Making Commitments to Racial Justice Actionable

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Abstract: In this article, we articulate a framework for making our commitments to racial justice actionable, a framework that moves from narrating confessional accounts to articulating our commitments and then acting on them through both self-work and work-with-others, a dialectic possibility we identify and explore. We model a method for moving beyond originary confessional narratives and engage in dialogue with "the willingness to be disturbed," (Wheatley, 2002) believing that disturbances are productive places from which we can more clearly articulate and act from our commitments. Drawing on our own experiences, we engage the political, systemic, and enduring nature of racism as we together chart an educational frame that counters the macro-logics of oppression enacted daily through micro-inequities. As we advocate for additional and ongoing considerations of the work of anti-racism in educational settings, we invite others to embrace, along with us, both the willingness to be disturbed and the attention to making commitments actionable.

This article is inspired by conversations we've had about how our shared commitments to racial justice become manifest and actionable in our everyday lives. We have long been in conversation in overlapping groups of colleagues and friends about embodying transformative racial justice in our personal and professional lives. As the personal and professional so often blur, we collectively decided we'd document these reflections for this special issue of *Across the Disciplines*—that is, to share our articulations of commitment and our efforts to make commitments actionable. We hope to open dialogue and engage with others similarly involved in conversations with friends and colleagues and, in doing so, to emphasize the processual nature of the work. The unified voice that follows is a product of recursive, dialogic process that cannot be captured by the linear development or unfolding of the argument of this article, but which we hope you will see as part of the conversation—a step along the way.

Our work hinges on dialectic thinking, which engages the necessary tension between the critique *against* racism and the critique *for* social and racial justice. Critique is differently defined but is always considered an essential condition to making change. Like Porter et al. (2000), "[we] are not interested in simply reporting how evil institutions are; we think critique needs an action plan" (p.613). Power structures and systems of oppression are not changed *enough* by critique *alone*, but can become more entrenched by each conversation, presentation, and article that reveals oppression (Kincaid, 2003). As The New London Group (2000/2002), Porter et al. (2000), and Kincaid (2000) all

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argue, change requires new stories, new ways of collaborating, and new ways of living. In other words, critique (in its many forms) should dovetail with opportunities to take action (also in its many forms).[1] Alongside our conversations about critique against and critique for, we discovered similar limits within our personal narratives, and these limits made us think about ways to re-narrate.

Because our discussion started by accounts of our first encounters and realizations of the depths of racism, we soon discovered the affordances and the limits of such narratives. Our article starts there, with reflections that were mainly characterized by a willingness to be disturbed. The trouble with the limits of our narrative accounts and our willingness to be disturbed catalyzed for us the move toward constructing a model for the reflective pursuit of racial justice. In what follows then, we first consider how "confessional" narratives often trap people into thinking of racism as primarily located outside of themselves and solvable by completing specific tasks (along the lines of a checklist). We argue that one must move from confessional narratives to articulations of commitment that are paired with reflective action. A great deal of self-work is required on the journey of growth from articulating of a commitment to racial justice to making that commitment actionable and sustainable. In this article, we discuss self-work through cultivating emotional intelligence and finding time and space to work on racial justice matters.[2] Thinking dialectically, we understand self-work is done alongside work-with-others, which moves us toward institutional change. In making our commitments actionable, then, we suggest the need to work in complementary personal, interpersonal, and institutional domains.

Cultivating a willingness to engage and articulate one's commitment can help us understand how to effect institutional change toward racial justice. But working with others in these three personal, interpersonal, and institutional domains to pursue social justice is a demanding project, which entails more than the long-term goal to end white privilege and oppression, while affirming the full enfranchisement of all people. Working to end racism also 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.

Embracing a Willingness to Be Disturbed

As we work together to restore hope for the future, we need to include a new and strange ally—our willingness to be disturbed. Our willingness to have our beliefs and ideas challenged by what others think. No one person or perspective can give us the answers we need to the problems of today. Paradoxically, we can only find those answers by admitting we don't know. We have to be willing to let go of our certainty and expect ourselves to be confused for a time (Wheatley, 2002, p. 34).

The processual work involved in creating this piece taught us that a willingness to be disturbed underlies the work of articulating and making commitments actionable. The more we talked, wrote together, and shared our commitments, the more we found ourselves challenged, confused, and even disturbed at times—wrestling with our personal narratives, our racialized positions in the world, and our relative power and privilege. We have had to re-dedicate ourselves to careful listening and to working through a number of risks and vulnerabilities amongst ourselves. Through choosing to be willingly disturbed, we have come to believe, as Margaret Wheatley (2002) does in *Turning to One Another*, that "[c]uriosity and good listening bring us back together" (p. 36). Our willingness to be disturbed and our willingness to listen help us overcome seemingly insurmountable divides in the face of institutionalized racism enacted daily through a series of ongoing micro-aggressions and micro-inequities (Sue et al., 2007). Willingness to listen and to be disturbed makes us develop ways to resist how these micro manifestations of aggressions and inequities recycle their ever-present historical legacies.

