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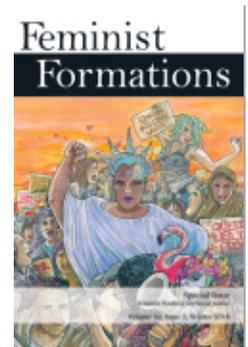
Boneset

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# Boneset

Qwo-Li Driskill

*In this essay, the author discusses the responsibility of scholars in women, gender, and sexuality studies to engage in activist pedagogies within the contexts of political and personal trauma.*

**Keywords:** activism / disability / Indigenous / pedagogy / queer / transgender

At my previous institution, I had the opportunity to have Suheir Hammad speak in my Modern Rhetorical Theory course. She asked the students in my class to tell stories of a time they broke. One student talked about breaking a bone. “Can you feel the weather changing in your bones?” she asked. “Yes,” the student replied. “Isn’t it amazing that after we break, we carry weather in our bodies?”

This morning, I am studying types of fractures: *hairline, spiral, stress*. I’m trying to find the words to tell you a story. I don’t have the words I want and need in order to tell you this story, but I suspect it’s your story, too, even if the details are different. I know you’re imagining your own stories as you read this, adding to and revising mine. I imagine this is a dialogue, not a monologue, and that as the reader you’re a part of both this listening and telling.

When 45 was elected by the electoral college (I think it’s important to be specific and clear over and over again that he did not win the popular vote), something inside me cracked. As the votes were coming in, I was teaching a course in our women, gender, and sexuality studies (WGSS) program at Oregon State University, which I ended early so some of the students and I could prepare for flights to the National Women’s Studies Association conference the next morning. “I don’t think he’ll win,” I remember saying, “but if he does, we’ll get through this. Take care of each other.” I learned that he was elected as I was packing for Montréal, and was dealing with the immediate emotional aftermath with friends and colleagues who were all going through similar emotions, but away from my family and many of my students.

I actually can't remember much about what that first class was like after NWSA. I think we had a long check-in. I do remember the feelings, though: grief and pain. Fear. The stakes of our work together shifted.

*Transverse. Segmental. Comminuted. Depressed.*

Part of the trauma for me about the current administration and political climate is how familiar it feels. I could tell you all of the ways I know this story already, but you know this story, too.

My memory has become significantly worse in the last year. The current daily traumas we hear, read about, and experience deeply impact me as a scholar and activist with complex post-traumatic stress, fibromyalgia, and myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome. I would venture to say that most—if not all—of our students and colleagues in women, gender, and sexuality studies who have experienced repeated and prolonged trauma (so, most—if not all—of them) are in a similar state of navigating constant triggers, flashbacks, exhaustion, fear, anger, and grief while trying to take care of ourselves and our communities, our families, our students, our colleagues, and our programs. None of us are doing well. We're tired. On edge. A little meaner. "How are you?" is a loaded question these days.

Most of my activist work takes place through my teaching and writing, and in the midst of the current political situation, I think that radical teaching is vital activist work. As radical scholars, we shouldn't dismiss the academy as a space from which to create radical change. Too often, I fear, in our critiques of the neoliberal institution, the increasingly corporate models of colleges and universities in the United States, and our understandings of the limits of the academy within larger social justice struggles, we also dismiss the real activist work of our teaching and scholarship.

As radical scholars and teachers working both inside and outside of the academy, we can create the spaces where we understand the fractures of our students and colleagues. We can create new spaces. After all, we create institutions.

I'm currently the director of graduate studies for our new PhD program in WGSS at Oregon State, and my deep hope is to create a space where students understand themselves as part of a community, as part of movements, as people who can change the world as well as the institution. And that change takes place, partially, in how we treat one another. And I think that in fields such as WGSS, queer studies, and ethnic studies it's important to remember that our scholarship is a part of movements, that our histories within the institution have come out of struggles for liberation.

I worry, sometimes, that we forget that—even if we pull out that history and dust it off every once in awhile. We are in these spaces because of intentional rebellion. We are here because feminists, radical people of color, queer and trans folks, and crips imagined—and imagine—a different present and future for all of us. To me, honoring that reality means continuing to do this work within our classrooms and scholarship, to take seriously that we are the

academic arms of liberation movements. This is our role and responsibility: we are part of movements for radical transformation and liberation, and we must continue to make possibilities for those who come after us.

It's not easy work. I feel the storms in my body, too. I'm in a constant state of trying to stay in *duyuktv*, in balance, and there is no single answer on how we move forward in our collective work together. In the words of Audre Lorde (1997), "Who said it was simple?" But in this immediate moment, I think we need to not pretend we aren't all hurting.

*Greenstick, compression, transverse.*

This is the labor of resetting bones.

**Qwo-Li Driskill** is an associate professor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. They are the author of *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory* (University of Arizona 2016) and *Walking with Ghosts: Poems* (Salt Publishing 2006).

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