

Anti-Racist Compassionate Action Circle

Anti-racist compassionate action is a continual process, similar to the Racial Resilience definition of racism, we understand anti-racism as a dynamic process as well.

The praxis of anti-racist compassionate action is a continual process of critical reflection on structural racism. This process pays particular attention to ways racial exceptionalism enables individuals, and therefore the structures they operate within, to avoid un-learning internalized racist ideologies so as to focus on changing racist policies or economic outcomes. When racist ideologies are not un-learned, racism and white supremacy will rearticulate itself in supposedly “anti-racist” or “non-prejudiced” structures (i.e. education, voting rights, etc.).

When people, but especially those of us who are white, avoid attending to our internalized racist ideologies, we breathe life into the lie that we are not complicit in a system that we know to be racist. Without attending to the ways racism frames our understandings of ourselves and our world we cannot become anti-racist because we are enmeshed with whiteness and lack the capacity to see ourselves for who we are. Additionally, we see others through the filtered lens of the white savior. In this reactive state, the actions we believe to be anti-racist are not for the benefit of others, rather they are for our own benefit, we center our experience of doing the action because it makes us feel good.

1. Grounding

- a. Anti-racist actions require us to be standing on solid ground, in a non-reactive state. To do otherwise would be to act-out or resist rather than respond to a given situation.
 - i. We have to develop a keen awareness of the distinction between being grounded and being knocked off-center. This requires us to learn how to distinguish between what we hear or what we see, and our internal reactions to what we see/hear.
 - ii. Our bodies react in different ways when we are enmeshed with an interior movement. Thus we must learn to pay nonjudgmental compassionate attention to our bodies and notice the distinction between groundedness and reactivity.
- b. Anti-racist actions ask us to know the realities of race and racism and how they shape the everyday experience of all people, and how they harm BIPOC folx. This learning and unlearning transforms how we see the world, and its transformative capacity is enhanced when we are in a grounded non-reactive state.
 - i. Learning key Critical Race Theory concepts help us expose the everydayness of race and racism in America. They key CRT themes that are useful for developing racial resilience are:
 1. **Racism is "normal" and ordinary for BIPOC folx.** American society was intentionally structured through a racist and sexist foundation.

2. **Interest Convergence** - anti-racist movements tend to make progress when their interests and the interests of those in positions of power converge, not necessarily due to moral persuasion.
 3. **Intersectionality** - no person has a single unitary identity that defines the totality of their experience. Intersecting identities shape the distribution of power in society.
 4. **The importance of Centering the voices of BIPOC folx.** Centering the voices of BIPOC folx recognizes that white voices have dominated the discourse and disrupts this practice by honoring the perspectives of BIPOC folx and de-centering (not dismissing) the perspectives of white folx.
- ii. Similar to CRT, Racial Formation Theory gives us the framework to understand the history and process of “how race came to be.” Key concepts for racial resilience are:
1. **Racialization** is the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.
 2. A **racial project** is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (material and psychological) along particular racial lines.
 3. A racial project can be defined as **racist** if it creates and reproduces an inequitable distribution of goods based on racial significations and identities.
 - a. For instance, mass incarceration is a racist racial project because BIPOC folx make up a disproportionate amount of those people who are imprisoned.
 - b. Importantly, if the outcome of a phenomenon (action, thought, feeling, policy, social structure, etc.) disproportionately harms BIPOC folx it is racist. Intention does not matter.
2. Self-compassion
- a. Anti-racist actions require a deep awareness of how we live and move within a racist society. We must guard against racial exceptionalism and recognize that racist thinking and racism live within all of us. As such, we must reflect on our own racialized assumptions (i.e. racist ideologies) and how these assumptions have shaped, and continue to shape our worlds.
 - b. For white folx, and those steeped in white culture, it is critical for us to notice, name, and compassionately dismantle the racialized ideologies within our internal worlds. This is perhaps the most difficult step for white people because it asks us to take a U-turn, to turn inward, and begin dismantling racism within ourselves before we attempt to “fix” larger structural issues.
 - i. At this point in the process if we have not identified how racism lives within our own minds and bodies (not those of other people but within ourselves) then we are struggling with racial exceptionalism. Racial

Exceptionalism is a lack of awareness and denial of the ways in which racism shapes one personally. It is the internalized belief that racism exists “out there” but not “in here” or in me; that I am an exception to racializing forces. For example, if you are white and reading this and thinking about how this applies to other white people but not yourself you are engaged in racial exceptionalism. Consider, as a white person, why wouldn’t you be susceptible to racial influences?

