

Queerly Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Queerly Cultivating Anti-Racist Feminist Pedagogy raises questions and analyzes classroom practices based on adrienne maree brown's (2017) *Emergent Strategy*, a radical self-help manual for our current political climate that calls for a paradigm shift in organizing work. Black, mixed, queer, pansexual, feminist writer, pleasure activist, facilitator and sci-fi scholar, brown builds on a continuous tradition of women of color feminists resisting oppression to bring together science fiction and permaculture, biomimicry and organizing, pleasure and activism. She offers fresh perspectives on how to imagine liberation and provides dynamic ways to think about teaching and learning. *Emergent Strategy* provides principles to help us change and grow, essential for all pedagogical work, and asks us to imagine liberation. In fact, emergent strategies can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success using the principles: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (brown, 2017, pp. 41-42). This article addresses present moment classroom concerns using these five principles to explore why and how to cultivate anti-racist feminist pedagogy and to do it queerly. In this case, queer is an action, a verb, something to do, and something to do to counter normative approaches: queer them. Thus, queerly cultivating anti-racist feminist pedagogy questions the status quo, and can be used to challenge taken for granted, problematic and oppressive classroom practices.

Keywords: Feminist, Anti-Racist, Queer, Pedagogy, Privilege, Oppression, Organizing, Emergent Strategy, Teaching

QUEERLY CULTIVATING ANTI-RACIST FEMINIST PEDAGOGY¹

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change

God
Is Change. (Butler, 1993, p. 3)

Octavia Butler begins her speculative apocalyptic novel, *Parable of the Sower*, with this pronouncement, setting the stage for her African American young woman protagonist, Lauren, to lead a radical cultural movement for societal transformation. Butler published 13 books and won many prestigious awards including being the first science fiction writer to be named a MacArthur Fellow. She saw herself as an outsider—a working-class Black woman raised by a single mother—and her fictional worlds challenged her readers' understandings of gender, race, sexuality and humanness.

Butler's recurring theme of change as a constant also inspires and frames the work of New York Times best-selling author, Adrienne maree brown, in her social justice organizing and self-help text, *Emergent Strategy* (2017). Black, mixed, queer, pansexual, feminist writer, pleasure activist, facilitator and sci-fi scholar, brown builds on a continuous tradition of women of color feminists resisting oppression to bring together science fiction and permaculture, biomimicry and organizing, pleasure and activism. *Emergent Strategy*, brown (2017) explains, "Is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for" (p. 3).

I draw on this radical genealogy in my pedagogy to ask how our current oppressive systems and carceral logics—including policing and punishment—shape our lives and constrain how we imagine our responses to injustice, harm and violence. How can we imagine a just society, and how can we raise questions about injustice and harm in the classroom? *Emergent Strategy*, a radical self-help manual for our current political climate calling for a paradigm shift in organizing work, has, to this point, not permeated discussions and analysis about classroom practices; yet it offers profound insights, building from Octavia Butler's radical tradition, to utilize in classrooms. brown offers fresh perspectives on how to imagine liberation and offers new and dynamic ways to think about teaching and learning. *Emergent Strategy* provides principles to help us change and grow—essential for all pedagogical work and asks us to imagine liberation.² In fact, emergent strategies can be integrated into classroom teaching and educational practices to create more meaningful learning, engagement, and measurable success using the principles: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (brown, 2017, pp. 41-42). Working from the school of feminist science fiction, particularly the insights in *Emergent Strategy*,

1 I acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which I live. Recognizing our role in colonialism and that we are on stolen land acknowledges that the present United States is a collection of chopped up territories and land purchases accumulated by genocide. I am conscious of my place on the ancestral homelands of the People of the Council of Three Fires: The Ojibwe, the Potawatomi and the Odawa. Chicago was also a site of trade and healing for the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Winnebago and Sauk and many others. Today there are more than 65,000 Native people, representing hundreds of tribal nations who call the Chicago-area home. Remembering the history and honoring the contributions and traditions of indigenous people is one step towards fighting their erasure.

this article engages present moment classroom concerns using these five principles to explore why and how to cultivate anti-racist feminist pedagogy and do it queerly.