We follow Wheatley's challenge to embrace a *willingness to be disturbed* to signify the important role self-work plays in our project. Like Wheatley, we value encountering disturbances because doing so helps us "see [our] own views more clearly," and is "a very useful way to see invisible beliefs" (p. 36). Entering into conversations with a willingness-to-be-disturbed stance signifies that personal epistemologies[3] are part of systemic racism and oppression. This willingness also signals an openness to dialogue with readers and a recognition that anti-racism work is messy and ongoing. In other words, we must voice that our conversations were not easy and included strife against our care not to reproduce racism and hurt. Likewise, we struggled with issues of wanting to be up to the task of publishing (of making public) our conversation. This task, for us, has involved recognizing from the onset that our commitment to anti-racism is not a one-time deal: we are here with each other and with others to learn, to recommit ourselves, and to work toward making our commitments actionable in our lives. We strive, therefore, to confront our individual and collective fears and respons(a/i)bilities—work that we have found necessitates a willingness to be disturbed, as Wheatley calls us to.

Finding and Listening to Disturbances in Our Narratives

We believe that disturbances are productive places from which we can clearly articulate and act from our commitments. In this article, we capture the generative potential of this willingness to be disturbed, as we work toward a framework that actualizes our shared commitments to social justice. But there is a story to how this model came to be, one that leads us to believe that articulating and making commitments actionable involves moving beyond what we term "confessional narratives."

Soon after we began working on this project, we realized that we tended to start, but then get trapped by, narrating our encounters with oppression in its varied forms. Our initial drafts began with writing self-reflections on our own histories with systemic, internalized, and (inter)nationalized racism. Our accounts were useful in some ways. They helped us to ground our positioning, identify how we have come to make anti-racism/racial justice central to our pedagogical and professional lives, articulate the commitments that guide our work, and describe the ways we act on those commitments. Writing our stories necessitated embracing disturbances and articulating commitments, and we realized common threads: all of us are, despite our different backgrounds and identities, part of a privileged group and shielded by manufactured segregation/distance. But as we all narrated our early encounters with oppression, we seemed to be in some ways attached to an idea of the self that emerges and lurks in the narrative. We wondered, therefore, about the real working of our narratives, and we could no longer deny their confessional nature.

Moving Beyond Confessional Narratives

Confessional accounts—efforts toward disclosing positionality, sharing an emergent recognition of oppression, and stating complicity paired with the need to counter injustice—are commonplace in anti-racist, feminist, class-conscious, and other social justice discourse. Yet, we realized that these confessionals, like all genres, have affordances and consequences. There are certainly important reasons for the continual re-emergence of confessional narratives, even in our own conversations and processual work. We, like many others, write such narratives responding to the desire to record: we feel the urge to know and to articulate the *when*, *where*, *how,* and the agonizing *why,* which together catalyze an increased recognition of oppression and dominance. This accounting transcends memory and recovery *per se*. We document to process, interpret, and testify. When in conversation, we also need to account for and often justify our investment in anti-racism, providing an originary moment, evolutionary history, and critical genealogy for our commitment. An articulation of positionality is necessary for the ethos of the speaker/writer who chooses to address racial justice in

order to understand the stake or mandate in the discourse. As such, narratives *can* ground our argument, pinpoint manifestations of racism, and renew our commitments. We also acknowledge that confessional narratives can be important indirect arguments against claims of (dis)trust as well as toward establishing alliance or solidarity. Recognizing these different functions is important, but the discourse that emerges within confessionals *can* limit the possibility of where the originary moment might lead.

Confessional accounts can trap us between narratives of victims/saviors and of villains/heroes. The confessional can lock us into the moment of countering outright denials or reluctant dismissals to claims of injustice (e.g., that racism doesn't still exist today, or that it exists outside of the self). Our own confessional accounts began to trap us into a stasis of fact: in affirming the presence of racism through countering denials of its existence. The classical rhetorical stases are invention/interpretive tools, pinpointing crucial questions that inform, constitute, and probably constrain our anti-racism discourse. As we shared confessional narratives, we stayed in the realm of the known and long proven, accounting for the fact that racism does exist, thrive, and morph, for example—even though many scholars have demonstrated this (Villanueva's 2006 analysis of master tropes being one prominent case). These personal histories provided us *only with a starting point* when exploring together our commitments to racial justice and how we make these commitments actionable.

We also realized that our accounts are bound to be local and individual, and so *separately* they deflated the political dimensions of all encounters with oppression. We see value in the adage "the personal is political," but the value also comes from showing the seamless and seamed connections between these domains. The personal is not just loosely situated in a bigger political scene where power is, on the one hand, (ab)used to maintain inequities and privilege and, on the other hand, minimally contested and optimally re-configured and subverted. Rather, personal experiences of racism and interventions for anti-racism also find their meaning in systems and institutions (including academic ones) that define and distribute power both in explicit and implicit ways. Such power is, in turn, affirmed in epistemological landscapes and networks of access and resources. The political nature of the personal is a constitutive dimension, for the personal occurs as we perceive it through the lens of experience (individual and collective), which is "a product of entire systems of social relations which are essentially time-bound, historically, culturally, and materially conditioned" (Leach, 1992). In other words, our individual action originates from and acts with or against systems of oppression and empowerment. While the work of composing, sharing, and circulating narratives is indeed crucial, there is nothing inherent in these narratives that leads narrators and interlocutors from narration to transformation, from conjecture to policy making, from problem-posing to solidarity-building. Confessional narratives must complement personal commitments with a move toward more systemic understanding of and action against oppression. Only then may we better recognize the political and find ways to intervene and work with/against systems of power. Transformation, policy-making, and coalition-building are processes that are commitment-driven, demanding long-term investment and frequent renewal.

