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Queered Outrage: Reclaiming Anger amid Facile Calls for Campus Civility

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Abstract

Campus calls for “civility” tend to limit access to legitimate anger expression, especially for those on the margins of power. By exploring how socially permissible anger is racialized and gendered, and highlighting anger-infused queer activism of Stonewall and ACT UP, we identify anger as an important tool for interrogating facile notions of civil discourse, with significant implications for campus life. Anger from the margins is a necessary corrective to power abuses, and its full expression is essential to securing academic freedom. This reclamation of a supposedly “negative” emotion can motivate truth-telling and institutional change. Although campus communities prefer to embrace optimistic speech—think happy Pride rainbows and uplifting calls for diversity and unity—a truly progressive campus environment requires richer appreciation of and engagement with speech containing sorrow, ambivalence, anger, and darkness.

Policies and practices to address incivility on colleges and university campuses, while intended to minimize harmful and hateful speech, all too often take aim at people who contest the status quo. Aggressive, intimidating, and domineering speech is often unremarked upon when the speaker is a powerful, presumably cisgender, heterosexual, white man. Yet the targets of incivility accusations on campus are, more frequently than not, those of us with identities and academic pursuits on the margins of campus life. Our voices are “political,” while hetero- and gender-normative faculty and administrative leaders remain supposedly

neutral. This equation of dissent with incivility is troubling, and the current weaponizing of civility discourses to stifle critical speech is a dangerous development. Inconvenient, dissenting members of our campus community may readily be cast aside when the campus body politic favors “civil discourse” over academic freedom and truth-telling.

For campus constituents whose personal and professional identities shine a light on the historic and current exclusions of “traditional” higher education, the costs of civility discourses are severe. As the pandemic persists and as far-right antidemocratic attacks grow more explosive, our analysis of current civility rhetoric recognizes a longer context of struggle over higher education’s purpose. Since the 1980s, diminished investment in public universities, particularly in the liberal arts, corresponds to an increasingly brown, Black, working-class, and female student body. Compounding the disinvestment are right-wing anti-intellectual objections to “woke,” “socialist,” and “PC” faculty and curricula, lately constituted as a moral panic about “critical race theory” in schools. Desperate for enrollment, university leaders too often prioritize their “brand” and placating conservative governing boards and state legislators, when what is needed is a robust defense of academic freedom.

In this article, we examine anger as a legitimate form of expression, one that troubles campus calls for civility as inherently good. We explore how anger and other “negative” emotions are commonly regarded as poisons to be eliminated if one is to fulfill legitimate personal, political, intellectual, and pedagogical goals. Queer anger is at the center of our argument, because even in the absence of overt homophobia and transphobia, queer and gender transgressive people face extreme scrutiny about whether we are “nice,” “likable,” or “civil” enough. Misogynistic tropes and racialized conceptions of anger inform the dismissal of queer concerns, deemed “unreasonable,” “angry,” or perhaps even “militant,” irrespective of the speech’s content. We must be wary, then, of societal or campus norms presented as neutral strategies, as they may blunt the expression of strong emotions and disproportionately constrain the expression of students, staff, and faculty from nondominant groups.

Campus speech dynamics mirror those of the broader culture, as people across the political spectrum undermine the moral and political

basis for angry queer outrage, primarily by weaponizing shame, not least of all shame about anger, sadness, and grief. Pinkwashing, celebrating diversity, and simplistic campus calls for “civility” and “dialogue” urge us to look away from deeper problems and inequities. In the face of pressures to put others at ease, it is more essential than ever to reclaim the integrity and validity of queer rage, both individually and collectively. In short, there is something to be learned from angry queer and trans folks about harnessing shame and grief in ways that are authentic as well as politically and pedagogically useful, particularly as we witness ramped up right-wing domestic terrorism, greater surveillance of academic speech, and threats to higher education’s core liberal arts mission.

