



Feminist Practices of Refusal

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Abstract: This essay reflects what an everyday feminist practice of refusal can look like. The practice that I describe in this article is deeply shaped by the feminist practices within my own cultural and religious ancestry as well as the work of decolonial feminist scholars Tuck and Yang who argue that refusal is a form of resistance and survival, specifically in response to settler colonialism. I include here a letter written by other graduate students and me as a call to action in response to institutional harm and abuses practiced by an individual faculty in our graduate program. Alongside this letter, I provide a reflection on my personal feminist practices and more specifically, acts of refusal as feminist practice within and in opposition to institutions. Refusal is something inherent within anti- and decolonial feminist practices—a form of resistance focused on individual growth and institutional transformation.

This is a story. Like many before it, it is not unique. It is a story that is not only mine to tell, but a story of which I am a part, a story I have helped to dismantle and a story I have helped to write. This is a story that is being told as a refusal to be forgotten, because “...remembering nourishes relations, sometimes creating new ties, stories, and futures” (Burch 2021, p. 20). Sharing these remembered stories is my way of creating new stories and helping imagine new futures. I have shared a letter here, written by me, and three other folks of color (some of us trans, some of us queer, some of us disabled, all of us femme, all of us socialized as girls) about our refusal to accept actions which are deeply misaligned with feminist practices and feminist knowledges. This letter, edited here with accompanying analysis, was written in the spirit of seeking feminist transformation within our program and institution. I share here the names of the three other authors of this letter, with their permission: Libia Marqueza Castro, Ariana Berenice, and Shaina Khan.

This manuscript is structured as such: on the left is the letter mentioned above, and on the right, in italics, is the accompanying analysis and personal anecdotes and reflections. I find it appealing to have my original work in the margins, somewhere in the realm of the Other—a realm I am familiar with, one to which I belong. When (frequently) asked *what are you really?* I am Other. It is in the margins, in the small, off to the side, where change happens. It is in this “...emergent strategy, strategy for building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions” where I see myself, and “...the potential scale of transformation that could come from movements intentionally practicing this adaptive, relational way of being, on our own and with others” (brown 2017, p. 2).

In moments when the stress of institutional harm has felt so overwhelming, I remember and remind myself I have survived inside my mother’s womb with war raging around us. I have survived physical attacks because of my hijab. I have survived medical harms against my fat body. The common denominator in each violence I have survived—it is always whiteness. The whiteness that builds upon colonialism and capitalism and imperialism. The whiteness that demands our bodies deteriorate from labor for corporations. The whiteness that doesn’t just colonize lands and languages, but bodies, minds, and identities. The kind of whiteness hooks references when she

says "...the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten" (1992, p. 39). I am angry. I am sad. I am stressed. And all because the absurd narcissism of whiteness demands attention. Demands to be the most oppressed. Demands to be the most intersectional. Demands to be the MOST.

And then I breathe. And I pause.

And I pause. And I remember. I remember that one of the guiding forces of my feminisms, of my practice, is love. I reconnect with the stories of love I have been told, and the stories of love I have read. "The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom" (hooks 2006, p. 250). I reconnect with the love that Omid Safi (2018) calls radical love: "...radical love and God are used interchangeably to denote love as the very essence of the divine" (p. xxii). This is the love I read in hooks' above words. It is the kind of love I must reconnect with in my feminist practice of refusal. Because I must refuse to let vengeful anger guide me, and I must refuse to replicate harms enacted by the very things that cause me anger. I must engage in what Ruha Benjamin (2016) calls "informed refusal"—refusal which "is seeded with a vision of what can and should be, and not only a critique of what is" (p. 970). So, this story here of my feminist practice and of anger and sadness, ultimately returns to love and beauty, "of what can and should be," because I am looking for the beauty ahead as a result of the collective feminisms I have practiced and the refusal I have practiced.

In the below letter I have anonymized names. University refers to the institution where these events took place and where all the authors are/were located, Program refers to the program that we were enrolled in, and Faculty refers to the individual whose behavior the letter addresses. Names of other individuals have been given randomized initials such as EB, TW, and so on. The names of those the letter was addressed to have been changed to their respective professional titles. This letter was written as a call to the institution, vis-à-vis college dean, school director, and program faculty, to witness, listen, and act in response to abuses of a singular faculty member.