Queer can be a noun, an adjective, and a verb, with various meanings in different contexts, similar to the ways in which *education*, *art* and *media* take on significance in different times and spaces. Non-binary white sex educator and scholar Meg-John Barker and white transgender illustrator Jules Scheele in *Queer: A Graphic History* (2016) note that in queer theory there is a particular emphasis on the idea of queer as an action, a verb, something to do, rather than something that folks are (or are not). Queer is at odds with ‘regimes of the normal’: those ‘normative’ ideals of aspiring to be normal in identity, behavior, appearance, relationships, etc. (Warner, 1999). Thus, queering questions taken for granted, status quo relations we, especially those of us with power and privilege, may have come to accept as part of white supremacy or sexism. In queer theory nothing is inherently straight and queering can be used to challenge harmful and oppressive classroom practices.

WHY PEDAGOGY?

Pedagogy, the study of theories of education, is about the practice of teaching. As a Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies faculty member at an urban, working-class, majority students of color public university, teaching is a central component of my academic position. The people who enroll in my classes often struggle to pay for their education and negotiate multiple hurdles on their way to the university: childcare responsibilities, underemployment or low wage full-time plus work, and long commutes. Their time in the classroom is valuable and I take seriously my work to create meaningful teaching and learning environments. I draw on popular culture, particularly speculative fiction, to make feminist theories and ideas relevant, visionary and accessible to my students, motivated by the questions: How can we imagine justice and liberation, and how can we work for life free from harm and violence, free from racism and white supremacy? These questions seem extremely timely given the political climate of ongoing racially motivated police murders and pandemic death. I am interested in research and dialogue surrounding pedagogy as I am committed to using this platform for radical social transformation. My pedagogical practice is characterized by feminism, anti-racism/anti-oppression, and queerness.

My framework for feminism is intersectional, anti-sexist, and gender curious. The term intersectionality was first used by Black legal scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the specific oppression Black women experience based both on race and gender. Crenshaw’s work is part of a long history of feminists, especially Black, Indigenous and other women of color, conceptualizing the interrelated nature of oppression. In 1977 the Combahee River Collective, a group of Radical Black Lesbian Socialist Feminists, explained how oppressions are interlocking, simultaneously experienced, structural and omnipresent. For me, as Barbara Smith, one of the Combahee River Collective organizers, wrote in 1979: “Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism” (emphasis in original, p. 49). This freedom for all women, including Indigenous women, transwomen, and femmes everywhere, would change our whole world in ways that would make us all free.

I use the term “cultivating” to modify anti-racist feminist pedagogy, inspired by queer white anti-racist feminist, activist and scholar Ann Russo’s (2019) *Feminist Accountability*, an intersectional analysis of anti-racist, accountability and transformative justice work. Cultivating, then, is a way to recognize this work as “a practice, not an end, and it is a continuous process, rather than a single act.” Pedagogy and teaching are “often embedded in the logics and structures of power and oppression” (p. 11). Thus, cultivating an awareness of power and oppression has the potential to alter our own pedagogy in ways which lead to more justice and transformation.

As I cultivate my anti-oppression pedagogy, I recognize ways my work—indeed my life— has been

radically shaped by lesbian feminism (not the trans exclusionary kind) and the love of women. I use queerly here because I am. Queer thinking and queer pedagogy is about resisting norms and normal. Additionally, queer is about people, activism, history and theory. Queer theory examines power relations and questions dominant and normalized binaries such as teacher/student and gay/straight.

My pedagogical lens amplifies anti-racism because white supremacy, capitalism and settler colonialism shape the U.S., continue to harm, and form the context of my lived experience as a white, cis-gendered, non-disabled, monolingual, U.S. citizen. The work for people with privilege is to acknowledge the benefits we receive, to take accountability for the harm we commit, both intentional and unintentional, and to struggle for justice. Using *Emergent Strategy*, we can learn to teach and “change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for” (brown, 2017, p. 3).