Casual and systematic violence against marginalized groups persists on campus and beyond, from microaggressions to police brutality, rationalized by patriarchal, white supremacist institutions. In this context, “diversity” and “civility” converge to drown out and shame dissenting voices on campus, laying bare an enduring double standard. Entitled men not uncommonly get a “pass,” their fiery tempers charitably interpreted as a by-product of learning masculinity in some earlier era, and potentially forgivable if they bring scholarly prestige to the institution. Likewise, the task of determining whose anger warrants attention is steeped in systems of dominance, with cascading effects on those of us who contribute to a “diverse” campus but who are effectively blocked from employing anger in the service of ethical, pedagogical, and political efficacy.

Meanwhile, faculty with nonnormative gender presentation, perhaps working on the fringes or at the intersections of traditional academic disciplines, are the unwitting recipients of conduct advice: “Tone it down,” “Act professional,” and “Be nice.” Our viability at the institution is tied to good behavior, compounding the heightened vulnerability and surveillance (including self-surveillance) that marginalized faculty already face, none more so than contingent and untenured faculty. Professional reprimands and retaliation inflicted on individuals may be coupled with cuts and mergers that erode faculty self-governance—with interdisciplinary, humanities-based academic units grounded in critical thought invariably at the top of the list. How to employ anger in the

service of truth-telling and institutional change is a lesson we can adapt from radical queer struggles of the past, swimming against a current—especially in pandemic times—that valorizes sacrifice and harmony.

Given the enduring links between heteronormativity and sexism, queer members of our campus communities continue to encounter barriers to full membership. We are effectively always interviewing to have our gender and humanity confirmed, especially if we are gender nonconforming or multiply marginalized. Such assessments often judge ostensibly queer people according to stereotypically middle-class heteronormative traits, the sort likely to be most acceptable to university administrators. So long as an expressive right to anger is a prerogative steeped in sexism and antipathy toward effeminacy, the anger of queer “others” may elicit disrespect, trivialization, or reprisal. Angry speech might be tolerated in the context of a particular egregious incident, at a rally, or on a picket line, but in the day-to-day operations of campus life, even merely frank and assertive speech amounts to “anger” and “insubordination” and is admonished as uncivil.

From Stonewall to ACT UP: Performative Queer Anger against a Backdrop of Erasure and Death

Now that higher education institutions house queer student groups, professionally staffed LGBTQ offices and “safe zones,” and inclusive curricula of one sort or the other, it is tempting to claim victory over a past era of homophobic exclusion and view queer anger as a relic of more oppressive times. Students at our midwestern public university, for example, delight in how visible and proud the queer campus community is, seemingly well-resourced and recognized among other identity groups. Yet we shortchange ourselves and our students when we pat ourselves on the back for having achieved campus acceptance and settle for the status quo. Lip service to diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus coexists all too comfortably with administrative agendas to streamline and eliminate programs and enhance efficiencies. The history, philosophy, and politics of queer rage, which we can bring to campus forums and classroom settings, provide a needed corrective to feel-good

diversity campaigns and their investments in neoliberalism and respectability.

It is partly because queer anger so rarely gets traction, particularly in professional and educational settings, that accounts of the Stonewall riots occupy such symbolic power for LGBTQ students, faculty, and our allies. These are necessary stories to consider and teach, recollections that evoke the heady image of gender-rebellious people of color, such as Sylvia Rivera, picking up rocks and fighting back against police harassers, prevailing—if only temporarily—over the powers that be. Rivera and her compatriot Marsha P. Johnson were engaged in social justice struggles alongside and beyond gay rights, and they were far from portraits of buttoned-up respectability. Grounded in their own experiences of marginality, they fiercely opposed homophobia, poverty and homelessness, and racism, and worked to create alternatives for disenfranchised queens, street kids, sex workers, and hustlers they organized with, asking, “Why do *we* always got to take the brunt of this shit?”¹

Although she has been belatedly elevated to prominence within the LGBTQ movement as a hero of Stonewall, Rivera was the subject of much consternation, derision, and marginalization in various activist spaces in her day, never mind the mainstream. As certain gay liberation leaders adopted respectability politics, and as vocal lesbian feminists denounced trans femininities, Rivera was repeatedly ejected from movements for her transgressive self-expression and confrontational style, though she recounted pridefully that she was able to bring her full “drag queen” self to Young Lords protests, and she spoke, too, of validation from Black Panther leader Huey Newton.² If the queer movement—and the public more generally—now embrace Rivera in her complexity, glorifying her angry rebellion against injustice at the intersections of many oppressions, it bears remembering that the conventions of polite discourse have led

¹ Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink and Blue* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 107–8, our emphasis.