The letter was written by graduate students after speaking to and interviewing several students, including alumni of the program, about their experiences with this particular faculty member. Those of us who wrote the letter, and the initial signatories all had experienced harm and abuse from this faculty member and felt that stepping forward publicly with a call for action was integral to creating meaningful and restorative change. While this letter was written in reference to a specific individual, by students within a specific program, and attending a specific institution, the experiences shared here, as stated above, are not unique. I feel that these stories will become more and more normalized under the Trump administration's targeted attacks on institutions of higher education and promotion of punishing social justice education and educators. With that in mind, this letter and manuscript continues to engage in refusal—a refusal to allow fear to dictate the narrative and potential outcomes.

31 July 2023

This is the date we sent the letter—it had been written over the course of several weeks, after several months of planning.

Dear Dean, Director, and Faculty:

We graduate students in the Program write this letter with the practices of our program in mind—from our deep love for and commitments toward radical change, accountability, and honesty. Most of us are not only students, but also graduate employees who have compiled information and drafted this letter during our unpaid summer break. Quoting our University Program website, we come to you from the standpoint of “feminist and anti-racist pedagogies and scholarship” with the hope of “contribut[ing] to social change and justice.”

Accountability is important to me as a teacher, as a student, as a community member. I cannot ask for accountability from others if I do not expect it of myself. Grace Lee Boggs (2011) reminds us that “...we have to think seriously about values and not just about abuses” (p. xvii.). We were intentional in how we wrote this letter, wanting to emphasize the values of our program, values we sought to uphold, and because these values allowed us to heal from and change abuses.

hooks (1994) states that “Often individuals who employ certain terms freely—terms like ‘theory’ or

We have observed and experienced a misalignment between our program's expressed and demonstrated values. Our time as students and graduate employees in the program has been challenging, particularly concerning curriculum, leadership, and a lack of upholding the pedagogies and scholarship which the program claims to center. While we have experienced incredible support from some faculty, we have suffered under the leadership and guidance of another. As the former Director and as an associate professor, Faculty has engaged in biased and abusive behavior towards graduate students and graduate employees. The goal of this letter is to demand change in Program leadership, policies, and pedagogical practices. For the sake of transparency, we have included in this letter lists of our grievances and our demands for change.

We have made great efforts to seek change within the program. Several of us have already stepped forward and met with Faculty to express these concerns, share our experiences, and ask for changes to be implemented. After several months, we have only seen a few changes. Many of our demands remain unmet and most alarmingly, Faculty is still scheduled to

'feminism'—are not necessarily practitioners whose habits of being and living most embody the action, the practice of theorizing or engaging in feminist struggle" (p. 62.). Joy Harjo (2015) states "You must speak in the language of justice". (p. 77). There was an agreed upon feeling that we had to remind the recipients of this letter that we expected these values to be embodied, to be engaged, and to be practiced.

Some positionality to further contextualize me; Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) points to the "...importance of locating ourselves and highlighting that place from where we are writing", (p. xiv): the story I have been told is that Imam Hossein knew he would be slaughtered at Karbala, because time is not linear, and he saw his death.¹ Why would he still show up? Because he knew that his death was in the name of justice and that his death would contribute to a movement for justice and in the name of love. Death is not a bad thing in Islam; death is something that comes to all so that "...we might remember them [the dead], be inspired by them, pray for them and receive any blessings their lives offer" (Abdul Khabeer, 2017).

To be in community, to work towards justice, means to be open to the

¹ For more on Imam Hossein and Karbala see Aghaie, K.S. (2004). *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i symbols and rituals in modern Iran*. University of Washington Press.

teach despite our extensive grievances regarding how they treat students and teach in the classroom.

As we have stepped forward to speak out about challenges and grievances, rumors have been spread that accuse us of transmisogyny and prejudice based on race and ethnicity. It seems that the louder we get, the louder these accusations get. Several students have expressed reluctance to speak to administrators and university offices because they fear such accusations and retaliation from Faculty. Because of these fears, the writers of this letter have made a point to speak to many of our peers and gather their stories to share, with their permission. This letter contains stories and grievances from the students who have signed below and from students who contributed anonymously.

We begin with two lists of grievances, separated by category, with specific examples of issues we have experienced.

Following our grievances is a list of the changes we demand.