A Case in Point: Narrative in Writing Center Literature

Much writing center literature discussing race and racism appears invested in the confessional narrative—in descriptive storytelling about racism observed in the center. Often, writing center literature posits tutors and directors as white, American, and native speakers of English and then recounts a story where the inability to recognize the systemic nature of racism leads to a tutor or writer of color ending their relationship with their writing center. These narratives tend to posit justice as teaching white tutors and writing center staff how to approach tutoring writers of color. One example is *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (2008), which opens with vignettes of

different kinds of writing conferences in which the tutor is presented as an ostensibly white, middle-class, and American undergraduate struggling to meet a student's needs. One pair named Patrick and Sabah work on a paper for Sabah's graduate seminar. Sabah, an international student from Singapore, struggles with talking about herself positively. She states, "In my country it is considered inappropriate and too prideful to brag on oneself" (p. 12). Patrick coaxes her to write confidently, but the text subtly emphasizes how his American values are more useful within the academy; the text states, "As an American, Patrick could boast of an accomplishment, or even take a justifiable pride in his achievements, but the same was not true for Sabah as a native of Singapore. Instead, her culture advocated restraint in discussing one's achievements and held that one should not claim excellence" (p. 12). Sabah's inability to express pride is described purely in cultural terms and as a complication for a white American tutor to avoid when tutoring an international student. This rendering, like others we have read of writing conferences, examine a racially charged situation as a moment for a tutor to adapt, rather than to question, the systemic nature of power in tutoring. The global is collapsed and dismissed into the local, and one-time strategies of avoiding or downplaying racial tension in conferences trump long-term, expansive, and explicit ones.

In many staff education texts and handbooks that exist in writing center studies, the influence of tutors' identities on writers' self-disclosures is never discussed. The common characterizations of tutors and writers not only ignore the needs of tutors of color and international peer tutors, but also invest in and rely on white privilege and power. These narratives position students of color as liabilities to writing center discourse, resulting in a polarized/polarizing dynamic of liability where racial privilege emerges and is affirmed. White tutors, in turn, learn to work with writers of color and multilingual writers with a set methodology that limits the flexibility that marks good tutoring practice. Relying on the confessional narrative in our literature, conference spaces, and interpersonal relationships gives us a false sense of one-time, interventive response to racism, often fueling frustration when the "problem" of racism isn't immediately solved. These narratives do little more than reveal the presence of racism and express displeasure in its appearance at specific moments, in specific centers.

Narratives, in this sense, further the idea of individual (rather than systemic) racism, indicating that change can be made by focusing our attention on "the racist" out there—here, picking up the ways we are trained to see "the racist" as the other, the few, and the obscure rather than thinking of "racism" as very much our own and embedded in all our everyday interactions. Illustrating the limits of the confessional, these narratives keep us in the realm of the problem, and they fail to move us toward articulations of our commitments or considerations of what ought to be. Further, they hinder important self-work and work-with-others.

Shifting the Narrative and Its Uptake

How do we move beyond confessional accounts to truly transformative narratives? Toward shifting our own and others' uptake of narratives, we need to recognize the political and global aspects of largely personal and local accounts. Indeed, confessional narratives share a larger purpose, as they are often written in response to two frequent critiques of anti-racism work. The first dismisses manifestations of racism or other forms of oppression as relics of the distant past and as random, individual occurrence. The second argues against this work on the grounds of its relevance to composition and rhetoric studies and writing center work and scholarship. (Villanueva's piece counters the former, and the CCCC Diversity blog has sought to counter the latter.) These dismissal and jurisdictional arguments miss two key points: that (1) the local is global and (2) the personal is political. First, scholarship has well articulated the nature of racialization and racial formulation, pinpointing "that racial identities and the social meanings attached to racial groups are widespread

and deeply embedded in social, educational, political and economic institutions" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1071).

Local articulations of racism can never be separated from national and international racial formulations. The decoding of the political nature of race issues evoked by individual and local narratives are crucial at this point in history where boundaries between peoples around the globe are shrinking. If we see that our goal is to teach more than reading and writing as techné and strive to invest in citizens who can participate in and enrich deliberative democracies (which is essentially a political project), we indeed need to recognize that "race issues cannot be treated as strictly local, for they are also caught up with national and international power relations" (Thompson, 1997, p. 9). Second, the political is always experienced on a personal level when people feel that their aspirations are undermined, stifled, or thwarted by political formulations that reproduce specific power articulations. Personal accounts can help us identify with the variegated nature of oppression.

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 actions.

We see, therefore, that reframing the uptake (ours and others) to the narrative itself requires an *attitudinal* and *action-oriented* shift. We recognize that much work needs to be done to capitalize on the power of the confessional narrative. While nothing in writing narratives inherently pursues the long process toward racial justice, we value narratives and see how they *can* be used toward pursuing our commitments—particularly when we *choose* to capitalize on their power for understanding the process (the means) toward change (particular ends). Narratives are an important first step, particularly when written and told for self-reflexivity, but they do not constitute the entirety of anti-racism work.