² Feinberg, *Trans Liberation*, 109; and Jesse Gan, “‘Still at the Back of the Bus’: Silvia Rivera’s Struggle,” *Centro Journal* 19, no. 1 (2007): 124–39.

activists, past and present, to disavow similarly intense and ferocious figures in progressive social movements and on campus.

Reflecting back on the place of outrage in the Stonewall rebellion can speak to our times and our workplaces, recognizing how some of the most oppressed and abused minority citizens effectively claimed their right to a queered anger, uninhibited by any quest to gain authorities' approval. Stonewall participants wielded appropriately theatrical "weapons" —for example, coins thrown toward police—to illustrate their rage. Their affect was legible as anger, to be sure, but it was simultaneously a performance, celebration, and catharsis, an embrace of what the straight world would surely view as excess. The ebullience and irreverence were an effective interruption of the status quo precisely because they were expressed through unapologetic collective action. More than simply camp, the activists exhibited what José Esteban Muñoz refers to as the "artist's guerrilla style, a style that functions as a ground-level cultural terrorism that fiercely skewers both straight culture and reactionary components of gay culture."³ It mattered, too, that the events were situated in a historical backdrop of youth rebellion, antiwar resistance, the civil rights and Black Power movements, and other liberation struggles that mobilized marginalized communities of all kinds.

At first glance, the streets of Greenwich Village in the summer of 1969 bear minimal resemblance to universities today. But we might ask, "Whose campus?" in the same spirit as Stonewall participants questioned, "Whose streets?" while resisting regimes of control. Joining forces, a coalition of predominantly poor and working-class Black and Puerto Rican folks "turned loose all the anger" against "gay oppression, police brutality, societal contempt," as Merle Woo put it. Having herself been ejected from academia, Woo resonated with Stonewall's revolutionary fervor. Writing forty years later, she observed how "the undesirables fought back for being outsiders, for being treated like dogs. They challenged sex-role stereotyping, racism, and class bigotry. They challenged the dysfunctional monogamous nuclear family, its patriarchal

³ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 102.

values, oppression of women and children, and sermons that sex is for procreation only.”⁴ Such a wide-ranging revolt against power was not simply contesting bar raids and police corruption; it was also a connect-the-dots moment of shared fury against external forces and internalized inhibitions that constrained both queer joy and queer fury.

Offering a potent contrast with the normative portrait of anger as violent aggression, the threat of dramatic rage may be anger’s queerest manifestation. Anger that is uncoupled from, or simply more loosely linked to, actual or implicit threats to others’ well-being can be productive of knowledge and also disarmingly confusing. Savviness about mobilizing one’s anger—and recognizing it as distinctive from the anger of abusers, homophobes, sexists, and racists—has been critical to activists’ refinement of oppositional knowledge and social transformation strategies. As Audre Lorde urged in the early 1980s, “We cannot allow our fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty; we must be quite serious about the choice of this topic and the angers entwined within it because, rest assured, our opponents are quite serious about their hatred of us.”⁵

Punching-up anger of this sort targets systemic inequality and demands institutional accountability. Further, queer outrage foregrounds those aspects of identities with shame attached to them, for example, a trans woman’s embrace of over-the-top femininity or a queer person’s affectionate adoption of a “pervert” identity. In the spirit of the latter example, a 1970s-era protester in Houston, objecting to homophobic police violence, held a placard announcing, “If you think gays are revolting . . . We are!”⁶ Shame and disgust can be a darkly humorous source of reclaimed power for the reviled; given that this form of expression is hardly well tolerated on campuses or in classrooms,

⁴ Merle Woo, “Stonewall Was a Riot—Now We Need a Revolution,” in *Smash the Church! Smash the State! Forty Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. Tommi Avicoli Mecca (San Francisco: City Lights, 2009), 283.

