



Pedagogies of Refusal: Opportunities and Obstacles to Anarcha-Feminism in Contemporary US Academia

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Introduction

In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg feminist author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson tells a story of the resistance and evasion enacted by deer relatives in the face of human control and exploitation. According to Simpson, deer refuse to engage with the humans who fail to practice reciprocal and respectful kinship. Instead, deer move away in order to repopulate and thrive amongst themselves. Simpson's notion of "generative refusal" is informed by this, in which communities withdraw from any tangible or intangible cause of harm, and instead "turn inward to rebuild" (2017: 244). Generative refusal is, thus, a tactic that seeks to renew and repair without the engagement of those who rule, violate, or oppress. In the case of so-called Canada, Simpson urges that Nishnaabeg and other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples do not approach the settler state government through appeals and legislation. Rather, Indigenous communities should *refuse* to engage, which constitutes a *generative* move of internal rebuilding and affirmation. We, as Indigenous peoples globally, must make ourselves able to "not be governed" by evading subject status under settler state control (Scott 2009: 327).

I am devoted to a career in higher education, a place where people of mixed racial and ethnic heritage have been excluded from or forced to assimilate within. Specifically, my family is Chicana, European, and Indigenous—dispossessed of land, lifeways, and tribal identity. My paternal grandfather, Louis Ornelas, was a survivor of the Sherman Institute, a Native boarding school in Riverside, California. There, he was literally and figuratively orphaned: not only were both of his parents deceased when he was released from Sherman as a teen and hence he had no family to return to, he had also been indoctrinated into white supremacist, settler colonial societal and linguistic norms, and was therefore orphaned from his culture. Institutions like Sherman relied on such erasure of Indigenous knowledges in order to assimilate through "education." In response to the legacy of trauma my family suffered due to the Sherman Institute, I prioritize Indigenous knowledges in all I do. As a mixed, genderqueer anarcha-feminist who seeks to enact *generative refusal* in the face of institutional rule, how might I foster learning communities that resist being governed? What are the tendencies of an



anarcha-feminist pedagogy informed by Indigenous feminism—as well as other feminisms? And how useful are these tendencies in *actually* evading and refusing the settler colonial academy?

Both anarchist and feminist theorists, in their written accounts and tangible acts of pedagogy, have attempted similar forms of resistance to rule. In addition to Simpson's Indigenous feminist concept of *generative refusal*, many other feminists, anarchists, and radical thinkers have worked to subvert settler colonial, white supremacist institutional conditions. Still others have attempted to reclaim and reorder educational spaces to better align with radical political aims. For example, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney offer *fugitivity* as a mobile position of Black radicalism within academia: “the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back” (2013: 28). Anarchist pedagogues, including radical educator Abraham DeLeon and geographer Farhang Rouhani, broadly critique formal educational institutions as contradictory to anarchist tendencies, but still see specific classrooms as able to be recuperated on a small scale (DeLeon 2009: 267; DeLeon 2006: 82; Rouhani 2012: 1733, 1738). In *Teaching to Transgress*, a treatise on Black feminist pedagogy, bell hooks admits that although there are many academic institutional aspects that are decidedly un-feminist, certain educational practices can still practice a feminist ethic (1994: 18). Scholar on indígena pedagogy, Sandy Grande (Quechua) states that building a “pedagogical home for the project of decolonization” requires a retreat from toxic “whitestream feminism” epistemology, now so thoroughly entrenched in academia (2004: 126).

These experiments in refusal within contemporary US academia, while crucially hopeful, must not overestimate the ability of individual classroom contexts to subvert and/or reclaim large-scale institutional structures. If anarchism and feminism have resisted rule since their respective inceptions, then their pedagogical proponents can't risk overlooking the limitations to resisting the settler colonial rule of educational institutions. Based on what I observed in my research on learning communities within feminist academia at a large, public, Research 1 University in the Midwestern United States, I argue that despite anarcha-feminism's ability to provide pedagogical theory with a framework that echoes anarchist and feminist concerns of cooperation, reflexivity, multiplicity, egalitarianism, anti-hierarchicalism, and autonomy, these tendencies were ultimately met with both opportunities and obstacles. I define “feminist academia” as including, but not limited to: classrooms, syllabi, course work, research, colloquia, and publishing that are expressly feminist in scope, purpose, and practice. Any anarcha-feminist approaches to pedagogy practiced within such feminist spaces must critically attend to anarchists' and feminists' contentions that contemporary US academia can be reclaimed or subverted.

So, why is an anarcha-feminist pedagogy useful to consider, especially if it never fully came to fruition within feminist academia as I observed it? Anarcha-feminism is an



important intervention in pedagogical theory for pushing feminist academia—as well as anarchist and anarcha-feminist educators—to evaluate potentially recuperative, reformist educational strategies. A pedagogy of not being governed requires radical alterations to education, if not wholesale *generative refusal*. It requires fundamental changes to rigid, inequitable, coercive relations, rather than neoliberal centrism—like lip service in favor of more “diversity” and “inclusivity”—when creating learning communities. As long as feminist, anarchist, and anarcha-feminist pedagogues participate in the settler colonial project of contemporary US academia, we should be aware of the opportunities and obstacles of strategies to refuse it. The learning communities I observed held opportunities for *certain* anarcha-feminist pedagogical strategies, but knowing where there are spaces of possibility is as essential as knowing these same spaces’ limitations. Acknowledging the difficulties can help us as anarchist, feminist, and anarcha-feminist pedagogues rethink and restructure our refusals to the rule of formal educational institutions. At the very least, articulating an anarcha-feminist pedagogy contributes to conversations that are largely deficient in considering anarchafeminism as a strategy for creating radical educational change.

Anarcha-feminism has largely been invisible within feminist academia, as both a theoretical subject and pedagogical practice (Bottici 2017: 96). In pedagogical theory, anarcha-feminism is nearly non-existent. Instead, much discourse on anarcha-feminism has focused on the explanation or exclusion of gender-based critiques within anarchist activism and theory.¹ Numerous authors—in articles from Chiara Bottici, Deric Shannon, and the Zero Collective, to name a few; in zines like Pongo Pygmaeus’s *AnarchaFeminism*; and even in several anthologies from the Dark Star Collective as well as a forthcoming collection from Cindy Milstein—have attempted to answer just “what the fuck is anarcha-feminism anyway?”² There are at best brief mentions of anarchafeminism within feminism as a whole, like in Carol Ehrlich’s “Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism,” but authors state again and again that anarchism should be interested in feminism rather than the other way around. I want to move conversations about anarcha-feminism beyond these repeated attempts at defining and defending it within anarchism. Therefore, this project is, in part, fueled by my interest in expanding what anarcha-feminism has to offer feminist academia and pedagogical theory. It is my hope that this offers a new way of utilizing anarcha-feminism by emphasizing unique and critical attention to pedagogy.

¹ The latter focus on taking anarchists to task for either overlooking sex- and gender-based inequality or perpetuating it is clarified by L. Brown 1993: 111-12; De Heredia 2007: 45-47; Gaarder 2009: 46-47; Kinna 2017: 255-56; Kowal 2019: 266-67; Leeder 1996: 142; Marso 2007: 73-74; Michel 2005: 239; Saornil 2005: 461; Zero 1993: 6-7.

² Borrowed from the London Anarcha-Feminist Kolektiv’s zine of the same name (2009).

³ See L. Brown 1989: 1; DeLeon 2006: 73; Kornegger 2012: 26; Shannon 2009: 60.



