

2021-2022 BWCP

Preparation Activity #3 Text

Diab et al (2013) argue that "[w]orking to end racism entails a willingness to be disturbed—that is, a willingness to cultivate a tireless investment in reflection, openness, and hope for a better, more fulfilling future for us all" (p. 2). They point to Lorde's (1981) "Uses of Anger," noting that the willingness to be disturbed requires our active engagement with "the generative force that resides in our uses of anger to move ourselves and others forward" (p. 9). The authors don't really locate a specific conceptual or social direction for where "forward" leads, depending instead on a vague claim: "[W]e seek to come to a place where we are less resigned to the presence of racism and other oppressions" (p. 9).

Identifying the possibility of emotional burn out in this direction "forward," they draw on Hartnett (2010) to assert that "joyful commitment" leads us to "be both radical in our demands and gentle in our demeanor" as we work against "inequality and oppression" (p. 9). They push further, focusing on the "need for self-work" (p. 11), which they define as "reflective, dialogic, and affective, as well as ongoing" (p. 11). Self-work, they argue, means "cultivating emotional intelligence [...] for inspiring frequent recommitment, for sustaining us, and for building strength for the long haul" (p. 9). To Diab et al (2013), emotional intelligence takes a distinctly individualistic perspective of emotional regulation:

"[Emotional intelligence] begins with being attentive to our emotions—that is, checking in about not only what we think (head) and plan to do (hands), but also how we feel (heart). Emotional intelligence refers to our ability to recognize and to manage effectively our emotional states, and it relates broadly to "self awareness, self management, social awareness, and the ability to manage relationships" (Goleman, 2006, p. 268). We can cultivate emotional intelligence through self-reflection and deliberate attention to the nature and function of our emotions, especially anger and joyful commitment" (p. 8).

Interestingly, elsewhere in their article, the authors critique such individualistic indulgences, warning us about the incompleteness and potentially narcissistic tendencies of "confessional narrative." (p. 6) But at the same time, they admit that racism and oppression always are experienced personally, by individuals, concluding that "personal accounts can help us identify with the variegated nature of oppression" (p. 6). They then attempt to expand the possibility of storytelling beyond the confessional and individualistic:

"Both global and political aspects of the local and personal account call for a different kind of engagement that willingly commits to listening and being disturbed by what narratives uncover as they testify to our increasing racial consciousness and commitment to racial equity. Through listening and reflective response, we can move from the realm of narrative as a personal account to narrative as collective, transpersonal, and resistive knowledge. If we choose to listen rhetorically to the narratives and recover the shadows of the discourse they (are perceived to) answer, we might reconsider how we recount and redirect uptake. Collective interpretation of narratives—that is, testifying and processing together—is crucial to collective recognition of our problems, our commitments to counter them, and our efforts toward making commitments actionable. Only when we dare to confront racial ideologies can we fully tell a transformative

story, a story that is not just confessional. Then, telling the story is an attempt at re-cording the ties we create with stories we choose to tell—toward motivating and grounding our action" (p. 6).

Clearly, Diab et al struggle to make sense of who the "we" they address might be. Whom do they intend to take up this "collective interpretation of narratives"? For whom is narrative "collective" or "transpersonal"? Calling for a "collective recognition of our problems" seems to indicate that many of "us" are unaware of the "problems" of racism and white supremacy. Worse, their assumption flattens out differences--what Lorde (1981) warns us to avoid--among the stories and motivations of people and communities from across racial positions and positioning in society. Would Baldwin (1962) and Lorde (1981) see themselves as part of Diab et al's (2013) "we"? Nope. Who, then, are Diab et al (2013) trying to motivate? Whom do they want to "confront racial ideologies" in order to "tell a transformative story [...] that is not just confessional"?

Perhaps the most troubling problem here in this piece is the underlying assumption that antiracism work is tiring and that we antiracist types need to practice self-care and recommitment, as if there's a choice or degree of choice to the commitment. In other words, many of us in closer proximity to whiteness indulge in antiracism as optional or contingent on personal energy, time, headspace, etc. The stories Lorde (1981) and Baldwin (1962) are telling do not reflect the struggle for racial justice as in any way optional or contingent. As Lorde (1981) testifies, there is only "the difficult lesson" of "orchestrating those furies [and] using them for strength and force and insight" *every, single, day*.

Despite these critiques, Diab et al (2013) importantly gesture toward engaging emotions as political and collective experiences, not just individual and personal--therefore private--experiences. Doing so requires that we writing center folks pay critical, self-reflective attention to emotions we share across experiences. While this sharing doesn't necessarily imply that we all experience racism and white supremacy, or any array of oppressions, in the same ways, it does suggest that we all feel and experience *through our bodies*. Johnson (2018) explains via the concepts of mindful writing and mindful tutoring: "The writing process is an embodied one; by paying closer attention to our bodies, we can begin to see how it is that we write with our bodies [...] As an embodied practice, mindfulness meditation has the potential to create the space a student needs to write by re-directing his or her focus to the body and its *affective* concerns" (p. 29).

For examples of embodied mindfulness, uses of anger, and balance among collective and personal emotion as political inquiry and resistance, imagine Finney (2011) writing her poem about dancing body to body with white supremacist politician Strom Thurmond. See and hear the bodily expression of her family's history across generations and out of enslavement and into her poetry in her acceptance speech at the National Book Award ceremony. Likewise, read Smith's (2017) words writing themselves across his body, the Black body, then through the body of white America and beyond into an imagined place where whiteness cannot extend its claws. Where he gives whiteness back its violence and raises the dead while "finding a place where my kin can be safe, where black people ain't but people the same color as the good, wet earth, until that means something, until then i bid you well, i bid you war, i bid you our lives to gamble with no more."