

Moving from *Unlikely* to *Likely* Allies in the Academy

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This letter has been delayed because of my grave reluctance to reach out to you, for what I want us to chew upon here is neither easy nor simple.

This letter attempts to break a silence which I had imposed upon myself ... I had decided never again to speak to white [W]omen about racism. I felt it was wasted energy because of destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by [W]hite women to one another at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. But I would like not to destroy you in my consciousness, not to have to.

(Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 1984, pp. 66, 70–71)

Getting “There”

12-Year Journey

(marinating, thinking, taking notes)

3-Year Trip

(writing, re-writing and editing)

Possible Book Titles

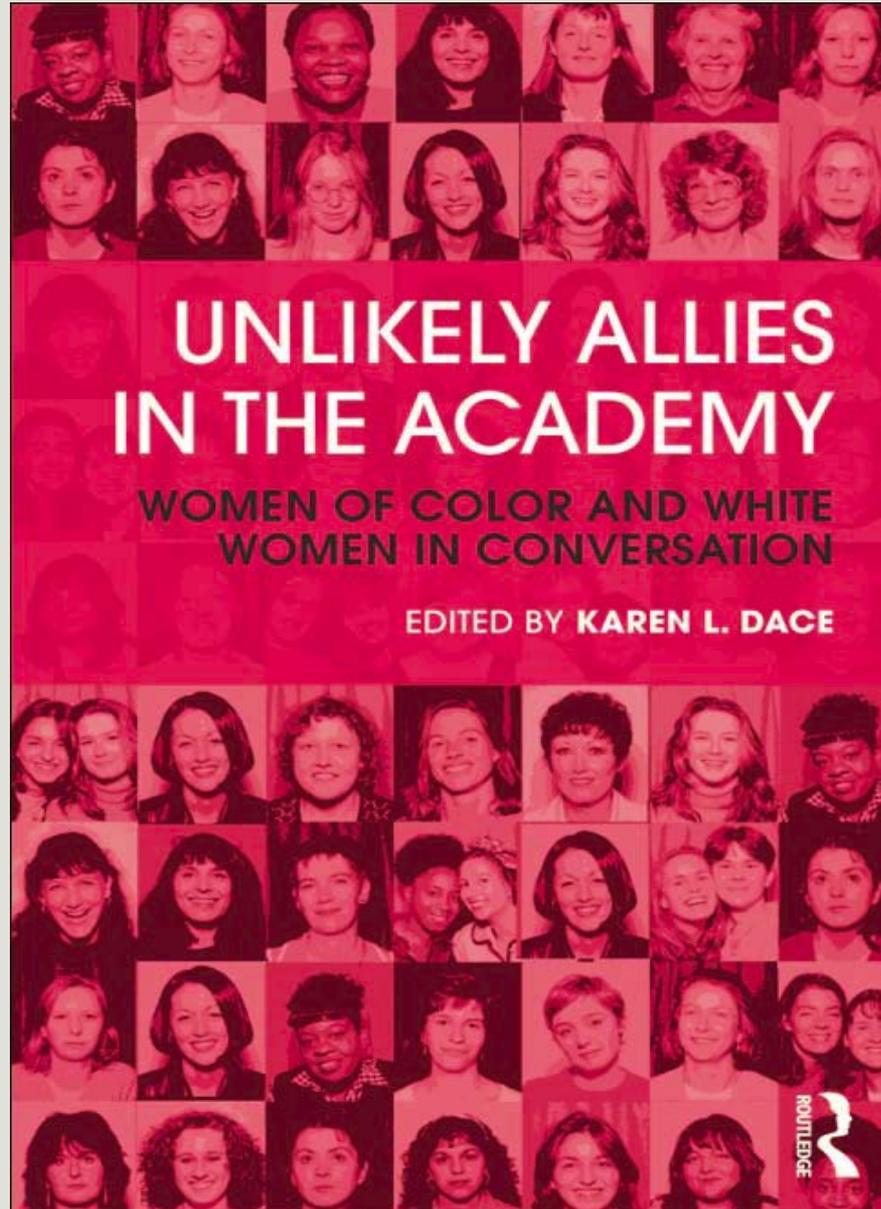
That's Why We Can't Be Friends

Why We Can't Be Friends

Why We Can't "Just" Be Friends

Why I F***ing Hate You!

Unlikely Allies in the Academy: Women
of Color and White Women in
Conversation



UNLIKELY ALLIES IN THE ACADEMY

WOMEN OF COLOR AND WHITE
WOMEN IN CONVERSATION

EDITED BY KAREN L. DACE

ROUTLEDGE

When Women of Color and White Women Talk it Can Look and Feel like...

My face goes hot, my tongue twitchy. I don't know what to say to her. All I know is I ain't saying it. And I know she ain't saying what she want [to] either and it's a strange thing happening here cause nobody saying nothing and we still managing to have us a conversation.