More than anything, though, what influences this research is a personal desire to explore the creation of anarcha-feminist learning communities, particularly if and how I might navigate being a Chicana and Indigenous anarcha-feminist pedagogue in a settler colonial educational institution. Real, tangible opportunities for anarcha-feminism already exist within these institutions and in daily life, often not explicitly acknowledged as such. Grounding my work in the learning community practices of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) clarifies that it is not some future utopia in which one might find anarcha-feminist pedagogy. Indeed the context of GWSS has a potential predisposition for engaging some of the ethics and values of anarcha-feminism (Soderling 2016: 44). Given that other disciplines are likely more invested in the authoritarian proclivities of higher education and, thus, likely more hesitant to enact radical pedagogies, GWSS classrooms are an intuitive place to experiment with these ethics and values. I and other pedagogues can point to such current examples as potential sites of further resistance and refusal.

Not Being Governed: Anarchism, Feminism, and Anarcha-Feminism

By definition, anarchism and feminism are different, but on a basic level both share a common disdain for domination and rule. Very broadly, anarchism is an ideology against (“an-” is a prefix meaning “to be without” in Greek) rule or rulers (or, “archon” in Greek). There have been many anarchists and anarchisms,³ the connection between which is “a universal condemnation of hierarchy and domination and a willingness to fight for the freedom of the human individual” (L. Brown 1993: 108). As there is no singular anarchism, there is also no singular feminism, but feminism is largely predicated on the assumption that inequality and rule based on intersecting gendered dimensions of social location and identity pervades most contemporary human relations under the white supremacist, settler state, and that this inequality and rule must be eradicated (Bendall 1993: 37; Zero 1993: 3-4). In discussing the anarcha-feminism of Emma Goldman, Hewitt states that both anarchism and feminism possess “a common recognition of the need to transform the power structures and social relations of hierarchy and domination” (2007: 316-17). Evidenced by Greenway’s comparison between late nineteenth century Western feminism and anarchism, both possess a “sexual and political dangerousness” that threatens interpersonal and institutional relationships based on rule (2011: xv). De Heredia, though specifically referring to anarcha-feminism in Spain, believes the term “anarcha-feminism” is redundant, a “tautology,” even going so far as to assert, “anarchism is a specific type of feminism” (2007: 44). Repeatedly, certain feminisms are equated with anarchism, anarchists are claimed as feminists, or feminist organizing is said to have at times been more anarchistic than anarchist organizing (Ackelsberg 2010: 101; Bendall 1993: 34; Douglas 1981: 2; Greenway 2011: xvi; Hewitt



2007: 317; Marshall 2010: 556-57; Shannon 2009: 60; Shulman 2007: 247; Zero 1993: 6).

The combinations, connections, and overlaps between anarchism and feminism are overly general and fail to recognize the presence of anarcha-feminism as a distinct and complex ideology. True, some strains of anarchism and feminism share commonalities (C. Ehrlich 2012: 59), but these generalizations are so broad that they miss exceptions, such as the reformist tendencies of liberal feminism being in direct contradiction to individualist anarchism's anti-statism. C. Ehrlich pays attention to the specific overlaps between different varieties of anarchism and feminism; the author believes that the radical feminism of the '60s and '70s (presumably not the primarily SWERF/TERF turf it has become) is most compatible with social anarchism because "[b]oth work to build alternative institutions, and both take the politics of the personal very seriously" (2012: 57-58). However, anarcha-feminism exposes that neither anarchism nor feminism is complete without taking more into account: anarchafeminism does not challenge rule through reformism—as anarchists have critiqued feminists for doing—and does not reduce oppression to class-based rule, which is a common feminist critique of anarchists (Ackelsberg 2010: 106; C. Ehrlich 2012: 58; Mott 2018: 426-27). Anarcha-feminism sees statist and capitalist hierarchies (as per anarchism) and gender-inflected hierarchies (as per feminism) as the rule/rs to be combated in contemporary societies (Ackelsberg 2010: 102; H. Ehrlich 1996: 140; Gaarder 2009: 47; Marshall 2010: 557; Zero 1993: 4). But the combination of anarchism and feminism leads to more than the sum of these parts. Anarcha-feminism is, at its core, opposed to any and all domination, believing that capitalist and statist rule rely on gender-based rule—as well as, but not limited to ageism, ableism, cissexism, colonialism, heterosexism, nationalism, orientalism, racism, sizeism, and speciesism—in order to maintain hegemony, and vice versa (Bottici 2017: 94-95; C. Ehrlich 2012: 58; Kinna 2017: 254; Shannon 2009: 69). Therefore, it is not enough to say "feminism practices what anarchism preaches," nor the reverse (Farrow 2012: 19). Anarcha-feminism practices what anarchism *and* feminism preach, and then some.

Critical Pedagogical Theories: From Ferrer to Hooks

Throughout the course of anarchist intellectual and political history, its proponents have grappled with critiques of and alternatives to pedagogy that resist being governed (DeLeon 2006: 73; Rouhani: 2012: 1729). Judith Suissa's *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* as well as *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education*, edited by Robert H. Haworth, extensively outline anarchist pedagogies. One of the best known anarchist pedagogues, Catalan educator Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, created an independent educational experiment known as



Escuela Moderna in Spain from 1901-1905, which was meant to ameliorate and prefigure a separate alternative to the deplorable educational conditions in Spain at the time (Avrich 1980: 3-7; Ferrer 1913: 22, 106). Continuing in this tradition, contemporary geographer Farhang Rouhani encourages educators to embrace anarchist pedagogy, believing that individual learning communities are able to work against and within spaces of contemporary US academia (2012: 1730). This turn toward already existing, formal academic institutions as sites of critical change is a departure from Ferrer, to say the least. Because I see such institutions as inherently ruled spaces, I don't necessarily share the optimism about anarchist pedagogy's ability to create radical classrooms therein.

Anarchism, as a theory and practice against rule, should not overestimate the ability of individual classroom contexts to generatively refuse and, likewise, should remain skeptical of participating in contemporary US academia, which is always, already imbued with institutionalized rule/rs. This educational context is inherently governed, hierarchical, and, therefore, an *un*-anarchist space, as indicated by DeLeon (2006: 83). Shukaitis and Graeber point out that academia and its constituents are not necessarily familiar or comfortable with critiquing hierarchy and, indeed, expect and embrace certain elitist practices (2007: 23). Although not explicitly anarchist, in the seminal work on critical pedagogy *Deschooling Society* (1971), Illich similarly problematizes school, defining it as both a noun (i.e., an institution) and, more importantly, a verb meaning to be socialized into the mores of normative society. Why, then, participate in and submit to this governance and rule? Exemplifying this skepticism, if not outright rejection, an anonymous online reviewer of the book *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire* declares, "Anarchists do not seek legitimacy in academia. Our goal is to destroy the university" ("Queering"). Anarchist pedagogues should also reconsider their attempts at legitimacy and creation of radical learning communities within an institution that is inherently ruled, and perhaps should consider refusing it altogether.

On the other hand, feminist pedagogy can be understood as putting feminism into educational practice (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 2009: 1; Janik-Marusov et al. 2011: 1522; Ropers-Huilman 2009: 55). In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks elucidates a Black feminist refusal of the Western notion that learners and facilitators alike must separate mind from body and repress feelings when entering the classroom (1994: 192). She also takes inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire, despite that Freire is not above feminist critique. For instance, hooks asserts that Freire "constructs a phallogocentric paradigm of liberation" (1994: 49). Yet ultimately, hooks encourages the rejection of what Freire dubs the banking model of education, in which teachers merely deposit information into students. Instead, hooks insists love and passion are necessary to educational communities (1994: 199). When examining relations and assessment in learning communities, Akyea and Sandoval also insist on caring for learners in terms of



“what they need to live their lives” (2005). Overall, feminist pedagogical theorists describe combating oppressive and unequal classroom relationships; building collaborative learning communities; “consciousness-raising” and empowering participants; validating and valuing individuals’ knowledge; respecting and embracing—rather than tokenizing—personal experiences; and challenging traditional views and practices as important to the creation of nurturing educational environments (Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 2009: 3-4; Ropers-Huilman 2009: 40; Villaverde 2008: 121-22; Webb, Allen, and Walker 2002: 68-71).