BUILDING EMERGENT STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Learning can be a transformational act and brown’s *Emergent Strategy* offers a clear description of liberatory philosophy with principles to help us change and grow. Using elements of *Emergent Strategy* as pedagogical interventions enable those of us in classrooms to imagine a liberated future: trust the people, what you pay attention to grows, less prep more presence, never a failure always a lesson, and change is constant (p. 41-42).

Trust the People (If You Trust the People They Become Trustworthy)

One of the primary principles of emergent strategy for brown (2017), is: “if you trust the people, they become trustworthy. Trust is a seed that grows with attention and space. The facilitator can be a gardener or the sun, the water” (p. 214). This principle can be applied to all forms of facilitation, especially pedagogy and teaching.

Trusting the people, or for educators, trusting the students, can be challenging because the longer we work in the field, the further we are from our own student days. We start to see the students through the lens of the hierarchical institution: on the other team, grade grubbing, scamming or trying to get away with doing less. We communicate this to them by not believing them when they offer the reason they were not in class or did not finish their work; when we ask for documentation for their illness or doctor visit or suspect they do not do the readings assigned because they are blowing us off or their crosstalk in class is because they are not paying attention, are bored or The list of ways professors and teachers suspect our students of being untrustworthy goes on and on.

I create a paradigm shift by offering another way to inhabit the classroom: *Trust the students. If you trust the students they become trustworthy.* If teachers change the way we view students as our opponents, harboring suspicions of them and their motives at the outset of the semester what might that look like? How can we use our pedagogy, our syllabi, our classroom interactions to build trust? Faculty must recognize our power: we are the ones who construct the curriculum, assign the reading, control the conversation, assess the work. What do we actually have to lose if we trust the students? More importantly, what do we gain if we plant the seeds of trust; what can grow in our classrooms with students? No matter our disciplines or fields, we can foster a collective classroom culture centering a willingness to learn, to engage the materials, and to create community.

I approach building trust in the classroom the first day by learning the names students want to be called (reading out names from the roster can alienate students if you mispronounce their names or use a name they don’t want to be called). I spend time before class starts talking about how things are going in the world, in our lives. I share about my life when it relates to the texts or to topics which arise in class. I talk about the importance of their thoughts and them coming to their own ideas about the world. Sometimes we get into a

circle for our class conversations and start class with a check-in where students share how they are doing, in addition to building trust, this creates a context where their whole selves are welcome into the room and can create opportunities for them to recognize how they are feeling and embrace learning alongside. This respect, and classroom empathy more broadly, is linked to student success and participation (Okonofua et al., 2016). How might we practice this more regularly in our classrooms? How do we build our syllabi in ways that trust our students? And if we have a random student here or there trying to “get around” on us, what have we lost? Who really loses if they lie about a doctor visit or why they need an extension on their paper? Across disciplines we can read syllabi for their emphasis: Are the due dates or the attendance policy more centrally located than what the learning will be? Can we create syllabi and classroom interactions to build trust?

Queering this first principle questions taken for granted, status quo relations of power many have come to accept as part of capitalism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Those of us with power, white people, men, heterosexuals, citizens, teachers and professors in the classroom, especially need to trust the people deemed untrustworthy: outsiders, queers, trans folks, people of color, undocumented, people with disabilities. Simply because those that experience the world without structural power and in different ways might just be the folks to lead us to liberation, like Lauren in Butler’s (1993) text *Parable of the Sower*. Simultaneously the role of the professor as having the power is queered by faculty of color or teachers with disabilities who are themselves deemed untrustworthy. Drawing on Smith’s (1979) definition of feminism, everyone must be free in order to imagine just and liberated feminist futures. Additionally, brown is not setting up the binary of either trustworthy or untrustworthy with this principle, she is reminding us: many things can be true at once.