- ii. Racial exceptionalism can be maintained even with the knowledge that structural racism exists, and that it shapes our own beings and identities. In this way, it is a dismissal of one of the pillars of CRT, that racism is normal. If racism is normal, then we all, on some level, can participate in it.
 - iii. Racial exceptionalism emerges when our concern about addressing structural racism is hijacked by our fears of being labeled a racist. Noticing our racial exceptionalism is an invitation to take the U-turn, to understand and attend to the FLAG’s of the interior movement that is inhibiting our critical self-reflection.
- c. For BIPOC folx, self-compassion is deceptively evident - in order to survive and flourish in a world that seeks to dehumanize us, we must tend to the racist wounds of our past in ways that preserve and promote our own humanity. To be sure, BIPOC folx have developed ways to weather the storms of structural racism. however, such weathering has had devastating effects on our individual and communal well-being. Racism is killing us inside, self-compassion can help us attend to those racist reactivities.
- i. Since the onset of European settler colonialism, the humanity of BIPOC folx has been judged against their ability to perform “humanness” in ways that mirror Eurocentric standards. Within this framework our humanness is always conditional on our ability to fit into the larger Eurocentric worldview.
 - ii. The dehumanizing logics of colonialism are still at work today - we do not have to look farther than the social uprisings during the summer of 2020 to see gross manifestation of colonial logic today. And yet, there are many BIPOC folx who view those who protest racial injustice in ways that make them uncomfortable as a part of the problem, rather than a product of a dehumanizing system.
 - iii. Given this, the challenge of self-compassion for BIPOC folx is to resist racial exceptionalism within ourselves. Racism exists within all of us because we have been taught to internalize racism. As such, we must compassionately dismantle and decolonize any way of thinking that dehumanizes ourselves.
3. Compassion for another
- a. True compassion seeks both to celebrate the joy and ease the suffering of another. This can only be done if we see others for who they are, and not the racialized stereotypical images of them that we have been told to create in our

minds (i.e. because racism is normal, and racialization helps us organize bodies, we are all susceptible to this).

- i. For white folx this means sitting with the reality of the everydayness of racism that is experienced by BIPOC folx - this is the reality experienced by your students, colleagues, supervisors, and your friends. In this way, compassion for another is an invitation for us to listen deeply to the experiences of BIPOC folx and learn from them. It is an invitation to de-center ourselves so that we can cultivate compassion for another with greater clarity.
 - ii. For BIPOC folx, this means recognizing the lure of racial exceptionalism within your white peers and compassionately pointing it out to them. This can be done with compassion because we recognize that racism lives within all of us, and they are not an exception. This does not mean that we give them a “pass” when they do something racist. Rather, it is an opportunity for us to invite them to see how their actions are harming us or our community.
- b. Sometimes, we find it difficult to extend compassion to people that trigger something within us. In these situations, we must remember that seeing them for who they are does not mean that we legitimize their racist behavior or their hesitant and resistant attitude to anti-racism. Rather, compassion asks us to stop the cycle of dehumanization and see them as full human beings, to listen to them, to teach them as best as we can, and to extend an invitation to reconciliation. Importantly, we do this without minimizing our own humanity in the process.

4. Compassionate action

- a. Compassion begs for embodiment – compassionate acts are contagious. Compassion recognizes our interconnection with all of life, even with those who abuse their power, and it extends the invitation of restored relationship to anyone willing to receive it.
- b. Anti-racism invites us into a new way of being in the world. When we are reactive, we view the world through the lens of our reactivity. Compassion allows us to understand dehumanizing forces (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc.) as forms of macro-level reactivity we have embodied and that shape our worldview. It also invites us to tend to our reactivity so that we do not filter our actions through the lenses of our reactivity (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc.).
- c. Anti-racist compassionate action begins by asking and working with the community we are seeking to engage, and asking them what they need and if there is mutual interest in our involvement. In short, we PULSE for them. We must never assume to know what communities need, rather we must approach them with humility, explain our goal and desire to extend help, and ***then listen***.
- d. After learning from the community, we can then move on to discerning specific actions that are authentic to who we are. Compassionate acts are sustainable only when they flow freely and naturally from our authentic Self. We must discern where our giftedness aligns with their needs.