These same scholars assume that learning communities, though housed under its shadow, are able to evade or refuse the grasp of academia. This appears in pedagogues’ attempts to change the imposed structures (through collaborating in knowledge production, for instance) and interactions (equalizing facilitation and decision-making). Such evasion would require autonomous, uncoerced independence within the settler colonial academic institution. All are undoubtedly admirable concerns necessary for feminist pedagogies. But in asserting the importance of nurturing and caring for students, feminist pedagogues must not extend critiques only so far as the interpersonal relationships between and among facilitators and learners. This risks placing undue burden on individual educators—particularly those of us who are BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, women and femmes, precariously employed, and/or disabled—to make conditions more amenable as well as risks leaving oppressive relations beyond the classroom largely intact. It also overestimates the capabilities of formal educational contexts to have large scale impacts. Despite feminist pedagogues’ critiques of problematic and un-feminist values inherent to Western schooling, difficulties to rejecting rule within this context must be acknowledged. Even hooks admits these spaces are uncaring, dispassionate, and dismissive of those who attempt to reject rule (1994: 191-92). Without the outright refusal of settler colonial academia, what options do we leave ourselves with?

Methods of Study: Epistemological Considerations

In studying the obstacles and opportunities to anarcha-feminist concerns within the pedagogical practices of GWSS learning communities, my research methods are informed by Indigenous, feminist, and anarchist epistemological concerns. Luker insists that “social science ‘methods,’ though conventionally imagined as neutral tools to get at the truth, are in fact deeply shaped by the social reality they wish to examine” (2008: 212). Acknowledging that researchers’ analysis and interpretation is filtered and biased (Merriam 2009: 232-33; Smith 2021: 1), I employ an Indigenous feminist epistemology. Borrowing from feminist theorists, such as Macarena Gómez-Barris’s ideation on “submerged viewpoints” (2017: 11), Patricia Hill Collins’s expansion of Foucauldian “subjugated knowledges” (2000: 9), and Donna Haraway’s conception of “situated



knowledges” (1991: 188), I accept and value my own and my research subjects’ production of knowledge and understanding that is based in and derives from their specific social locations. In this way, I reject a supposedly neutral, objective search for the “Truth” and legitimize the situated, personal experiences of research participants.

I also recognize that research itself is a dirty word for many Indigenous peoples, who have been subjected to the scrutinizing eye of empire’s data-gatherers. However, Indigenous knowledges and lifeways are crucial to creating counter narratives to the settler state and its co-conspirators. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) tells us, “[w]riting about our experiences under imperialism and its more specific expression of colonialism has become a significant project of the indigenous world” (2012: 57). For Smith, Indigenous research is an alternate account that challenges traditional Western epistemologies. In fact, telling our own stories is, as Mishuana Goeman (Seneca) states, a way to “unsettle settler space” (2013: 2). Through my attempt to narrate my own and others’ concerns with academia, I aim to be responsible to the participants of this study and to other writers’ perspectives, whether Indigenous or not.

As anarchism challenges conceptions of authority, I too challenge monolithic “expert” evaluation and embrace a plurality of voices in my empirical data collection. I recognize that I am the ultimate arbiter of my methods and results, but I strive to cocreate knowledge of anarcha-feminist pedagogy with my subjects and, therefore, reject a singular, rigid, authoritative narrative. Here I borrow from Feyerabend who, in *Against Method*, proposes an anarchic, pluralistic methodology that is against strict rules and recognizes that universalized, rigid traditions impede individuality and creativity in research (1993: 12). Therefore, I kept my research method options as open and flexible as possible. However, in practice, being against universalized, rigid methods and for pluralism and flexibility proved difficult with Institutional Review Board (IRB) expectations of standardized evaluation techniques. Instead, flexibility translated into the incorporation of survey and interview responses that did not match my observational notes or were otherwise “negative cases” (Merriam 2009: 219; Robson 2011: 154-60; Winkle-Wagner 2009: 134). However, I do not consider these “outliers”³ as anomalous, like more orthodox researchers might, but rather I see them as opportunities to give a diversity of perspectives as opposed to just one.

In order to get multiple perspectives on the potential of an anarcha-feminist pedagogy within feminist academia, my research methods involve the triangulation of qualitative analysis of longitudinal, non-participant observations; open-ended anonymous survey questionnaires; and semi-structured interviews from learning community members of introductory, advanced, and graduate levels of GWSS

³ Such as one survey respondent’s dissent over multiplicitous facilitation that others found helpful.

⁵ Two from the introductory level GWSS course and three from the graduate level GWSS course.



instruction. Before research commenced, I purposefully selected my participant sample from members of learning communities in the GWSS discipline. Although these sites and those within them are not necessarily *anarcha*-feminist, exclusively studying GWSS learning communities provides direct exploration and insight into the concept of anarcha-feminist pedagogy in an explicitly feminist field of academia. I recruited participants by contacting facilitators in the GWSS department through university email. After providing an overview of the procedures, I gained informed consent from participants for classroom observations as well as voluntary surveys and interviews, as per IRB requirements (Creswell 2012: 210-12).

Research sites consisted of the classrooms that I observed as well as an on campus office setting where I conducted interviews. Observations involving descriptive, reflective field notes took place during the fall 2013 semester at a large, public, Research 1 university in the Midwestern United States. The data collection process began with attending each course three times, approximately four weeks apart. Additionally, I distributed anonymous, end-of-semester surveys and consent forms for voluntary interviews to the learning communities, and obtained participant survey responses from learners and consent for 15 interviews. After contacting all willing participants, I was able to interview five learners⁵ and three facilitators. These one-on-one, audio-recorded interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each and involved general, open-ended questions and probing sub-questions on themes related to anarcha-feminism and pedagogy. For example, “Who made decisions about course content and structure?” and “How did the course emphasize cooperation?” I created these unstandardized research measurements myself, attempting to capture as many potential facets of anarchafeminist tendencies within learning communities.

Finally, my research processes concluded with data analysis involving transcribing, coding, and anonymizing my data. First, I transcribed all observations, survey responses, and interview notes. I did not transcribe full interviews (for lack of time), but instead referred to audio recordings to refresh my memory of participants’ comments. Data interpretation, though a subjective task (Creswell 2012: 238), involved inductive, thematic coding analysis in order to filter the prominent anarcha-feminist themes from observation field notes, written survey responses, and audio recorded interviews (Robson 2011: 474). I categorized data by identifying similarities and patterns, then generalized and linked them to anarcha-feminist pedagogical concerns. Lastly, I changed all survey respondent and interviewee names to pseudonyms in order to provide gender neutrality, protect anonymity, and offer a more narrative structure to my analysis.