What You Pay Attention to Grows

This principle rings true when we hear it and has been stated by many (Chopra, 1995, p.111; GeneenRoth, 2012) and used in fields of life coaching and self-help. How can it be applied to queer anti-racist feminist pedagogy? Just as trust can grow with people when we pay attention to trust, so can the power of feminist love, a central tenet of my pedagogical practice. I believe, as Black woman scholar, author and public intellectual bell hooks (2001) emphasizes that when love is nurtured in us it enhances our capacity to be self-actualized and to engage in communion with the world around us (p. 4). **This is not romantic love but the love of resistance and collectivity.** Teaching this form of love asks students to resist the self-hatred promoted by oppression and to take themselves—their minds and bodies—and each other seriously. Recognizing systems of oppression, through theory and analysis, allows students to examine society and culture, to think in more liberatory ways, and to build collective and individual forms of resistance to ableism, patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, transphobia, nationalism, capitalism, anti-Semitism, etc. The first step to resist patriarchy is to resist self-hatred. When we get the oppressors out of our heads we can imagine freedom. As Audre Lorde (1984), a self-described Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet reminds us, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 110).

To focus on love may appear a tall order to practice in classrooms. I start each semester off with structured opportunities to connect across differences and build community—for students to get to know each other and me. Because *what you pay attention to grows*, I often assign bell hook’s (2001) book *All About Love: New Visions* to center our exploration of feminist love. I pay attention to assignments which prepare students to talk to each other about the readings and to encourage participation in class. For example, I create assignments giving them chances to write their thoughts about the readings on their own and then to share those ideas in smaller groups, to learn about each other through the meanings they made from the texts. This also gives every student the opportunity to think through some of their ideas in advance, not only to those that feel comfortable answering questions from a lecture or speaking up in class discussion.

In addition to traditional theory and research texts, I incorporate film, video, poetry and fiction into the curriculum to create opportunities to engage ideas from multiple genres, forms, and points of view. The

interdisciplinary course content challenges students to imagine different ways to think, to practice love, to resist domination and to relate to each other with justice.

I use this range of media to welcome different teachers into the classroom, an aspect of the concept of *ethical referencing*. Regina Yung Lee (2018), offers this framework to center, research and actively reference Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, other people of color and LGBTQ folks in work, in syllabi, and course lectures.³ The *Cite Black Women* and #CiteASista™ movements also motivate people to practice incorporating and centering Black women's scholarship and writing. When syllabi include assigned readings by people of color and the students are required to properly reference those texts, it highlights the work people of color have done and continue to do. It also makes sure students, especially students of color, know they belong. They belong in higher education, as professors, researchers, poets, filmmakers, writers, and everywhere. Ethical referencing, *Cite Black Women*, and #CiteASista™ pay attention to creating and supporting multiracial communities in academia and can be practiced across all fields. Whose work do you teach? Who is featured in the textbooks and examples you use? Make a point to investigate and diversify syllabi (use the Center for Urban Education's, 2018, *Equity-minded inquiry series: Syllabus Review*) and texts because research confirms: diversity and inclusion contribute to college success and retention (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016). When you imagine what you want to grow in your classrooms with students, such as their ability to learn and understand the ideas, what can you change in your teaching or materials to pay more attention to the acts and practices that contribute to those abilities and to students' academic success?

How to queer this principle of what you pay attention to grows? First, recognize some of what folks are conditioned to value in our culture: money, influence, and ourselves as individuals, not feminist love or ethical referencing. In fact, what most teachers have been taught to pay attention to, for example, assignment due dates and the canon in academic fields, is steeped in white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and capitalism. If the focus of our attention remains normative, love and connecting across differences cannot happen. Queering this principle is resisting the pull of cultural norms to buy ourselves happy or distrust difference. It is to go one step beyond and become aware of the interconnected nature of social identities, such as gender identity, sexuality, race, class, ability, nationality, and religion, among others. It is to accept "the relational nature of those differences," as Elsa Barkley Brown (1992) has evocatively noted: The privileges afforded to white people are literally at the direct detriment of those not white; white people lead the lives we do because women and men of color live the lives they do (p. 298). Paying attention to how power circulates creates opportunities for all of us to learn, listen, dialogue and act across differences.