Grievances Related to the Faculty's Supervision of Graduate Employment:

1. Lack of transparency regarding Graduate Assistantship expectations/the Graduate Teaching Handbook:
 - a. During the 2022-2023 school year, our leadership required

potential of backlash, but "if we create feminist theory, feminist movements that address this pain [injustice], we will have no difficulty building a mass-based feminist resistance struggle" (hooks, 1994, p. 75). So, what is my positionality? Well, I am Shia Muslim Iranian Irish-American queer trans disabled neurodivergent. I was raised bilingual by a former Catholic nun and an always Shia Muslim in Northern Virginia, but I am, as I said in kindergarten on international day, 'New Jersian'. Why does all of this matter? Because it tells me, and you, at least part of why I am here. Why I helped write this letter. I knew that we would be met with backlash, and I knew that the institution which seeks to uphold its own power would not provide any meaningful support or action, but I also knew I had to do this. Like Yamada (1979) says, "The grievance procedure was a time consuming and emotionally draining process, but the basic principle was too important for me to ignore" (p. 35).

hooks (1994) states that "...when students share experiences in conjunction with academic subject matter...[they] remember each other" (p. 151). In centering our experiences and the experiences of our peers, we practiced remembering and witnessing. We created space for people to remember their own stories, for us to witness their stories and experiences, and for our stories and experiences to come together in

- that GTAs submit a syllabus, a Week 1 lesson plan, and a welcome letter in order to have their courses approved for publication on Canvas. These requirements are not listed in the handbook, and fulfilling these requirements with constant feedback and changes from Faculty has prevented several folks from moving forward with publishing courses and creating further lesson plans in a timely manner for our students.
- b. Several times, Faculty has solicited our input on what would be helpful in GTA meetings, and then they have dismissed or ignored most of our feedback. Instead, they have expected students to lead workshops in GTA meetings, which adds work to our schedules. Faculty had told us that in the 2023 school year, each GTA must lead at least one workshop. In addition, we were denied time in GTA meetings to discuss our questions and concerns related to our teaching positions.
2. Lack of transparency regarding assistantship assignments:
 - a. It is unclear how teaching assignments are determined. Several students have expressed concerns over the general topics, or some of the

collective remembering and experiencing, to use this as a way to honor each other and be accountable to each other. Ghaziani and Brim (2019) reference "Sara Ahmed's calls for an 'affinity of hammers' . . . [which] rejects identity in favor of trans/feminist politicality that draws on the lived experiences of different people who share the feeling of being hammered by oppressive systems" (p. 10).

We felt we had to come together to connect our experiences of being hammered by a system in order for there to be any possibility for change, and with the understanding that sometimes these affinities are all that we have, at least in the moment. Since writing and then circulating this letter, we had several students come forward to tell us they felt seen and felt empowered to share their stories as well.

The sense of being seen and empowered was reciprocal. Our peers joining these acts of calling out and refusing reminded us we were not alone. The majority of students who came forward were, like us, people with multiple marginalized identities. Our very presence already queered the institution. To then call out institutional harm amplified this "queering" of space and place. The fact that so many of us were queer and trans amplified our queering acts

- content, of their assigned courses. In particular, students have told Faculty about personal trauma regarding their course topics that prevents them from teaching effectively.
- b. Faculty has dismissed such concerns and misgivings.
 3. Pressure to work through sickness and onerous personal challenges: Advice given by Faculty to one student regarding chronic illness and work completion focused on inaccessible suggestions that did not take the student's disability into consideration.
 4. Micromanaging graduate student instructors: As a supervisor, Faculty provides prolonged and unceasing feedback on students' teaching syllabi, which causes unnecessary delays in our course preparation. Faculty is also rigid in graduate students' course design choices and refuses to allow graduate students to implement personal pedagogies that we developed in the Program courses we were required to take. In contrast, other faculty on the leadership team have been flexible with our pedagogical choices in the courses they supervise.

Grievances Related to Curriculum, Pedagogy, and the Classroom:

1. Clear favoritism towards specific students in the classroom and in

further still. Cathy J. Cohen (1997) states that "at the very heart of queer politics...is a fundamental challenge to...dominant society" (445). Our act of refusal challenged the institution to see us, to acknowledge us, and to refrain from exclusion.

Cohen goes on to say that "it is "in their fundamental challenge to a systemic process of domination and exclusion...that queer activists and queer theorists are tied to and rooted in a tradition of political struggle most often identified with people of color and other marginal groups" (1997, 445). Our act in writing this letter, our refusal, our queering of space and place...these things were all deeply informed by the experiences of us writers and many more who joined in speaking up, as people of color. We already knew what it was to be placed within the realm of Other, to have to advocate daily for our livelihood and wellbeing.