So, to cultivate our willingness to be disturbed and to make our commitment to racial justice actionable, we knew that we needed to disrupt such narratives in order to move collaboratively toward an actionable stance. We also realized that we need to shape-shift, to re-narrate stories that capture our vision. Much like the "trickster moments" that Geller et al. (2006) urge writing center staff to embrace and seek out, we pursue narratives that "can be generative, can nudge us to be mindful, to notice more" (p. 17). And, like The New London Group (2002), by utilizing Design to improve Available Designs, we want to be "designers of our social futures" (p. 36), focusing on rhetorical, systemic, and institutional work that makes "our working lives, our public lives (citizenship), and our personal lives (lifeworlds)" (p. 10) more racially just. Toward acting on these goals, in what follows we propose two interdependent rhetorical moves that have the potential to re-design, transform, and move us closer toward racial justice. Namely, these moves are articulating our commitments and making these commitments actionable. By no means are these final points of our thinking or in our long work together, but they are, we hope, valuable in proposing the types of self-work and work-with-others needed to engage in everyday/over-time, local/global, personal/political anti-racism. We start by articulating our commitments.

Articulating Our Commitments

Just as it is important to be open to a willingness to be disturbed and to move beyond confessional narratives, we see a need to articulate our commitments so that we can make them actionable. What grounds our vision and guides our process of embracing and sustaining the work of anti-racism? The act of articulating (and re-articulating, regularly) our commitments is important for ensuring ongoing engagement with anti-racism rather than interested performance that is easy to drop in and drop out of. Further, we have found that it's not enough to engage *just* in a "critique of" or "action against" racism (or stances that make us complicit), but rather we need a positive articulation of "critique for" and "action toward" to keep our eyes on the *ought to be*, to pull from Horton (1997), Mathieu (2005), and others.

Put most simply, our shared commitment is to equity, to justice, to humanity. Work for anti-racism is simultaneously work for racial justice and, as we understand it, work for social justice broadly, as our identities overlap and systems of power and privilege are intertwined. Equity work is always incomplete and always striving. It is everyday and local, while systematic and institutional. We have come to this understanding through seeing how systemic racism is enacted in small, regular, and everyday micro-inequities and micro-aggressions—bias enacted often not through conscious intent, but through the normalization of inequitable experience (see, e.g., Rowe, 1990; Sue et al., 2007). As we work at unlearning white supremacy and undoing this everyday racism, we engage in a process of tracing the ways systems of power and privilege work similarly, and yet differently, across enactments of oppression based on group membership. The work of articulating commitments involves asking questions of ourselves such as the following:

- *Values:* What values, attitudes, and actions *can* and *must* we practice for anti-racism?
- *Emotions:* How can we experience and act from joy in the pursuit of racial justice, and how can we mobilize joy to sustain and leverage our commitments over time?
- *Relationships:* What relationships best fuel our actions—so that, for instance, time is spent caucusing (e.g., whites building solidarity with others whites committed to racial justice) and in building cross-racial coalitions and meaningful relationships?
- *Conditions:* What conditions enable the development of beliefs/values, attitudes, and actions consistent with anti-racism? What conditions foster cross-racial relations? What conditions best sustain and motivate ongoing action and activism?

These questions cover a huge territory, but each question reflects our understanding of the multi-dimensional work of making commitments actionable, which comprises (1) self-work and (2) work-with-others on both the (3) interpersonal and (4) institutional levels. We turn next to these dimensions in which we see possibility for making commitments actionable.

Making Our Commitments Actionable

This framework grows out of and responds to the need for *dialectic thinking*—of residing in a liminal space of both-and. Drawing on Papa, Singhal, and Papa (2006), we understand the dialectic *not* as simple dualisms, but as conceptualizations with four elements: "(1) contradiction, (2) motion, (3) totality, and (4) praxis" (p. 43). Together, these elements help us understand how seemingly contradictory stances and moves are not only necessary, but also mutually constitutive and supportive. The dialectic framework helps us value, for instance, where we are and, at the same time, to aspire toward where we'd like to be. This means appreciating what has been learned and also

setting goals toward observing and intervening more frequently and in more nuanced and timely ways. Dialectic thinking is a strengths-based approach toward personal and micro-level change with the goal of influencing political, institutional, and more traditionally conceived macro-level change.

We are drawn to dialectic thinking largely from the process through which we wrote the first drafts of this article, a dialogue in a shared document. As we moved away from our own confessional narratives and the dialogue as a presentational mode and began to question and engage one another dialogically at a deeper level, we realized how powerful dialectic thinking can be as a method. The dialectic allows us to see the productive tensions between critique and action, for example. We can neither be so drawn to the realm of critique that we miss other ways of taking action with others, nor can we be so focused on outward action that we lose critical, introspective reflection upon our methods, processes and goals. As a framework for making our commitments actionable, the dialectic allows us to understand the importance of self-work alongside work-with-others, two ways of conceptualizing critique-and-action that we explore in what follows.

Doing Self-Work

Dialectic thinking directs our attention toward the important role of self-work—or an individual's own "self study," with the goal of building self-reflexivity—and plays alongside and in the service of work outward in the world and with others. This self-work entails an investment in a serious, processual self-reflection and a rich dialogue with the self about how we think, how we feel, and finally how we invent time and space as lacking or available. The following sections reflect this process of self-reflection, which involves, among other considerations, the work of cultivating emotional intelligence and finding both time and place for the work. We offer these examples to begin operationalizing our commitments and understanding self-work as action-oriented and valuable.

Cultivating Emotional Intelligence

We have found that self-work often 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—two emotions we explore here. We reference anger and joyful commitment because they represent two different ends of the spectrum, noting how each can be a generative force that helps us work to attain racial justice.