Less Prep More Presence

In becoming too attached to the preparation for class and covering all the material, we might miss the actual practice of being present with each other and learning. Practicing community building in classrooms, meetings, and organizing work gives us the opportunity to listen to each other across differences, learn across differences, and grow our capacity to embody the worlds we long for. This is not just a practice in women's, gender and sexuality studies, the humanities or social sciences; *less is more* is a common principle in business and leadership studies.

In the sciences, Elizabeth Kitchen and her colleagues (2003) researched the idea of "attempt less and accomplish more" (p. 188) in their large lecture Cell Biology courses. They covered less material but used interactive teaching techniques which required students to explain about the science they were learning in more depth than the traditional lecture course control group. At the end of the semester the students in both settings did equally well on the same exams, even the students in the sections which did not cover all

3 I practice ethical referencing in this article and cite the race or queer identity of authors when possible or known.

the material that was on the test. The real change was the students in the interactive sections gained more confidence in dealing with biological concepts and scientific reasoning (p. 190-191). For Kitchen and her colleagues, more presence meant learning to talk about science and explain scientific concepts, which led not only to accomplishing more than just content coverage, but also to community building and critical thinking.

How can we cultivate more presence in our pedagogy and classrooms? There are days when many students come to class without having read the assigned texts (the students did the less prep part of this principle) and we can still practice presence and engage the texts in the classroom. Ask students to read out loud specific quotes or paragraphs and together as a class analyze their meaning. Or have the students turn to their neighbors to think about what the textual passage might mean together. Additionally, reading out loud encourages a different valuing of the texts, centers students' voices, increases their public speaking skills and confidence. It is also important to explain the value of reading out loud in class. Often students have negative or fearful responses to this request, so to frame it as an opportunity to hear different voices and to think differently about the texts can transform some of those responses.

Valuing student voices brings back the first tenet of trusting students when it comes to less prep, more presence. When we are present in a class and a conversation takes an unexpected turn, when a great question stumps the instructor, can we be present enough to change our lesson plan, our curriculum to add new ideas, questions or themes into future classes? Can we be generous enough to encompass more?

In these pandemic times how might this principle work in online learning? In my teaching, less preparation means my online learning environments are confusing to students (many emailed to tell me my course was disorganized and hard to follow). I know organization and what makes sense is socially constructed; what is disorganized for some might be clear to others. Simultaneously taking a course which seems disorganized is frustrating. My response is to be present with generosity and respect. I empathize with the confusion (this is all confusing to me too!), validate the students' experiences of alienation and inability to find assignments and due dates. I email and check in on them when I do not hear from them. I appreciate their work, support their ideas and them showing up. I encourage them, which research shows improves their participation and engagement (Okonofua et al., 2016). This is not a social science or humanities response: generosity and compassion can be practiced in all online teaching. Teacher empathy can change student interactions and improve their success (Okonofua et al., 2016). In my evaluations during the pandemic, students reported: they learned a lot, felt heard, and found this online class less alienating than others.

Is all presence the same and equal? Queering the idea of presence is to question anything constructed as value-neutral and to ask ourselves and others for a deeper listening, listening with more intent, and more vulnerability. This is a multidirectional listening where we are willing to see our interrelatedness as humans and our desire to connect across the power lines, oppressions and harms separate us. AnaLouise Keating (2009), feminist woman of colors, defines, "This deep listening as listening with raw openness to underscore its difficult, potentially painful dimensions. ... Peeling back our defensive barriers, we expose ourselves (our identities, our beliefs, and our worldviews) to change" (p. 92). Listening with raw openness challenges us to queerly resist the binaries of either/or thinking and judgments, and the normative ways we have been taught to fear difference, instead using it as a resource for transformation as Lorde (1984, p. 115) challenges us to do. Listening with raw openness means teachers are present with their students, learning with their students and learning from their students. This form of listening also asks, especially of people with privilege, to listen in ways that open us up to uncertainty and recognize we don't always know. This offers us so many opportunities to learn. And sometimes not knowing can lead to mistakes.