- e. On an individual level, whatever anti-racist compassionate action we decide to take should embody the eight qualities Frank Rogers identifies in the Compassion Compass article.
 - i. These eight qualities comprise the coordinates on the compass of compassion-based activism. When we find ourselves in the midst of violence and violation, compassion-based activism invites us to seek that path that courageously embodies empowered personal dignity while extending a compassionate love for our adversary; that aligns with a cosmic universal inclusivity while firmly establishing limits around violation; that is calmly grounded in a truthful non-reactive presence while curiously open to our opponent's truth; and that strategically focuses on systemic violence while creatively engaging in imaginative social problem-solving.
 - ii. These 8 points address and help us restructure the racist and oppressive ideologies we have normalized, and thus prepare us to thoughtfully discern how our action addresses the economic and political dimensions of structural racism.
- f. When discerning compassionate action on an institutional level, compassionate actions should be embodied in at least one of the following 7 pillars. These pillars provide a framework for moving from individual preparation for anti-racist compassionate action to institutional and structural action. The seven pillars assess how that action might manifest. Institutional actions that do not align with one of the pillars are most likely not attuned to the principles of compassion-based anti-racism and need re-evaluation. The 7 pillars are:
 - i. Generosity (i.e. financial aid, scholarships, etc.)
 - 1. Compassion often takes the form of offering resources to ease others' suffering or to ensure their flourishing. How might your institution use their resources to address racial inequities in your organization?
 - ii. Service (i.e. addressing immediate needs such as revising enrollment and recruitment policies, changing pedagogy, expanding the "canon" within your discipline, etc.)
 - 1. Compassion can take the form of caring directly for the immediate needs of those who are suffering. What are the immediate needs of the BIPOC folx at your institution? How will you learn what those needs are? Upon learning what those needs are, how are you going to help implement the necessary changes?
 - iii. Witness (i.e. research, teaching, public scholarship, etc.)
 - 1. Compassion can involve bearing witness of the plight of those who suffer - vigils for peace and freedom abroad, movement for Black lives signs in your yard. How might the work of your institution bear witness to the plight of racism in America and/or abroad?
 - iv. Solidarity (i.e. #scholarstrike, protesting, standing with those who have been marginalized and supporting them in ways that they request, etc.)

1. Compassion can take the radical form of sharing the plight of those whose suffering requires more than just short-term remedies. While there will be short-term anti-racist actions that your institution can do immediately, those actions alone will not be enough to eliminate racist practices from your organization, particularly if your organization has a long history of avoiding addressing racism. How might your institution be in solidarity with BIPOC folx in ways that subvert the traditional power-structures that have enabled racism to persist within your institutional culture?
 - v. Empowerment (i.e. Give/help secure marginalized groups the resources they need to flourish on their own, etc.)
 1. Compassion can go beyond attending to the material needs of those who suffer. Rather it can empower BIPOC folx with the tools and capacities to sustain their own flourishing. Acts of empowerment recognize the subtle dependency that long-term supporters can encourage, and it evades the threat of white saviorism that can creep unconsciously into those who see themselves as allies.
 - vi. Accountability (i.e. diversity officer that has actual authority within the institution, diverse faculty, transparency, etc.)
 1. Compassion can take the form of creating structures of accountability within institutions. All too often, institutions reactively address structural racism within their organization, usually because a racist act has just occurred or they have been made aware of something for which they are ashamed. In these moments, the creation and maintenance of structures of accountability are essential to help maintain a commitment to building an anti-racist institution.
 - vii. Justice (i.e. institutional restructuring that prioritizes equity, developing an anti-racist and anti-oppressive ethos and embedding it into the foundation of the institution, repentance, and reparations, etc.)
 1. Compassion can attend to the unjust causes that give rise to the suffering in the first place. Compassionate action, therefore, can take the form of public advocacy, political lobbying, nonviolent resistance, and civil disobedience. Compassion seeks justice. Justice is compassion politically configured.
5. Reassessing
- a. Our actions, however well-conceived, will not be enough to end racism within our institutions – structural racism is built into the foundation of America and has a history of rearticulating itself when those who are in power because of structural racism feel threatened.
 - b. In this way, anti-racist actions become a new beginning where further reflection is needed. Solving one problem can often expose others that we had not considered. Actions must be reassessed from the perspective of those who have

been disproportionately harmed by the particular action to effectively evaluate their success.

- i. Did the implementation of the anti-racist action bring about the desired result? If not, what should have been done to replace the previous action to make it more effective? How do the affected communities feel about the actions that were taken? What if any are the unintended consequences from their vantage point?
- c. After a complete reassessment is finished, we begin the process again. This time armed with more information, a clearer understanding of what the problems are that we are trying to solve, and a stronger and more trusting relationship with the community or communities we are trying to serve.

