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## Loving Loving? Problematizing Pedagogies of Care and Chéla Sandoval's Love as a Hermeneutic

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Loving Loving? Problematizing Pedagogies of Care and Chéla Sandoval's

Love as a Hermeneutic

by

Allison Brimmer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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# **Loving Loving? Problematizing Pedagogies of Care and Chéla Sandoval's Love as a Hermeneutic**

Allison Brimmer

## **ABSTRACT**

My thesis project is an argument for and an investigation into the complex dynamics of what I term a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Drawing from scholarly work in the fields of feminist theory, cultural studies, whiteness studies, and rhetoric and composition, in what follows I argue for a “blurring” of the traditional reason-emotion split that, I believe, continues to stifle learners in today’s U.S. educational system. I then offer a pedagogical theory that rejects or “blurs” this split, acknowledges and examines the affective realm, and is fueled by the more holistic notion and theory of “love as a hermeneutic” put forth by self-identified U.S. third-world feminist Chéla Sandoval. Next, I make connections between Sandoval’s theory and the work of several contemporary feminist scholars who theorize “love” and the formation of powerful coalitions that can work toward fostering democratizing social change in U.S. society today. Many feminist critics have argued against an “ethic of care” (which is closely related to theorizations of love), claiming it perpetuates racism and sexism, among other forms of discrimination. I discuss and problematize these critiques and come to argue that, ultimately, they can be mobilized to forward and enrich my concept of a critical, feminist,

anti-racist pedagogy attuned to affect and geared toward democratizing social change.

## **Chapter One: Challenging the Reason/Emotion Split in Education with Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy**

This thesis delineates, problematizes, and, finally, supports the notion of a critical, feminist, anti-racist, class-conscious pedagogy attuned to an ethic of care. Revisiting and extending debates surrounding pedagogy, affect, race privilege, gender privilege, and class privilege within the fields of feminist theory, education, whiteness studies, and composition studies, I argue for (and critique) a pedagogical theory (critical, feminist, and anti-racist) that I believe can offer important and ultimately empowering opportunities for educators and students alike. Specifically, I examine theories and a few practices of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that challenge students and teachers to actively investigate the social construction of affect, especially their own affective investments, in relation to the affective realm sanctioned by today's contemporary U.S. culture.

The method I use in this thesis is a discursive deconstruction that 1) argues against the contemporary reason/emotion split in education, and 2) to re-values the emotional realm and its potential for enacting emancipatory pedagogies. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is based on two key elements. As I have suggested, the first involves recognizing the genealogy of scientific thinking and how this thinking has influenced the traditional, Western, patriarchal emphasis on intellect and reason in education. This Cartesian emphasis on intellect and reason has been inculcated through centuries of detached, abstract, rationalist scientific discourse. With a purposeful move away

from strictly rationalist inquiries, the pedagogy I advocate requires examinations of the distinct affective roles “assigned” and the responses compelled within contemporary U.S. society, especially in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identity categories.<sup>1</sup> For example, complex social forces (including “ideological state apparatuses” such as contemporary military, media, government, family, and educational systems<sup>2</sup>) construct women as more emotional than men; therefore, women are expected to perform this emotionality more than men in everyday life. People of color are stereotyped as “lower class” and more passionate, erotic, and expressive than white people. Because emotion and passion have been consistently devalued, women and people of color are, by extension, devalued and commodified. The critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy I advocate requires students to examine these varied and limiting messages about power, privilege, and affect as they are circulated in and through people and the various social structures in which we participate in U.S. culture.

The second aspect of enacting a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy involves displacing the patriarchal educational orientation that stigmatizes an

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I refer to a variety of privileges and oppressions, but I concentrate on race and gender privilege in terms of the critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that I theorize; therefore, these are the two primary privileges which I mention most often. However, I recognize that people are privileged and oppressed in contemporary U.S. society not just based on racialized and gendered categories. Thus, even though my focus is on race and gender, the pedagogical theory I advocate makes room, indeed necessitates, an investigation of privilege and dominance structures related to various identity categories such as ethnicity, economic class, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, able-bodiedness, body size, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See Althusser.

acknowledgement of the affective terrain of the classroom. By “affective terrain” I mean the powerful affective dimensions that shape our (teachers’ and students’) thinking, talking, and writing about privilege and oppression in U.S. culture. These dimensions are complex and sometimes contradictory, but they must be respected if they are to be examined as a subject of study in the critical classroom. By considering and respecting these dimensions, educators foster an overall sense of respect for all learners in the classroom; this respect, of course, is a vital component of successful educational experiences.

In my view, in today’s time where reason is still valued over emotion and the mind takes precedence over the body, it is an empowering political act to consider the realm of affect in addition to and in conjunction with intellectual ways of understanding and approaching the world. The still dominant reason/emotion split in U.S. society is a damaging, socially constructed bifurcation of the individual thinking/feeling self. And it often leads to dysfunctional, inadequate education. In today’s detached, over-rationalized schooling environments, teachers are compelled (often by students and colleagues alike) to “disavow our loves, our loves of learning, our passion for teaching, our care and concern for our students,” as well as “our love of inquiry” (Liston and Garrison 2-3).

At a time when conservative politics and conservative politicians dominate U.S. government and society, at a time when the political center has made a dramatic shift to the right, at a time when conservative backlash pervades our everyday lives, it is more urgent than ever for teachers/scholars/public intellectuals to renew their commitment to fostering critical consciousness in their



students.<sup>3</sup> Educators must make a central tenet of our pedagogy the understanding that our affective dispositions are, in effect, created and controlled by and through the ideology of those in power; the affective realm is deeply connected to the individual's concrete experiences yet simultaneously circumscribed by larger social structures that both encourage and discourage distinct affective responses. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy helps educators to learn and re-learn with our students what it means for our daily lives when we understand that what feels personal and individual is, actually, "political and structural," as well (West 72).

Critical pedagogies that compel learners to investigate affective dimensions of issues such as racism, sexism, and classism are risky and controversial, to be sure. Each time educators facilitate a class that is alive with debate and discussion we are sure to experience and incite strong reactions, both intellectual and emotional. However, recent theoretical moves in composition studies and feminist theory that involve examining not just the politics of reason but also the politics of emotion<sup>4</sup> support my claim for a theory and practice of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy attuned to the complexities of affect.

With a commitment to the difficult work of "blurring" the split between reason and emotion, teachers can enact a pedagogy that validates the affective

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<sup>3</sup> The term public intellectual, although perhaps lofty and certainly contestable, is useful for understanding the way academics envision the productive, democratizing work of learning/teaching. Following Gramsci, I define a public intellectual as committed to engaging in (often) rebellious and (hopefully) productive critiques of society.

<sup>4</sup> See Albrecht-Crane, Boler, Crawford, Langstraat, West, and Worsham.

terrain in responsible and empowering ways. I invoke bell hooks here who champions just this type of pedagogical theory in her oft-cited *Teaching to Transgress*:

Those of us who have been intimately engaged as students or teachers with feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the mind/body split and allows us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence, wholehearted. (193)

Learners (both teachers and students) can, I believe, learn to think and write more critically about ourselves and the world around us when our inquiries are more holistic, when affect is recognized and respected instead of restricted and repressed. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can inspire emancipatory learning when educators create multiple opportunities for students to read culture and consider how the affective realm constructs and is constructed by specifically raced, gendered, classed, etc. relations of power and privilege in and beyond the classroom.

A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy asks, what are the implications of a social structure that creates, manipulates, and enforces in people appropriate affective responses to the world around us? What does it mean to say that, in many ways, our feelings are not our own but are instead products of a dominant ideology, of a “new conservatism?” Is it possible to have feelings separate from or in spite of ideology’s powerful hold? Can we ever trust our own emotions?

## Outlining My Project

In chapter two of this work, I lay the foundation for my project and discuss self-identified U.S. third-world theorist Chéla Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*, a brilliant theoretical work that defines people living in today's late-capitalist, post-modern society as "citizen subject-agents" who have the capacity to work toward establishing a more equal and democratic society. Sandoval outlines specific "ideological forms" that can be used as "methods" or "technologies" for enacting democratizing social change. In addition to four forms of ideology labeled "equal rights," "revolutionary," "supremacist," and "separatist," citizen subject-agents can develop a final and powerful ideological form which she defines as a "differential" or "oppositional consciousness." Differential or oppositional consciousness is a sort of awareness that allows diverse people to coalesce and move back and forth in the various ideological forms Sandoval highlights, all with the goal of creating a more fair and just society. The ideological forms, in combination, foreground Sandoval's notion of "love as a hermeneutic," a theory that is wholly optimistic yet thoroughly grounded by the complexities of today's racist, sexist, and classist U.S. society. I argue in chapter two that love as a hermeneutic (i.e., "interpreting" everyday life and our place(s) in it with a "loving" orientation toward self and others) is an especially powerful concept for the pedagogical theory that I offer in this work.

In chapter three of this thesis I relate Sandoval's work to a confluence of contemporary feminist scholars, most notably Wendy Brown, Kathy Ferguson, Donna Haraway, bell hooks, and Chantal Mouffe who theorize in powerfully

similar ways about love, coalition, and democratizing social change. These scholars seem to be calling for more investigations into the realm of affect and the concept of love as vital for empowering political projects. Their work, when framed in the context of a cultural studies writing classroom, offers important directions a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can take.

For example, feminist educational theorist and whiteness studies scholar Audrey Thompson discusses the importance of relationality in the pedagogical situation. Envisioning the classroom as a sort of “third space” of possibility and interested in pedagogy as performance, for Thompson, learning is understood as experience that is created and continually (re)generated (“Entertaining” 433). A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy necessarily follows Thompson’s lead by resisting the Western, rationalist, patriarchal urge to understand the classroom as solely a place for building static knowledge bases. I argue in this subsection of chapter three that it is beneficial to remember and remind our students that the critical classroom is a place for positioning oneself to embark on new journeys—such as conducting inquiries into the realm of affect, and not just conducting excavations into old, standard territories (“Entertaining” 432-3).