⁵ Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1981): 8.

⁶ Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown, *We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation* (New York: Ten Speed, 2019), 84.

teaching about it affords a unique opportunity to interrogate respectability politics.

A queerly reconceptualized anger, then, invites us to open our eyes to the nuanced subjectivities motivating the acts of vulnerable, debased others. It resists the rush to “unity” in many college campus diversity discourses. Reckoning with the discomfiting anger of artist, writer, and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz, for example, offers a lesson on confrontation not associated with incipient violence toward others. As he explained, “The rest of my life is being unwound and seen through a frame of death. And my anger is more about this culture’s refusal to deal with mortality. My rage is really about the fact that WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT I’D CONTRACTED THIS VIRUS IT DIDN’T TAKE ME LONG TO REALIZE THAT I’D CONTRACTED A DISEASED SOCIETY AS WELL.”⁷ Wojnarowicz’s anger is political to be sure, but it resides in the same creative well that gave birth to his art. It is of a piece with his consciousness of, and grief about, his impending death and the broader devastation in gay communities of the 1980s and 1990s.

Further lessons about the power of queered anger can be explored in pedagogy highlighting the activism of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, founded in 1987, better known as ACT UP. As Michael Warner explains, the organization “made possible a politics directed against shame and normalization, and aiming at a complex mobilization of people beyond sexual identity.”⁸ Hinging as the movement did on shattering the myth of gay docility and refusing to plead for mere tolerance and inclusion, activist artists and intellectuals embraced stereotypes about queer identity, sometimes pushing them to darkly comic campy limits, through choreographed displays of rage in expected as well as “sacred” sites, from streets and city halls to churches and shopping malls. Such dramatic transgressions—especially “die ins” with

⁷ David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 113–14; emphasis in original.

⁸ Michael Warner, “Queer and Then: The End of Queer Theory?,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 1, 2012, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/QueerThen-/130161/>.

people lying en masse in the streets—were unabashedly theatrical, political, and grounded in searing, grieving consciousness of death.

As has been the case with so much activism before it, part of ACT UP's success depended on stripping away the veneer of contentment and assimilability demanded of marginalized groups by the modern state. The protests worked—sometimes exceedingly well—not just because they made members of the dominant culture physically afraid (many believed erroneously that HIV could be transmitted by casual contact), but even more so because their accommodating masks were replaced by a confrontational performative fury and sorrow that could be jarringly disarming. Susan Stryker explains that “one strategy was simply to erupt into visibility in the everyday spaces of city life through how one dressed”; biker jackets, combat boots, political T-shirts, tattoos and facial piercings, and Day-Glo stickers of Queer Nation screamed for attention.⁹ So, too, the bomb with a lit fuse that was the Lesbian Avengers logo. Queer activism during this period was, quite literally, deadly serious, but it was also grounded in performance and expressed through style and affect. This was anger, but it was an anger with an aesthetic informed by grief, shame, and death.

Articulating desire—sexual, political, and otherwise—has been an important piece of a “gay agenda,” that hateful coinage of the Far Right that militant queer activists dare to reclaim. Zoe Leonard's provocation in the early 1990s, “I want a dyke for president,” captures how activists of the day rebelled against modest goals and moderately paced social change. This determination reverberated in the emergent body of queer theory, as Warner describes: “a broadening of minority politics to question the framework of the sayable; attention to the hierarchies of respectability that saturate the world; movement across overlapping but widely disparate structures of violence and power in order to conjure a series of margins that have no identity core; an oddly melancholy utopianism; a speculative and prophetic stance outside politics—not to mention an ability to do much of that—through the play of its own

⁹ Susan Stryker, “More Words about My ‘Words to Victor Frankenstein,’” *GLQ* 25, no. 1 (2017): 168.

style.”¹⁰ By taking seriously intellectual, pedagogical, and artistic expressions of anger and longing, whether playful and comic, or sad and sober, queer thought challenges the dualisms separating intelligent, creative, collegial professors and students from their rage and their impatient demands for justice.

