

WHITE FEMINIST FRAGILITY:
FROM PART OF THE PROBLEM TO RADICAL ALLYSHIP

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Abstract

Feminism has a whiteness problem. Feminists of colour such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Kimberlé Crenshaw have been talking about this problem since the 1970's, and the term 'white feminism' emerged to describe the predominantly white, upper-middle class, academic, heterosexual women who had taken control of mainstream feminist discourses. The problem being, after the early grassroots feminist consciousness raising of the 19th century, the feminist movement turned academic, an arena where radical feminists, lesbians, women of colour, and poor women were largely underrepresented. The result of this is decades of feminist theorizing, philosophy, and activism became focused on the problems of the privileged few. While feminists of colour started speaking out about this problem over 50 years ago, in 2017 the viral #MeToo movement brought to light the continued indifference towards women of colour and those who experience intersection systems of oppression. #MeToo was overwhelming focused on elite Hollywood actresses, and when it was later revealed that the phrase 'Me Too' had been in use by African American activist and community organizer Tarana Burke since 2007 to show solidarity to young, socioeconomically oppressed women and girls of colour, there were renewed calls to examine why the women in our society who hold the most privileged were also gaining the most attention for their causes.

The purpose of this work is to define white feminism, understand the structures and strategies that support it, and explain how white supremacy functions to prevent advancement and maintain divisions between feminists. I will use concepts from writers like Audre Lorde, Layla Saad, and Marilyn Frye to analyse feminist discourses, past and

present, in order to establish a pattern within feminism to centre whiteness. As a feminist who is white, I will call upon other white feminists to challenge institutional racism, decentre whiteness in feminist practice, and commit to radical anti-racism work as a main tenant of feminist activism.

Lay Summary

White feminism is a term used to describe feminists who are predominantly white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, and who lack an understanding of the intersectional problems faced by women of colour, queer, and poor. While women of colour have been writing, theorizing, and speaking out about this issue for decades, when the #MeToo movement became viral in 2017, a movement which focused on the privileged and predominantly white Hollywood elite, there were renewed calls by women of colour for white feminist to question why institutional sexism are only taken seriously when voiced by some of the most privileged women in our society. This work will examine the history and strategies of white feminism, and challenge white feminists to consider how their own feminist practice can evolve towards intersectionality and anti-racism.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, T. MacIntyre.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Lay Summary.....	v
Preface.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Figures.....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	x
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
A (White) Feminist Awakening.....	1
White Feminism & Black Erasure.....	5
White Feminism & White Fragility.....	6
Background and Relevance.....	9
Methodology.....	11
A Call to Action: White Feminist (Ignore)ance.....	12
Chapter Two: White Feminism: A Her-story.....	15
Votes for (White) Women.....	17
The Sins of my Foremothers: Eugenic Feminism.....	19
The 'Me' in #MeToo.....	22
Chapter Three: Beyond Intersectionality: White Feminist Fragility.....	25
The Feminist Bio-Politic.....	28
White Fragility.....	31
Angry White Women: White Feminist Resentment.....	35
Chapter Four: The Functions and Failures of White Feminism.....	37
White Supremacy and Me: Radical De-Colonization.....	38
Spiritual Bypassing: “We are all alike in soul and diverse in outer experience”...42	
Tone Policing: “Thank you for not coming out swinging”.....	43
Centring: “It was a personal experience for me that felt like an attack”.....	45
Is it the task of women of colour to educate white women?.....	46
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	49

Radicalizing Feminist Consciousness Raising.....	49
Radical Disloyalty to Whiteness.....	52
Power to embrace our Difference.....	53
Pathways to a Wholistic Feminist Consciousness.....	54
Radical White Feminism.....	55
Works Cited.....	59

List of Figures

Figure 1	Screenshot of @Alyssa_Milano Tweet, October 16 2017.....	22
Figure 2a	Screenshot of LaylaFSaad Instagram post July 2018.....	40
Figure 2b	Screenshot of LaylaFSaad July 2018 Comments Section.....	40
Figure 2c	Screenshot of LaylaFSaad July 2018 Comments section Cont.....	40
Figure 3a	Screenshot of LaylaFSaad Instagram post August 2018.....	41
Figure 3b	Screenshot of LaylaFSaad July 2018 Comments Section.....	41
Figure 3c	Screenshot of LaylaFSaad July 2018 Comments section Cont.....	41

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Introduction: A (White) Feminist Awakening

“Feminists are made, not born.” – bell hooks

I had a comfortable childhood; born in 1990 in Nova Scotia, Canada, I grew up in a middle class household with my white nuclear family. My parents had and continue to have a solid marriage, my sister and I tolerated each other’s existence, and all-in-all, the most hardship I faced was school yard bullying.

It shouldn’t have come as a surprise to my mother when I firmly rejected the notion of feminism in my teenage years. Afterall, I had grown up in the ‘Girl Power’ generation: *Spice Girls*, *Xena Warrior Princess*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X Files*. Pop culture was teaching me that women could do anything men could do – all while wearing tightly fitted, glittery outfits (with the exception of Dr. Dana Scully from the *XFiles*). You see, I didn’t reject feminism because I didn’t believe in equality (more on this later), I rejected feminism because I did not see myself or other women as oppressed.

I could point my number at any number of influences as an explanation for my disinterest in feminism; the media, pop culture, the general suspicion that feminism was somehow equated with lesbianism (since I now identify as queer, this internalized homophobia can take some of the blame). Acclaimed feminist theorist bell hooks, author of influential works such as *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981), *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (1984) and *Feminism is for Everybody: Passional Politics* (2000) has spent her career understanding and deconstructing pathways to feminism and the importance of intersectionality. In her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks offers an explanation for my disinterest which may be less tied to

my generation, and more so related to the timeless patriarchal nature of our society. As hooks explains; “When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege. Before women could change the patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness.”(9) What I had been missing was this opportunity to raise my consciousness – to remove the blindfold of societal constructs and start questioning the ways women around me were treated.

Soon after starting my undergraduate degree in the 2010’s, my feminist consciousness began to take form. I could no longer ignore the seemingly endless series of news headlines covering stories about sexual violence and harassment, stories like the tragic suicide of British Columbia Teen Amanda Todd in 2012, who took her own life after a sexual predator posted nude photos of Todd online, and she became the target of brutal bullying at the hands of her peers. The term “slut shaming” took form to describe this behavior: bullying young women for perceived promiscuity, regardless of circumstances. (Murphy, *“Amanda Todd: Bullied to Death”*) I was learning the hard truths about our society: it wasn’t just that there weren’t enough women becoming doctors, politicians, and CEOs. The world is a dangerous and unforgiving place if you had the bad luck of being born female.

I became an avid reader of feminist websites like *Jezebel* and *Feministing*. I devoured the book *Full Frontal Feminism* by influential writer Jessica Valenti (founder of *Feministing*) and started gifting/ lending/ strongly recommending the book to all of my

friends who had yet to have their own feminist awakening. I became involved with #Hollarback to combat street harassment, I vocally supported the Slut Walk movement, and I became so enthralled with it all I even penned my own blog titled *Release the Feminist Kraken*. I was filled with fire and purpose: I was going to join my foremothers in the fight to dismantle the patriarchy.

While I had in many ways raised my feminist consciousness, my pathway towards enlightenment was not exactly what hooks was describing when she talks about the original living room gatherings of women across all social-economic and racial divides. As feminist thinking progressed, feminists forming political and sociological theories sought validity through academia. Universities, to this day, are exclusive institutions accessible only to those with class and race privilege. What this means is that as feminism came to be officially recognized by academia, it was the privileged white, middle class women leading the discussions in university lecture halls. hooks makes a strong connection between the transition to academic feminism and the silencing and erasure of women of colour: when academia is the accepted standard of validation and credential, the radical queer, black, indigenous, and or poor women are easily ignored and dismissed. Privileged white women were choosing which oppressions were worth studying and analyzing. They created a hierarchy of need based on the concept that gender based discrimination was the *ultimate* discrimination, and once equality was achieved, all over forms of oppressions would fall away as well (hooks, 9).

The result of this is that the gatekeepers of the feminism I embraced and learned from are the white feminists born of academia, the feminists who focused solely on the

universality of sexism as the rallying point for *all* women. In terms of what this meant for me, individually, is that for a while at least, I lived and practiced a feminism which focused solely on the inequality between (white) men and (white) women, because I had failed to seek knowledge outside of the mainstream feminist discourses.

When I reflect on my feminist awakening, I can see clearly who is missing from the articles, blogs, and websites I was exposed to, which victims of horrible crimes were worth mentioning. Overwhelmingly, the stories being told were those of white women, as shown by Researcher Sarah Stillman in her 2007 study titled *The 'Missing White Girl Syndrome': Disappeared Women and Media Activism*. Stillman found that between 2000 and 2005, 76% of missing children featured on news outlets CNN were white children, while only accounting for 54% of abductions (492). While all violence is tragic and unacceptable, ignoring the disproportionately high rate of violence against women of colour, in particular the institutional neglect in regard of the safety of Indigenous women in Canada as proven by the 2016 inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls (National Assembly of First Nations), has only served to further isolate and oppress those women who are already vulnerable.

While I made an effort to educate myself on racial oppression and include intersectionality in my feminist practice, I felt that issues of racism were best left to those who experience it; I was not racist, and as a privileged white woman myself, I understood it was not my place to take on these challenges. I continued my silence on issues of race until the #MeToo movement went viral in 2017. The viral hashtag, and the focus on the entertainment industry hit close to home. My career was in the film and television industry, and I had experienced the rampant sexual harassment and assault

being described by famous Hollywood elites, yet still felt as if I was not in a position of enough power in my role as a production assistant to speak out. I started thinking about power, who has it? Who does not? Who was #MeToo for, and who was it actually liberating? Only once #MeToo went mainstream did anyone realize that 'Me Too' was already being used as a symbol of solidarity for victims; the major difference is the original creator, African American Activist and Community Organizer Tarana Burke's version of Me Too was to help young women of colour in her community, many of whom are poor and facing any number of intersecting challenges. It's quite ironic that a movement intended for disadvantaged women and girls of colour was co-opted so completely by the white Hollywood elite. It is uncomfortable to admit that it took something of this scale to cause me to question my own complicity with centering whiteness in my feminism, and to recognize the real world implications of racial erasure within a movement dominated by upper-middle class white women.

White Feminism & Black Erasure

In 1979 Black-Lesbian-Feminist icon Audre Lorde attended a feminist conference by the New York Institute for the Humanities. The type of feminism that Lorde encountered there was overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, and academic – just as hooks describes (10). Lorde was one of only two women of colour invited to speak at the conference. In response, Lorde penned the famous essay *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. To Lorde, "It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third

World women, and lesbians”(16), Yet there Lorde was, at a conference dedicated to difference, in a sea of whiteness.

Fast forward to 2017: white actress Alyssa Milano takes to twitter and makes a simple request to her (millions) of followers: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” The response was instantaneous. By the next day, the hashtag #metoo had been used 500,000 times (@Alyssa_Milano). The movement only gained momentum, and 45 days later, the hashtag had been used across all social media platforms 85 millions times (Sayej). The virility of the hashtag, along with the downfall of a number of powerful men in Hollywood, meant that the discussion about the rampant sexual abuse in Hollywood was covered by most major news outlets. Though these two events took place almost 40 years apart, the similarities are difficult to ignore. #MeToo centres white, heterosexual, rich women, at the expense of further subjugating poor women and girls of colour.

White Feminism & White Fragility

The problem revealing itself in the paragraphs above has come to be known as *white feminism*. White feminism is a term which has been in use since feminist theorists of colour such as hooks, Audre Lorde, and Kimberlé Crenshaw began writing about racism in feminism in the 1970’s. The qualities of white feminism are more defined than simply a feminist who is white. For the purposes of this paper, I define the term white feminism as the practice of feminism that centers the problems of predominantly white, middle to upper class, heterosexual women, and tends to focus exclusively on gender inequality as the primary source of all other societal oppressions. White feminism is also, intentionally or otherwise, committed to white supremacy.

Here I will take a moment to re-contextualize the term 'white supremacy' from the image the term conjures in contemporary times. Today, the term white supremacy brings to mind the Klu Klux Klan, burning crosses, and the era of slavery long past. However, white supremacy continues to be the foundation of modern western societies, and can be found within anyone holding white privilege. Sociologist and lecturer Robin DiAngelo defines white supremacy in her 2017 book *White Fragility: Why it's so Hard for White People to talk about Racism*. As DiAngelo puts it, "Most white people do not identify with these images [white supremacy as described above] of white supremacists and so take great umbrage to the term being used more broadly. For sociologists and those involved in current racial justice movements, however, white supremacy is a descriptive and useful term to capture the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white and the practices based on this assumption" (56). White supremacy, while jarring to many well-meaning white people, is important language to use in a discussion of white feminism because the desire to protect latent racial superiority and denial of personal responsibility is one of the main ways white feminists can cause harm to women of colour.

DiAngelo provides useful language in her book which helps me to better understand that implicit and insidious nature of internalized white supremacy. The most important term in DiAngelo's book is in the title: *white fragility*. As she explains:

"We perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offence. The smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable – the mere suggestion that being white has meaning often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as

argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from the stress inducing situation. These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy” (26). White fragility is a powerful tool of white feminism, and as I explore the functions and strategies of white feminism further, I will show how white fragility is one of the major challenges that must be overcome.

Though white feminists have had the language, theory, and opportunity to embrace intersectionality and difference within the movement for the past 40 years, thanks to the work of black feminist philosophers and theorists, white feminists continue to practice a form of feminism which centers whiteness, denies difference, and subjugates women of colour. What this shows us is that intentional or not, influential white feminists who are the gate keepers of feminist knowledge and theory remains firmly planted in the false universality of the white westernized experience of sexism and fails to provide more than a passing reference to intersectionality.

The aim of this work is to understand the systems which built and maintain white feminism, identify its structures and strategies, and to provide a vocabulary for these strategies. In the conclusion of this work, I will propose a call to action to disrupt conventional white feminist discourses and provide pathways towards feminist consciousness raising which centre the voices of women of colour and anti-racism theory. This can only be accomplished if white women who practice feminism commit themselves to radical consciousness raising, taking responsibility for the deconstruction of racism, and to acknowledge and reject the internalized allegiance to whiteness.

Background and Relevance

White feminism has deep roots, but with so much research, theory, and philosophy by women of colour available, why do white feminists still struggle to talk about race? Philosopher and radical feminist Marilyn Frye is one of first white feminists to reflect on and deconstruct what she refers to as 'whiteness' in feminism, penning *The Politics of Reality* in 1983. In an essay titled *On Being White: Thinking Towards a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy*, Frye reflects on her own journey towards understanding her own complicity, and the complicity of other white feminists, in the intentional ignorance towards issues of racism and white supremacy which ran rampant within feminist institutions. Frye embarks on what must have been an uncomfortable personal journey as she describes the problematic ways she herself initially tried to engage with anti-racism work in her feminism, an early misguided strategy was to create a racism consciousness raising group, for white women only (111). As a result, Frye admits she was on the receiving end of anger and frustrations from feminists of colour: while Frye meant well and was attempting to take responsibility for raising white feminist consciousness towards issues of race, what this whites only group actually achieved was to reproduce silencing and erasure that feminists of colour were trying to fight against (113)

Frye refers to her own behaviour, and that of other white feminists as the 'whiteness' problem. Frye realizes that this problem is caused by what she calls *false universalization*. When people generally say 'men' they mean *white* men; when we say 'women,' we mean *white* women. In short, says Frye, "we don't think of ourselves as white" (117).

This is where the conflict lies: The majority of well-meaning white feminists are ignorant to their own racialized existence. In addition, when white feminists centre themselves in this frame of mind, the movement becomes overly simplified. White feminists speak with a sort of grand generalization, a false universality of their own specific problems. As bell hooks writes in her 1989 book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*,

Contemporary feminist thinkers often cite sexual politics as the origin of this crisis...Such an assumption has fostered the notion that elimination of sexist oppression would necessarily lead to the eradication of all forms of domination... Ideologically, thinking in this direction enables Western women, especially privileged white women, to suggest that racism and class exploitation are merely the offspring of the parent system: patriarchy” (19).

What hooks is identifying is at the root of the white feminist problem; a hierarchy of need, one which prioritizes the patriarchal oppression of middle class white women over intersecting forces of oppression and dominance faced by women of colour, lesbians, and the poor. When white feminists insist racism will be solved once women achieve equality, they deny the reality of racial oppression and white supremacy, and in turn, are supporting and reinforcing that white dominance over women of colour. This is why it is of critical importance that those who consider themselves feminists understand intersectionality and have done the work to understand the structures and functions of racism – even if this involves the discomfort of acknowledging personal behaviours which reproduce the racist patriarchy.

Methodology

The methodology of this work will be a qualitative discourse analysis, which will consist of data relating to white supremacy, white fragility, and white feminism. This data will be collected in the form of academic books, news articles, editorials, and social media posts. I will use the theoretical work of Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Marilyn Frye to frame my analysis. I will also consult contemporary feminist writers such as Layla Saad, and Rachel Cargile, among others, to support my findings and underscore the urgency in which contemporary white feminists must address the systematic ignorance within the modern feminist movement.

In order to capture the true complexity of white feminism, this work requires historical context. Therefore, I will provide a brief history of the women's suffrage movement/ feminist movement in order to contextualize the contemporary problem of white feminism and white feminist fragility. I will also make limited use of the Michel Foucault's ideas regarding *bio power* to help provide context and depth to our understanding of how white supremacy functions in our society.

Foucault was fascinated with the complex ways governments, states, and judicial systems exercised power over a population, and how this developed starting in the 17th century. *Biopower* is concerned with how the state holds the power to subjugate bodies (251). According to Foucault, there are two poles to biopower, one being *disciplinary*, referring to the power of the state to incarcerate, limit the movements, and disenfranchise the population. The second pole "focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with

all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population.”(251) Bio-politics is the practice of bio-power: the intersection of power/knowledge and discourse to influence the physical minds and bodies of a population. As Foucault discusses at length in *Society Must be Defended*, control of the physical body is a tool of capitalism. Under capitalism, bodies must be used as a means for production, or else that body will not have access to the basic necessities of life. This has led to the prison industrial complex, a broken western system of poverty and welfare, and sweatshops worldwide. This exploitation of bodies, according to Foucault, leads us directly back to the topic at hand: white supremacy. We can draw direct comparisons with the problem of white feminism, and again back to what Audre Lorde writes about in *The Master's Tools*. If white women maintain their allegiance to the white bio-politic, meaning, valuing and protecting their *whiteness* before dismantling systems of oppression, then by its very nature white feminism functions to further oppress women of colour while seeking *equality* with white male oppressors.

A Call to Action: White Feminist (Ignore)ance

If mainstream feminist practice is white feminism, is the movement capable of creating any meaningful progress? Until white feminists recognize that their allegiance to their race is redirecting feminist discourse, resources, and energy towards protecting and reproducing white supremacy, there can be no meaningful progress.

In this work I call on white feminists to end the cycle. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is not enough – white feminists need to do the introspective anti-racism work required to fully understand the extent to which white supremacy and

the patriarchy dictate our global society. By asking women of colour to use their time, knowledge, and emotional energy to convince us that racism is real, we are wasting time. Instead of using our difference as power, our difference has divided us, and distracted us.

To summarize, in this work, I will form a clear connection between historical patterns of colonization with the current form of Westernized bio-power – a form of white supremacy that seeks to protect itself at all costs. Once this connection has been established, I will explore how white supremacy - through exercising the various facets of bio-power - has worked to create a society where the white majority is encouraged, either explicitly or implicitly, to protect whiteness and how the feminist movement came to embody and replicate these values in white feminist practice. I will argue that until white feminists do the radical self-reflective work to de-centre whiteness from feminist practice and consciousness-raising, the fight to dismantle the patriarchy in any meaningful way cannot begin in earnest.

The ambition of this work is to propose a strategy to help facilitate the deconstruction of white feminism; this will include utilizing the work of women of colour such as bell hooks, Lyla Saad, and Rachel Cargle. I will identify terms, behaviours, and vocabulary which assist with identifying and disrupting white feminism in practice. My main argument is that anti-racism *must* be centred in feminist practice, because, as is made clear by Kimberle Crenshaw, bell hooks, and many more, racism and sexism occur concurrently. Racism is exasperated by gender; sexism is exasperated by race. Overcoming white feminism will not only require a reconfiguration of how white feminists understand difference; it will require radical self-acceptance. Accepting that white

fragility exists in everyone who holds white privilege, and that intentional or not, we are all complicit in structural racism. Ignorance can no longer be an excuse; as Fyre writes “ignorance of these sorts is a complex result of many acts and many negligences. To begin to appreciate this one need only to hear the active verb to ‘ignore’ in the word ‘ignorance’. Our ignorance is perpetuated for us in many way and we have may ways of perpetuating it for ourselves” (118). Only once white feminists are able to fully accept their participation in white supremacy and reject their willful ignorance can they take steps towards true intersectionality.

Chapter 2: White Feminism: a Herstory

In 1979 Audre Lorde was invited to participate in a conference by the New York institute for the Humanities. Lorde, a Black lesbian feminist, wrote the essay *The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House* to reflect on her experience at the conference, where she was one of only two women of colour invited to speak. The essay speaks strongly to the lack of diversity in this academic setting, and how this causes damage to the movement as a whole:

It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians. And yet, I stand here as a Black lesbian feminist, been invited to comment within the only panel at this conference where the input of Black feminists and lesbians is represented. What this says about the vision of this conference is sad, in a country where racism, sexism, and homophobia are inseparable. To read this program is to assume that lesbian and Black women have nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power. And what does it mean in personal and political terms when even the two Black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable. (Lord, 18)

Lorde begins her essay by questioning the very purpose of feminist discourse when it so sadly lacks diversity of thought. Who is this feminism *for*, and what exactly is it trying

to accomplish? This essay is a call to action to white women, an invitation to accept difference as power and to liberate themselves of the patriarchal notion that there are *acceptable* women, and *unacceptable* women. To Lorde, the patriarchy isn't just men. The patriarchy, which feminism purports to dismantle, is protecting the status quo; meaning white, elite, heterosexuals. A feminism that only challenges the patriarchy based on gender inequality for white women isn't really challenging the patriarchy at all – in fact, it only serves to protect it: “For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support” (18). This last statement, which identifies white women who ultimately view the patriarchy as something to live with and live under, resonates throughout time. The Women's Suffrage movement of the mid 19th century is what many consider to be the beginning of modern feminism. White women around the world, primarily in Europe and colonized countries, started fighting for legal personhood, the right to vote, and to own property (Franceschet et al. 5). This movement was ultimately successful, in Australia, women nationally won the right to vote in 1902; in America 1920, in the United Kingdom in 1928; Canada 1940. Other European and nations colonized by Europeans followed suit along a similar timeline. While without question the suffrage movement made big strides towards gender equality, it is important to remember that in most cases the suffrage movement was only by, for, and about, *white* women. In Canada, Indigenous people were not granted the right to vote until 1960; Aboriginal peoples of Australia 1962; in the United States women of colour, while *technically* eligible to vote following the Civil War,

were effectively banned from voting due to laws tying voter rights to property ownership, and property ownership was denied to women of colour. They were fully granted voting rights in 1965 (Franceschet et al. 5).

To anyone who might suggest that white women in the Suffrage movement may have simply excluded women of colour because of social segregation, I will use the Canadian suffrage movement to illustrate that women of colour were not only excluded; they were often targeted for further oppression.

Votes for (White) Women

A major milestone for the Canadian Suffrage movement was what is famously known as *The Persons Case*. Before the Canadian Constitution was known as such, the Dominion of Canada was governed under the *British North America Act, 1867* (The BNA). Section 24 of this act stated that only 'qualified persons' could be appointed to the Senate. While most white women in Canada had gained the right to vote and run for local government and magistrate positions by the mid 1920's (with the exception of Quebec, who did not follow suit until 1940), women were not considered 'qualified persons' and therefore ineligible for seats in the Senate (Devereux, 5).

In 1928, a group of suffragettes now known as *The Famous Five* (Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards), signed a letter petitioning the Supreme Court of Canada to consider the definition of 'qualified persons' and if that could be interpreted to include women. The Supreme Court unanimously voted that while women were 'persons', they are not 'qualified persons'; meaning, they would not be eligible for a seat in Senate. It is reported that the judges of the Supreme Court at the time based their decision on interpreting the law as it was

intended at the time it was written – 1867. The Supreme Court decided that women were *not* intended to be included (Devereux, 4).

The Famous Five then decided to take the petition to the Privy Council – at the time the Privy Council, as an entity of the British Empire, was the last level of court above the Supreme Court. The Privy Council ruled in favour of the Famous Five, and on October 18th, 1929 white Canadian women were finally declared qualified persons.

The Famous Five are widely celebrated in Canadian history. A *Canadian Heritage Minute* which ran on public television in the 1990's depicts the series of events. The Persons Case is taught to students in Social Studies classes across the country. A monument of the Famous Five signing the petition is immortalized in Alberta and on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

Before continuing this discussion, I would like to return for a moment to the logic used by the Supreme Court when deciding that women were *not* qualified to run for senate. The decision was based on the idea that law is ironclad, irreversible, and assumes those who came before held an almost god-like power to know what truth is. This argument, which has been repeated throughout history, is a function of patriarchy. It serves only to protect the status quo, and has vast implications for our legal institutions, notions of truth, and historical revisions. This commitment and defence of the past is extremely relevant to a discussion of feminism, as feminism shares a colonial history with the patriarchy. How much or how little we hold historical figures accountable for not only their actions, but the future consequences of those actions, is fundamental to anti-racist practice.

The Sins of my Foremothers: Eugenic Feminism

In 2005 Dr. Cecily Devereux of the University of Alberta published the book *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism*. In this book Devereux examines McClung's legacy to see to what extent her activism was influenced by eugenics. Eugenics was a popular philosophy in colonized nations; Eugenics, based on ideas gleaned from Darwinism, is the notion that humanity and civilization can be improved with selective breeding. If those with undesirable traits are not permitted to reproduce, then those undesirable traits will simply cease to exist. Undesirable traits essentially included anyone not able-bodied, mentally stable, white, and heterosexual (Devereux, 4).

The information that McClung was an advocate of eugenics is not new, but often downplayed. In the same year that McClung and the Famous Five were petitioning the Supreme Court, McClung and Emily Murphy were also vocal Eugenicists and in full support of the 1928 Sexual Sterilization Act (McCavitt, 362). This act granted the province of Alberta the authority to sterilize anyone deemed mentally deficient in order to protect the gene pool. The term 'Mentally deficient' could be applied liberally (unlike the use of the word 'person' apparently), and applied to: alcoholics, the homeless, poorly behaved children, social deviance, those with epilepsy, and most often, simply being an Indigenous woman (Devereux, 10). While estimates differ widely, by the time forced sterilization was repealed in the 1972, the closest official estimate of the number of individuals who underwent legal forced sterilization is roughly 2500. Despite making up approximately 3.4% of the population of Alberta, Metis or Indigenous people accounted for 25.7% of sterilizations (McCavitt, 364).

Forced sterilization of women was just one arm of the 'take the Indian out of the child' policy established by first Canadian Prime Minister John A MacDonalD, and McClung was a enthusiastic advocate for 'uplifting' the native people of Canada. With the advantage of hindsight, in 2019 we have a clearer understanding of the damage caused to the Indigenous population by these actions, laws, and policies. How do we reconcile the irony of a figure who dedicated much of her life to fighting for (white) women's equality, while simultaneously supporting what is now officially recognized as cultural genocide?

Devereux addresses how many contemporary critics attempt to engage with McClung's duality"

Like so many feminists of the first wave, she is understood to have paradoxically done 'good' work for many women that is 'bad' because it took place within a framework of cultural imperialism. Contemporary critical evaluations have tended to negotiate this paradox by swinging between a sense that is it 'inappropriate to judge a woman like McClung by contemporary standards and a sense that a woman like McClung *must* be judged by contemporary standards because she figures at this time as a national hero. Neither approach is entirely satisfactory, the first because it seems to suggest that the ideas of earlier generations cannot be properly assessed or that they *should* not be assessed, the second because it leads to a kind of historical denial and to a serious overwriting and reconfiguration of a problematic past.

(Devereux,12)

Both of these approaches to assessing McClung and her legacy, in my opinion, are reductive. The discussion should not be whether or not McClung was a good or bad person, or what her intention was at the time. These are simply moral judgments. Systematic inequality was not created because of the lack of morals of one or even many individuals. Those who argue that McClung was a product of her society are not wrong; McClung lived in an imperial society focused on the enduring domination of the British Empire. However, declaring her a product of her society does not absolve McClung and other Eugenicists of their legacy. To argue that 'they thought they were doing the right thing' only serves to further victimize those who continued to suffer under colonial patriarchy. While 'right' and 'wrong' may have been a philosophical exercise for colonists, the Indigenous people of Canada were always aware that what was happening to them was wrong. To use historical (white) social norms to defend actions of the past only serves to further disenfranchise oppressed people and ignores the autonomy of past and present-day individuals who wish to hold institutions and governments accountable.

I am choosing to engage with Nellie McClung not to demand she be erased from the feminist herstory books; McClung will continue to be an important historical figure and should be remembered and studied. I am choosing McClung as an example of how the roots of white feminism were established long ago and continue to be reproduced. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, the desire to place people in a moral good/bad binary is a problematic trait of current and contemporary feminism.

The 'Me' in #MeToo

We cannot change the past; we can only learn from it. When I look to the actions of McClung, and then to the white women holding the Feminist conference Lorde attended in 1979, and again to contemporary feminist movements such as #MeToo, there is a discernable pattern. A cycle of repetition is characterized by white women dominating feminist discourse and receiving the most credit and praise.

We are nearing a century since McClung and the Famous Five signed their petition, yet an analysis of how the 2017 #MeToo movement unfolded, arguably the most visible feminist moment in recent years, it seems that very little has changed. Much of the public conversation surrounding topics of social justice often take place on social media, with hashtags becoming the rallying point to create a collective voice of resistance. However, as many black, indigenous, and queer activists have drawn attention to, this resistance often only seems to apply to wealthy, heterosexual, white women.

The series of events leading up to and following the 2017 #MeToo movement is a convenient example to illustrate how little has changed. The social media hashtag #MeToo went viral in 2017 after popular white actress Alyssa Milano tweeted:



Fig.1

According to a report published by *The Guardian* in December 2017, in the 45 days following this tweet, #MeToo was used on twitter and facebook 85 million times (Sayej). While the popularity of this hashtag was obviously successful in drawing attention to the often-ignored reality of workplace sexual violence, the majority of the discussion in the weeks following Milano's tweet was led by white, privileged, Hollywood actresses. In addition to the narrow scope of #MeToo, black feminists were quick to point out that MeToo was already in use as a call of solidarity against sexual violence. As Dr. Penny Griffin summarizes in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*,

#MeToo is not a movement by and for white women, although it has arguably been coopted by and for white women. The origins of the #MeToo movement lie in the work of Tarana Burke, a black, US-based women's activists. Burke established 'Me Too' in 2006 as an activist group to help and locate resources for young survivors of sexual violence in underprivileged communities, especially (but not only) young women of colour. (562)

It is ironic that a movement intended for underprivileged young women of colour being was overrun by the white, wealthy, social elite. Even if unintentional, this series of events is reproducing a tradition of white women only looking out for the interests of other white women. Violence against women of colour in the workplace and in general is experienced at significantly higher rate than white women. Indigenous women in Canada are particularly vulnerable, with the Canadian Human Rights Commission reporting that "young indigenous women are five times more likely than other Canadian women to die as a result of violence" (Assembly of First Nations). Returning to Lorde's words I quotes earlier: "It is of particular arrogance to engage in a discussion of

feminism without the without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians” (Lord, 18). Yet, here we are, once again, centering wealthy heterosexual white women in the conversation.

On November 10th, 2017, the Washington Post published a piece by Tarana Burke, reflecting on the sudden virality of her programs namesake. The article, titled ‘#MeToo was started for black and brown women and girls. They’re still being ignored.’ Burke reflects on her own work, and the work of other black activists over the last decade.

What history has shown us time and again is that if marginalized voices- those of people of colour, queer people, disabled people, poor people – aren’t centred in our movements then they tend to become no more than a footnote. I often say that sexual violence knows no race, class or gender, but the response to it does. “Me Too.” Is a response to the spectrum of gender-based sexual violence that comes directly from survivors – all survivors. We can’t afford a racialized, gendered, or classist response. Ending sexual violence will require every voice from every corner of the world and it will require those whose voices are most often heard to find ways to amplify those voices that often go unheard (Burke).

The series of events which took place which resulted in an elite and white-washed version of #MeToo was predictably ironic. This pattern pre-dates the Suffrage movement and illustrates how black-erasure is a critical feature of main-stream or, what I’ll be referring to as ‘white feminism’. Burke’s writing in this piece helps me define what is meant by the term; ‘white feminism’ is a form of feminism generally practiced by

white, middle class, heterosexual women, which disregards race, sexuality, poverty, or gender identity as causes worth including in their activism. In the following chapters, I will examine and analysis the functions of white feminism, and propose an approach to disrupt it.

Chapter 3: Beyond Intersectionality: White Feminist Fragility

Lorraine Bethel is an African American lesbian, feminist, poet, and author. The following excerpt is from a poem, titled *What Chou Mean 'We', White Girl*, Bethel penned when she and Barbara Smith, who is also an African American lesbian feminist, were the guest editors of the “Black Women’s Issue” of *Conditions: Five*, a literary magazine predominantly for black lesbian women. The full poem, which fills up 6 pages of *Conditions* is a raw, visceral take down of the academic, white feminism which has alienated and further oppressed feminists of colour in the 1970’s. The following passage touches on the tokenism and subjugation black feminists often experienced when approached by white academic feminists.

I knew it was coming when she said “You don’t know me,
But I got your name from...”
They never know us,
selecting their victims from a rolodex labeled feminists, Black
or Lesbians, Black
or better still, lesbian feminists, Black
a list I’m convinced some white girl is selling
and has made enough money from
to retire with a Swiss bank account
an index of Black women, feminists, lesbians
literate ones who don’t eat white women or bite their heads off
or say “That’s irrelevant to my struggle as a Black woman,”
or “The women’s movement is a white girl trip,”

or “Are you a bull dyke?” or “Get out of my face, bitch!”

when feminism is mentioned to them. (Bethel, 86)

In this passage, Bethel acknowledges she is one of a limited number of black women who identify as feminist, something that at the time was considered rare thanks to underrepresentation in academia, along with the commitment white feminists had to only discuss topics which were relevant to *their* lives; topics that did not resonate with women of colour. The powerful title of this piece, *What Chou Mean We, White Girl*, summarizes the feelings of exclusion, willful ignorance, and disdain feminists of colour felt when attempting to engage with white feminists; there is a certain amount of irony with the use of the collective ‘we’ when a privileged white woman speaks from a podium at an academic conference where there are only one or two women of colour in attendance. It is thanks to women like Bethel using their anger that acclaimed writer and feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the widely influential concept of Intersectionality in the 1989, in an effort to articulate and communicate to white feminists the intersecting challenges faced by women of colour. As feminists seemed unwilling to discuss racism, and anti-racism activists seemed unwilling to discuss sexism, Crenshaw took it on herself to provide language and make space for the often-ignored problems faced by women of colour. As Crenshaw explains: “The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women” (3). These words echo the experience of Audre Lorde at the conference which inspired her essay

The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House and will be echoed once again in 2017 when Tarana Burke addresses the #MeToo movement.

In the previous chapter a brief analysis of historical feminisms reveals the early precedent to centre whiteness in mainstream feminist practice. What this analysis makes clear is that colonial patterns of disenfranchisement of people of colour have been replicated in Suffrage movements around the globe, in the 2nd Wave feminism of the 80's, through the so called '3rd wave' of the 90's and 00's, and again in the 2017 #MeToo movement. African American feminists such as Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Kimberlé Crenshaw have been writing about the exclusion of women of colour, poor women, and queer women for decades. If women of colour have been talking about the problem of white feminism for so long, why does feminism to this day continue to struggle with centring whiteness? White exclusivity in feminism has been a topic black feminists have theorized about for decades, yet almost all eventually come to the same foundational conclusion: an internalized and often invisible commitment to white supremacy.

The Feminist Bio-politic

Understanding the *why* of racism is crucial to understanding the problem of white feminism. While I have made the intentional choice to exclude white male academics in this work, I do believe any examination of power, especially how power operates in society and on individual bodies, can benefit from the theoretical work of Michel Foucault. Foucault, the highly influential French philosopher and theorist, was fascinated with the complex ways governments, states, and judicial systems exercised power over a population, and how this developed starting in the 17th century, as global

European colonization was in full swing. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* theorised that there are two forms of power – “two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations” (139). The first pole of power is disciplinary power, and the second pole - which will be of focus in the work - is “focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population (139). Bio-politics is the practice of bio-power: the intersection of power/knowledge and discourse to influence the physical minds and bodies of a population.

As Foucault discusses at length in *Society Must be Defended*, control of the physical body is a tool of capitalism. Under capitalism, bodies must be used as a means for production, or else that body will not have access to the basic necessities of life. This has led to the prison industrial complex, a broken western system of poverty and welfare, and sweatshops worldwide. This exploitation of bodies, according to Foucault, leads us directly back to the topic at hand: the racism. In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault writes: “...a battle that has to be waged not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage” (61). What this means is that our governments are not racist by accident. As Foucault writes, bio-political racism is “a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products [...] the internal racism of

permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization” (62). As Foucault predicted, racism has become a pillar in contemporary society. Racism has become so normalised, it is invisible to most white folks. The government does not have to be explicitly racist, because racism is the default. Bio-power and bio-politics are the invisible systems at work in our society which creates a perpetual cycle of race and gender based discrimination.

Angela Davis, an icon of radical black feminism and civil rights, has dedicated her life to dismantling racism. Davis has lived through different political periods and different waves of feminism and has a unique perspective to analyse the bio-political implications of structural racism and how it functions on colonial societies. In a 2008 talk at Murdoch University titled *Recognizing Racism in the Era of Neoliberalism*, Davis identifies how the solidified definition of racism which formed following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s has contributed to patterns of structural racism: “Definitions of racism informed by particular historical conditions became trans- or ahistorical ways of conceptualizing racial discrimination and subjugation. The persistence of these meanings beyond the particular historical conditions that produced them has hampered the evolution of a new vocabulary and new discourse that might allow us to identify new modes of racism in what is known as the post-civil rights era” (Davis).

The definition Davis provides for neo-liberalism is “the flawed assumption that history does not matter” (Davis). What Davis argues is that racism was moved from *present*, to *past*. It became understood that slavery is racist; segregation is racist; the Klu Klux Klan is racist. Keeping generational wealth generated by slave owners is *not* racist. The war on drugs is *not* racist. Police brutality against people of colour is *not*

racist. All of these instances, under neo-liberalism, are justified because every instance is treated as an individual data point – not a trend which builds on hundreds of years of subjugation (Davis). