

Relations of the Heart: White Anti-Racist Engagement through Facing, Narrative and Co-Creative Space

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The Wisdom of Love: The Labor of Love for the Other in Research, Psychotherapy, and Practice

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Abstract:

This essay aims to address the role of love in anti-racist White Americans' engagement with dissent. Of particular interest are the possibilities of facing, narrative, and co-creative space drawn from Levinasian ethics and relational psychology to address what Adrienne Harris calls "the blank psychic space" of whiteness. For Emmanuel Levinas, facing the Other humanizes the one with whom we dissent and requires an alternative to the projective blame that pervades much of the current discourse on race in America. I will use Emmanuel Levinas' ethic of facing to describe how interpersonal engagement between White persons challenges the fixity and unity of White identity. Particularly in contexts of disagreement and misunderstanding, I will explore how the labor between White persons draws to the surface symbolic meaning that has hitherto been obscured and protected in the unspoken unconsciousness of whiteness. Using concepts of fluidity and interrelatedness from narrative therapy, I will explore how remaining face-to-face generates mutual exploration of difference, desire and lack in the White American experience, leading to a more integrated expression of White identity and deepened understanding of responsibility in dismantling racism. I will also examine the role of facing in developing a co-creative space described by Julia Kristeva in *Intimate Revolt*, where identification with the Other opens "ill-being" to the possibility of rebirth. Ill-being, in the context of this essay, involves the implicit and explicit ways white supremacy perpetuates itself amongst White Americans through privileging the individual, safety and domination over against community, vulnerability and mutuality.