Recognizing our own emotional responses helps us to act even through uncertainty. This reflexivity springs from a recognition of the generative potential of emotions, which are a force that can be harnessed. Reflective recognition of our emotional states helps us to take up a productive, albeit discomforting, liminal stance. From this stance, we ask ourselves: Can we reside in a place of creative possibility, while naming our range of emotional responses (e.g., *anger* because of oppression; *frustration* because we are not doing enough; *hurt* because we are misunderstood)? Can we reflect on what positive/negative emotions have to teach us? Are we *acting*, *reacting*, or both*?* These questions are partly informed by Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1984) in which she explains how anger (even fury) is an appropriate response to racism. These questions are equally informed by Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Anger* (2001), which discusses the need to *acknowledge* and *care for* one's anger the way we would care for a broken leg (and not hide, neglect, or cut it off). Both Audre Lorde and Thich Nhat Hanh are powerful

activists who recognize the generative force that resides in our uses of anger to move ourselves and others forward. This *moving forward* is not automatic though; it is critical to anti-racism work and, therefore, must be observable.

Reflecting on the uses of anger, we seek to come to a place where we are less resigned to the presence of racism and other oppressions. Racism shifts and changes and may seem impossible to quantify or truly represent; it is false to say that "we're in a better place" now than we were fifty years ago. Many of us who work to end oppression come to places where we have little more energy than to recount the oppressions we see, to patch and piece together solutions for people wronged by our institutions, and to choose which oppressions in our life we have the time to battle. For example, while writing this, laws like Arizona's HB-87, Alabama's HB-57, and Georgia's HB-87 (both copycats of Arizona's bill) legislate racial profiling and discrimination and, in effect, write into law the association of whiteness with citizenship. We must always keep hope that there is an end that we are striving for, and that our seemingly small interventions will bring tides of change in the years to come.

Anti-racism is so often associated with struggle, and yet acts of struggle—and especially of resistance—can be full of joy, excitement, learning, and growth. We recognize that these emotions, though at very different ends of the emotional spectrum, teach us and help us act toward a more equitable and just world. Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and Buddhist teachings, Hartnett (2010) writes about the need to commit ourselves to activism while caring for ourselves and others. "Joyful commitment," writes Hartnett, "asks us to pledge ourselves to work for social justice and for personal growth, to be both radical in our demands and gentle in our demeanor, both outraged by inequality and oppression and joyous in our commitments to end them" (p. 71). As such, functional, generative uses of anger and the move toward a joyful commitment nourish the spirit. Functional, generative uses of our emotions offer transformation that can both result from and sustain the pursuit of social justice. We find that cultivating emotional intelligence is important for inspiring frequent re-commitment, for sustaining us, and for building strength for the long haul.

Finding Time and Space

For the most part, the self-work involved in cultivating emotional intelligence doesn't come easily or naturally. We often find any number of priorities claiming our attention, so it's necessary to devote time and space not only for the work of anti-racism, but especially for the self-work required in doing this work. So we find that part of self-work is about finding the time and space for ongoing reflection—reflections on one's own positioning and power, on one's relations and ways of relating, on one's participation and leadership, and on so much more. Finding time and space for self-work is perhaps most important when it is in such limited supply and when self-care is considered a privilege in and of itself. The dialectic helps us see the value in *prioritizing time* for self-work, as this work informs and strengthens work-with-others. Similarly, the dialectic helps us to understand the *importance of space*, as we reflect differently at and away from our local home contexts.

Reflecting on moments of our deepest self-reflection, we have found that self-work often occurs outside our everyday rhythms and frequently with others, both informally and formally (e.g., through organized caucuses and coalitions). Institutes and retreats can play important roles in facilitating and supporting self-work. Some of us have participated in summer institutes and anti-racism workshops that have helped us do this self-work. With the help of facilitators and colleagues from outside our local contexts, we've looked, looked again, and listened more carefully than we probably would have in the everyday context and rhythm of life. National and international networks have also proven important to supporting our everyday activism in local contexts. We have found it important to

cultivate the habit of intentionally disrupting our usual practices and finding the time and space for reflective self-work.

Anti-racism often does not receive the time and attention it should because it is often seen as *in addition* to other responsibilities. Geller et al. (2007) write that many writing center directors feel they do not have time for anti-oppression and anti-racism education for their tutors (and consequently for themselves) because ending racism is posited as a Sisyphean task that is overshadowed by the other pressures put on writing centers at their academic institutions. Thus, we look for ways to make anti-racism part of every task and to articulate the goals of anti-racism as central to our writing centers/programs, teaching, and scholarship. To do this, we need the time and space to get out of our normal, local, and patterned contexts to think with each other about how our commitments can become *integral to* all of our responsibilities. We need the time and space with allies to discuss matters and plan action that can jumpstart change. We need the time and space to help us deepen our commitments, creating really important synergies and partnerships. When in the absence of the luxury to participate in national networks, we must work harder to find people to affiliate with to do this work and stay in the work.

As we work against oppression and for social justice, we complement self-work with work-with-others. The cumulative impact of cultivating emotional intelligence and finding time and space to renew our commitments can help us work with others differently and more effectively. Through the dialectic, we see that action-oriented self-work is every bit as important as working with others. The ways we do this work may align, overlap, and even diverge. At times, self-work may become the central means for articulating and pursuing our commitments, while, at other times, we may be largely engaged in outward-oriented partnerships or institutional work. What is important to note as we transition into a discussion of working with others is that each actionable move necessitates, informs, and strengthens the other.

