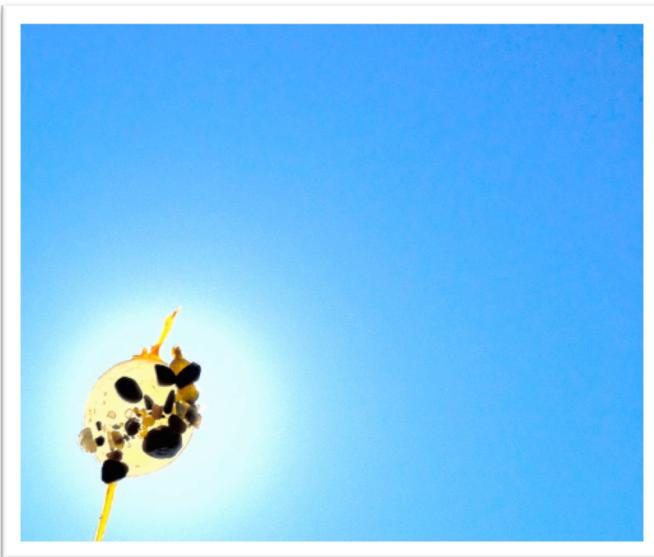


# On Collaboration: Starting With Each Other

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I would like to invite you to breathe, deeply. To remember why you do this work—this work for liberation. Think of the communities your work is in service of—hold them in your mind—feel them. What are your wishes and dreams for them? Let's remember why we're here, what brought us into this work of daring to create movements that value all of us; daring to assert that Queer Asian and Pacific Islanders matter; *that we matter.*



Let us ground in all those who have come before us and honor them. All the freedom fighters who have made this moment possible. All of the queer Asian and Pacific Islander (API) folks in particular that have gone the hard road of being the only queer person or the only person of color, or the only asian, or the only pacific islander. Let us ground in the legacy of racial justice and queer liberation organizing and community building, of immigrant justice work and radical women of color and trans liberation work. Everyone who has wanted something more than criminalization, isolation, shame, self hatred and invisibility.

Let us ground in and honor all of the people who are currently fighting for us. For all of us in this room—each and every one of us. For the first queer API person we ever met; or whose writings we read or who helped make it possible for us to be who we are. For the first time we were ever in a room full of queer APIs. For the queer APIs in the south, rural lands, small cities who don't have access to this type of space and belonging. For the queer API folks who have families that do not support them. For everyone currently involved in and committed to building queer API community. For all of the people fighting for liberation in this country and around the globe in big and small ways whether they are working for food justice, reproductive justice, the community caretakers, child care workers, prison abolitionists, healers and radical educators.

And finally, let us ground in and honor those yet to come, the people who we do this work for. We hope we can give them intact queer API communities and organizing. We vow to be able to pass on concrete, substantial tools and learnings to them; and wish for them a deep sense of pride, belonging and dignity in who they are, in all of their complexities. Our work and our time is responsible to them and we work so that they may have a lighter burden to carry...

I do this work in service of community. I tell my story with the knowing that our stories are tools for liberation. I speak knowing that all of our voices are important. I speak to leave evidence for the people like me who are searching for reflection and recognition and a “yes, we exist.” I speak to leave evidence for folks who have been told that disability is not as important as race, or that gender justice will have to wait until after class equality is won. For folks who have been told that how you feel is less important than what you think; for those who don't have the luxury of being able to rattle off 10, even 5, writers or books that reflect their identities or experiences. Those of us who straddle the lines between multiple oppressed

communities. For those of us who are working to *end violence for all of us, not just some of us*. For those of us who truly believe that no one's safety is more important than anyone else's, *even when we feel unsafe*.

I want to specifically name my privilege *as a disabled person*, when so many of us are locked up in prisons, institutions, group homes, or in the back rooms of our families' houses. I have a level of mobility that many disabled folks don't have and I know it is a huge reason I am visible. As someone who is physically disabled and does not have mental or cognitive disabilities, I know how privileged it is to get to speak from the mic to a crowd full of people and be listened to...