Analysis of Core Concepts: Opportunities and Obstacles to Anarchafeminist Pedagogy

Echoing anarchist and feminist pedagogies and works on anarcha-feminism, core tendencies of an anarcha-feminist pedagogy include *cooperation*, *reflexivity*, *multiplicity*, *egalitarianism*, *anti-hierarchicalism*, and *autonomy*. I have gleaned these after reading broadly through anarcha-feminist materials, including (but not limited to) zines, books, op-eds, articles, and activism spanning over a century. Some of these are explicitly named in anarcha-feminist texts—like Amster’s visions of anarchist pedagogies that share certain penchants and processes (2002: 438) or Kowal’s supposition about the “several intersecting points of emphasis that shape anarcha-feminism” (2019: 268)—while other tendencies I’ve inferred from authors’ general discussions and concerns. Nevertheless, these are values that arose over and over throughout this history, affirmed by their transformational potentiality and importance. Looking beyond the key figures and texts like Emma Goldman and *Quiet Rumors: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*, I have also been inspired by non-English and/or non-white visionaries, such as Luisa Capetillo, Lucy Parsons, and He Zhen. From the “free love” thinkers of the turn of the twentieth century to the “second wave” feminists of the ‘60s and ‘70s, from *Mujeres Libres* of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement of the ‘30s to the contemporary Bolivian collective, *Mujeres Creando*, I am attentive to a long lineage of anarcha-feminists. I also weave in threads of Indigenous feminist pedagogical refusals that align with anarchafeminism, not to draw false equivalences, but instead to more wholly represent my personal perspective and concerns. Below I outline why each of the tendencies I’ve identified is important to an anarcha-feminist pedagogy, how it manifested in the learning communities I observed, and what opportunities or obstacles seem to exist within academia. Overall, my research reveals that many of these tendencies were indeed already present within the GWSS learning communities I observed, despite not being explicitly labeled as anarcha-feminist. Such tendencies consist of the attention to responsibility amongst learning community members; critical reflection on course materials as well as the self; and multiplicitous, flexible facilitation. Furthermore, opportunities for egalitarian practices include co-producing knowledge, equalizing decision-making, and democratizing voice.

Anarcha-feminist pedagogical tendency	Definition	Example
<i>cooperation</i>	enact responsibility, connections, solidarity, and compassion amongst learning community members	collaborative learning and opportunities between learners, such as group projects



<i>reflexivity</i>	critically reflect on oneself, course materials, institutional surroundings, and educational efficacy	peer reviews, constructive feedback, and suggestions from fellow members of the learning community
<i>multiplicity</i>	attend to the specific contexts, experiences, needs, desires, interests, and knowledges of particular learners, classes, schools, and communities	flexible participation style, assignments, timelines, and course materials
<i>egalitarianism</i>	ameliorate inequity as best as possible to create democratic, voluntary, participatory, horizontal learning communities	knowledge co-produced through brainstorming, operationalizing terms, or revising a document together
<i>anti-hierarchicalism</i>	actively challenge Western claims to hierarchical intellectual authority, expertise, and hegemonic knowledge	transparency and equal say in grading, content, and expectations
<i>autonomy</i>	encourage and empower experimentation without compulsion and coercion	co-facilitation and shared decision-making about discussion patterns

Table 1: Tendencies of an anarcha-feminist pedagogy

Cooperation: “I Felt It Was My Responsibility To Respect And Listen To Others”⁴

Cooperation is central (but not limited) to anarcha-feminist pedagogy, as a way to resist individualistic expectations of academia. Articulated in the seminal anarchist text, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (2006), Peter Kropotkin argues that humans do not just have a responsibility to cooperate with others, but also that cooperation is necessary for humans’ survival as social animals. Many pedagogues, particularly anarchists, possess a similarly essentialized trust that people are naturally cooperative. The work of

⁴ Quoted from survey respondent Li.



Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Sarah Hunt also emphasizes the crucial interconnectedness of Indigenous kinship practices ("In Her Name"). In "Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics," Hunt and Holmes outline the need to decolonize interpersonal relationships, with a focus on queer connections serving as sources of rupture and alliance in the face of settler colonialism (2015: 167). Unfortunately, current schooling does not furnish opportunities for such decolonial relations (Avrich 1980: 12; DeLeon 2008: 130; DeLeon 2006: 85-86; Mueller 2012: 20-21). DeLeon affirms that compassion and solidarity can be nurtured in educational contexts by "stressing the importance of cooperation in establishing a school community, finding new ways of classroom evaluation, and modeling cooperative behavior in school organizational structures" (2006: 85). The GWSS courses I observed provided opportunities for DeLeon's endeavors at "modeling cooperative behavior," through verbal encouragement from facilitators, collaborative learning opportunities between learners, and the ability of members of the learning communities to consider and affirm one another.

Showing a sense of responsibility to and care for others in the learning community, facilitators voiced explicit encouragement to learners. For example, one facilitator began every class period by opening the space to questions and comments about coursework, expectations, academics, and life in general. Not only did interviewees from this learning community note that this was helpful, I too saw these "check-ins" as mutually beneficial for the learners to give feedback and the facilitator to receive it. Though not explicitly anarcho-feminist, this facilitators' words show an opportunity already present in GWSS learning communities for enacting mutualism through responsiveness and encouragement to others. Learners also demonstrated cooperation with and responsibility to each other through collaborative learning opportunities, such as large discussions and group projects. In one learning community, co-facilitation (i.e. learners calling on each other) required learners to engage with one another and not just with the facilitator. At times, I sensed some disengaged body language and distraction from learners' electronic devices—which could, in fact, be mechanisms for *increasing* concentration and attention to academic tasks—but most were attentive to their respective learning communities. In one, several learners apologized for talking over each other, which implied attentiveness. Even dissent was kind and compassionate between learners, as both survey and interview respondents that members of the learning community were able to maintain respect: interactions between learners were "sometimes challenging but in a respectful manner" (Rani) as well as "[f]riendly, but still able to debate" (Sen). Responsibility to and cooperation with others in the learning community was even addressed in one group by the creation of explicit community expectations and agreements.



Interestingly though, responsibility to others seemingly came from a sense of needing to maintain order within the ruled space of academia. As evidenced by Hadley, “I did feel the need to make sure that my opinions would not offend [sic] anyone when I expressed them.” Also, cooperation was seen as a requisite for participating in—and therefore passing—the course: “Yes [the course emphasized cooperation]—we had several group projects in class and a bigger one that was presented in class...” (Isa). Thus, there is a contradiction between genuinely feeling responsible to a community of which one is a part (what an anarcha-feminist pedagogue would hope for) and feeling the *need* to cooperate as an externally imposed expectation (e.g., as part of a graded assignment).⁵ Paz seemed frustrated by the lack of responsibility amongst members of the learning community because a “protectiveness” over each other resulted in not “pushing” colleagues intellectually. Certainly an anarcha-feminist learning community should emphasize respect and responsibility, but should also encourage disagreement as a chance for reflection.

Reflexivity: “We Were Encouraged to Look at Ourselves in this Course”

In some learning communities I observed, responsibility to one another linked to reflexivity. Reflection on oneself, institutional surroundings, and educational efficacy is indicative of anarcha-feminist attention to *reflexivity*. Influenced by a Freirean philosophy of conscientização and dialogic process (Freire 2010: 109; Freire 2012: 80-81, 88-89), anarcha-feminist pedagogy analyzes language and behavior, interrogates positionality, is aware of omissions, accounts for limitations, and evolves fluidly in educational contexts (Armaline 2009: 136-37; Chattopadhyay 2019: 37; Haworth 2012: 1; hooks 1994: 77; Janik-Marusov et al. 2011: 1527-28, 1534-35; Kincheloe 2008: 49; Mott 2018: 427; Soderling 2016: 50; Villaverde 2008: 135). Returning to *As We Have Always Done*, Leanne Simpson affirms the “fluid, dynamic, and responsive” nature of traditional Nishnaabeg knowledges that are meant “to build strong societies of individuals who are functioning as their best selves” (2017: 122). Simpson also encourages continual reflections on rather than “a singular, shallow interpretation of Nishnaabeg thought” in service to holding both ourselves and each other accountable (2017: 122). Feminist pedagogical theorist Leila Villaverde explains the importance of this reflection and evolution: as forms of oppression mutate, so must forms of resistance (2008: 133). In other words, we cannot assume that our own personal transformation or that of schooling is ever “done.” Thus, reflexivity is necessary for acknowledging and resisting the multiplicitous forms of oppression, particularly to resist indifference, complacency, and stagnation within the settler colonial space of US academia.