Although I have a sense that those of us who pursue the realm of affect in the context of intellectual inquiry are in the minority, I am energized to see that Thompson does not underestimate the power of relation (“Entertaining” 432).<sup>5</sup> So many of us are trained to actively reject, neglect, or remain oblivious to ever-present and complex dynamics of relationality. Teachers and students are

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<sup>5</sup> I like Thompson’s definitions of relationships being created when people “do things together,” such as in the classroom (“Entertaining” 432).

reticent—to say the least—to acknowledge and investigate the realm of affect. As Thompson posits, the pedagogical situation is an especially rich, relational (affective) experience for students and teachers alike. In today’s usually sterilized educational climate, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical theory of affect as I define it challenges dominant paradigms and acknowledges, analyzes, and cultivates, as well as critiques, the politics of relationality in our profession, most notably in our classrooms. Unfortunately, as Liston and Garrison remind us, “[a]ll too often, emotions are taken as affective upheavals in an otherwise smoothly functioning and reasonable process” (2).<sup>6</sup> I rely on several scholars’ work in chapter three to argue that a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy does not have to understand emotions as “affective upheavals.” Instead, the pedagogy that I advocate disrupts the U.S. culture’s logocentric orientation and asks us to recognize the affect bound up in everyday relations. No doubt, logic and reason are tied intricately to affect. As I have tried to establish, it is *unreasonable* and even damaging, actually, to attempt to sanitize our classrooms and divorce affect from the realm of thinking. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can be fueled by appreciating the complexity of affect and relationality and by examining the intricate, sometimes contradictory, nature of affective relations in the cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Liston and Garrison recognize the neglect and even disrespect shown by academics toward the realm of affect in terms of their work and the profession. Referring to the untapped power of theorizing complicated and often empowering notions of love and affect in academic culture today, they argue that “[l]ove, as a concept has seemed terribly suspect, irrational, somewhat out-of-bounds, and a bit too unwieldy. ...Rarely have modern scholarly analyses seemed adept at handling the stuff of feelings...” (4).

studies writing classroom. It is vital to note, though, that an appreciation for and examination of relationality is not simple and straightforward.

Therefore, in chapter four I problematize the pedagogical theory I am arguing for in this thesis. No doubt, the notions of love, relationality, and coalition which I champion are not without complications. For example, as with other realms, power is, of course, always already at work in the affective realm. There is no neutral zone in the classroom. Thompson has noted the danger of educators appealing to “an authentic relational orientation grounded in social innocence” (“Not” 530). Indeed, the “third space” of the classroom is still a space where people—constructed in the undeniably discriminatory social world—meet to learn together. Although I champion a theoretical and methodological pedagogy which is guided by Chéla Sandoval’s notion of love as a hermeneutic, I understand that “love” cannot possibly be a cure for all that ails racist and sexist society, and, by extension, our colleagues and students. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy acknowledges the social construction of people and the affective realm, and, instead of clinging to feel-good relationality as a sort of innocent savior of classroom interactions, it complicates and analyzes the power dynamics of that relationality, specifically in terms of race and gender.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dimensions of class privilege are another factor to consider when discussing relationality. Deeply entrenched privilege structures support the class-privileged educator’s ability to ignore the reality that class privileged students have access to more “training” which schools them to “feel” and “relate” in certain ways deemed more “appropriate” in the classroom (See Boler). Economic privilege is also further complicated in terms of the dynamics of racism. People of color are automatically associated with poverty in this culture. Conversely, poor whites are often considered “white trash,” a label that is becoming more common in everyday use. The term “white trash” discriminates against poor white people, as

For example, this thesis might lead people to understand that white teachers, especially those who claim their classrooms are “colorblind” and democratic, enact “a specifically White, social ideal that provides us with no means of understanding or changing the ways in which we fail in our responsibilities to one another” (Thompson, “Not” 531). I recognize that many feminist scholars might make the connection between my theory and a pedagogy that is mostly “feel-good” in nature and therefore blind to the political implications of a white woman (myself) arguing that teachers must re-value the affective dimensions of everyday culture and of the classroom. In fact, as I discuss in more depth in chapter four, some feminists have argued that appealing to love or an “ethic of care” becomes a method of perpetuating uncritical, white supremacist notions of care in the classroom and contemporary culture.

The pedagogy I argue for can also be considered problematic in terms of gender dynamics. Indeed, by re-valuing affect I am re-invoking the traditionally devalued realm with which women are associated. Especially because the majority of teachers of writing are women, arguing that teachers must work to foster respect and use “love as a hermeneutic” in the critical classroom might be considered a naïve perpetuation of sexism. Lynn Worsham and Eileen Schell, for example, caution that the feminist teacher cannot afford to “nurture” students in uncritical ways because when she does, she does nothing more than reify traditional stereotypes of women as mother-teachers. Those of us who are

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well as those who aren’t white. In fact, the term “white trash” serves to reinforce racism. “White” trash implicitly codes non-whites as inherently pre-disposed to being “trash,” or poor. Using the word “white” allows lower class whites to secure their race privilege, thus reinforcing white supremacy.

women writing teachers, then, might embody the devalued, emotional women whose work simply supports more traditional, patriarchal educational practices.

In chapter five I argue that paying attention to (and critiquing) affect does not have to equal playing the role of mother-teacher. In fact, rejecting, or “blurring,” the reason/emotion split is perhaps one of the best ways to subvert dominant patriarchal codes and to work against status quo racism, sexism, classism, etc. In this chapter I consider strategies for dealing with the discomfort that a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy often inspires in teachers and students. I discuss how a straightforward recognition of the intense discomfort people experience in relation to critical pedagogy is an important part of the implementation of that pedagogy. Theories and strategies put forth by Megan Boler are especially useful for the critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogue. For example, critical pedagogues must work to understand the extreme discomfort students experience in our classrooms, and we must offer “productive replacements” for the sense of loss that critical pedagogies often engender. Boler’s concept of critical hope is especially useful, as well.

The educational goal of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is both sound and rigorous: it is to challenge constantly ourselves and the worlds around us, to learn more about the social construction of affect and how that shapes our and our students’ worldviews. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is fueled by Sandoval’s theory of love as a hermeneutic, which is both optimistic and realistic in its approach. Drawing on the work of scholars who theorize notions of community and coalition as crucial for enacting democratizing social change, I



argue that my theory for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy has much to offer both students and teachers alike. Moreover, I believe that it can and should be implemented in strategic ways in the cultural studies writing classroom.

## **Chapter Two: Outlining the Theory that Fuels a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy: Chéla Sandoval, Ethics, and Love as a Hermeneutic**

As I indicated in the introduction to this work, I am interested in the construction of affect in larger society, specifically in how that construction affects our understandings of race and gender. Additionally, I want to understand better how that construction gets played out through individual learners (students and teachers) in our classrooms. I am interested in contemporary scholars' and students' ideas about relationality, most notably relationality in the classroom, and in the ways that this relationality might be linked to a concept of love. In this chapter, I argue that Chéla Sandoval's theory of love as a hermeneutic can serve as an important antidote to the fragmented experience of all citizen subject-agents living in late capitalist, post modernist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy.<sup>8</sup>

Sandoval's project, as well as my own, strives to theorize the way that love as a hermeneutic can foster democratizing social change (136).<sup>9</sup> In this chapter I delineate Sandoval's theory of love that circumscribes the ideological forms she defines as key to the methodology of those who are oppressed, and I

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<sup>8</sup> With this description I invoke bell hooks' strategy of describing U.S. society. Instead of referring simply to a "discriminatory society," in many of her books bell hooks delineates the oppressive nature of the U.S. with a string of powerful and accurate adjectives. Perhaps hooks employs these strings of adjectives such as "late capitalist, post modernist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy" (as I do occasionally in this thesis), because it forces readers to slow down and consider specific discriminatory qualities of a larger, oppressive regime.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Sandoval writes: "My contribution is to identify a hermeneutics of love that can create social change" (136).

contend that the notion of love as a hermeneutic is a valuable concept that can be instructive not only for those who are “more” oppressed in today’s racist and sexist status quo, but also for those, such as myself, who are more privileged. With this approach, I hope to further Sandoval’s vision and to enact new types and moments of force, power, and possibility in the ways that people think about, and more importantly improve, the concrete realities of individuals living in U.S. society today.

Sandoval sees the work of scholars she identifies as “third-world writers,” such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Franz Fanon, Che Guevera, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cherie Moraga, and Emma Perez as sharing a common definition of love as “‘breaking’ through whatever controls in order to find ‘understanding and community’: [love] is described as ‘hope’ and ‘faith’ in the potential goodness of some promised land” (140). With a tempered yet faithful hope comes Sandoval’s theory of “‘love’ as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen subject-agents, regardless of social class” (140). The concept of love in new and productive forms is a heuristic for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Indeed, the notion of love can be instrumental for a pedagogical theory and practice shaped by, in spite of, and in resistance to the strife, pain, and misery, as well as temporary joys and exhilarations, associated with living and struggling in contemporary U.S. society today.