We knew we had to come forward, and we knew we had to speak with others before us and those to come after us because part of our practice was refusing to let these harms continue, and "We must remember that one of the most insidious ways of keeping women and minorities powerless is to let them talk only about harmless and inconsequential subjects, or let them speak freely and not listen to them with serious intent" (Yamada 1979, p. 40).

mentorship choices: Faculty is dismissive of certain students when they speak up in class, but they engage with certain other students' ideas and questions. Additionally, certain favored students are sent articles, calls for papers, and other career-building opportunities that are not shared more widely, while other students are not sent such resources.

2. Inaccessible workload and assignments: A noticeable fraction—one PhD student estimates half—of the PhD students who were recently enrolled in "REQUIRED COURSE" have had to take an "incomplete" in that course because the curriculum is so dense and Faculty is not flexible with assignments or materials. In "REQUIRED COURSE", and other courses taught by Faculty, there is an exorbitant amount of assigned reading—so much so that only a small percentage of the assigned readings are discussed in class, as it is impossible to thoroughly address all assigned content.
3. Refusal to receive feedback on courses:
 - a. Faculty has consistently refused to take feedback from students on the rigor of "REQUIRED COURSE" and other courses Faculty teaches,

The syllabus/classroom is one of my favorite places to demonstrate my feminist practice, a space that allows for me to be creative and to imagine what I would want as a student. hooks (1994) discusses the importance of embodiment in relation to the classroom, that "we learn to enter the classroom 'whole' and not as 'disembodied spirit'" (p. 193). The syllabus is a place where I introduce embodiment, established through assigned texts and classroom policies that I am bringing my full self to the space and invite students to do the same. One of the ways I invite this into the classroom is by creating projects that allow students to use their own voice such as weekly reflection journals in which they are asked to provide feedback on that week's materials and discussions, the classroom pedagogy, and their own contributions. Another way I bring embodiment into the classroom is by opening class sessions with yoga breathing exercises and sometimes including basic physical movements to help ground us all into the space. I encourage students to listen to their bodies in the space—to take care of their needs.

The syllabus is a living document, one which I invite collaboration from students, to provide feedback on the syllabus and help establish ground rules for the classroom. Brooks,

despite students' expressing frustrations with being assigned many readings that are often not even addressed in class discussions.

- b. Faculty also tells us they do not read evaluations. We understand that course evaluations are a complicated matter, and some students in Program courses use harmful and violent language in their evaluations. However, Faculty's unwillingness to even engage with feedback from graduate students, either in person or through course evaluations, indicates a lack of flexibility and concern for effective pedagogy. This mindset and this behavior are misaligned with program pedagogical expectations.
4. Discouraging students from speaking to other committee members: Multiple students have said Faculty, as a student's MA or PhD committee chair, discourages them from speaking with other members of their committee. Those students fear retaliation or roadblocks completing their work if they do consult other committee members.

The following are our demands for changes to Program.

Demands

Franklin-Phipps, and Rath (2018) state that "the creation of a collaborative space that is simultaneously outside and within the neoliberal, settler colonial academy is an act of resistance" (p. 10). Collaboration becomes part of the ongoing process in my teaching, inviting students to actively engage in conversations and build on each other's ideas, to "...collectively engage in resistance that transform[s] our current reality' of neoliberal academic expectations" (hooks 1994, p. 67). This resistance, or refusal, to place myself in a role of the only holder of knowledge connects back to the origins of my feminisms, found within the Islam that was taught in my home—that we are all our own teachers, that we should all "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave", a saying I heard repeatedly in my home, and that we should understand those around us to be teachers as well.

Receiving feedback is integral to building community with students, and to growing as a teacher. If, like Reitenauer (2017), "My role...will be to provide in-depth learner-centered feedback on every aspect of their [the students] work in the course" (p. 104), and I also present them with a teaching philosophy which states that I am "just as accountable to you as you are to me", then I too must be open to feedback.

1. Dissolution of Faculty's positional power over the graduate program and instatement of democratic structure, one that includes specific and official mechanisms for addressing graduate student feedback to prevent some abuses of power.
2. Transparency from leadership on the process for assigning graduate assistantship appointments, and transparency and consistency on the Full-Time Equivalent allotment to teaching and administrative work.
3. Assignment of an instructor or professor other than Faculty to teach "REQUIRED COURSE" and "GRADUATE SEMINAR".
4. Extra support and flexibility for non-traditional students, parents, students of color, ESL students.
5. Explicit and demonstrated commitment against grind culture and in favor of healthy educational environments.
6. Implementation of feedback processes that give students ample opportunity to talk about issues within the program as we experience them.
7. Finally, a timely response that details the actions the program will take to resolve the above issues and the timeline on which such actions will occur.

