

**Counterpoint**  
**Peter A. Kindle, MA, MDiv**

Even spurious quotations can be well-known, and this one, reputedly of Socrates through Plato is among the best:

The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they allow disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children now are tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers (Lien, 2000).

With more authority, Christopher Lucas (1994) reports that university professors complained of student disinterest in studies, and that students complained of the cost of books, as early as 800 years ago. It is not hard to imagine that the thirteenth century equivalent of a doctoral dissertation was often critiqued by established faculty as passionately irrelevant, significant only in obscurity, and descriptively superficial.

According to the Council on Social Work Education (2004), approximately 250 students complete a dissertation in social work every year. Volume alone suggests that most will not become classics; few do in any discipline. Mapp is correct in the reminder that knowledge advances incrementally. Karger may lament the fact that dissertations deal with minutia, but it is only in this fashion that any progress is made.

If the academic marketplace were to elevate the standard for dissertation research as advocated by Karger, then his argument would be stronger. The market does not so dictate, and other evidence seems to suggest that it would be unwise to do so. On a national basis, only half of doctoral students graduate (Smallwood, 2004). This alone indicates that the transition from classroom to independent research is sufficiently challenging and supports Mapp's contention that methodological rigor is the doctoral equivalent of a practice internship.

Nonetheless, I believe that there is a kernel of truth in Karger's charges. Dissertations should be focused on small pockets of progress, but this does not mean that progress should be sacrificed on the altar of completion expediency. Data mining and intricate statistical acrobatics alone should not suffice to make a dissertation. Furthermore, irrelevance is amplified by half-baked theoretical frameworks that inadequately contextualize studies. Neither students nor committees should accept weak theoretical justification. Just because data is accessible does not mean that a dissertation is hidden within it.

Karger demands outside-the-box creativity, a demand that I find ambiguous and unreasonable, but I am unwilling to endorse Mapp's pragmatism that borders on fatalism. I want to make a difference. If I did not, I would not be pursuing a doctorate. I call on my future chair and my future committee to help me do so.

#### References

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