In order to develop love as a hermeneutic, as a method of interpreting, understanding, and navigating the complicated worlds in which we all live, students and teachers can achieve what Sandoval defines as differential or

oppositional consciousness, a sort of awareness that enables Others to engage in other “ideological forms” that comprise the methodology of the oppressed.<sup>10</sup> In order to gain this awareness, the citizen subject-agent must learn how to deconstruct complex sign systems in order to gain insight into the power relations operating within and through them. Following Roland Barthes’ notion of semiotics, the citizen subject-agent must be able to read dominant ideologies created, maintained, and enforced through various social systems.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of enacting a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, this means studying with our students the texts of our culture and learning to read them for signs of dominant ideologies at work. With the commitment to “blurring” the reason/emotion split, teachers and students can read the emotional appeals and

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<sup>10</sup> Sandoval’s text focuses on emancipatory methods used by those who are oppressed in U.S. society, thus the terminology “methodology of the oppressed.” Sandoval’s explication of the methodology also reveals crucial insights for people who experience more privilege than oppression. No doubt, the language she uses and the theoretical concepts she invokes are not easily accessible; however, the “ideological forms” that Sandoval defines and the concept of love as a hermeneutic that she invokes reveal critical insights for educators who use critical pedagogies. The “methodology of the oppressed” can be instrumental for a pedagogy that challenges variously privileged students and teachers to acknowledge and come to terms with their own privileges. With Sandoval’s work comes pedagogical possibility for working toward democratizing social transformation.

<sup>11</sup> Sandoval’s invocation of Barthes’ semiotics relates well to studying the variety of ideological state apparatuses outlined by Louis Althusser. In other words, part of the “methodology of the oppressed” that can be translated to the critical classroom is an analysis of the dominant ideologies that inform various cultural sources (apparatuses) such as the media, the military, and familial, governmental, educational, and religious institutions. Sandoval’s “methodology of the oppressed” allows for an examination of dominant economic ideology as well, most notably its power to “infiltrate” the consciousness of individuals to the point that, according to Herbert Marcuse, “the political needs of society become individual needs and aspirations [and] their satisfaction promotes business and the commonweal” (xli).

the political assumptions associated with these texts that lead people to particular racist, sexist, classist etc. worldviews. Thus we can come to recognize both the sign systems and the affective dimensions of those systems that are invisible and normativizing, and we can learn read them with a more critical eye.

### **Ethics and Ideological Forms**

Like Sandoval's methodology, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy requires a commitment to a democratic ideal, what Sandoval terms an "ethics" (44). For Sandoval, the ethics consist of five "ideological forms," all intrinsic to the process(es) of mobilizing for democratizing social change.<sup>12</sup> The first, "the equal rights ideological form," is the mode that understands equality for all peoples to be the main and unifying goal of emancipation (56). While assimilationist and integrationist in nature, this equal-rights ideology is necessary at times in order to forge connections between disparate ideas and groups in the name of a sort of "greater good."

This form is especially relevant for today's college classroom. It is important to take into consideration (indeed, how can one forget?) that our classrooms are composed of radically different individuals. While we are all socially constructed through, among other things, white supremacist, sexist, and classist sign systems, we have radically different perspectives. Some socially

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<sup>12</sup> Identifying the forms as "ideologies" is an honest, ethical, and effective approach which serves an important educative function: it helps us to remember and/or see the constructed, situated, consistently ideological nature of all perspectives, therefore enriching the critical inquiries we make and the critical stands that we take.

privileged students are able to read easily dominant ideology's sign systems, while other students are threatened by a critical pedagogy that asks them to recognize and challenge the dominant status quo. The equal-rights ideology is that which strives to make empowering, temporarily unifying connections among disparate peoples, such as those in our classrooms.

The second ideological form of the ethics that Sandoval envisions is the "revolutionary form" (56). Radically different from the equal rights form, the revolutionary form does not work to establish equal rights within the dominant structures of society. Instead, this ideology is one that aspires to dramatically restructuring dominant categories and social hierarchies. The revolutionary ideology holds in sight the "goal of functioning beyond all domination/subordination power axes" (56-7). The idealistic hope for complete revolution and social equality is a key facet of this form. The revolutionary form is especially appealing because it maintains a utopian vision that is crucial, I believe, for any peoples doing the difficult sometimes seemingly insurmountable work of trying to bring about democratizing change.

Sandoval's third ideological form, "supremacism," enables "the oppressed [to] not only *claim* their differences, but also [to] assert that their differences have provided them access to a higher evolutionary level than that attained by those who hold social power" (57). Armed with the claim that the oppressed have access to experience and knowledge of social structures that the privileged cannot see from their vantage point, "[t]he mission of the supremacist

practitioners of oppositional consciousness is to provide the social order a higher ethical and moral vision” (57).

This ideological form provides especially important information for people who are privileged by race, gender, class, etc. and do not have access to the vantage point of the oppressed. Privilege systems work best through their invisibility. For example, racism maintains its invisibility through challenges of so-called “reverse racism” made by people who do not see their privilege but are the ones who actually benefit from racism. Consider the claim of a teacher who believes that it would be unfair, a type of reverse racism, to silence a white student who argues that there is no such thing as racism. Critic Megan Boler introduces the term “affirmative action pedagogy” to counter such beliefs (“Editor’s” vii). By challenging racist or other oppressive worldviews as they are being expressed by our colleagues and students, affirmative action is a sort of “supremacist” pedagogy that validates those who experience oppression.

In another example of the privileged not seeing their privilege, educators and students might consider what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva defines as color-blind racism: that which occurs when white people (again, in the context of my project I am referring to students and teachers) claim that they do not “see color,” that they are “color blind;” therefore, or so they argue, they do not discriminate against people who are not white. It is quite common for white people to maintain that they believe in “equal rights” for all people and that U.S. citizens now live in an “equal society” and compete on a “level playing field” where racism is no longer an “issue.” This, of course, is not the case. Sandoval’s “supremacist

ideology” endorses educational discussions about various facets of privilege, including teaching concrete facts about privilege in everyday life.<sup>13</sup> Sandoval’s supremacism makes room for helping privileged people (whether they are privileged based on their race, gender, economic class or a combination thereof) to see that privilege structures really *do* exist.

Sandoval’s fourth ideological form, the “separatist ideology,” can be used as necessary to separate oneself from oppressive social structures (57).

Occasionally, as in the instance of women’s-only spaces formed during the feminist movement of the 1970s, groups find a need to “protect and nurture” themselves as an entity in temporary separation. Alice Walker also refers to temporary separatism as sometimes necessary for women’s health (xi). Several of today’s women’s music festivals are actively separatist, as well. Often, privileged people do not recognize the need for (temporary) separatism. They see it as causing further divides between diverse groups of people; however, by labeling separatism as a specific and necessary ideological form, Sandoval creates an opportunity for the privileged to understand the necessity of separation. Moreover, she validates those who may feel the need to separate.

The fifth and final ideological form is the mode of “differential or oppositional consciousness,” which is similar to the clutch in an automobile. With differential or oppositional consciousness the citizen subject-agent gains the ability to “shift” or weave between and among the other four oppositional

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<sup>13</sup> For example, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has indicated for decades now that white men earn more money for the same work performed than do men of color; white women earn less than white men and men of color; and women of color earn the least of all.



ideologies. This shifting is that which helps people to develop and maintain the strength necessary to move toward democratizing social change; differential or oppositional consciousness is both an empowering *form* of awareness and a *process* by which citizen subject-agents can “assume” or “engage in” the various ideological forms in productive ways that can effect democratizing social change. Sandoval explains that the differential or oppositional consciousness “has a mobile, retroactive, and transformative effect on the previous four [ideologies], setting them all into diverse processual relationships” (55). As processual relationships, the categories of ideology (equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist) seem to offer moments of fixed meaning and possibility, a sort of “strategic essentialism” around which people and ideas can coalesce.<sup>14</sup>

Sandoval’s theories about distinct “methodologies” of the oppressed (moving among the ideological forms in order to effect democratizing social change) can be extremely valuable for critical, feminist, anti-racist teachers who are committed to enacting pedagogies geared toward democratizing social change. Starting by learning to “read” dominant ideological sign systems, citizen subject-agents can eventually exhibit the orientation of love as a hermeneutic which is comprised of the various ideological forms Sandoval describes.

The “equal rights ideology” is that which might appeal best to disparate peoples who do not agree on much more than the fact that society “should be equal.” The “revolutionary ideology” is the necessary opposite of the “equal rights ideology” because it makes room for a distinct fight against injustice which may

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<sup>14</sup> See Spivak.

not be recognized by all but is definitely experienced by many. Following this, the “supremacist ideology” allows for the education of those who have heretofore not recognized various privilege structures in contemporary U.S. society. The “separatist ideology” provides for the conception of a “safe space,” where those who are oppressed can find temporary salvation from dominant and oppressive social ideologies. Finally, the ideology of differential or oppositional consciousness is that which may help citizen subject-agents to “engage in” and “see” the various ideological forms with the goal of enacting democratizing social change. Sandoval’s descriptions of various and empowering ideological forms—circumscribed by her theory of love as a hermeneutic—have concrete implications for teaching and learning (inside and outside the classroom). In the following chapter, I garner support for my theory of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy by outlining arguments made by a variety of contemporary feminist scholars who consider love, coalition, and the challenge of working for democratizing social change.

### **Chapter Three: Love and Coalition: Feminist Theories of Coalition and their Implications for a Critical, Feminist, Anti-racist Pedagogy**

In this chapter I relate theories put forth by a variety of feminist scholars whose works resonate with each other in various and empowering ways. The theorists I discuss—Wendy Brown, Kathy Ferguson, Donna Haraway, bell hooks, Chantal Mouffe, and Chéla Sandoval—all write about theories and methods for envisioning and fostering democratizing social change. And I argue that these scholars seem committed to bringing about that change by theorizing the complexities and possibilities of human connection, coalition, and love, all concepts that reject or “blur” the entrenched, patriarchal reason/emotion split. The connections I make between these scholars support well my argument that love as a hermeneutic is a theory that holds great promise for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this approach is its openness to critique. In other words, even as I argue for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that is based upon love as a hermeneutic, I am well aware of the complications associated with this approach. Throughout this chapter, I inject potential critiques of my argument in an effort to enrich it further.

