfounded beliefs, highlighting the necessary psychological transformation that Freire emphasized. Freire alluded to the psychological nature of critical awareness and its importance for education, though he never fully developed the psychological aspect necessary for conscientização (the development of critical consciousness). [80] Freire asserts:

> The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and recreate, in their power to transform the world. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account.[81]

The development of critical consciousness is the process in which individuals, not as passive recipients but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the sociocultural reality shaping their lives and their capacity to transform that reality.[82] This process requires more than critical sociopolitical awareness; it requires a psychological transformation.

Conscientização, for Freire, grows out of a critical educational effort through a series of stages ranging from semi-intransitive to transitive (critical) consciousness.[83] In the semi-intransitive phase, individuals perceive only basic survival needs and often resort to "magical thinking," attributing their oppressed state to external factors like "God's will." In this stage, people are passive in the historical process, lacking agency and broader historical awareness, leading to an inauthentic existence dominated by external forces.

In the second stage, transitive consciousness, individuals move beyond mere biological understanding and engage deeply with others and the world, recognizing life's dynamism. Initially, this stage is naïve, marked by oversimplified views, nostalgia, undervaluing common people, gregariousness, disinterest in investigation, and preference for fanciful explanations. It features weak arguments, strong emotions, polemics over dialogue, and magical reasoning.[84] In naïve-transitivity, individuals are part of a larger group with vulnerable and distortable dialogue.

The ultimate, though not certain, stage of consciousness is critical transitivity, marked by problem interpretation, causal analysis, evidence testing, and willingness to revise. Participants in this stage strive to minimize distortions and accept personal responsibility. Conscientização involves educational efforts focused on active dialogue to foster social and political accountabilityand uncover false consciousness. [85]

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80. Robert L. Lake and Vicki Dagostino, "Converging Self-Other Awareness: Erich Fromm and Paulo Freire on Transcending the Fear of Freedom," in *Paulo Freire's Intellectual Roots: Toward Historicity in Praxis*, eds. R. Lake & T. Kress, 101-126. (New York, NY: Continuum Publishers, 2013).

81. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

82. Arthur S. Lloyd, "Freire, Conscientization, and Adult Education," *Adult Education* 23, no. 1 (1972): 4.

83. Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

84. Freire, *Education,* 18.

85. Freire, *Education,* 1998.

Failure to transition through the stages that lead to critical consciousness may result in a fanaticized consciousness, further removing the individual from reality than even the semi-intransitive state. Freire explains, "To the extent that a person acts more on the basis of emotionality than of reason, his behavior occurs adaptively and cannot result in commitment, for committed behavior has its roots in critical consciousness and capacity for genuine thought."[86]

Fanaticized consciousness results in distorted reasoning that makes people irrational. For those who hold a fanaticized consciousness, "The possibility of dialogue diminishes markedly."[87] In this state of consciousness, people are often unaware of their own subjugation and lack true freedom. Despite believing they are free, they conform to societal norms and fixed patterns of behavior. Their creativity and agency are limited, rendering them passive objects rather than active subjects.

To recognize their state of conformity, individuals must reflect on their situation. This reflection is meaningful only when coupled with action to change the reality that led to their conformist state, i.e., what Freire terms "praxis."[88] The evolution from naive obedience to critical awareness is key for genuine liberation, while the absence of this evolution can lead to a dehumanized, fanatical mindset associated with mass conformity and loss of self. [89]

Freire discussed the consequences of this in the Brazilian context during an economic transition, similar to the current economic and political situation in the United States, with its staggering wealth inequality and movement from "democracy" to authoritarianism. In Brazil, heightened emotional responses and irrationality, especially from the right, obstructed the adoption of an education program promoting critical consciousness. This opposition arose from fears that an empowered, critical populace would threaten established privileges. Those holding irrational beliefs viewed human development as a threat to their own dehumanization, leading to strong resistance against efforts to encourage true human growth. It is clear to see how semi-intransitive consciousness is imminently possible in the United States today, underscoring the importance of education for critical consciousness.