I was asked to speak about collaboration and how we build alliances for social change. There is so much I could say about it, but really, to me, it comes down to our relationships. It's not about the smartest analysis or the fanciest organizing campaign with sleek billboards, buttons and stickers. It's about the quality of our relationships with each other, how well you can build community and how you treat people.

If we are truly committed to ending oppression and violence, then we must be committed to each other. Then we must live out of the simple truth that *we need each other*. We need each other. And this is where I would like to center my comments for today.

The best analysis in the world is useless if we don't treat each other well. If we don't invest our time and energy in learning how to love each other better, if we can't build relationships that can last more than 2-5 years. If we can't commit to practicing working out hard dynamics in our relationships or if we are recreating the very conditions we are fighting against inside of our collectives, organizations, and movements.

It doesn't matter how much you know, if you're not willing to work on your heart and your relationship with yourself. If you don't know how to say, "I'm sorry," "that really hurt my feelings," or "I messed up." None of this matters if you are interested in staying "right" all the time or always wanting to only talk about the places you're oppressed and never talk about the places you are privileged.

All of us here know that oppression needs to be ended. All of us have been moved to come out here today. But then what? Our movements don't lack people being inspired and motivated, it lacks what comes next: the day-in and day-out work to end oppression and violence that is not glamorous or easy.

Take the day-to-day work of being an ally to queer disabled API folks, for example. The work of learning about your able bodied privilege, valuing the voices of disabled queer APIs, making sure your events are accessible, fighting ableism in public *and* private, educating your fellow able bodied queer API comrades about their able-bodied privilege. As a queer disabled korean adoptee woman, I ask you, how are you connecting your identity as an able bodied person to your identity as a queer API? How are you connecting your fight for queer APIs to fighting ableism? How are you making sure that queer API community and family building is accessible for *all queer APIs*? How are you actively listening, valuing and learning about queer disabled APIs?

Because you can *know* about something and it doesn't mean that your behavior is going to change. It's the white middle class way of activism, isn't it? If I know different, then I will do different, but we all know that it takes much more work to change. Good intentions are not enough. We need to practice. We have to be in it for the long haul.

Because hopefully what that sharp analysis should tell us, is that systems of oppression and violence are deeply embedded in our lives and world, intertwined with each other; and white supremacy and transphobia are not going to be ended in a campaign or in 5, 20 or 50 years. It is going to take a long time. And we have to be committed to each other through it. We have to think of our relationships as long-term relationships with each other, as people we will be working with and plan to know for the next 30, 40 years.

Any kind of systematic change we want to make will require us to work together to do it. And we have to have relationships strong enough to hold us as we go up against something as powerful as the state, the medical industrial complex, the prison system, the gender binary system, the church, immigration system, the war machine, global capitalism.

Because we're going to mess up. Of that I am sure. We cannot, on the one hand have sharp analysis about how pervasive systems of oppression and violence are and then on the other hand, expect people to act like that's not the world we exist in. Of course there are times we are going to do and say oppressive things, of course we are going to hurt each other, of course we are going to be violent, collude in violence or accept violence as normal.

We must roll up our sleeves and start doing the hard work of learning how to work through conflict, pain and hurt as if our lives depended on it—because they do. We have to learn how to have hard conversations and get skilled at talking about and dealing with shame, guilt, trauma, hurt, and anger. That's the kind of skills building and workshops that I want to see at conferences! And not some new-aged privileged imperialist, "let's go to India and get healed and work on our relationship disconnected from the rest of the world and injustice." But rather, we are doing this *in service* of liberation because our movements, organizations, groups and communities are imploding from the inside. People get into fights and then we never see them in the same room again; most of our non-profits feel more like corporations with CEOs and dictatorships; break-ups divide entire queer communities or people are exiled or leave and never heard from again; activists are burning out or being traumatized by the very movements that seek to end trauma; campaigns fail because we don't know how to listen and work together, so instead of coalitions, we have turf wars and undermine each other for next year's grant that barely pays the bills.