U.S. society is composed of diverse individuals who have been constructed in diverse moments under diverse circumstances. Our perspectives are shaped by the concrete circumstances of our lives, especially in terms of the privileges we have (or do not have) in relation to economic class, racial and ethnic identity, gender and sexual orientation, etc. The feminist critics I invoke in this chapter recognize that, given immense power differentials and their

subsequent effects on individual perspectives, the notion of a complete and collective movement toward democratizing social change is unlikely and probably unhealthy. Although they theorize ways of looking at the world and ways of forming coalition that will lead to democratizing social change, they are also cognizant of the fact that there are limits, that coalition and/or “love” can do only so much to move people toward more democratic worldviews.

Nonetheless, as I indicated in chapter two, I believe Sandoval’s notion of differential or oppositional consciousness can be quite empowering. I want to connect this differential or oppositional consciousness, with its ability to slide between ideological forms (its ability to morph, queer, and displace, as well as transgress them), to the powerful notion of “mobile subjectivities” as imagined by Ferguson in *The Man Question*. In lieu of fixed, static conceptions of identity and agency, Ferguson offers the concept of “mobile subjectivities”. By “enacting” or “performing” mobile subjectivity, citizen subject-agents possess a sense of irony, they can understand people’s positioning and group memberships or coalitions as contingent, complex, conflicted, and powerful. The mobile subject’s positioning is never too rooted to *not be uprooted* for the sake of coalition (154).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Feminist theorists Bernice Johnson Reagon and Noël Sturgeon also consider the power of coalitions and coalition politics in effecting democratizing social change in a variety of contexts.

## **Theorizing Democratizing Social Change: Problematic and Powerful Coalitions**

Conceptions such as Sandoval's ideological forms and Ferguson's mobile subjectivities are useful for theorizing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical enactment of coalition politics geared toward democratizing social change. Acknowledging and analyzing relationality and affective dimensions of our lives and our teaching, teachers and students can find meaningful, if contingent, coalitions through mutual commitments to larger political goals. This practice seems in line with Sandoval's equal rights ideology which I interpret as a call for diverse peoples (e.g., students and teachers) to agree upon and strive toward goals of more equitable, democratic social relations.

In addition to Ferguson's mobile subjectivities and Sandoval's notion of empowering movement across ideological forms, Haraway's concept of being always already socially "positioned," yet embedded in webs of connection, is also helpful for my project. Haraway writes: "we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different—and power-differentiated—communities" ("Situated" 187). As Sandoval, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Noël Sturgeon see it, freedom-minded individuals seek each other, coalesce, form coalitions around a common goal of emancipation, and work together to effect democratizing social change. I imagine this as the ultimate model of the classroom informed by a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy.

The problem, though, becomes defining what and who is “freedom-minded.” Haraway argues for “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being” (“Situated” 195). A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy arises from and is ever cognizant of the reality of U.S. (and global) relations of domination and their effects on real people’s lives, yet it maintains the lofty goal of (in the case of my project, students and teachers) enacting democratizing social change. In her more recent work, Haraway calls for “collected, networked, situated practices of witnessing” (*Modest* 267). In fact, Haraway cites Sandoval’s theory of differential or oppositional consciousness as a theory and method that can be “learned broadly.” She suggests that Sandoval’s theory is a “nonreductive, noninnocent, achieved political-semiotic sensibility” (*Modest* 275 n. 2). Understanding the need for and possibility of group membership that takes into account our vast differences can lead to the citizen subject-agent’s ability to transgress dominant social hierarchy—the white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy—in order to form meaningful coalitions.

As Ferguson writes, mobile subjectivities “seek strategies by which to stay honest about our affirmations while we keep moving toward them” (154). The critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogue’s affirmations or desires to dismantle the white supremacist patriarchy are, certainly, broad and dangerously utopian, yet they are vital if those of us who are linked to different communities are to continue working with others toward something better and more equal than what “we” have now. Likening the struggle to theorize and enact democratizing social

change to a game of cat's cradle in which one makes "string figures on fingers," Haraway explains that democratizing social change activists "rely on relays from many hands" in the struggle to connect and work for emancipation of oppressed peoples (*Modest* 268). Cat's cradle is a game of patterns and knots, which requires great skill. "Cat's cradle invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone" (*Modest* 269).

It is collectivity that I want to emphasize here, for its very theoreticization leads to notions of possibility and methods by which to make those possibilities for democratizing social change a reality. Thus, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy joins students and teachers in a sort of collective, pedagogical dance choreographed to a "melody of Freirean emancipation."<sup>16</sup>

Feminist theorist Wendy Brown offers an interesting and useful way to imagine the difficult work of coming together in coalition. Individuals with commitments to democratization must be willing and able to subsume in some form their "I-ness" (their unique, concrete identities constructed at given moments in particular locations, formed at the nexus of race, class, gender, sexual, and other power-infused relations that construct identity). When people temporarily subsume the "I" in favor of an "abstract 'we' represented by the [radically diverse, yet] universal community of the state," there is more space and possibility for coalition politics (Brown 56). Similar to Sandoval's equal-rights ideological form,

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<sup>16</sup> I am referring here, of course, to revolutionary educator and political activist, Paulo Freire, who argued for education's place in the empowerment of oppressed peoples. Andrea Greenbaum refers to a "melody of Freirean emancipation" in the Introduction to her edited collection *Insurrections: Approaches to Teaching Resistance* (xiii) .

subscribing to Brown's communal "we" can be a concrete method for mobilization in our classrooms, the academy, and perhaps larger society, as well.

Buttressed with "a new vision and world of thought and action, of theory and method, of alliance," a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can lead students and teachers to imagine and create common spaces around which to mobilize (Brown 56). Identity or individual student perspective is not shed, but is instead understood to be the multiplicitous embodiment of diverse experience that carries with it the potential for alliance. Brown poses a central question:

What if we sought to supplant the language of "I am"—with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social with moral positioning—with the language of "I want this for us"? (75)

Brown's concept of political orientation as "I want this for us" is an incredibly powerful notion for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy as it points toward the goal of individuals working in coalition for equality. I sense an echo of Brown's call for liberation in the work of Chantal Mouffe, another political theorist who understands the complexities of coalitions. She argues that there will always be struggle, and because of the nature of struggle, some will always be excluded in the name of consensus. "Every consensus is by nature exclusionary" but that exclusion does not exist in final form (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 172). Instead, "a radical democratic society is one in which every form and basis of exclusion is continually put in question" (Worsham and Olson 167). Parallel to the "logic of exclusion," Mouffe posits a "logic of universal inclusion" (qtd. in Worsham and



Olson 189). The two logics circulate in continual tension, and the result is Mouffe's concept of the *societas*, "a bond which links citizens together;" *societas* involves consensus, but leaves room for dissensus, for "different understandings of values" (183). Mouffe recognizes that there will always be hegemonic struggle; there will always be struggle between individuals in the name of freedom projects.<sup>17</sup> For her, politics means "the impossibility of a completely harmonious society" (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 173), yet in striving for a more equitable social harmony people can "make room for dissensus" (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 176). "There is no such thing as 'the' [a single] common good," Mouffe explains, "even though it's an horizon that we cannot do without" (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 179).

Feminist critic and activist Bernice Johnson Reagon explains well the difficulties of coalescing for the "common good" in her oft-cited text, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." First delivered as a speech at a women's music festival in the late 1960s, Johnson Reagon suggests that those who work for democratizing social change should feel "threatened to the core" – if they are doing it "right" and "well". In fact, "*really* doing coalition work" means feeling as if one is going to "keel over and die" at any minute (356). There is no real safety or comfort in coalition, according to Johnson Reagon. Instead, "[c]oalition work ... is some of the most dangerous work you can do" (359).

A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy encourages students and teachers to take the risk of coming together across difference. Beyond this, it offers

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<sup>17</sup> I borrow here from Haraway's reference to "freedom projects" in *Modest Witness* (269).

opportunities for us to engage in the freedom projects we find most compelling. It argues that harmonies of common good or solidarity—solidarity that is inclusive of difference yet moves “beyond it” in striving toward a common good—can be powerful.

This notion of optimistic striving toward a common good, despite the immense difficulties inherent in coalition, is indicative of a strong orientation toward a problematized yet persistent note of hope. Freire speaks to the issue of a critical, yet enduring hope. He writes:

I reject the notion that nothing can be done about the consequences of economic globalization and refuse to bow my head gently because nothing can be done against the unavoidable. (43)

In a resonant vein, Haraway calls for hope, as well:

I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope. (*Modest* 265)

Indeed, what ties together the works I am citing here are the fragile and persistent threads of hope (reminiscent of Haraway’s cat’s cradle ) weaving in and out of this theory spring from and grounded in the harsh realities of everyday life. In the face of gross inequities due to late capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy, hope is a narrative that keeps “us” going. As Haraway puts it, “cat’s cradle is a game for nominalists like me who cannot not desire what we

cannot possibly have” (*Modest* 268). Despite the reality that complete democratization will perhaps never be achieved, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is supported by the work of the many theorists, students and teachers alike, who are bound together by a yearning for something better.<sup>18</sup>

### **So What Does Love Have to Do With It?**

Yearning for something better involves an active striving toward democratizing social change. This, I argue, is where the concept of love can be most helpful for those of us who (often struggle to) maintain commitments to fostering democratizing social change in the face of what seems like ever-increasing adversity under global capitalism in the U.S.’s white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. Sandoval’s “physics of love,” a.k.a. “love as a hermeneutics” is a fascinating and complex overarching principle that drives the differential or oppositional consciousness necessary for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. “Love as a social movement,” writes Sandoval, “is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global coalitions of citizen [subject-agent]-activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation” (184). Indeed, love as a hermeneutic works to connect all of us—all citizen subject-agents, including students, teachers, and theorists who are looking for intellectual and actual methods that lead to concrete, democratizing social change.