If we think of the power of rage and anger primarily in terms of individual motivating emotions, as part of a personally redemptive narrative, we will miss much of what is noteworthy about queer rage. ACT UP is distinctive for its embrace of darkness and death, and a collective righteous anger at the then-commonplace notion that gay people, especially sexually “promiscuous” ones, quite simply, didn’t deserve to live. This was a time, then, of queer people claiming their very right to life against a backdrop of suffering and death resulting as much from public indifference and hostility as from the virus. As Vito Russo put it, surviving was a goal but so too was wanting “to be around to kick their asses after it’s over, to say who’s to praise and who’s to blame. . . . Because these are brave, courageous, beautiful people who are dying.”¹¹ Another way of explaining it is that “mourning became militancy within the movement,” and militancy demanded accountability.¹²

Bold queer provocations tested the limits of conventional, civil political discourse. An ACT UP protest in New York in 1990 at the appearance of President George Bush captures the times. The protesters carried coffins through the streets emblazoned with slogans like “Republicans Kill Me,” “Killed by Bush and Helms,” “GOP = RIP,” “Fuck You, George!,” and “We’re Here, We’re Queer, We Hate the Fucking President!” And although deaths from AIDS lent tremendous gravitas to this protest, the movement carried forward an almost giddy strand of gay activism, inspired by radical feminist protests and the zaps of the early days of gay liberation. In their highly teachable collection of queer liberation images, Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown point out that

¹⁰ Warner, “Queer and Then.”

¹¹ Quoted in Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 294.

¹² Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 9.

the approach was “‘playful, mischievous, and dead serious’ allowing ‘good guys’ to publicly embarrass the bad guys.”¹³ Collectively the book’s images and captions illustrate a queer ethical framework—a redefinition of “good guys” and “bad guys,” lovers and haters, in stark opposition to the conservative metric of so-called family values.

In order to fully appreciate the political savvy at work here, we must question the dualism separating strong feelings like anger and grief from intelligence, rationality, and the capacity to deliberate and make change. After all, the emotional work of AIDS activists was at times “manifestly calculated and instrumental,” as sociologist Deborah Gould observed. The New York ACT UP chapter, at its first meeting, discussed converting a Gay Pride parade to one for “Gay Rage.”¹⁴ Likewise, critics interrogated “Gay Shame” in publications and gatherings, including a 2003 University of Michigan conference, exploring the limits of pride as a unifying principle for twenty-first-century gay politics and community. The founding of the academic journal *GLQ* similarly originated as an academic publishing outlet meant to “startle, surprise, upset” and “transform,” as described by founder David Halperin.¹⁵

As queer and trans access to academe and other liberal institutions has grown in recent decades, censure and self-censorship, too, persist when “unity in diversity” is the order of the day. And, of course, successfully avoiding the “angry” label can be an ongoing matter of life and death for people of color in a violently white supremacist culture, one in which murders of trans women of color are an epidemic. Yet our queered outrage—expressed through our pedagogy and in our campus involvement—remains a vital asset for contesting racist and transphobic violence, sexual harassment, gerrymandering, and other threats to liberty and democracy in society at large.

¹³ Riemer and Brown, *We Are Everywhere*, 125.

¹⁴ Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 221.

¹⁵ David M. Halperin, “The Fulfilled and Unfulfilled Promises of *GLQ*,” *GLQ* 25, no. 1 (2019): 8.