The contributors to this letter include students of color, queer folks, and/or

Receiving constructive feedback is important in teaching, and outside of the classroom as well, a way to open conversation and engage in clear communication, because "a key aspect of the pedagogies developed in various liberation movements is that learning happens in conversation with other people..." (Bejarano and Soderling 2021, p. 215). My first faculty adjunct position was in Spring 2018, and I was so excited to design and teach my course Gendered Islamophobia and the Media. Part of that excitement was in assigning materials I felt were relevant.

The course centered Muslim voices as a response to media representations of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim adjacent people. Like Zidani (2021), "I sought to learn more about the role media plays in building, maintaining, or erasing history", and how minoritized groups, in this case Muslims, tell our own stories (p. 970). My excitement, especially regarding sharing texts by Muslims, meant I assigned A LOT. It was a class that met two days a week, and I gave them readings for every single day. One of the most consistent pieces of feedback I received from students, and I ask for feedback in addition to evaluations, was that there was too much reading. So, I took their advice, and I made sure to cut down readings—this meant my future classes had more time to really delve

trans and gender-diverse folks. We are all aware of—and have experienced—racial and gender-based harm from academic institutions and from our peers. We write this letter having gathered feedback and examples from our own experiences and those of our peers, and we have carefully considered our grievances against the possibility of prejudice. We have concluded that our experiences within this program are real, and our grievances are legitimate. Our demands for change are rooted in deep care for our program, our peers, and our values.

In community,
Graduate Leaders for Equitable
Education

into our topics. I did not want to be like so many professors I had encountered as an undergrad and in my MA program, and, sadly at University, who simply could not and would not listen to students' feedback.

Teaching from a place of embodiment means acknowledging and understanding and being able to hold space for students when they cannot show up: whether that is physically, mentally, emotionally—academia places such heavy burdens upon us, burdens which feel increasingly daunting given multiple marginalized identities. I do my best to meet students where they are, in part because I wanted that to be offered to me, to be offered grace and understanding, so I ask the same of them. I am transparent on days I may be less focused in my teaching and can share that without details or placing them in an awkward position of feeling they need to provide me with care. I have found that being honest with students about how I am doing, maybe on a day when my anxiety is heightened for example, opens them up to realizing they too can be honest with me. I never ask them for details, they do not owe me explanations, I simply ask them to communicate. And if they don't want to communicate with me, I am still available to help them locate someone they do want to talk to.

“Every change that has happened has come as a result of mass

movements...” (Davis 2016, p. 36). Our movement was not mass in numbers, but our movement had momentum and grew, reminding us that change is possible. Someone I interviewed for this letter told me that one reason they decided to share their story was because it’s something they would encourage their own students to do, to speak up against harm and violence. I felt the same and did the same. I truly feel one of my duties as an instructor is to help students understand their power, and that they can create meaningful change. I start with something seemingly small, but have students decide on any significant changes to our classroom structure, syllabus, and ground rules. I want them to know they have ideas of value, and they too are teachers.

“Progressive professors working to transform the curriculum so that it does not reflect biases or reinforce systems of domination are most often the individuals willing to take the risks that engaged pedagogy requires and to make their teaching a site of resistance” (hooks 1994, p. 21). This is the type of pedagogy I want to embrace and implement, and the kind of feminist practice I want to bring to the classroom—a pedagogy and practice that doesn’t just seek to transform away from these dominant systems but is open to continue transforming. I have openly said that one of the benefits of being an adjunct

professor is that I often feel invisible in a good way. The kind of invisible that allows me to feel like I do not have to uphold institutional harms because all I have to lose is my job, and let's be real, it's not like adjuncting pays a lot. Sure, no benefits like healthcare and below minimum wage pay are horrible, but I always feel like I can maintain my integrity.

Conclusion

Thomas King (2003) says, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are”, and “there is generally a proper place and time to tell a story” (p. 153) and this was and is the proper place and time to tell these stories.