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<sup>18</sup> See hooks’ *Yearning* as well as *Teaching to Transgress* for more work centered on the theme of *yearning* for democratization.

No doubt, a vision of a “loving,” democratic society is the loftiest, most utopian vision of all, and it could be argued that it is connected directly to the humanist vision of an Enlightenment search for Truth in the name of humankind. Some may suggest I might as well just quote the Beatles’ “All we need is love” and leave it at that. When viewed from this angle, love as a hermeneutic reifies the reason/emotion split and becomes an essentialist thrust toward simple (and unrealistic) “happy endings.” Nonetheless, for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy, love as a hermeneutic can fix both a meaning and an approach to an amorphous concept that looks something like hope, like consensus, like *societas*, like community, like “wanting for us” in order to conceptualize, and more importantly *implement*, strategic moves toward emancipation.

Precisely because it is so amorphous and ambiguous, the word love is an ideal choice for thinking about a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Wielded in the service of democratizing social change through intellectual commitment as well as pointing towards rich, human connection and relationality, the “love” informing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy understands fully that there is no love that is unproblematic, no love where power and oppression do not exist. Holding on to love and hope with a critical understanding of their complexities is perhaps the best chance “we” have for forming alliances capable of doing “good” for “us.”

The term love connotes an impulse towards passion. Considering passion as more than impulse is valuable for this theory of love connected to a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Mouffe explains that passion is that which really

“moves people to act in politics” (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 197). “Reason” and individual “interests” are no doubt impetuses for political action; but passion (as a “placeholder for desire and for [a] collective form of identification”) works to assemble individuals working toward a greater “common good” (197). The vital “issue for democratic politics is how we can mobilize those passions toward democratic designs” (197). The mobilization of passions is very much linked to a theory of love that proves to be at worst beneficial and at best revolutionary. Teaching and learning through a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy with love as its hermeneutic is an important method of mobilizing passions in productive ways.

There seems to be much support for my argument that considering affective dimensions, “love,” if you will, can be instrumental for an everyday approach to teaching, learning, and living in more democratic ways. For example, cultural critic bell hooks obviously champions the theorization of love for effecting democratizing social change. Three of her most recent books, *All About Love: New Visions*, *Salvation: Black People and Love*, and *Communion: The Female Search for Love* call for a definition and implementation of the concept of love in order to better the circumstances of all people, especially those who receive few (if any) benefits under a late capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy. hooks defines love as much more than a feeling; love involves “various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (*All* 5). A love grounded in actions that demonstrate respect is positive force, especially as it “automatically assumes accountability

and responsibility” (13). Beyond personal commitments to loving each other, hooks sees love’s potential to enact democratizing social change.

It is this love ethic, similar to an ethic of care as envisioned by feminist theorists such as Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto, that encodes possibility for harnessing emotional power in the name of revolution. As hooks states, “I want to know love’s truths as we live them” (xxv). The “truths” of love can be registered on a variety of scales, but most importantly for this project, they can be found in the classroom and in the academy as we enact a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy.

In *Salvation*, hooks argues that love will be what works to “uplift” African Americans in racist U.S. society (*Salvation* 209). Loving in a concrete, material way will enable African Americans to find love for themselves, their families, and “their people.” Similar to separatism and supremacism as defined by Sandoval, hooks’ love as salvation works to make differences in real lives. Her call is similar to what I have been sketching in this paper: people “need to vigilantly create the alternative ground where our love can grow and flourish” (hooks, *Salvation* 185). hooks argues that the call to love in previous emancipatory movements such as the civil rights movement under Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a call that involved more than politics; it involved “a call to stand for justice and freedom with one’s whole heart, body, mind, and spirit” (210).

I believe that it takes an investment of this magnitude, an investment of *more* than the mind, in order to effect marked democratizing social change. A hermeneutics of love is an orientation towards people that makes passionate

struggle for democratizing social change its focus. Only in the struggle for justice and equality can love truly flourish in a way that brings *about* that justice and equality. More work needs to be done in this arena of theorizing love as a force that combines connection, coalition, and care. Not in the least bit “touchy-feely,” this concept of love makes manifest a hope for more and better things for all people. It is grounded in the reality that those who are not white, not male, not heterosexual, not able-bodied, not Christian, and not rich have access to fewer of the benefits and suffer more of the discrimination accompanying this late capitalist, white supremacist heteropatriarchy.<sup>19</sup> And a pedagogical theory grounded in love will and should always be questioned and critiqued. For if the spirit of critique is grounded in a love ethic, it will make the force of love even stronger. It is this love that I want to envision in classrooms, in academic departments, in professional publications, and in the spirit with which academics critique each other.<sup>20</sup>

In the classroom, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy grounded in the concept of love understands love

as a yearning to connect with our natural and social worlds in a meaningful fashion [that] can fuel our critical intent to act against the structures that block an abundant and engaged approach to

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<sup>19</sup> See Lorde.

<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, this love must be made manifest in the everyday lives of all citizen subject-agents, for it implicates many more than just those individuals working in academe. This love nourishes progressive political coalitions of all peoples working for democratizing social change. Indeed, a problematized and political love can work to inspire new, better, and more direct action that brings about democratizing social change.

teaching and learning. ...With [a] critical capacity, love can disturb and disrupt the reigning order, not in a violent or harmful fashion, but with creative and caring energies. (Liston and Garrison 3)

Creative and caring energies come, at least in part, from enthusiastic theorizing about concrete possibilities. The connections between feminist scholars discussing coalition and political change are far-reaching and substantiate well my claim that there seem to be many of “us” out there seeking substantial theories that can lead to constructive practices.

My project is to envision these connections and empowering practices, this notion of “love as a hermeneutic,” in real and everyday ways that make a positive difference in classrooms and academic culture, in general. No doubt, as I have indicated, many will question this project and perhaps label it as nothing more than an idealist vision of bright and cheerful classrooms and academic departments. In the following chapter I discuss several critiques of my argument for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy fueled by love as a hermeneutic. In addition to considering the potential naiveté that arguing for “love” may connote, I anticipate and address other feminist criticisms of my pedagogical theory. Specifically, I consider the claims that pedagogies based on an “ethic of care” (related closely to love as a hermeneutic) do more to support racism and sexism than to dismantle them.



## **Chapter Four: Considering Critiques: Problematizing a Theory of Love and a Pedagogy of Care**

In this chapter, I consider three vital and potentially productive critiques of the critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogical theory I am sketching in this thesis. First, as I have indicated, the appeal to love as part of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy may be read as naïve and ineffective; moreover it may even be read as downright offensive to those who recognize and/or experience in various forms the harsh realities of discrimination in contemporary U.S. culture. The second critique involves feminist debates over an ethic of care, which I believe can be associated with an appeal to love as a hermeneutic. Traditionally, feminist theorists who champion a pedagogy fueled by an ethic of care have been class privileged, white women academics. Some feminists posit that an emphasis on an ethic of care works to reinforce white supremacy. Third, some scholars have critiqued women teachers who embrace pedagogy premised on an ethic of care as reifying gender stereotypes. Although I take issue with certain elements of their arguments, in general, scholarly concerns over an ethic of care have been very useful.

After considering these three critiques, I discuss the necessity of anticipating and responding to the discomfort that students and teachers experience in response to the pedagogy I advocate. As I have indicated, I believe that educators can enact a more effective critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy when they consider seriously the affective dimensions of the critical classroom, perhaps most importantly the discomfort and sense of loss that many privileged

students experience as we challenge them to examine more critically contemporary U.S. society today. Beyond developing a sensitivity to the struggles students (and teachers) experience in relation to critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies, teachers can offer a variety of what Megan Boler terms “productive replacements” that support students (and colleagues) as they grapple with a sense of loss, as well as new knowledge and new questions about power and privilege in the world around them (Boler, “Teaching” 127).

As I stated in the previous chapter, perhaps because the term love is so vague and amorphous, yet familiar to many in some form or another, it can be both useful and appealing. However, appeals to love as a hermeneutic for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy certainly can also connote the naïve hope for “happy people” and “happy endings.” Is an appeal to an “ethic of love” just another wishy, washy plea for “caring” pedagogies that make students feel good at the expense of intense social critique? What, after all, does love do for the student who believes that there is no need for democratizing social change because we live in an equal society? What does love do for the student who believes there is no such thing as white privilege or sexism? What does love do for the student who understands all too well that privilege exists and that it is wielded to her disadvantage day in and day out? What does love do for the teacher who says he just is not “into” thinking about affect or racism; it is not his “cup of tea”? And what does love do for the feminist teacher who enacts anti-racist pedagogy and works with students who live in a culture that encourages them to think of her as another mother, or at least stereotypically feminine (and

thus devalued), especially when she discusses affective dimensions in the pedagogical situation?

In truth, many theories of care have been described as re-inscribing the very white, middle class, male privilege dynamics they are purporting to disrupt. For example, Audrey Thompson discusses the privileged positions of white, middle-class feminist academics, and how those positions often blind them to the complexities of care in the classroom. These women who argue for an ethic of care often have defined standards for this ethic based on their own experiences of receiving care from their privileged white mothers or from women (and sometimes men) of color who were hired for the job. As such, the dominant cultural group's definition of "care" becomes the default definition of care for all contexts, and scholars championing an ethic of care "fail to acknowledge and address the [white normativity and supremacy reflected in] their political and cultural assumptions" (Thompson, "Not" 525). Especially in "'feminine' accounts of caring, the caring ideal may be treated as generic or as pluralistic [i.e., equally accessible to all people], but it is likely to be referenced implicitly to a White-middle-class ethic of domestic well-being" (Thompson, "Not" 529). Thompson argues this point effectively:

caring as it is practiced in White, middle-class homes is part of the fabric of values that has helped to perpetuate classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism; it cannot be treated as a freestanding set of domestic values uncontaminated by the oppressive values of the public sphere. ("Not" 530)

I think Thompson is correct when she argues that default definitions of care have helped to perpetuate race, gender, and class (*et al.*) privilege. Indeed, besides Thompson's discussions, many theorists who argue for an ethic of care seem to neglect that women of color have been compelled to perform nurturing functions for whites (men, women, and children alike) since the institution of slavery in the U.S. Today, people of color, especially women of color, still provide an inordinate amount of underpaid and devalued "caring" labor.