We must work to transform our selves, each other and the systems we're up against. *The task in front of us is to learn how to value and practice individual, collective and systematic change together.* There is no other choice. Someone once said, "community is taking responsibility for the relationships in the group." What if we moved from that place? What if we understood each other as our collective responsibility? What if we understood that we are all interconnected and what harms you will impact me—and THIS is why addressing power and privilege are so vital?

*How can we demand accountability from the state, if we can't even hold our selves and each other accountable?*

How do we stretch for each other and learn to live past our lifetimes? How do we live in service of people 3-5 generations to come? How do we grow our skills to be able to center our vision and think long-term? That's the kind of thinking I want us to have. Because, the truth is, most of us won't live to see the kind of large scale change that we dream of, but we can do our best to lay the necessary ground work for the next generation to be able to take it and run.

I want to leave a legacy of useful tools and substantial work for the people coming after us. I want to be able to give them loving, intact queer API communities and API women (gender queer, trans and cis) who love themselves and each other. I want to give them a world free of sexual violence. But most of all, I want to be able to leave them with a legacy of stories of how people came through harm with each other, how they risked loving each other in the face of uncertainty, how they built family and community that centered resiliency and healing.

Because the truth is, we need each other. *We need each other.* I need you and *each and every one of you make my life more possible.* We owe our existence to each other in so many ways. *I don't know how you have survived, but I am grateful you are here.*

Take some time to look around at each other. Connect with each other and realize all the brilliance in this room. Commit to each other and remember that every time we turn away from each other, we turn away from ourselves. Remember that loving each other as fellow queer API folks is loving ourselves. This is

where coalition building, collaboration and building alliances across movements begins: with each other. Because movements, coalitions, communities... they're all made up of individual, living, breathing people. What good is it if you claim solidarity and alliance with disabled people, if you don't treat the disabled people you know well?

Commit to not letting go of each other, even when it's hard—especially when it's hard. *Commit to finally learn that the ends do not justify the means.* How many times do we have to learn that **how** we do the work is just as important as the work we do? Commit to thinking about after the meeting, after the protest, after the revolution. Commit to being a grounded force to end violence and oppression. Commit to being a grounded force for healing and community. Commit to learning about where each of you are different and how "our differences lie down inside of us," as audre lorde talks about.

What I'm talking about is reinventing how we love each other and knowing that solidarity is love, collaboration is love. And really, isn't that what queerness is about: loving? I am talking about growing and cultivating a deep love that starts with those closest to us and letting it permeate out. Starting with our own communities. Building strong foundations of love.

And I just want to be clear, I am not talking about love that isn't accountable. I am not talking about staying in harmful and dangerous or abusive relationships. The kind of love I want us to grow is accountable and assertive. Really, I am talking about collective love, where we look out for each other...

I have been all over the country speaking for the past seven years and across the board, almost everyone I have met, has longed for community and love that will be able to be the foundation for justice and liberation. Community and love that are just and liberatory. But most of us have been so hurt, experienced such harsh things, that we are afraid to try again. Each time community, political work or love fails us, it is that much harder to muster up the courage to try again. I know it's hard. And I am not standing up here saying I am perfect at this by any means—far from it.

But what I am saying is that it is our only chance. We have to be bold. We have to be courageous. We have to be willing to risk again and again and again. In a violent and oppressive world, the work of love is never done.

I'd like to close with one of my favorite quotes, by a fellow korean adoptee:

*I am realizing that our stories weave together, that acknowledgment of your story does not mean a necessary preclusion of my own. Something has been shattered. Some door flung open that I will never close. And I will lose some people when I acknowledge the door, while others will accompany me to the other side. And I cannot forget the people who are waiting there, people i have been holding my breath to see.*

—Soo Na, from *Garlic and Salt in Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*