Queer Anger as a Resource for Campuses and Classrooms

In campus cultures modeled on the notion of being a family, bourgeois homonormativity offers a kind of alluring bargain, such that some embrace the very norms built to exclude queer and trans distinctiveness in order to achieve belonging. It's especially problematic given that, as Heather Love and other queer theorists insist, the very notion of queerness should demand space for the abject, for example, "shyness, ambivalence, failure, melancholia, loneliness, regression, victimhood, heartbreak, antimodernism, immaturity, self-hatred, despair, shame."¹⁶ In the campus-as-family imaginary, queer and trans rebellion troubles the familial harmony, not unlike the angsty teenagers and yapping dogs needing correction from the adults in charge. It is an inopportune time on our campuses, however, to obey and come to heel.

Although infrequently uttered aloud on college campuses, enduring stereotypes about queer and trans people persist in oblique ways, impugning our humanity and capacity to be civilized. The homophobic notion of queerness as an identity that is primarily sexual, evil, and miserable, with an agenda aiming to recruit, dupe, or force others into our "lifestyle," all suggest an unassimilability that requires surveillance, control, and perhaps symbolic if not actual relegation to a crumbling campus building's musty basement. Periodic acknowledgment in strategic plans, and tokenizing inclusion in diversity dialogues and in general educational curricula, may superficially credit queer people and the study of queer lives. But these gestures should not lure us into complacency about progress.

Many queer and trans folks have, understandably, felt compelled to translate our fury, shame, sorrow, and trepidation into lavender-hued antics, ones that might enable us to secure a piece of the diversity pie. Waving an apparently innocuous rainbow flag, and working to put our neighbors, colleagues, and students at ease, is surely a radical act of defiance for many. Similarly, popular college student "coming out" panel

¹⁶ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 146.

presentations, chock-full of stories of overcoming bigotry and finding love and community, can be powerful interventions against isolation and internalized stigma. Yet they can also operate as happy entertainment and anodyne educational fodder for the mainstream, whose members leave with a self-satisfied sense that homophobia and heterosexism are in check. They help tick the strategic-plan boxes for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the expense of true transformation. We conclude our article, then, with further reflections on the place of noncompliance and outrage in the context of our campus lives, recognizing that the mismanagement crises and crackdowns on campus speech and academic freedom in the COVID-19 era are revealing the deeper roots of inequity and failed leadership.

Given the sharp values divide of our times, the impulse to compromise and assimilate is worth resisting where feasible. Those on the margins need and deserve the opportunity for an unapologetic reclamation of the whole self, even in its apparent unacceptability, even when it is raging or grief-stricken. Fortunately, the patriarchal version of anger—the anger of terror and excuse-making—is not the only version available to us. And whatever version of political rage we lean toward must include an embrace of the supposedly negative emotions intrinsic to a fully formed, authentically and existentially human subjectivity.

No matter its ethical justifications, artistic and academic work that expresses anger and rage is likely to elicit persecution. Here, global activists fighting to preserve gender studies in authoritarian states, and historical troublemakers such as those discussed above, inspire us to persist in our resistance. Adopting a queered anger with intention, cognition, and thoughtfulness, rather than in utter opposition to these qualities, we can tap into a nondualistic, mature, productive, and attractive affect, avoiding the merely tantrum-like, destructive, and repulsive anger of tyrants. As despotic forces gain traction across the globe, the humanities are an essential part of challenging anti-intellectual authoritarianism and cruelty. There is a need, an urgency even, to bring our righteous anger to campus, to risk such conversations in our classrooms and on campuses. Likewise, in “student-centered” university discourses about “employability,” we cannot afford to drop our vigilance in asserting the value and necessity of the liberal arts.

Cautiousness about expressing anger, of course, remains legitimate, given academic conventions and a desire to obtain and maintain employment in a shrinking job market. Being perceived as anything other than a “reasonable, objective scholar,” a “likeable” instructor, a “congenial” colleague, or even a properly socialized woman remains risky. The social conditioning runs so deep that one wonders, Will strong expression of “negative” affect wreck my reputation, if not my career? Unfortunately, self-reflective honesty about what one’s own anger might mean is made much more difficult by a university culture that simplistically conflates faculty civility with politeness and docility. It has perhaps never been more understandable for faculty members to feel that we cannot afford to be honest, even with ourselves, about our own difficult feelings and unruly emotions. We have good reason to fear being punished by administrators or evaluated by students as “unfriendly” or “too intense.”