Alas, do theories of care and love take into account difference and domination? The answer is no, not enough of the time. Indeed, one might visualize the caring pedagogue as the unreflective white teacher who raves that she just "loves" all her "kids." Or as the teacher who believes that if she or he just gives that "disadvantaged" (codeword for non-white or poor or disabled) student a little more care and attention, he or she will adapt magically to the classroom's uncritical, white privileged status quo. Care along these lines, obviously, is oppressive and condescending. It ignores the various plights of various peoples and imagines the classroom as a sort of "blissful bubble" where teachers and students "don't see color" or difference and learn together, somehow magically divorced from the realities of dominance and oppression in contemporary culture.<sup>21</sup>

The concept of "care" in larger society has thus been and continues to be associated with privileged recipients, nurturing women, and the domestic

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<sup>21</sup> I refer here again to the notion of "color-blind racism" as put forth by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.

sphere.<sup>22</sup> Transferred into the realm of academics, some argue that the “performance of care” functions to exploit women teachers who are expected to perform this “emotional labor” more than their male counterparts. Issues of gender and gender oppression thus come into play when considering women teachers, an ethic of care, and its implications for pedagogy. Traditionally associated with the devalued realm of care or affect, women are often relegated to the position of “love lover” and selfless emotional laborer. When assuming the role of care-taker in our classrooms, departments, and universities, female teachers often embody maternal stereotypes that reinforce sexist hierarchies. According to feminist compositionist Lynn Worsham, “maternal nurturance and care” is

an *impossible topos* for the feminist teacher, one that simply resubmits women intellectuals to the pedagogic authority of dominant discourses that set up the ideology of nurturance for the benefit of men and at the expense of women. (“Going” 238)

Women teachers are compelled to perform caring behaviors that reify sexist stereotypes. Another feminist compositionist, Eileen Schell, considers this issue carefully in her brilliant explication of the lower-class status of and pressures placed on women writing teachers in the academic workforce. Given the now commonplace phenomenon of “channeling” women teachers into part-time and non-tenure track positions one can see that these “handmaids, wives, mothers, and midwives ... [are] a biological and social extension of unpaid, undervalued,

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<sup>22</sup> Care and the domestic sphere are, of course, associated with the realm of emotion (not reason) and are therefore devalued.

domestic labor” (Schell 46, 62). Similar to Worsham, Schell reminds us that “maternal,” or caring, pedagogies do disservice to racial, class, and sexual differences, in effect smothering these differences in the (white—because the majority of teachers are white) mothering arms of nurturance.

I want to contend, however, that the conflation of nurturance and care with mothering is not necessarily helpful, yet it is precisely the image that dominant social forces package up and sell to us on a daily basis. After all, as the commercial goes, “Choosy mothers choose Jif,” and women are not worthy if they are not making the right choices in nurturing others. But when people equate nurturing with the maternal, we do, I think, enact a different kind of violence, a categorical violence against a necessary yet neglected component of teaching: a type of nurturing that compels us to work not only with our students on an intellectual level but also with respect for and attention to their (and our) affective states.

However, there is no doubt that, at this juncture of time and place, nurturing has become a form of devalued cultural capital. Those who are interpellated to perform nurturing behaviors in this society, women (and, by extension, women teachers), are still devalued, even as they perform the majority of this emotional labor. As Susan Miller and others previously mentioned have made clear, the field of composition in particular is relegated to the bottom rungs of the ladder in English studies and, since the field is comprised of a majority of women, the teaching of writing is especially devalued (by students and professors, alike). What is more, many of us in composition studies unknowingly

tend to maintain this hierarchy by consenting to the Mother/Maid teacher identity that is so often projected onto us. In the predominantly female field of composition, women compositionists act as the base on which the male-identified superstructure of literary studies depends. As Miller puts it, a sexual division of labor in composition studies persists; undoubtedly, the notion of service, still viewed by most English departments as teaching writing, is tied to pedagogy (which many view as the “work” that involves more emotional labor) while the notion of intellectualism and theory is tied to literature (what many view as the reason-based “play” of male-dominated literary studies) (Miller 41). Men develop “the” knowledge base, and women put it into practice by teaching and serving the (masculinized) intellectual and (feminized) emotional needs of their students, the field of literary studies, the university, and society at large.

Andrea Greenbaum offers an intriguing pedagogical alternative to this dilemma. Advocating what she terms a “bitch pedagogy,” she posits that our job as teachers is to help our students develop critical thinking skills by being assertive in the classroom and by teaching the “art of confrontation and debate” (152-3). She writes,

we have an ethical obligation to model and teach young women agonistic discourse, to teach them not to do what they are socially constructed to do—to yield, concede, make nice, smooth egos, avoid friction, take on the emotional work—but to push, assert, insist, *remove emotionality* and position themselves as authoritatively as possible in order to become critical thinkers,

speakers, writers, fully capable of meeting the demands of a democratic society. (emphasis added 159)

Obviously, Greenbaum is well aware of the nature of women's stereotypical social construction as loving nurturers. Acknowledging this construction is a necessary part of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy fueled by love as a hermeneutic. And it is important that the interest in a theory of love and in respecting and investigating affect in the classroom does not become coded as "making nice" and "avoiding friction," for when it does, the limiting patriarchal reason/emotion split ("removing emotionality" versus "soothing egos") remains.<sup>23</sup>

In truth, we engage in a wide variety of behaviors (including asserting, challenging, soothing, redirecting, reassuring, and showing respect) as we argue, debate, and learn together with our students. While I certainly do not recommend enacting blindly the stereotypes of soothing, caring, class-privileged white female teachers, I do want to (re)emphasize that, to be most effective, teachers *cannot afford* to engage in work that does not acknowledge people and the care that will support their learning. Even though the danger remains of reifying sexist and racist dominance structures when we adopt pedagogies that look for ways to enact (as well as critique) care and love in the classroom, I believe that finding ways to value and interrogate the affective domain is what will be most effective if we are committed to actually fostering democratizing social change. For it is the affective investments, as much as the intellectual investments, that fuel individuals' attachments to racism and sexism.

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<sup>23</sup> For more discussion on the phenomenon and ramifications of "soothing the egos" and "tending the wounds" of our students, see Bartky.



It is important to reiterate here, however, that it is not just white and male privilege systems that are perpetuated under the guise of loving and care. The class-based dimensions of care assure that “the eros of affluent citizens, their emotional and civic potential, is positively cultivated, while the eros of poor citizens, their emotional and civic potential, is institutionally suppressed” (Burch 86). “Love” becomes a positive and encouraged attribute for the “haves.” For the “have-nots,” however, there is less time and space for the luxury of loving homes and loving school environments.

What we need, among other things, are

theories of [the necessary social function of] nurturing ... that help us to think about what will support students, theories that help us envision more responsive and fulfilling relationships, theories that help us to argue for the kinds of institutional changes that must be made in schools, in the workplace, and government so that we can address the pressing needs of students.... (Thompson, “Not” 528)

I read Thompson’s call for a theorization of “nurturing” as similar to the variety of feminists’ theorization of coalition I discussed in chapter three. What we need are theories that take into account the complexities (and dangers) associated with “caring” pedagogies. A necessary component of this theorization is the critique provided by feminists who identify the reification of oppressive social ideologies that takes place when teachers, white woman teachers, especially, adopt under-theorized pedagogies based on an “ethic of care.”

When considered from a place that acknowledges the dangers of an uncomplicated care, love as a hermeneutic becomes empowering for students and teachers alike. In this chapter I have highlighted several critiques which serve to problematize my argument for a pedagogy that is attuned to affect and informed by Sandoval's notion of love as a hermeneutic. No doubt, a theory of love as a hermeneutic can be read as an essentialist and naïve theory that believes a little bit of idealism can lead to massive social change.

What is more, arguments for an ethic of care, which can be related to the notion of love as a hermeneutic, have often reinforced "default definitions" of care as they are stereotyped and understood by dominant social groups. As such, care is considered, at best, non prestigious. It becomes that which more women (and often men) of color are expected to give to all people and that which more financially privileged women (read: white women) perform in selected or chosen areas, including the classroom. When the pedagogies teachers utilize are informed by undertheorized notions of care, women teachers serve as symbolic (and actual) representations of the stereotypically selfless mother. Both students and (usually male-driven English) departments are supported by the work of these women.

Attention must be paid to the ways that teachers perpetuate status quo social structures that maintain racism, sexism, classism, and other inequalities. However, as I have argued, the conflation of mothering with nurturing serves to devalue the important work of paying attention to affective dimensions of the pedagogical situation. By recognizing the various feminist critiques of

pedagogies of care and nurturance, critical, feminist, anti-racist educators can be all the more attuned to complex power dynamics in their profession, in their classrooms, and, indeed, in their own lives. Critiqued, challenged, and thus strengthened, educators can better understand when, where, and how care becomes domination and love becomes lethal, and they can work to engage their students (and themselves) in emancipatory projects that work to foster marked and democratizing social change.

In addition to the arguments about pedagogies of care reifying sexist and racist social structures, another concern is that these pedagogies are ineffective because they are met with such staunch resistance from students and colleagues alike. In the following chapter, I consider the discomfort and sense of loss that many students (and teachers) experience related to a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. Ultimately, I offer pedagogical theories and practices that are instructive for teachers committed to creating classrooms, workplaces (and even societies) focused on the goal of enacting democratizing social change.