Doing Work-with-Others

As the complement to and extension of self-work, we recognize the need to do work within groups and across groups—both of which are crucial to systemic intervention toward racial justice. We know that this work not only differs from self-work, but also necessitates an ongoing reflection on the means and the ends of collaboration, participation, and leadership. Working with others is processual in nature and has many dimensions: cognitive, affective, and processual/procedural. In what follows, we identify the general moves of this work that emerged from our ongoing dialogue and reflection (i.e., through shared self-work). Specifically, we discuss two primary types of work-with-others, which we identify as (1) self-work with others and (2) working together toward institutional change. Too often in doing anti-racism, we skip over the various types of self-work with others, which we here are trying to tease out and attend to with care. We believe self-work is so important because work-with-others needs to balance a number of dialectic possibilities: responding tactically, while planning strategically; being in-the-moment, while thinking long-term and working over-time; attending to interpersonal dynamics, while taking on institutional leadership.

Within these and other dialectics, two main moves inform this work-with-others. First, we would like to create more space for self-work with others. They can help us listen more and more deeply to the "disturbances" in our accounts, to the articulations of our commitments, and to the moves toward making those commitments actionable. This is why we would like to engage with others in critical, reflective, courageous dialogues about power—both in the sense of privilege and power *over* and in the sense of power *with* and *for*. Second, we would like to engage with others in the relational and affective work involved in creating racially just institutions in which all members' rights are realized.

In making institutional change, we must reflect on and recognize power relative to others, which involves deep attention to the right to tell and the obligation to listen. As we extrapolate below, some of these moves are procedural, some interactional, some rhetorical—and all informed by the dialectic.

Doing Self-Work with Others

In this section, we focus on two (of what surely are many) dimensions of working with others toward social justice. These are (1) critical reflection on one's own power, privilege, and positioning and (2) taking care of the collective. These dimensions show the need for self-work with others to be reflective, dialogic, and affective, as well as ongoing, as this work cannot be a one-time deal. As we care for ourselves, we care for others, and others care for us: care toward intra- and cross-racial solidarity that can only be built through ongoing self-work, courageous dialogue, and the willingness to be disturbed.

Critical Reflection on One's Own Power, Privilege, Positioning

When working with others—both through caucuses (i.e., within one's racial membership group) and through coalitions (i.e., in cross-racial collaborations), critical reflection on one's role is important for building solidarity and sustaining relations toward collaborative work over time. Recognition of power and privilege, especially our own, is difficult but doable and indispensible in work-with-others. Though it is possible to train oneself to notice how we articulate power, it is in relation to others that we tend to make claims *about* or *using* our power. Critical reflections on power—and the manifestations and implications of power *over*, *with*, and *for*—are essential to anti-racism. These reflections not only teach us how the logic of oppression, as a discourse, is a dynamic articulation of collective power over and power denial, but especially show us how our own power makes solidarity possible.

Fortunately, we often find ourselves situated to make commitments to fairness and justice actionable. This often happens when we choose to be in the generative place of being teacher/learner with our colleagues and students—for example, when we interrogate with others what it means to be a confidant and, in turn, an ally. The ally role is not a role that one should enter without giving thought to the harm as well as the good that can be done. In the case of anti-racism, well-meaning white folks can do damage when acting only on what *they* see as the right thing to do in terms of racial justice without listening to folks of color. Instead, to prevent the hurt that eliminates the possibility of cross-racial solidarity, whites need to recognize that in working with others, there's a need to appreciate, to challenge, and to be willingly disturbed. When it is well used, the ally role is a relationally smart move that can open much possibility. But when it is not done well—that is, without critical reflections on one's power, privilege, and positioning—it can hurt ourselves and others and get us further mired in the mud of institutionalized racism. Doing self-work with others involves ongoing care-full self-reflection that takes place, in part, through courageous dialogues. As we c*ourageously* confront our own prejudiced assumptions on our own, we need equally to learn from and listen to others (both within and across racial groups) who can help us realize these assumptions. Collaborative processing leads us to a second dimension of work-with-others: caretaking of the collective.

Taking Care of the Collective

Effective and sustained work-with-others tends to the needs and the goals of all parties involved. The absence of such attention risks foiling the condition of togetherness that enables a dialogic process in the pursuit of racial justice. This is why it is crucial to complement cognitive, critical reflection with

affective and relational resources that we can use to support one another. Community organizers recognize the value of "caretaking of the collective," foregrounding our need to build intentional structures to care for ourselves and each other when engaged in anti-racism work. We struggle with embodying the wisdom of this notion (the value of caretaking), and it seems that we are not alone, as is evidenced by a question posed at a conference workshop that one of us recently attended: *How do we better cultivate peace within ourselves when we're engaged in peace-work?*

The work of everyday anti-racism necessitates the emotional intelligence we've discussed earlier. Knowing when we need to re-fuel is important for sustaining the work, and it is equally important to recognize when others need time to refuel. This self-care can happen with others, as we process together modalities of oppression, while leaning into each other's needs and strengths. At its best, caretaking can facilitate and build a collaborative anti-racism network, as partnerships and collaborative leadership are needed for making institutional change. Thinking dialectically, we see that engaging in self-work with others can strengthen work within institutions (e.g., in our classrooms and writing programs), just as working together for institutional change can allow us to do self-work with others. That said, critical reflection and caretaking come into play just as much when working for institutional change: we never leave behind self-work, but carry qualities such as reflection, dialogue, and emotional intelligence with us into more structural ways of making our commitments actionable. Likewise, we continue to find time and space for sustained and commitment-driven work-with-others *institutionally*.