Addressing the Fear of Identity Loss: A Psychodynamic Approach to Conscientização in SFE Education

Using a socio-psychodynamic pedagogy, instructors can help students explore their unconscious motives and the historical contexts shaping their identities. This approach encourages both an open and honest assessment of the social context along with introspection, allowing students to examine the social construction of reality and the self and to thereby uncover internalized distortions. Recognizing the ever-evolving nature of identity, students should come to value healthy shifts in identity as pivotal for both individual and societal evolution.

Reconstructing one's identity necessitates self-reflection.[90] In this process, the role of the professor becomes crucial not only as a guide but also as a fellow traveler in this introspective journey. To achieve conscientização, the development of critical consciousness, it is essential for educators to help students become aware of and confront the latent fears that could inhibit such awakening. Prilleltensky states, "Unless individuals are aware of the ideological deception of

86. Freire, *Education,* 20.
87. Freire, *Education,* 20.
88. Freire, *Pedagogy,* 2003.
89. Freire, *Education,* 1998.
90. Butin, "Identity," 2005.

which they have fallen victim, they are unlikely to engage in productive change-promoting action. Although awareness does not necessarily guarantee constructive action, it is certainly a condition sine qua non."[91]

People's acceptance of the prevalent ideology, even when it does not reflect their interests, can be a legitimate topic of psychological investigation.[92] Achieving awareness requires a psychodynamic pedagogical approach. This method involves helping students recognize and address the ideological deceptions they have internalized, fostering a deeper understanding of how these deceptions shape their perceptions and actions. Felman argues that psychoanalysis is a pedagogical experience that provides access to new knowledge previously denied to consciousness, offering a lesson in cognition and miscognition.[93] Thus:

> Teaching, like analysis, has to deal not so much with lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge. Ignorance is nothing more than a desire to ignore. It is not a simple lack of information but the incapacity—or the refusal—to acknowledge one's own implication in the information.[94]

In this light, SFE educators must utilize a pedagogy of the unconscious, where the educator unsettles the complacency and conceptual identities of the students, prompting them to recognize how meaning is constructed. This approach fosters a mindset that is both skeptical and receptive to uncertainty, especially when dealing with long-held personal notions that may lead to opposition and stagnation.

Hayes emphasizes the need to explain how individuals become subjects influenced by ideology and how psychology might play a role in this process.[95] As part of a psychodynamic approach to de-ideologization, the teacher should guide students systematically through discourse on unconscious thoughts or resistances to thought.[96] Therefore, "Pedagogy should aim to undo the 'subject of certainty,' including the teacher's subjective position as well as the student's."[97]

Difficulties in teaching critical consciousness arise from failing to addressing unconscious thought patterns shared by teachers and students.[98] Students possess resistant knowledge that requires both acknowledgment and learning, similar to how analysts help patients articulate their unconscious beliefs. Simply conveying facts does not work unless resistance is overcome, a challenge often faced by both teachers and therapists. For this reason, educators themselves must also undergo a transformation of consciousness so that they can articulate that to their students. This speaks to the importance of education for critical consciousness for teacher educators as well.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully articulate a psychodynamic pedagogy, the essential elements include focusing on the unconscious mind, challenging students to reconsider fixed desires, and disrupting the comfort of conceptual identities as they simultaneously struggle to understand dominant societal narratives. This approach is integral to becoming open to

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91. Isaac Prilleltensky, "Psychology and the Status Quo," *American Psychologist* 44, no. 5 (1989): 799.

92. Prilleltensky, "Psychology," 800.

93. Shoshana Felman, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable," *Yale French Studies*, no. 63 (1982): 27.

94. Felman, "Psychoanalysis," 30.

95. Hayes, G. (1989). Psychology and ideology: The case of Althusser. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 19(2), pp. 84-90.

96. Jay, "The Subject," 789.

97. Jay, "The Subject," 789.

98. Jay, "The Subject," 1987.

conscientização. The teacher's role is to challenge students by provoking discomfort and doubt, much like a psychoanalyst, to stimulate genuine learning and awaken critical consciousness. At the same time, however, the teacher must create a safe environment where students feel secure enough to embrace their vulnerability. This dual responsibility of cultivating discomfort while ensuring trust and safety helps foster both vulnerability and the courage to engage in bold, transformative learning.