## **Chapter Five: Dynamics of Discomfort: Strategies for Dealing with Discomfort and a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy**

In this chapter I discuss the privilege that often blinds people to the racist, sexist, and classist realities challenged by critical pedagogies. I also consider the dynamics of discomfort that accompany critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies. In addition to exhibiting anger and defensiveness, many students also experience a distinct sense of loss when their worldviews are challenged. Following a theory of love as a hermeneutic, critical, feminist, anti-racist educators can learn to recognize these complex dynamics and respond to them effectively. I offer pedagogical theories and methods offered by feminist theorists Megan Boler and Audrey Thompson, among others, as important responses to the distinct affective struggles students encounter in the critical, feminist, anti-racist classroom.

Of course, employing a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is not some magical approach that immediately fosters democratizing social change. Indeed, it is important to recognize that privilege (in terms of race, class, gender, etc.) encourages teachers and students to feel entitled to avoid any discussions that seriously challenge that privilege. Educators and students have several justifications for why they do not want to discuss privilege. For example, critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is understood, more often than not, as too “political” for the classroom (as though the classroom can be a neutral zone free from politics and ideology). Privileged educators also often suggest that they are not “qualified” to enact critical pedagogies; they claim they do not have the

expertise to teach students to engage in critical thinking about gender, race, class, and other privileges.<sup>24</sup> These are the sorts of attitudes that maintain an uncritical, pedagogical status quo; additionally, they reveal the affective responses of discomfort and/or denial that so many teachers and students experience about topics surrounding social critique.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its transformative potential, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can be categorized as what Boler terms a “pedagogy of discomfort.”<sup>25</sup> The pedagogy I am advocating violently disrupts most people’s everyday *modus operandi*. When we do compel others to investigate heretofore unrecognized privilege structures, when we make the familiar strange, we often inspire psychic dissonance and intense “discomfort.” Thompson sees this discomfort as an integral part of the learning process, as that which creates a possibility for learning in the first place (“Entertaining” 433). Many students have harsh reactions to critical, anti-racist, feminist pedagogy—reactions against the teacher, their classmates and classroom(s), their daily relationships, and, perhaps most saliently, themselves and many aspects of the lives they have led up to the time they entered our classes.

In close contact with a critical pedagogue’s professional zeal, students who are unaccustomed to discussing issues of privilege and oppression out loud

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<sup>24</sup> This claim is especially problematic for teachers of writing because of the “social turn” in our field. This paradigm shift has inspired a substantial amount of contemporary criticism which focuses on our responsibilities as teachers of writing and the complexities of teaching students about language, power, ideology, racism, sexism, classism, etc.

<sup>25</sup> See Boler’s *Feeling Power*, a fascinating examination of education’s role in controlling and manufacturing emotions.

and in a public forum often experience that zeal as unethical “cultural surgery run amok” (Thompson, “Entertaining” 434).<sup>26</sup> Given their lack of experience in cultural critique, for many students,

taking ideas apart and putting them back together in unrecognizable ways threatens a way of life in which they have learned to flourish. Indeed it may seem to violate fundamental values associated with individual freedom, spontaneous self-expression, and straightforward economic and moral agency.

(Thompson, “Entertaining” 435)

Because the U.S.’s contemporary white supremacist, sexist, classist privilege structure allows privileged students to avoid the discomfort of seeing, let alone discussing, the oppression that results from their privilege, students experience a challenge to the racist and sexist status quo as a “loss” of something they deserve, something to which they feel they have a right. Thompson makes good sense. It is vital to recognize that students who are resistant to critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies attuned to issues of affect may often experience our courses as a threat which leads to loss of self. As Burch puts it, “a fully developed concept of love in relation to teaching and learning requires that we formulate inquiries that will jeopardize our students’ very identities” (87). As the mythical qualities of dominant cultural narratives such as meritocracy, rugged

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<sup>26</sup> Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy is not unethical, though. In fact, I would suggest that it is the most “loving,” supportive, and socially responsible pedagogy because it challenges and simultaneously supports learners to continue in their inquiries (despite the difficult affective responses they may be experiencing) with the goal of learning about social structures and enacting democratizing social change.

individualism, and the American dream are introduced to students, usually for the first time, they experience the critique of these cultural narratives as a critique of themselves and the lives they have led.

As we know all too well, students experiencing this sense of loss often express intense affective responses—intense passion that I read as an effort to maintain their sense of self in the face of the dissonance a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy creates. And so, what to do when faced with the young white male student whose parents are paying for him to go to school yet who does not seem to recognize this privilege? What to do when he exclaims, “I am working hard and earning my education just like anybody else. But when I graduate, I’m going to lose jobs just because I’m a white man. That’s reverse discrimination, and I’m sick of it.”? Many would argue that an ethic of care and a pedagogy fueled by love as a hermeneutic just does not “cut it” in a situation like this.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Boler provides her readers with a thorough analysis of the emotional investments students hold, and she also offers an explanation of her notion of a “pedagogy of discomfort” that can help students investigate and challenge those investments. In addition, Boler’s work considers the pedagogue’s perspective, revealing the inevitable frustration (indeed “suffering”) teachers deal with as they experience their students’ reticence to engage in rigorous and often painful self critique. Boler demonstrates the value in observing our “own sites of attachment to another’s change” (“Teaching” 126). I remember my first semester of teaching. Not used to the countless hours of class preparation and as a slower grader than I am now of student compositions, it seemed I spent all my time engrossed in my teaching. At night, I would lie in bed and agonize over my students and their progress or what I perceived as a lack thereof. Finally, I learned to visualize a file folder for each student. As I mentally closed each folder, I relaxed enough to let go of my worry over their growth and my performance. Today, some ten years later, I still find myself occasionally using that trick. Boler’s honesty about the psychic space her students sometimes take up in her head is validating. Her acknowledgement of the affective realm is an important rejection of the oppressive and enduring reason/emotion split, and it demonstrates the difficult “affective work” most of us are already doing every day.

Students often project these defensive and angry responses directly onto their teachers (Samuels 463). After all, we are the ones compelling them to re-examine everyday life, that which seems most normal and natural, and to learn to recognize the horrific reality of discrimination that fuels it. What is more, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that encourages self-reflexivity compels students to examine their own participation in the privilege structures that maintain discrimination. Teachers must acknowledge the emotions their students are experiencing but simultaneously maintain a Teflon-like exterior so that the frustrations remain *with* the students. As I have indicated, frustration and the dissonance they experience is what will move students to learn new lessons about how the world works and how *they* work within it. Following this, the notion of love as hermeneutic can be mobilized to serve as a “resting place” in the midst of great discomfort. Love as a hermeneutic can act as an overarching principle to support students and teachers despite their discomfort. And it can help them to continue challenging themselves and each other in the critical classroom.

The most effective way to implement a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that might best educate students who are unaware of or are defensive about their privilege (such as the students described above) is to be attuned to the affective dimensions that inform these students’ intense responses. We must respect the complexity of these students’ (and our own) affective responses and remind ourselves that the often passionate and/or “angry resistance of those who feel threatened in our classrooms is also a complex cry for recognition and care” (Boler, “Teaching” 120). Discussing the intensity and diversity of the affective



responses people have to critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy—discussing these “cries for care” disguised by angry and defensive responses—is a powerful method of responding productively to the tensions that arise in the critical classroom, and it can lead to thinking and feeling our way to new perspectives about the issues at hand.

I believe that the concept of love as a hermeneutic can become an essential part of how teachers approach students and the powerful affective responses they have to critical pedagogy. A “pedagogy of love,” as Kelly might put it, asks us to be fully present and in the moment with ourselves and our students—in the midst of intense debate (Kelly 166). From this orientation,

[i]n this loving space is also created the opportunity to form new attachments to old sources of love, attachments that bear the mark of responsible engagement for change. (Kelly 166)

To create the loving and transformative pedagogical space of which Kelly writes, teachers must invoke “compassion, which is especially crucial for those who feel they are out on a limb” (Boler, “Teaching” 127). Conveying compassion can be as simple as validating our students’ responses. This does not preclude challenging those responses, but before we do we must look past racist or sexist or classist responses and toward the student who, no doubt, is hurting. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy sees the “whole” student and her or his wholly complicated response. It is this type of sensitivity that can foster productive coalitions, similar to Haraway’s “webs of connection” and Mouffe’s *societas* which I argued for in chapter three; it is this type of exchange that supports students

and teachers in pedagogical challenges to the dominant and undemocratic social narratives that circumscribe our everyday lives.

Of course, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy must involve more than being sensitive to affective dimensions when we are discussing privilege structures with our colleagues or our students, or when we are reading our students' responses to those discussions (Boler, "Teaching" 120). Last semester, one white woman student wrote in her final paper that the class had spent much time focusing on inequalities in society, but it had not spent enough time offering solutions to those problems. This is not the first time I have encountered this response. In truth, as we spend the semester deconstructing the dominant, discriminatory ideologies that we and our students are encouraged to embrace in this culture, and as many of our students grasp the reality of the widespread discrimination that exists, they are left with an affective disposition of powerlessness. They understand intellectually that one person cannot end discrimination, and they often ask, "What are we supposed to do about all of this, anyway?"

Boler suggests that students who experience extreme growing pains in classrooms that require them to analyze cultural forces they heretofore did not know existed "need something to replace what I am threatening to take away from them" ("Teaching" 126). She suggests that educators incorporate "productive replacements" in their course content to provide a "clear delineation of what will replace the sense of self lost" ("Teaching" 127). For students, as well as for teachers, "productive replacements" include 1) reading first-person accounts of oppressors who learn to recognize their privilege and work to

relinquish it, and 2) discussing the benefits of ending oppression (for not only the oppressed but also the oppressors) (“Teaching” 130).