During these volatile, dangerous times, we increasingly view anger as a messenger providing clarity about what and who needs attention and care. Feeling anger on our own behalf can cultivate healthy self-regard and self-esteem, and anger toward systems for which we are not the target—in our case, say, our undocumented students or Asian American colleagues—enables empathy and compassion that bind us to other sentient beings. Further, we can see that anger about the treatment of animals, the natural world, and disregard for basic values such as truth-telling is vitally necessary. Placing this ethos in our scholarship and pedagogy—reconceptualizing anger rather than relying solely on the patriarchal, abusive version—we can listen to it and learn from it rather than feel controlled or shamed by it.

Embracing a queered version of anger prompts us to foreground in our pedagogy and scholarship examples of courageous activism, the full ferocity of which is too often obscured. Rather than depict queer radicals as historical aberrations, or shy away from their insistent eruptions of emotions, we might situate them among direct action and civil disobedience luminaries past and present. We should also question the march-of-progress views of social justice that are way too convenient to match reality. We might be more vocal when the radical views of Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr., say, are bypassed in favor of his more conciliatory rhetoric, words that find favor in signature quotes and graduation speeches. Similarly, we can contest the dismissal of the anger-fueled manifestos of US lesbian feminists of the 1970s, pausing a bit longer to contemplate what was and is deemed ugly, offensive, and unworthy of embrace.

Grounded in a more expansive notion of anger, we professors might be more inclined to spend time exploring the complicated subjectivity of some of the most outrageous activists, assigning manifestos, personal narratives, and imaginative exercises.¹⁷ We might recruit our students' unsanitized, subjective responses to them as well as sharing our own. We can, perhaps, better face the full fierceness of our social justice histories as we attend to our own roiling internal furies in the present. The possibilities here are many, since these are not necessarily add-ons to our current teaching practices but perhaps rather a reframing of current content. For teachers who do not now include much in the way of memoir, fiction, and film but rely, instead, on more research-based material, the wilder, anger-fueled sources depicting queer rage may elicit deeper reflections about mobilizing outrage in the service of justice.

Obviously, we must still be responsible teachers and colleagues, availing ourselves of practical precautions, treating one another with respect, and providing our students with mental health resources. But if marginalized people have learned anything in recent years, it is that there is no escape from this difficult reality, one that includes not just the anger of newly empowered white supremacists but also a fury that lives within us. The silencing of dissent with platitudes about politeness or civility remains deeply worrisome, especially since it is those in power themselves who usually get to define and enforce these terms. When "civil discourse" shuts down unruly voices, it jeopardizes our access to legitimate dissent and capacity to exercise academic freedom.

¹⁷ For ideas and resources, see Leila J. Rupp and Susan K. Freeman, eds., *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017).

Upon even minimal reflection, many see that civility ought not be reduced to self-serving, finger-wagging calls to “be nice,” and that, in fact, our convictions must often be expressed with fierceness, especially in the face of trenchant stupidity or deadly injustice. Ideally, after all, norms about civil discourse are meant to increase robust, substantive speech, not to curtail it. And because the recent catastrophes and betrayals have become political and social debacles of the highest order—devastating our universities along with our nation—outspoken campus voices are more necessary than ever. This is a matter of saving not just our jobs and our departments but also the future of academic institutions altogether. As has always been the case, those in positions of power may try to selectively define and enforce “civility” when troublemakers appear, when we speak in terms that evoke queerness and rage rather than conformity and submission. The deployment of civility talk is a heavy-handed and dangerous tactic, rooted in a facile, self-serving conception of anger, and academics have a special responsibility not to fall for such authoritarian tricks. After all, academic freedom means nothing at all if vulnerable faculty can be cut from the herd or chased from the table the moment the person controlling the mic or the Zoom mute button decides they sound too angry.

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