Since the self is shaped by language and cultural discourse, the unconscious is formed by the influence of these elements, with the subject's identity arising from the impact of symbols and signifiers.[99] A psychodynamic pedagogy should follow the approach of literary pedagogy described by Jay, "...to teach students to recognize how meaning is unnatural and constructed [because] this cannot help but unsettle the security of their ordinary perceptions and values."[100]

In sum, experiencing how one's truth is tied to a social position can prompt alarm, defensiveness, or shame when the consequences of that perspective are revealed.[101] Students can easily learn to repeat liberal platitudes, but the real struggle lies in opening interpretation to undecidability as students prefer "knowing" the "new truth" about social relations to the more dangerous experience of making interpretations and value judgments in the absence of transcendental verities.[102] In such a process, students can peer into the social construction of identity, reducing the fear of losing the self that lies at the heart of resistance, thereby opening the door to conscientização.

Conclusion

Once hegemonic ideologies are internalized through socialization, they become deeply resistant to change because they form the foundation of a person's identity, relationships, and worldview. Addressing students' unconscious fears of losing their established identity and social connections early in Social Foundations of Education courses is crucial to overcoming this resistance. By confronting these fears, students can engage more fully in the process of transforming oppressive social conditions and developing critical self-awareness.

In this process, it is not enough to rely solely on rational approaches. While cognitive strategies—like deconstructing ideologies and examining belief systems—are important for helping students critically assess the world, they do not fully account for the powerful emotional and unconscious forces that often drive resistance. Educators must also engage with the emotional dimensions of learning, as unconscious fears, desires, and attachments can impede the rational understanding of new ideas. Therefore, before introducing anti-hegemonic concepts, educators must help students not only de-ideologize their minds but also confront the emotional barriers that protect their established identities. This dual approach is essential for breaking through the psychological defenses that hinder conscientização.

The relationship between psychoanalysis, education, and ideology highlights the need for addressing both rational and emotional aspects of resistance. Although most educators are not psychoanalysts, they can employ psychoanalytic techniques to help students become aware of the unconscious fears and emotional dissonance that fuel resistance. Oppressive realities persist only when accepted, so developing awareness of these ideological deceptions is key to fostering critical

99. Thiong'o, *Decolonizing*, 1986.
100. Jay, "The Subject," 792.
101. Jay, "The Subject," 792.
102. Jay, "The Subject," 792-793.

consciousness. This awareness requires a socio-psychoanalytic pedagogy that not only brings unconscious thoughts to the surface but also disrupts fixed desires and challenges existing conceptual identities, leading to greater self-awareness, sociopolitical consciousness, and social progress.

Educators have a profound responsibility in this regard. It is not sufficient to introduce counter-narratives and rely solely on rational argument; they must also create a space for emotional reflection and dialogue that reveals the deeply embedded ideologies and unconscious fears that often drive resistance. While educators do not need to be trained psychoanalysts, they can draw on psychoanalytic insights to help students uncover the emotional and psychological barriers to critical consciousness. By addressing both the rational and emotional dimensions of resistance, educators can empower students to challenge constructed realities and reclaim their identities, positioning them to drive social transformation. As Martín-Baró explains:

> On becoming socialized, the individual internalizes a reality, an objective world, and shapes his or her own personal identity. Basically, to accept an internalized reality is to incorporate a scheme of values, a frame of reference, that will work as a system for decoding objective acts and subjective experiences.[103]

While psychological domination through hegemonic ideologies is powerful, it is not deterministic. As Fanon reminds us, "He is overpowered but not tamed. He is treated as inferior but not convinced of his inferiority."[104] Educators aiming to foster conscientização must help students uncover the fears and emotional resistance at the heart of their ideological attachments. By doing so, they enable students to overcome detrimental social norms and internal fears, fostering both personal growth and societal transformation. Fanon's statement is a powerful reminder of this when he pronounces, "...in their innermost spirit, the natives admit no accusation. He is overpowered but not tamed. He is treated as inferior but not convinced of his inferiority."[105]

Educators who hope to help students enter into conscientização must be prepared to help them uncover the fear at the heart of resistance through a socio-psychodynamic pedagogy. In doing so, they empower students to prevail over detrimental social norms and internal fears, opening them up to true learning and anti-oppressive teaching practices.

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103. Martín-Baró, *Writings,* 75-76.
104. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth (*New York: Grove Press, 1963): 53.
105. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth (*New York: Grove Press, 1963): 53.

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