A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy should include teaching towards the hope for democratizing social change. This hope can become its own “productive replacement” for students who are reluctant to take the leap toward transforming their teaching and learning experiences into ones that incorporate challenge, risk, and critical self interrogation. A pedagogy attuned to love as a hermeneutic and to the diverse and often discomfiting affective dimensions of the critical, feminist, anti-racist classroom can assist educators in teaching towards hope. Boler imagines “critical hope” as that which necessarily (realistically) requires the suspension of certainty or closure. “Our perspectives and vision are partial,” she emphasizes (“Teaching” 131). And we will never completely succeed in helping one hundred percent of our students to learn new lessons about themselves and the world around them. Moreover, teachers must not fall into the trap of neglecting their own affective dispositions and biases. By harboring an openness to change and perspective, however, we can make room for the compassion which can lead to necessary patience with ourselves and our students (Boler, “Teaching” 131). From a more patient, compassionate place fueled by love as a hermeneutic we are better equipped to enact critical pedagogies that foster an atmosphere of respect—what some might even call love—for ourselves and our students as learners with ever-present potential for growth. As I have discussed, discomfort is inevitable when we risk ourselves and adopt critical pedagogy; actively reminding ourselves and our students of the

inevitability of this discomfort is part of the process of learning. I would argue that discussions about this discomfort serve as valuable and “productive replacements” in and of themselves.<sup>28</sup>

It is vital that teachers begin to theorize ways that we can support privileged students and the affective responses they have while challenging them to question previously *unquestioned* perspectives in the critical classroom. In the face of angry and defensive responses, it is rather easy for educators to become defensive themselves. Instead, we can follow Boler’s recommendations and learn to see our students as not just angry and defensive, but also as feeling a sense of vulnerability and loss. Critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogues are most effective when they teach with “critical hope” in mind and when they incorporate “productive replacements” into their curricula. These replacements include teaching about the benefits of democratizing social change for all people and highlighting the work of oppressors who have come to recognize and work against their own oppression.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, I argue that paying close attention to intense affective responses to our pedagogy—and making those responses a subject of consideration for the classroom—is an excellent technique for helping students to relax enough to learn. Simply put, invoking sensitivity and providing support is an important part of a pedagogy that challenges students to challenge

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<sup>28</sup> In addition to discussing the variety of intense responses students have surrounding our critical pedagogy, we can engage in simple behaviors that also make this pedagogy more effective. Boler posits that engaging in a behavior as simple as smiling can and does make a major difference for students who inevitably struggle with critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies.

<sup>29</sup> For example, whiteness studies scholars have published articles that detail their own processes of coming to consciousness about their privileged position in U.S. society’s racist status quo. See Clark and O’Donnell.

the dominant, oppressive ideologies they have been constructed to embrace in today's conservative climate.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions: Making the Case for Love as a Hermeneutic and a Critical, Feminist, Anti-Racist Pedagogy**

Throughout this thesis I have argued for the necessity of rejecting the traditional, patriarchal reason/emotion split, which continues to stifle our classrooms, our profession, and our society, in general. Educators must work to “blur” this split, to understand that reason can never be separated from emotion. By refusing to re-enact this split and by instead working to understand how reason and emotion work in tandem, we can encourage our students (and our colleagues) to think in new and more critical ways about how not just thinking but also feeling works to inculcate individuals in racist, classist, sexist (etc.) everyday relations.

By “following” the affective responses of our students (and our colleagues) educators can understand better “where folks are coming from” when we adopt critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogies (Boler, “Teaching” 120). Furthermore, In the context of the academy and our classrooms, specifically, and guided by Sandoval’s theory of love as a hermeneutic, teachers can exhibit and inspire in our colleagues and in our students the sort of “mobilizing passion” about which Chantal Mouffe writes; this is the sort of passion that “blurs” the reason/emotion split and strives “wholeheartedly” for democratizing social change (qtd. in Worsham and Olson, 127). With love as a hermeneutic, people can work toward what we will never actually have: a truly and completely democratic society. As critical pedagogues, we can not afford to reach for or hope for anything less.

It is true that we, our students, and our colleagues are embedded in a social structure that discriminates and privileges often simultaneously and at random. Languages of discrimination are communicated daily. One language I am particularly concerned with is one that I have been trained to read, speak, write, and perform: the language of white supremacy. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy has the potential to help white learners such as myself and many of my students come to new places where they fear and deny less the reality of racist, everyday culture. In addition to disrupting the racist U.S. status quo, the pedagogy I have argued for is one that encourages all learners to think more critically about their perspectives, their affective responses, and how their complex thinking/feeling selves have been shaped by dominant U.S. culture. Moreover, as I have argued, this pedagogy is most effective when it encourages students and teachers to examine affective dimensions not only of everyday U.S. culture but also of the pedagogical situation. In other words, the critical pedagogy I am arguing for must be attuned to the often intense emotional reactions that occur in the classroom as we challenge students and ourselves to look at the world(s) around us in new ways.

I have also argued that feminist theorist Chéla Sandoval has provided educators and theorists with several key concepts that have important implications for the pedagogy I am advocating. The primary theory, love as a hermeneutic, might be defined as a committed worldview or orientation toward people and ideas that works toward productive coalitions—formed because of

and despite the dominance and oppression that occurs in contemporary U.S. society.

Sandoval identifies several “ideological forms,” which may be understood as particular orientations or worldviews that people adopt at various times in order to effect democratizing social change. The first, the “equal rights ideological form,” is especially relevant for a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy because it refers to people (such as students from disparate backgrounds who are bestowed with different race, class, and gender privileges, etc.) who can come together across great differences to learn and (hopefully) share the common goal of equal rights. Sandoval’s second ideological form, the “revolutionary form,” is in tension with the first. As distinctly “revolutionary,” this form assists in the struggle to overthrow that which is markedly unjust, that which must be changed in order to move toward democratizing social change. The third ideological form, the “supremacist form,” is the form that acknowledges that those who are oppressed have a more complete view of society because of the discrimination they have experienced. Given the invisible quality of privilege, those who have experienced its counterpart, oppression, come together temporarily in the “supremacist form” in order to provide greater vision for all people, such as those who come together in the “equal rights” form. Sandoval’s fourth ideological form, the “separatist form,” understands that there are moments when separatism is the only or the healthiest option for those who are oppressed. Sandoval’s fifth ideological form is named “differential or oppositional consciousness.” Differential or oppositional consciousness is the orientation that, like a clutch in an automobile, enables the



process of shifting between ideological forms as needed; such movement becomes a sort of catalyst for the process of enacting democratizing social change.

Thinking in these very detailed ways about strategies for empowering self and others resonates with the work of the various scholars I have discussed: Wendy Brown, Kathy Ferguson, Donna Haraway, bell hooks, and Mouffe, all of whom seem to be writing about coalition, connection, and passionate mobilization in the name of bringing about democratizing social change. Sandoval's love as a hermeneutic is an ideal, overarching conception that can buttress a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy attuned not just to intellectual critique but also to critique of the affective dimensions of the contemporary culture and the pedagogical situation. Brown's notion of "I want this for us," resonates with Mouffe's mobilization of passions, Ferguson's mobile subjectivities, and hooks' call to understand love as that which may be the most emancipatory force available for democratizing social change.

What I appreciate most about these works is the explanatory power of their almost impossible idealism. Indeed, these theories envision revolution. They conceptualize a truly democratic society where equality is an everyday reality. Yet simultaneously, these works discuss very specifically the devastating reality that contemporary society is a mechanism that perpetuates gross injustice, discrimination, and oppression. I believe that people cannot afford to lose sight of the theory of love as we engage in the daily processes of working toward democratizing social change. We will not have equality, but we will strive for it,

and that is what will make a difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Pedagogy is an ideal place for this theory, for it is in the everyday work of teaching and learning that we can try to maintain what Megan Boler names “critical hope,” that which acknowledges the reality of oppression but not without persistent hope that things can be done about it (“Teaching” 131).

Educational theorists, whiteness studies scholars, and feminist critics alike have offered excellent critiques that enrich my theory of critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy. The notion of love or “care” as an antidote to social injustice can be an uncritical argument for “shiny happy people” (REM). For example, when white feminist theorists write about an ethic of care and do not take into account the inordinate amounts of care that women (and men) of color have been and continue to be compelled to provide, we reify white privilege structures. When feminist theorists extol the virtues of an ethic of care without also considering carefully the gender inequalities that are reified when women do the majority of caretaking in this culture, we perpetuate sexism. When we promote an ethic of care that does not acknowledge the class-based dimensions of caring or the lives that caretakers-for-hire often lead, we do more damage than good.

However, love as a hermeneutic can be a significant part of a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy that compels learners to investigate that very “love” and “care” in question. Asking ourselves and our students very difficult questions about contemporary society and about the power relations that fuel it is a difficult task. It often leads to skepticism, angry resistance, frustration, a sense of loss and a feeling of hopelessness. As I have tried to make clear, I believe in

acknowledging the presence and power of the affective realm in society. When teachers and students examine that realm, a critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy can offer “productive replacements” for this sense of loss.

By embracing a pedagogy attuned to affect, critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogues can respect and examine the affective domain in productive ways that lead to democratizing social change. This is the goal of the pedagogy I have argued for in this thesis: to find new, concrete methods for empowering ourselves and others as we learn about the construction of inequalities and work to eradicate them. We must not take lightly the intricate ways in which emotion is bound up with reason. Recognizing the presence of emotion and examining its power to solidify people’s worldviews can be of great value. A critical, feminist, anti-racist pedagogy purposefully acknowledges and examines affective dimensions of individual perspectives and educational experiences alike, and it moves toward emancipation in carefully chosen but powerful steps that may lead people in new, more egalitarian directions.

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