In *Living a Feminist Life* Sara Ahmed (2017) says that “citations can be feminist bricks: they are the materials through which, from which, we create our dwellings” (p. 16). In *Committed* Susan Burch (2021) says “extensive citations are intended as invitations and access points, ways to continue research and learning...” (p. 20). Citation is an important piece of my feminist practice, to give credit, to name, to not present the work of others as my own – with that in mind, I am intentionally not naming the people who signed this letter, nor have I named any of the people who contributed stories as we agreed that moving forward we would present this letter as from a collective, and our collective grew several months after it was initially written and sent. But I will not, nor can I, take sole credit for this letter, rather indicate that I helped to write it, and I had my name signed to it when it was first sent. There is also a sense of absurdity I feel surfacing in relation to citations given that one of the harms done by the primary person “named” in this letter, Faculty, as causing harm is that they stole work from others, there were fears from others of their work being stolen, and as I first began writing this essay within the margins, more accusations of, shall I say, unfeminist citational practices by the same person were revealed in terms of stealing...not work, but stories and histories, memories and identities and well, citations.

I draw connections between citations and love—I see them as sides of the same feminist coin, if you will. The very same feminist practice which also engages in refusal,

because refusal is also itself a form of love. By refusing to engage in the same tactics of Faculty and the institution, we who wrote, signed, and contributed to this letter engaged in citational work, love, and refusal. I had the honor of collaborating on a presentation at the first inaugural bell hooks symposium in June 2023. Our presentation, titled “Pedagogies of Love: from Zainab bint Ali to bell hooks”, was a discussion about our individual relationships with Zainab bint Ali, Islamic feminisms, bell hooks, and connections between spiritual and religious practices as feminisms. For me, from Zainab bint Ali to bell hooks, love is integral to my feminist practice. The love I feel for my community, my students, for my ancestors, for my future ancestors – that love guides me in even the most painful of times. And it has been ever so painful right now. But I am not here with the purpose of “serving up pain stories on a silver platter for the settler colonial academy” (Tuck and Yang 2014, p. 812). I am instead here to recount this feminist practice of refusal as an extension of love, because “without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed” (hooks 2006, p. 243), and in order “to be a mystic of the path of radical love necessitates tenderness in our intimate dealings, and a fierce commitment to social justice in the community we live in, both local and global” (Safi 2018, p. xxxvi). Understanding that change is something we must embrace and invite, change means that we create space for ourselves to change and grow and learn from the stories and moments around us. adrienne maree brown (2017) reminds us of Octavia Butler’s wisdom: “all that you touch you change / all that you change, changes you” (p. 14). Change is important in connection to refusal, because as I refuse to uphold systems of oppression, I want to do this in community, and I want to do it with the purpose of change.

The thing is, our path towards change began long before we even started writing this letter. We discussed various tactics to take, such as a sort of calling in or intervention. We tried constructive feedback publicly in class and in private conversations. We sought guidance from our peers and from our faculty and from our friends and from our families. This letter was not written on a whim; it was written over several drafts and several meetings and several edits. S.E. Hinton’s (2012) *The*

Outsiders is one of my introductions to feminism, specifically of the importance of community and found family. US culture demands individualism, so to be in community is refusal—the greasers of Hinton’s book, captured later on film by Francis Ford Coppola (1983), are defiant of the rugged US individualism placed upon them, expected even more so from them as young men. They refuse to live up to the toxic masculine expectations—that’s not to say they don’t have their moments—as they create community, holding physical, mental, and emotional space for each other, and working to survive a world that does not welcome or want them. Sure, I didn’t know it was feminism when I first read and saw *The Outsiders*, rather I knew that I felt a sense of class solidarity with the main characters, and I saw myself reflected in Ponyboy’s daydreaming and writing, in Dallas Winston’s fierce and impulsive loyalty, in Two-Bit’s desire to ease pain with humor. (And upon reflection, I think I wanted to be them). I felt a connection to their repeated refusals to compromise or be separated by state surveillance mechanisms like child and family protective services. I felt connected to their community. Feminist practice is community practice. Feminist practice means speaking up against abuse, recognizing my own boundaries and limitations. Feminist practice creates room for community collaboration, but “community...is dangerous to the neoliberal academy. It refuses the production of individualized ‘entrepreneurial actors’ in favor of a solidarity that provides the conditions of possibility for collective resistance to practices deemed unsupportive or oppressive. The neoliberal academy prefers docile individuals much less likely to call attention to abuses of power and disrupt institutional machines of (re)production” (Brooks, Franklin-Phipps, Rath 2018, p. 5). To be in community is to refuse to abide by the institution’s expectations.

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