⁵ See Rouhani 2012: 1737.



Respondents described an encouragement and capacity to critically reflect on themselves, their surroundings (e.g., school, society, etc.), and/or course content, which proved helpful for both learners and facilitators. Reflexivity was apparent when learners analyzed their own thoughts and experiences, those of the authors they read, and the societal structures that influenced these. The self-reflection and critical thinking inherent to this practice was meant to better inform themselves not just as students, but as well-rounded people. This is similar to “anarchist educational programmes [that] also involved a commitment to political and moral education, in the sense of challenging the dominant values of the capitalist system... as well as fostering the social virtues” (Suissa 2012: 105). Hadley covered this most succinctly: “We were encouraged mostly to look at ourselves in this course and how the topics were reflected in everyday life. ...I think we were more asked to critique and reflect on society and how we affected it and how it affected us.” Members of the learning communities I observed were personally reflexive in attempts to improve and redefine themselves, which echoes the analysis and reflection on positionality within a classroom that many scholars describe as necessary for feminist educational experiences (Fisher 2001: 34-36; hooks 1994: 61; Janik-Marusov et al. 2011: 1523). Many learners appreciated time spent in and out of class reflecting on course concepts and how they applied to their own lives, and learners lamented when they saw these components missing. Though working with other learners provided different perspectives and opportunities for reflection, Blake would have liked more discussion in order to “think deeper” and Paz didn’t feel intellectually “pushed.”

Opportunities for reflexivity weren’t always apparent in the GWSS learning communities I observed. Two respondents from the same learning community saw little to no encouragement for critique or reflection on themselves, others in the course, or the academic institution, except for peer editing. Paz expressed further disappointment that learners took course readings at “face value” and suggested that the facilitator could have encouraged a collaborative, reflexive process for more nuanced understanding of the material. Noting this lack of space for critical reflection, learners stated that more constructive feedback and suggestions from members of the learning community would have helped in order to know where they needed to grow as learners. Removing or ignoring reflection deprives a learning community of the possibility for in-depth critiques of and connections between (inter)personal experiences and white supremacist, settler colonial structures. In this way, a crucial part of the learning experience—explicitly fostering more in-depth engagement and personal growth—is at risk of being lost.



Multiplicity: “The Instructor Let the Students Head off in Any Direction”⁶

Pedagogical flexibility arises from an acknowledgment of the multiplicity of sources of social and political transformation. In anarchist milieus, these multiplicities of—rather than singular—responses are often referred to as a “diversity of tactics” (Gelderloos 2013: 10). As there is no monolithic, “best” method for teaching and learning, another tendency of an anarcha-feminist pedagogy is that of *multiplicity*. Like anarchist and feminist pedagogies, an anarcha-feminist pedagogy must attend to specificity and hence may look at the contextual lives, experiences, needs, desires, interests, and knowledges of particular students, classes, schools, or communities (Akyea and Sandoval 2005; DeLeon 2006: 80; Illich 1971: 78; Kincheloe 2008: 32-33). For example, resistances and alternatives to schooling must avoid being ethnocentric, that is, acting like intellectual missionaries or colonizers (Grande 2004: 3; Malott 2012; 281; Simpson 2017: 149-50). This echoes Danika Medak-Saltzman (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), Deepti Misri, and Beverly Weber’s work based in critical disability studies, women of color feminisms, and Indigenous notions of wellbeing. The authors reject the normalized practices of settler colonial educational institutions that “harm peoples whose bodies do not comply with maximized exploitation of labor or are disabled by those same exploitations” and, instead, they suggest “clearing space” for a multiplicity of non-normative embodiments and temporalities (2022: 2, 7). In fact, an anarcha-feminist pedagogy informed by anarchist pedagogical theories is against the kind of standardization, prescriptions, sameness, and dogmatism that the settler academy requires (Armaline 2009: 139-40; DeLeon 2012: 8; Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012: 23; Love 2012: 60). In a discussion of Emma Goldman’s “anarcho-feminism,” Hewitt explains that this aversion to prescription is due to the fact that “a fixed ideology is a closed system, and is thus inherently authoritarian” (2007: 314). Recognizing there are, as one facilitator said during our interview, different personalities to “orchestrate,” we as anarcha-feminist pedagogues might consider collectively tailoring projects, assignments, and course materials to student interests.⁷ It may seem daunting to open decision-making to an entire learning community, yet it is a clear way of taking disability justice seriously by including the many needs of learners and resisting the rigidity of the institution.

Motivated by the need for flexibility in the GWSS learning communities I observed, opportunities for pedagogical multiplicity occurred through facilitators’ teaching style and learners’ engagement. A facilitator from one learning community and survey respondents from another felt that their respective courses offered multiple ways of learning, for example, “...discussion of readings & issues, powerpoints [sic], actual readings, papers and presentation of info. ...Our [facilitator] was really great and found fun ways to depict concepts” (Isa). Li continued in describing how another facilitator

⁶ Quoted from survey respondent Kai.

⁷ See Janik-Marusov et al. 2011: 1533-34; Villaverde 2008: 136.



embraced multiplicity in the presentation and instruction of information: “we looked at multiple genres and studied different mediums (text, visuals, documentary, audio, etc.) as tools of learning/teaching.” When facilitators alternated the discussion patterns, included small group work, and even lectured—if needed or desired by learners—they rejected rigidity in their learning communities and displayed multiplicity.

Multiplicity was also present in the collaborative construction of assignments’ expectations and timelines. For example, facilitators changed deadlines after hearing learners’ rationales, as reflected by Jordan and Nat’s respective comments: “we had a schedule but we moved at our own pace” and “[the facilitator] was always open for suggestions.” This allowed for learners to be flexible as well, as explained by Li: “...the assignments were quite open-ended and *we were able to tweak them for our own interests*” (emphasis added). One learning community’s project even allowed learners to choose their own reading material and thereby choose their entry into course themes. Providing content in multiple ways was positive for those whose learning styles varied, as this appeared both engaging (by mixing things up) as well as helpful (for understanding the same thing in different ways).

While learners certainly benefited from these decisions to cater to multiple learning styles, several obstacles arose when, ultimately, the facilitators chose how many and which learning styles to cater to. Learners had to advocate for change and, therefore, flexibility required the facilitators’ permission. For example, asking for alterations to deadlines or presentation of material in multiple formats should be a collective process, not up to learners to *ask for* and facilitators to *allow*. Maintaining a gatekeeper-like status, in which facilitators make the ultimate decisions about what is requested of them, creates an unequal relationship between learners and facilitators, despite outwardly seeming flexible. This is because, as Chattopadhyay warns, “whitesupremacist pedagogy universalizes students of different classes, genders, cultures and traditions, stifling creativity and autonomy by *subsuming student ideas, challenges, and explanations under the instructor*” (2019: 37, emphasis added). Also, having many and varied activities and teaching techniques could be multiplicitous and inclusive, but also possibly time-consuming, stilted, and confusing. Gael agreed: “I enjoyed the topics, but wish the format had been different. there [sic] were a lot of group activities, especially artistic or visual, which is not at all how I learn. [What would you change about this course, if anything?] More adaptation to how students seem to process material.” So, while some felt the myriad of activities was helpful, at least one learner felt it was constraining. It felt similarly constraining when multiplicity was absent in teaching, as made clear when Sen wrote about whether learners were offered multiple ways of learning: “Not really, reading, talking in depth about theory + criticism, *little variants within that*. I wish there had been some aspects of ‘lecture’ + not just discussion” (emphasis added). The challenge for us as anarchafeminist pedagogues is to



balance multiple, flexible options that are not solely chosen by the facilitator. It is important to co-create an appropriate variety of community expectations, syllabi, course content, and learning materials *with* learners so they have a stake and a say in this process.