Abileen, *The Help*

A Funny Thing About *The Help*

In many of the discussions of both the book and film, many White women saw themselves in Skeeter, the woman who wrote the Black women's stories.

But, in the workplace many women of Color experience *Hilly* everyday.



Let's Talk About It...

How would you characterize relationships between women of Color and White women in the academy?

Why are cross-race relationships between women important?

Do the responsibilities for creating meaningful dialogue across race differ for women of Color and White women?

Why do some see creating meaningful dialogue across race as an act of bravery?

A Rare Opportunity

I invite White women to listen to the voices in this book. We have an opportunity that we are not frequently offered: to witness the experiences of women of Color as they interact with White women in the academy. The words, feelings and experiences may be painful or shocking. However, the stories are told in the hope that things will change, that White women will hear how what we do affects the lives of women of Color, will reflect on what they learn, and will act to change both their thinking and behavior.

Frances Kendall

A Wish for Women of Color

My hope is that women of Color will come to know that so many of the painful and frustrating experiences they have with their White women colleagues are not about them—that women of Color will no longer question their brilliance, capabilities, insights, instincts or power when confronted with the interests of White women who have not dealt with their privilege or responsibilities.

Malia Villegas

Alutiiq/Sugpiaq (Alaska Native)

One More Thing for Women of Color

YOU ARE *NOT* CRAZY!!



“Don’t Trust Me...”

Peggy McIntosh: Brenda, don’t trust me.

Brenda Flyswithhawks: Even you, Peggy?

Peggy McIntosh: Don’t trust me, Brenda. I will betray you.

Cross-Race Relationships Can Be Messy

There is a genuine commitment to work through the confusion no matter how much time it takes. It comes in the form of questions, hurt feelings, taking sides, feeling frustrated, and “aha, so that’s what you mean. Okay” expressions. It doesn’t always work out. Sometimes we stop with hurt feelings. But just as frequently we plow through the confusion as a group, putting ideas in order and creating a shared picture which we can all see. And all of this is possible because disagreements and confusion are not received as invalidation of our individual ideas.

Lynet Uttal, 1990

Unlikely Allies Contributors

10 White Women

10 Women of Color

- 3 African American
- 3 Indigenous
- 2 Asian Americans
- 2 Chicanas

Representing colleges, universities and university consulting agencies in the United States, Australia and New Zealand

White Women Non-Allies

Withdraw immediately when things get tough

Become angry, defensive and resentful during difficult dialogues

Attempt to silence women of Color

Are dismissive

Are suspicious of women of Color

Plant seeds of distrust

Use tears to deflect attention away from important issues

Genuine White Women Allies

Can tell women of Color when they are right or wrong

Acknowledge racism, power and privilege

Advocate for social justice

Do not expect to be rewarded

Stay “in the fight”

Know they can learn from people of Color

Acknowledge the significance of their relationships with White men

Accept that they don't have to be in charge of women of Color or in their space

Genuine White Women Allies (cont.)

Acknowledge historical and political barriers

Interrupt “bad behavior” of White men & women

Resist being offended and defensive

Don’t need to play “Oppression Olympics”

Are not threatened by initiatives for people of Color

Believe people of Color’s expertise extends beyond matters of race

Aren’t threatened when people speak another language in their presence

Aren’t offended when included in definitions of diversity

Women of Color Non-Allies

Tell White women what they think White women want to hear rather than sharing difficult or painful truths

Sugar coat reality

Throw other people of Color “under the bus”

Assume they are “ALL knowing” in race matters

Speak in very “essentialized” ways

Work against other women of Color who are creating cross-race relationships with Latinas, White women, etc.

Women of Color Allies

Speak truth to power and privilege

Don't behave as if they are all-knowing

Encourage and celebrate White women allies

Do not expect White women allies to be super heroines

Are “available”

Are part of a new network and open to learning more about themselves and others

Are vulnerable

Successful Cross-Race Relationships Are

Messy

Difficult

Rare

Draining—emotionally, intellectually, physically

Time consuming—they don't happen overnight

Hard on “outside” relationships

Beneficial to both parties and the workplace

Easier to walk away from than to maintain

Necessary for individual and workplace success

Women of Color are Looking for...

Personals

Looking for the Ideal White Woman (IWW) for a long term relationship built on respect, trust and a commitment to social justice. IWW must demonstrate a continuous dedication to equity and justice and not require ongoing praise, validation or reward from me. IWW must have a strong sense of self, understand her white identity, how race and racism affect the everyday experiences of all people and how and to what degree she benefits from institutional and individual racism. IWW will speak up and out regarding issues of justice without prompting and not necessarily for the benefit of marginalized peoples. She will understand that her own integrity and humanity are at stake and how she personally benefits from a more just society. Lastly, IWW must have a sense of humor, laugh at what is funny, be willing to make mistakes and most importantly find, develop and support other IWW.

Kristi Ryujin

Discussion

KAREN L. DACE

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