

Cultivating the 'Generative Gaze'



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Short Description: I coined the term Generative Gaze as a way of conveying the resources fashioned by my Ancestors, enslaved Africans and disinherited Native Americans, to offer creative insights, practices and medicine to heal our broken world. In this presentation I share my thoughts as I work to develop a framework to describe the Generative Gaze. My research reveals that the Generative Gaze centers justice, fierce inclusivity, compassion and a commitment to fair play born of traditions that value the sacred within each and every human being, no matter their station in life.

Keywords: Generative Gaze, Prosocial Behavior, Compassion, Fierce Inclusivity, Justice, Fair Play, Discriminatory Design, Generative Buffering.

Detailed Abstract: As a critically conscious global citizen, my concerns center on issues of social justice and eradicating the toxins of racism, misogyny, heterosexism, poverty, structural inequality, and the wanton destruction of our planet (Bell, 2010; Essed, 1991; Freire, 1970; George, 2020, 2021; Grier & Cobbs, 1992; Noguera, 2020; West, 2004; Wilkerson, 2020). Thus, if you accept the proposition concerning the foregoing toxins, then you may agree we have an obligation to complete our Herculean environmental clean-up mission. This is, in my view, an intergenerational undertaking that requires,

inter alia, focus, political will, energy and drive. The complex imbroglio of existential threats confronting our world (i.e., the climate crisis and environmental degradation, heterosexism, racism, poverty and mass incarceration, among others) makes cultivating the Generative Gaze an essential 21st century leadership practice. We are living with the consequences of “discriminatory design” the laws and practices that normalize “racial hierarchies—not as an ideological aberration...but as an economic imperative that is built into the machine” (Benjamin, 2016, p. 148). My research caused me to theorize that the Generative Gaze centers compassion, prosocial behavior, fierce inclusivity, justice, and a commitment to fair play born of traditions that value the sacred within each and every human being, no matter their station in life. My lived experience informs me that we are at a crossroads. Indeed, this is a profound inflection point that requires us to restructure our thinking, values, institutions and practices. Freire (1970) insists that we center the marginalized and exploited members of our community as leaders and genuine partners. Hartley (2018) posits that leadership praxis is complex and frequently contested. She challenges us as leaders to “create synergies to enhance our understanding” (p. 202). I agree and view the Generative Gaze as an essential approach to apprehending and healing our world. The Generative Gaze draws upon resources fashioned by my forebearers, enslaved Africans and disinherited Native Americans, offering creative insights, practices, and *medicine* to heal our broken world. This *medicine* includes resources both the universal and particular—music, story, song, and ceremony—drawn from traditions such as the rigorous intersectional analysis of Womanist Theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Devoe, 2020; Walker, 1983) and the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Great Law of Peace which teaches that leaders must consider the implications of their decisions for 7 generations (George, 2020; Noguera, 2020). The Generative Gaze employs circle technology to de-emphasize hierarchy and place everyone equidistant from the center where power resides and is exercised—the work is from *center to circumference*. The monumentally important intergenerational assignment of

cultivating leadership for a thriving future is urgent precisely because of our failure to be truly democratic and inclusive (Wilkerson, 2020).

Finally, I flag Kotre & Kotre's (1998) concept of generative buffering—the commitment to disrupt and eventually end the transmission of harmful traits, ideas, patterns, practices, and institutions. Buffering is an essential ingredient in the Generative Gaze's work of reimagining leadership. The Generative Gaze requires us to identify and uproot toxic, self-defeating practices and patterns that cause or exacerbate the existential threats confronting our world.

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