Egalitarianism: “Our Interactions Made Us All Seem Equal”

Much like anarchist and feminist pedagogues who desire equitable, democratic, voluntary, participatory, horizontal educational spaces, anarcha-feminism emphasizes *egalitarianism* within learning communities (Akyea and Sandoval 2005; Amster 2002: 436; Armaline 2009: 137; DeLeon 2008: 127; DeLeon 2009: 267, 269-70; DeLeon 2006: 82; Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012: 18; Kincheloe 2008: 1; Malott 2012: 278; Mueller 2012: 17-18; Villaverde 2008: 123, 127-28). This is a means to refuse (as best as possible) the hierarchies that arise within contemporary US academia, so that learners might meaningfully participate and develop intellectually. Extending anarchists’ and feminists’ assessment of social and political inequalities as unjust, an anarcha-feminist pedagogy also sees a need to ameliorate inequity in specific learning communities, not to mention inequity in access to education in general (Suissa 2012: 63). In order to strive for egalitarianism, many anarchist and feminist pedagogical theorists underscore relating to students with compassion, empathy, love, nurturance, encouragement, responsiveness, sensitivity, and passion (Akyea and Sandoval 2005; Avrich 1980: 13; Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona 2009: 4-6; DeLeon and Ross 2010: 9; Heckert, Shannon, and Willis 2012: 18; Janik-Marusov et al. 2011: 1533; Kincheloe 2008: 3; Love 2012: 55, 58; Mueller 2012: 22; Ropers-Huilman 2009: 50). Additionally, Cisneros reveals that Indigenous Writing Pedagogies (IWP) require an intertwined co-construction of knowledges, relationality to each other and land, and the valuation of what all learners bring to the classroom setting (2022: 1769-70). At the same time, we as anarchafeminist pedagogues must not be naïve to the reality bell hooks speaks of when renouncing “the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination” (1994: 18). Yet, hooks realized that, despite encountering such systems throughout higher education, “professors *did not have to be dictators* in the classroom” (1994: 18, emphasis added). In other words, domination is a choice—one which we can refuse. As I discuss below, the impositions of the institutional structures were a major obstacle to challenging dictatorial facilitation. Nevertheless there were still opportunities for expanding anarcha-feminist pedagogical practices of egalitarianism through democratizing voice, co-producing knowledge, and equalizing decision-making within GWSS learning communities.

In all three learning communities, I observed a kind, encouraging atmosphere, conversational discussions, and even friendly humor, which humanized the facilitators



and fostered a more egalitarian learning community. Many research participants commented and agreed upon this: “[The instructor] was really good about not creating a hierarchy in the classroom + our interactions made us all seem equal” (Mika). One facilitator said that learners actually controlled the content of discussions and that, for the most part, there was equal sharing. If not, then the facilitator would ask learners’ questions posted online as an attempt to allow some quieter learning community members to feel more included or possibly even comfortable chiming in. These casual, supportive learning communities included as many members as possible, thereby modeling an opportunity for egalitarianism.

Several respondents noted that despite the facilitator having the ultimate say in things like grading, learners nevertheless collaborated in and contributed to the learning community: the instructor “made most decisions but kept us [learners] informed and involved where it was possible” (Li) and “structured an open discussion... [in which] students had the freedom to move the discussion in the desired direction” (Kai). Alex described a diplomatic and inclusive environment and felt the facilitator heard everyone’s opinion. Blake echoed this inclusivity, stating “there was not a time when I didn’t feel respected [by the facilitator].” Involving and respecting learners’ voices proved necessary for fostering more equitable relations within the learning communities I observed.

Further attempts at encouraging egalitarianism were demonstrated by activities and discussions in which members of the learning communities produced knowledge together. At least once in every learning community I observed, members brainstormed, operationalized terms, or revised a document together. Also, when learners led discussions and presentations, they became “experts” on particular chosen topics by explaining concepts to others, thereby distributing some power to learners. Coproducing knowledge became a way to level some of the unequal classroom structures that typically privilege a singular intellectual authority.

Learners frequently expressed that the GWSS communities leaned more towards equality than dictatorship, but ultimately the “existing systems of domination” crept into the classroom regardless of any participant’s explicit intentions (hooks 1994: 18). Denying this would be tantamount to the colorblind “racial belonging” and “psychic freedom” that whites experience in institutional settings (DiAngelo 2011: 62). Or, we can look to the field of what Matt Brim calls “Rich Queer Studies” to witness the ways that class stratifications (and its gendered, racialized dynamics) are glossed over in academia, even in supposedly subversive spaces (2020: 64). A specific obstacle to egalitarianism arose around the issue of knowledgeability. In other words, learning communities felt unequal when individuals’ knowledge of a subject differed significantly and, furthermore, when some were able to express it more comfortably than others. For instance, Hadley wrote, “some students [sic] voices were definitely heard more. I feel



like the students who were louder or more aggressive got to talk the most.” Similarly grappling with equalizing interactions in the classroom, Rouhani explains that “those with greater knowledge and experience dominated discussions and others felt scared to speak...” (2012: 1734). This certainly reflects the concerns of DiAngelo, Brim, and countless others: that supposedly “equitable” relations within academia are a comfort if not an illusion that only a few (re: white, affluent) learners are able to access. Though it is nearly impossible to truly equalize all knowledge with which learners enter into the community, it is advisable for us to still employ collaboration in order to co-create knowledge. Rouhani adds that collaboration is a means to achieve egalitarianism, because “when this knowledge differential turned more into a reciprocal relationship of exchanging ideas, questions, and challenges, discussions became critically productive” (2012: 1734). Several opportunities, such as co-producing knowledge, offer solutions to what I observed as obstacles to the anarcha-feminist tendency toward egalitarianism, but still cannot tame the hierarchical structure of contemporary US academia.

Anti-Hierarchicalism: “I Don’t Want to Grade Them But I Have To”

In order to resist being ruled, anarchist and feminist pedagogues claim it is possible to subvert the educational system from within individual classroom contexts. Alternatively, they propose challenging the interpersonal and institutional hierarchies on which academia rests. Rouhani is an excellent example of this optimism that an individual anarchistic classroom can refuse inequality within a formal educational institution (2012: 1734). An anarcha-feminist pedagogy, too, explicitly acknowledges and actively challenges the claims to hierarchical intellectual authority, expertise, and hegemonic knowledge—as well as neutrality, objectivity, detachment, rationality, positivism, and “Truth”—much like feminist theorists’ opposition to masculinist expectations (Campbell 2012; DeLeon 2006: 75; Juris 2007: 165; Kincheloe 2008: 27, 52, 108; Love 2012: 54; Suissa 2010: 57; Villaverde 2008: 124). This reinforces that we as anarcha-feminist pedagogues must be wary of and continue to challenge elements of schooling that privilege and legitimize certain voices. However, claiming the ability to fully refuse through *anti-hierarchicalism*—even and especially on a small-scale— overlooks the deeply ingrained and inescapable expectations within an institution predicated on ruled space (Soderling 2016: 51). Settler colonial education is predicated on the ranking of Western knowledges over non-Western ones, the ranking of resources and research dollars above human and more-than-human well-being. The dissociative work of Native residential and boarding schools on Turtle Island as well as the land grabs initiated by the Morrill Act—which benefitted an estimated fifty-two US universities—are both testament to this (Lee and Ahtone 2020; Ornelas 2021: 95).



Expectations of hierarchical educational spaces and obstacles to challenging hierarchy are clear in the GWSS learning communities I observed, due to the practice and promotion of facilitator-based decision-making and intellectual authority on assignments, assessment, materials, etc. Survey respondents commented on the hierarchical structure of their learning community, noting that facilitators had the final say in grading, course content, and structure, to the point that there was very little transparency. Rani's survey comment emphasizes this: "Unclear how [the] final grade is being determined by the professor." One facilitator admitted, "I don't want to grade them but I have to," and although the facilitator did provide formal grades to the university at the end of the semester, the facilitator at least offered meetings with learners to have a conversation about the judgment of the content of learners' work.

Assuming that facilitators are the ultimate authority in these learning communities not only led learners to defer to them in decision-making, but in knowledge as well. In one learning community, the facilitator decided who talked, learners reflected their thoughts directly to the facilitator rather than to the other learners, and the learners often didn't speak unless prompted. Clarifying questions were often directed to the facilitators, who were seen as intellectual authorities and, interestingly, several respondents even wanted more authority in terms of foundational information and active, guiding instruction. Dylan said, "We [learners] are given ideas [by the facilitator] + different ways to interact + think about those ideas." The implication here is that, because they know best, facilitators impart conceptual knowledge and methods for examination, emphasized by the phrase "We are *given* ideas" (emphasis added). Therefore, hierarchy existed based on the facilitators' authority on the material as well as what Blake called a structural "power dynamic" that kept learners feeling fully equal to the facilitator.

The expectations of the academic institution posed particular constraints to antihierarchicalism by shaping the learning communities I observed into hierarchical spaces. Indeed, academia is not neutral, but counter to an egalitarian ideal in its reinforcement of harmful social, political, and economic hierarchies shaped by ideologies of the larger social structure (Armeline 2009: 140; Haworth 2012: 2-4; Illich 1971: 99-102; Kincheloe 2008: 2, 7; Mueller 2012: 27-28). In the contemporary US, this includes "biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism [which] have distorted education" (hooks 1994: 29). Anarchist pedagogues, such as Rouhani, often assert their ability to challenge these inherent hierarchies by describing learning communities that "were structured in an anti-hierarchical format with me as the professor acting primarily as a participant..." (2012: 1734). But even Rouhani, after claiming to be an equal participant in the learning community, admitted that impositions of hierarchy were inescapable: "I say anti- rather than non-hierarchical, because while critical of power hierarchies in the classroom, *we nonetheless had to admit*



their presence” (2012: 1734, emphasis added). As Paz put it, feminist educational spaces should be equal, but in academia it’s difficult since there are always hierarchical structures and an inability to question the facilitator. This interviewee believed there needed to be a leveling of knowledge and power. However, as illustrated, learners still expected that facilitators can and should hold intellectual authority in learning communities, with several respondents even desiring more “top-down” facilitation. Therefore, despite anti-hierarchical efforts that we as anarcha-feminist pedagogues might make within academia, learning communities, such as those I observed, will still exhibit hierarchical characteristics because of institutional and interpersonal expectations of the larger educational environment.

Autonomy: “I Felt Intellectually Constrained”⁸

Because its roots lie in anarchism’s desire for freedom from rule, many authors cite *autonomy* as central to anarcha-feminism (L. Brown 1993: 1272-8; H. Ehrlich 1996: 139; Kensinger 2007: 264-65; Marso 2007: 85; Zero 1993: 4). Commitment to learner and facilitator autonomy within anarcha-feminist pedagogical practices means encouraging and empowering individuals and communities to experiment, learn, and implement educational practices without compulsion and coercion as well as form their own visions of egalitarianism, which allows for self-determining, agentic personal and communal growth (Armaline 2009: 136-37; Avrich 1980: 7; DeLeon 2008: 127; DeLeon 2006: 82; Illich 1971: 73; Love 2012: 53; Rouhani 2012: 1729, 1737; Suissa 2012: 75; Todd 2012: 75). Rouhani sees an anarchistic learning community as autonomous, one that independently creates and self-governs an educational space supposedly beyond the purview of the institution it was housed under (2012: 1733). Lucy Nicholas is similarly concerned with how to maximize the autonomy of the student subject, making it as free from coercion as possible, considering that “learning how to be a self” is central to educational discourse (2012: 243). Theorist on individualism, L. Brown maintains that this autonomy is possible because: individuals, for the anarchist, are best suited to decide for themselves how to run the affairs of their own lives; they are best served when left unrestrained by authority and unhampered by relationships of domination. The ontological basis for these beliefs is an understanding that individuals are free and responsible agents who are fit to determine their own development (1989: 2).

As a caution against libertarian adherence to autonomy that borders on individualism, the desire for freedom from rule must also be tempered with a healthy dose of responsibility to others (discussed above under “Cooperation”). Indigenous feminists like Stephanie Lumsden (Hupa) and Sarah Deer (Muscogee) have asserted the

⁸ Quoted from survey respondent Rani.



connection between bodily sovereignty for Indigenous women and girls, in particular, and the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. With this in mind, I am attentive to autonomy as of critical importance to Native learners, again, not in defense of individualism but as an acknowledgement of the political stakes of self-determination.

From what I observed, obstacles to maintaining autonomy and selfdetermination include institutional and interpersonal constraints within the learning communities, such as both facilitators' and learners' inability to work and make decisions completely independently from the university. Facilitators whom I interviewed explained their feelings of being constricted by limitations to what they could include in course content, how they could structure courses, and how little time they felt they had in a given class period or semester. Similarly, some learners felt coerced into forms of learning or communicating that perhaps were not their ideal. For example, assignments that required creativity or class interactions that relied on public speaking limited their freedom as learners: "Sometimes *there is pressure to talk* in class, but that is because we know *our grade is dependent on it*" (Mika, emphasis added). Neither facilitators nor learners were able to evade the structural dictation of the duration and format of the learning communities' meetings.

Learners also felt an unequal power dynamic stifled their ability to act autonomously due to the presence of an educational institution that privileged facilitators. Research participants referred to mutual respect on paper and even in practice, but still reported unequal flexibility and agency due to the fact that facilitators had more decision-making abilities based on their paid positions in the hierarchical university system. Exemplifying this, learners' comments indicated that the mere presence of inequitable knowledge and assessment was constraining: "We are *learning from the Prof* so I don't always see her as an equal" (Casey, my emphasis). Hence, the educational institution legitimized facilitators' intellectual authority at the expense of learners' freedom to choose course content, ability to assert their own knowledges, and equalize input in decision-making.

Further constraints in the learning communities arose around interpersonal issues of differing identities and experiences. Isa explained the pressure to not discuss difference and inequality: "Being a minority was a little daunting because my perspective is different from theirs [white students'] and I didn't want to offend anyone or be singled out." On the other hand, some learners felt constrained by the expectation to maintain certain decorum, as if their own dominant voices or privileged experiences would negatively affect the discussion: "...since I do have privilege [sic] surrounding my identity, I often didn't want to share my opinion in fear of coming off *nieve* [sic] of my identity" (Nat). Fear of being "singled out" in an already marginalized social location led some, like Isa, to feel constrained, as if they could not act autonomously or genuinely. Conversely, though not nearly as grievous in consequence, others in more dominant



social locations didn't express vulnerability for fear of appearing ignorant in front of other learning community members, even if such comments might spark crucial debate or discussion about things like privilege and oppression.

Maintaining autonomy proved particularly difficult in the face of the constraints presented by the formal academic institution, such as interpersonal and institutional inequality as well as limitations to course content, structure, and time. Anarcha-feminist pedagogues like myself may attempt to refuse such constraints within educational institutions, but learning communities cannot be truly autonomous and agentic if members are unable to work and make decisions independent of the institution. Even Rouhani, who was repeatedly optimistic about the ability of small-scale learning communities to remain autonomous within academia, admitted there are challenges to implementing an anarchist pedagogy within a "primarily coercive institution" (2012: 1737). Certainly, facilitators I observed expressed a need for strategies to get learners to engage without forcing them; however, there were few evident opportunities for empowering learners' autonomy and organizing around individual interests. Cofacilitation, one of the few examples I observed, seemed helpful in empowering individuals to make their own decisions about discussion patterns. However, any anarcha-feminist strategies for autonomy within feminist academia were still enacted under the control of the settler institution and could not guarantee refusal of the constraining academic and interpersonal expectations.

Concluding Thoughts: Results & Recommendations

This paper has attempted to explore some of the key elements of an anarchafeminist pedagogy as well as the opportunities and obstacles for these elements within contemporary US feminist academia. Within the GWSS learning communities I observed, utilizing particular anarcha-feminist tendencies such as cooperation, reflexivity, multiplicity, and egalitarianism, provided ways of refusing the governance of the educational institution. Feelings of cooperation and responsibility to a learning community were best fostered through verbal encouragement from facilitators, collaborative learning opportunities between learners, and the regard that members of the learning communities gave one another. Encouraging critical reflection and analysis on thoughts and experiences, course materials, and societal structures was indicative of anarcha-feminist attention to reflexivity. Multiplicity was best reflected in flexible instruction, discussions, assignments, and expectations. Though egalitarianism proved difficult to achieve, several opportunities arose for democratizing voice, equalizing decision-making, and co-producing knowledge.



Unfortunately, obstacles to challenging hierarchy and maintaining autonomy made it difficult for GWSS learning communities to truly practice resistance and refusal. Whether it was the institution itself that legitimized the voices of facilitators, the facilitator's position in classrooms as the assessors, or learners' desire for an intellectual authority, hierarchy was present and made it difficult to break down those barriers between one another. Also, facilitators and learners were unable to work and make decisions completely autonomously and independently from institutional guidelines and limitations and, therefore, the GWSS learning communities I observed failed to evade the governance and ruled space of academia.

Obviously, context matters here. There are risks to claiming an anarcha-feminist pedagogy, which may have hindered any facilitators' or learners' attempts to subvert the interpersonal and institutional expectations on their learning community. That is to say, the ability to practice an anarcha-feminist pedagogy in higher education might be more or less possible depending on the physical and social location of its proponents. It would likely be easier for a tenured professor who is a white cisman in a humanities discipline to utilize some of these tendencies than for a precariously employed, gender nonconforming person of color in a STEM field to do so. Bodily and financial security could provide more room for experimentation in the classroom because such risk-taking would be less detrimental to one's personal status. Implementing an anarcha-feminist pedagogy might also be easier if learners are more open and amenable to the facilitator, since learners come with their own prejudices, whether they recognize it or not. And, as Mott points out, the terms anarchism, feminism, and anarcha-feminism are each a "loaded concept" that many facilitators and learners alike will approach with preconceived notions (2018: 430). What is more, the site of the college or university itself might make a difference in how and why these tendencies of anarcha-feminism are taken up. A large, public, Research 1 institution, such as the one I observed, undoubtedly has incorporated language of "diversity" and "inclusivity" into its mission, despite past and present day violences. How, then, can we ensure that an anarcha-feminist pedagogy is not similarly co-opted? Under what conditions could an anarcha-feminist pedagogy be enacted successfully in academia, if any? Are smaller institutions, such as community colleges or liberal arts schools, more amenable to an anarcha-feminist pedagogy? And what would "success" look like, anyway? Alternatively, how could potential "failures" be used as spaces of growth?

Where my work is limited, I hope other researchers, educators, organizers, and those interested in anarcha-feminism will continue. Though contemporary US academia is seemingly unable to be fully refused from within, there may be other opportunities for exploring and enacting anarcha-feminist tendencies through pedagogy. Critical—in particular, feminist—pedagogues should consider, are there other tendencies of anarcha-feminist resistance to governance useful to learning communities? What



subjects or disciplines lend themselves best to an anarcha-feminist pedagogy, if any? How might an anarcha-feminist pedagogue assess students and be assessed, if at all? Certainly these and many more questions deserve attention and are relevant to more than just anarcha-feminists, namely feminists in academia. One (hesitant) recommendation includes taking inspiration from the Indigenous pedagogies presented by learning communities like the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning in Yellowknife, Canada, which may be useful for looking beyond Western epistemologies and settings. Anna Lydia Svalastog, Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree), and Ketil Lenert Hansen (Sámi) clarify that, although fields like GWSS and Indigenous Studies have made their way into the academy, ultimately, they have “not been able to overcome the hegemonic system” (2021: 13). Therefore, the authors aver that such relational Knowledges are best fostered outside of Western educational systems. Are there similar Knowledges, land-based pedagogies, and ancestral practices that we as Indigenous peoples can utilize to refuse settler colonial institutions and their rigid forms of knowledge production? Additionally, Ferrer’s anarchistic Escuela Moderna, Illich’s voluntary education, and free skools’ decentralization of knowledge are all promising places for truly not being governed, yet are beyond the scope of this paper. It is my hope that discussions of anarcha-feminism will converse with more voices in the future in order to expand both pedagogical and feminist theory.

It may seem tenuous for an ideology like anarcha-feminism to be let into the fold of dominant US educational models. Feminist academia, on the other hand, is already ensconced in this setting and could at least benefit from giving anarcha-feminism credence and including this point of view on radical, anti-oppressive pedagogy. An anarcha-feminist pedagogy informed by Indigenous feminisms can, in fact, help to disrupt formalized settler colonial educational practices by seeking alternatives on stolen land. This is not so much a call to decolonize the academy, which has been a site of land grabs, extractive research practices, scientific racism, misrepresentation, erasure, tokenization, and outright white supremacy. Instead, I believe that an anarchafeminist pedagogy demands *generative refusal*. Because anarcha-feminism is meant to resist rule, true refusal (à la Simpson) must acknowledge that recuperation is not attainable within the space of contemporary US academia and that we as its proponents must turn away from spaces that have caused harm for so many of us and our kin, human and more-than-human. However, anarcha-feminism and feminist academia may find common enemies, goals, and tactics, such as similar struggles against hierarchy, efforts for egalitarianism, and attendance to the interrelatedness of all forms of oppression (Hewitt 2007: 317; Shannon 2009: 69-70). As a discipline that critiques hierarchy and emphasizes equality, in order for feminist academia to put these beliefs into practice, it must welcome meaningful consideration of anarcha-feminism as both theoretical subject and pedagogical practice. On a theoretical level, including anarchafeminism’s anti-statism and anti-capitalism means expanding the subject matter in feminist



academia. Enacting an anarcha-feminist pedagogy in learning communities requires commitment to cooperation, reflexivity, multiplicity, egalitarianism, antihierarchicalism, and autonomy.

In light of recent protests against settler state oppression, murderous misogyny, systems of carcerality, and white supremacist violence (e.g. the MMIWG2S Movement, the Movement for Black Lives, the 2020 uprisings, etc.), if feminist academia in the US fails to include anarcha-feminism's radical voices, then it does so at a time when these critiques are more crucial and relevant than ever. At the end of the twentieth century, Leeder echoed this sentiment: anarcha-feminism "may be old in its traditions but it is strangely modern in its relevance to today's world" (1996: 148). As a potential strategy to resist rule inside and outside of settler colonial educational institutions, feminists must consider an anarcha-feminist pedagogy as critical for creating radical pedagogical change.

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