Working Together for Institutional Change

In relation to institutional change, reflecting on and acting from places of (em)powerment become essential. As we work with others toward institutional change, the process and result of the dialectic of critique against oppression and for racial justice will vary. That said, we work within this dialectic as we articulate and act from our commitments, while also deliberating the consequences of choosing to *interrogate, relinquish,* and/or *use* power (especially when our work seems to reproduce the status quo) and not just acknowledge that power exists. To this end, in these final sections focused on institutional change, we complement (1) interrogating power with (2) utilizing power. This interrogation of power over, however, can't be done only on a one-with-one level because it creates instances of insulated, local response to manifestations of racism. Instead, we need to make this interrogation of power structural so it is independent of the director of a writing program/center. Interrogating power should be part of an institution's culture, history, and vision—i.e., woven into its institutional fabric.

Interrogating Power

Our desire to interrogate power directs us to be more deliberate about questioning who, when, how, and to what end power is used in writing instruction, writing programs, and educational institutions more broadly. At times, our response may be troubled by an urge to *relinquish power to resist oppression*, a desire that was explicitly expressed in a workshop we co-led recently. But we neither think relinquishing power is the only choice we have to pursue racial justice, though the urge to do so is understandable, nor is it necessarily useful or inherently altruistic. We can, alternatively, choose to use power *with* one another and for the pursuit of racial justice. As power over is relational (a relation of domination), so is power with relational, thriving when people together are willing to: (1) resist the urge to speak for others; (2) embrace the duty to listen to claims of grievance, even when under-vocalized; and (3) embrace respons(i/a)bility.

First, power over can be interrogated as we resist *the urge to speak for*. We invoke here Linda Alcoff's (1991-1992) recognition of the very fine line between advocacy and totalizing (reducing and misrepresenting) the experiences of others even as we attempt to be allies. What makes us cross over that line—whether we trip and reproduce what we are against or whether we enable a discourse of testifying and solidarity? Alcoff offers a four-dimensional reflective process. The process can start by *at best* resisting and *at least* interrogating the desire to speak for others.

Second, it is almost impossible to resist the urge to speak without embracing the duty to listen. This begs the question: *How can we listen better and ask others to listen better so we don't need the "proxy speaker" or the "sponsor"?* Rhetorical listening has been addressed well in the literature (e.g., Ratcliffe, 2005), asking us to interrogate our assumptions about who has the right to tell and what accounts or interests impede us from recognizing this right. Rhetorical listening invites questions like: Who has the right to tell and to testify? How do we signal a commitment to listen when others' testify and seek to be heard? What is the impact of not telling and not listening? But if the process of interrogating power starts with this model of critical examination, it goes deeper and becomes more demanding when we, as Alcoff states, examine our positions and the tacit ideological discourses that define how we know, feel, be, and—we would like to add here—listen. Alcoff (1991-1992) recommends, therefore, a serious analysis of our standpoint and context, an openness to critique and accountability, and an attentiveness to consequences of our privileges and the affordances of our positions. All enable listening.

Third, embracing responsibility and response ability is part of the dialogic, recursive nature of the work toward racial justice. There are numerous manifestations of the challenge of interrogation of power over, which we think, when balanced by the choice to embrace joyful commitment, can result in response ability. We've seen white folks start anti-racism work and then abandon it: leave articles half-written, committee charges half-met. It also prompts us to think about how white people so often get "credit" for doing anti-racism work (i.e., professional credit and academic cultural currency), while people of color are expected and over-required to do "diversity work" without much, if any, credit. And even with the research and many narratives about faculty of color doing "double duty" (Gloria, 1998, p. 37)—that is, over-doing service, advising, teaching, research, and writing work—the problem is so entrenched that whites committed to anti-racism continue to benefit from it. For example, white faculty who write about race and anti-racism are recognized for this work and can trace professional gains from it (see, for example, hooks, 1994). Even when recognizing the problem, whites committed to anti-racism participate in and benefit from this structural inequity. Another way of saying the same thing: though whites committed to anti-racism participate in and benefit from this structural inequity, relinquishing the work neither alleviates the asymmetrical distributions of responsibility to recover from racism nor does it solve the problem. Rather, it invites us to contemplate a central question: What rhetorical and leadership skills do we need to develop for the kind of solidarity and advocacy that struggles with the power of whiteness within movements of racial justice? We believe these skills come from an approach where we are willing to be disturbed and to let go to the extent that one becomes willing to be summoned by those we need to listen to the most, if they choose to. The skills, practice, and responsibility of interrogating power are necessary alongside the skills, practice, and responsibility of using power for wider institutional change.

Using Power

Because racism is institutional, we believe that a significant part of our making commitments actionable must happen within the institutions we occupy and shape. Institutions are big structures full of bureaucracies, and as Fox (2009) points out, "Most of us, even in rhetoric and composition, aren't prepared for working in bureaucracies" (p. 15). However, institutions can be changed, and we

look for ways to use institutions for greater access and equity. Consider what Porter et al. (2000) say about institutions:

Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable. In other words, we made 'em, we can fix 'em. Institutions R Us. (p. 611)

True, not everyone within an institution holds the same power, but we shouldn't allow our individual positions to determine whether we act. When we are in the shadow of power feeling small and subjugated, too often deferral—saying it's not our place to speak/act or it's someone else's struggle—presents itself as an easy move. But why not change our perspective? If we're in the shadow of power, that means we are really, really close to power, and with some creativity, we may be able to make something of the situation.

Teachers, writing program administrators (WPAs), and writing center directors are ideally positioned to do institutional change work, forwarding equity and social justice goals. And, as Porter et al. (2000) write, "for those of you who think such optimism is politically naive and hopelessly liberal and romantic, we believe that we (and you, too) have to commit to this hypothesis anyway, the alternative—political despair—being worse" (p. 611). Again, though, commitments must be actionable and more than hopeful rhetoric. Within the context of understanding racism as a manifestation of institutional culture, politeness, and silence,[4] we believe intentional efforts must be made to disrupt the status quo. Working toward more racially diverse teaching and tutoring staff and cultivating the conditions that support racially just pedagogy and administration represent two areas well suited for activism and institutional change.

Writing program administrators and writing center directors occupy positions of power making them responsible for structural components of an educational space. These spaces have the potential to harm, heal, empower, and produce any number of other negative and positive consequences related to race and equity matters. "We cannot remake the world through schooling," The New London Group (2002) points out, "but we can instantiate a vision through pedagogy that creates in microcosm a transformed set of relationships and possibilities for social futures" (p. 19). WPAs' conscious work (e.g., toward recruiting, hiring, and retaining a racially diverse staff as well as providing professional development opportunities) can help teachers/tutors confront racism within themselves, their classes/conferences, and the writing program/center in general.

A specific example of an institutional shift occurs when directors think critically about the staff in regards to race and other identity memberships. The suggestion to hire more tutors of color at first seems tokenizing, and many writing centers/programs are potentially motivated by tokenizing efforts. We have seen, however, remarkable shifts through conscious hiring when this hiring accompanies a move toward actively supporting tutors of color, and changing the climate of the center/program. For example, tutors draw in new clients/writers from their networks, forward new perspectives on what the center/program should be and how it should function, and participate in shared leadership. Moving away from attempting to effect change *only* from top-down, one-time efforts and shifting toward long-term approaches to changing the culture of the writing center, writing program, and higher education as a whole mitigates the disappointment accompanied with slow change.

Documents like "Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Institution" show the gradual nature of change and specify fundamental, observable markers of institutional change, but even such carefully constructed documents sometimes contain ambiguity, which represents both an entry into dialogue and potential impediment to action/goal actualization. Using power to effect change

institutionally involves work-with-others in which we act based on commitments. Careful articulations—combing over word choice and phrasing—go hand-in-hand with the dialectic of interrogating and using power. These are different manifestations of power, which remind us of the role self-work plays when working with others, both interpersonally and institutionally. The many ways in which we work to make our commitments actionable—many of which are discussed here, while many more we continue to explore and find together—necessitate the both-and stance characteristic of dialectic thinking. And the dialectic, we find, brings us back to cultivating a willingness to be disturbed—that is, a stance of genuine openness to listening, learning, and leading, on one's own and with others.

Conclusion

Together, we believe that an everyday educational process toward racial justice works against the macro-logics of oppression enacted daily through micro-inequities. A dialectic intervention focused on self-work and work-with-others might, at first, seem to have only local impact. However, if the local and personal converse with or gesture toward historical, social, economic, or otherwise material roots and implications, we believe they have the potential of moving us toward addressing the larger macro-logics of inequity and oppression. We address inequity also by acknowledging how we experience, see, understand, participate in, and advocate against these macro-logics and micro-inequities differently based on our racial identities, personal histories, and intersecting positions within broader systems of power and privilege. Talking and listening across these differences has meant, for us, struggle, yet hope; vulnerability, yet possibility.

Through working together, we have come to realize the care-full, processual, reiterative, and self-reflexive nature of the work for equity and social justice in educational settings. It is this togetherness and openness to being disturbed that allows us now to think about a transformative narrative, one that moves beyond confessional accounts. Ultimately, we write toward the goal of making our commitments actionable and, in turn, creating new realities that are more racially just specifically and socially just in general. By continually doing the self-work and work-with-others, we hope to live a recursive theory-practice-theory-practice life allowing us to never stop learning and acting with our local, national, and international communities. We hope to inspire this willingness to be disturbed in others, and we look forward to learning from and engaging with and alongside you on the long haul toward racial justice.

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Notes

[1] The work of Barron and Grimm (2002); Villanueva (2006); Condon (2007); Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet (2007); and Denny (2010) provide good examples of placing critique and action in tandem. Each of these authors identify instances of racism in writing centers alongside suggesting ways to take action toward racial justice.

[2] The term "matter" is used intentionally in place of "issue" to signify our hope that we will embrace an attitude that the content of readings, discussions, and projects *matter* for everyone as opposed to existing as only an *issue* of concern for some. This strategy is based on De Jean and Elsebree's move to do the same in their article "Queer Matters: Educating Educators about Homophobia" (2008).

[3] Personal epistemologies, as defined by Hoefer (2008), refer to "what individuals believe about what counts as knowledge and where it resides, how individuals come to know, and how knowledge is constructed and evaluated" (p. 5).

[4] See Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2006) for an in-depth discussion of silence and oppression. Another good resource considering the role institutional culture, politeness, and silence play in perpetuating racism and other social injustices is Louise Dunlap's *Undoing the Silence: Six Tools for Social Change Writing* (2007). "Everyday Racism: Anti-Racism Work and Writing Center Practice" in Geller et al.'s *The Everyday Writing Center* (2007) engages with these matters specifically within the context of writing centers.

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