Never a Failure Always a Lesson

Failure or mistakes happen in interactions with students and colleagues and this principle reminds us: mistakes and failures are chances to learn. In anti-racist pedagogy, particularly for white educators, often the

mistakes are about racism or other oppressions.

Feminist accountability recognizes, as Russo (2019) explains, we are often overwhelmed, hurt, angry when we are in a classroom or a meeting where racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism manifest. Sometimes these occurrences get pointed out, other times ignored or silenced. It can be difficult to know how to address these inevitable harms which cannot be avoided in systems of oppression. Our work is then to cultivate the ability to respond to the commonplace instances of oppression and harm (Russo, 2019, p. 28-29). Also, the logics normalizing systemic oppression are always present, as Black psychologist and educator Beverly Tatum (1996) explains, “like smog in the air. . . . [A]lways, day in and day out we are breathing it in” (P. 6).

Thus, we are all involved in the everyday occurrences of racism, sexism, heterosexism because we are all breathing the smog of systemic oppression. Often these harms stem from unconscious bias. “The human brain can take in 11 million pieces of information in any one moment. We’re only consciously aware of maybe 40 of these—at best” (powell, 2014, slide 3). We will not be rid of this bias and thus need to address it. We need to become more cognitively aware of our own biases and slow down. We must take more time so our minds can make conscious choices and recognize the logics of sexism or racism, for example.

Even when I take time, I am still racist and commit microaggressions. (I use this term for its current parlance despite my agreement with theorists’ critiques, like Ibram X. Kendi’s (2019), about how it minimizes racist abuse.) Derald Wing Sue (2010), Asian American multicultural scholar, explains that microaggressions are, “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership. The term was first coined by Pierce in 1970 in his work with Black Americans” (p. xvi).

African American psychiatrist and professor Chester M. Pierce, defined microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). I have done this by calling students the wrong names, mispronouncing their names, passing papers back incorrectly and more. These mistakes are compounded by systemic racism. It means something different for me, the white teacher, to mix up the white students’ names than those of the Latinx or African American students, or to mispronounce Asian and Asian American student names. How we respond in these moments can be the lesson. When I call an African American student by the wrong name: Do I recognize it? Can I apologize and name it as racialized? Sometimes.

Sometimes I can stop and apologize in front of the whole class and discuss how as a white person not remembering or not pronouncing the name correctly is a white way of being. In other words, I can use my own failure as an example of the way white people don’t have to be good at that work because of white supremacy. I recognize white people have the privilege to: not always be able to tell the difference between people of color and not always remember people of color’s names, nor even be able to pronounce them. And those acts are microaggressions. Sometimes I explain and take accountability for my failure, try to learn and change, and not do it again. Because I have been taught, like white people and other people with power are: my feelings matter, I am tempted to apologize and explain too much; ask for assurances, especially from those I harm. This centers me and my feelings, how I feel bad because I committed a microaggression, and also how I really am a good white person.

Sometimes I can recognize this behavior as white fragility. For Robin Diangelo (2018), white educator and consultant, white fragility “may be conceptualized as the *sociology of dominance*: an outcome of white people’s socialization into white supremacy and a means to protect, maintain and reproduce white supremacy” (italics in original, p.113). After I realize that I commit a microaggression, in the classroom or a meeting, sometimes I can also recognize the mindset that continues the harm: I must then be validated by those I have harmed. Thus, another layer of utilizing the principle of failure as a lesson is to move to repair (Diangelo, 2018, p.145), apologize, take accountability, and not spend time on *my* feelings, *my* fragility, with the folks I hurt.

The lesson is: I will, sadly, commit microaggressions and harm others, in meetings, classrooms and

beyond. We will all be in spaces where sexism, racism, homophobia, settler colonialism, anti-Semitism manifest. We all experience privilege and will commit microaggressions and oppressive acts against others. There is not one of us who is free of the “smog” of systemic oppression. These failures and mistakes happen in all disciplines and classrooms. We can be racist or sexist, ableist or anti-Semitic, Heterosexist or anti-Muslim because of the “day in and day out” nature of oppression (Tatum, 1996, p. 6). The lesson is: we need to cultivate our ability to recognize our harmful actions, respond to our mistakes, take accountability, move to repair, realize our failure as a lesson, and become resilient in our work to imagine justice and liberation.

Where is the queer in this principle, in recognizing our mistakes and asking for ourselves and other people to be accountable? The queer is in the resiliency, in the face of failure we continue to build community. The queer is also in recognizing a good/bad behavior binary. We are not bad people but people living within systems of oppression shaping how we engage in the world. Committing microaggressions does not make us bad people; apologizing and taking accountability to learn and change does not make us good people. The queer work then is to recognize how these systemic power relations manifest and impact us, so in coming together we will have more power to resist and, as brown (2017) says, “work for the just and liberated worlds we long for” (p. 3). The queer is also in the connections created in repair and community building. In the feminist love of justice and valuing the humanity of those different from us. In the students who were encouraged to succeed with our respect. The queer is the joy in our ability to change. To return to the opening quote from Octavia Butler (1993), the work of queer anti-racist feminist pedagogy is to recognize: “All that you touch you change. All that you change, changes you. The only lasting truth is change” (p. 3).

Change is Constant

One thing we can count on in this world is how things change. Can we embrace it? One strategy I practice is what Mari Matsuda (1991), Asian American activist and lawyer calls, “Ask the other question” (p. 1189). Matsuda invites us to recognize interlocking forms of oppression by not just focusing on the most glaring form. For instance, Matsuda writes, “When I see something that looks racist, I ask ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’” (p. 1189). Asking the other question reminds us how oppression is interconnected and changing.

How does this analysis emerge in my teaching and community? I used to call out and try to isolate people who caused harm, or people who were racist or people who were homophobic. I thought isolating the person would somehow create a space free from harm and oppression; through asking the other questions I now realize we all commit harm and microaggressions. The work, as Russo (2019) reminds us is to focus “more on how we will respond *when* it manifests” (italics in original, p. 29) and to see ourselves as continually implicated in the “smog” of white supremacy which requires a collective to sustain meaningful political change.

Why not use the organizing strategy of “Calling In,” instead? It has been called “A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable” (Trần, 2013). Calling in, supporting and educating people to recognize the “smog,” gives those of us who make mistakes an opportunity to change and be accountable, to recognize how all are shaped by sexism, racism, classism, islamophobia, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ableism, and colonialism. Thus, we all commit harm and microaggressions and all need to take accountability, repair and change, the practice of calling in can help.⁴ By working together, we can overcome the overarching systems of oppression which keep us separate and unequal, whether in the classroom, in autonomous spaces for people of color, in white anti-racist groups, in people with disabilities organizing spaces and beyond. It is first in our imaginations where we are unconstrained in our responses but in queerly cultivating anti-racist feminist pedagogy we intentionally change in ways to grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for. This involves trusting each other, recognizing failure as a lesson, working to be present

⁴ As Ngọc Loan Trần (2013) notes, this is not in opposition to calling out but another tool to be used in community and with people we with whom we have common ground, say in the classroom or in faculty meetings.

and pay attention to what we want to grow. Let us resist white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, ableism, and heteropatriarchy together!

Gloria Anzaldúa charted a path for us. As one of the first openly queer Chicana Indigenous writers, her theory and activism helped redefine and develop inclusionary movements for social justice. She reminds us, “Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (1987, p. 87). She challenges us to change our minds, our hearts and our behavior:

We are ready for change.
Let us link hands and hearts
together find a path through the dark woods
step through the doorways between worlds
leaving huellas for others to follow,
build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our “home”
si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos.
Now let us shift. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 576)

Let’s cultivate our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.

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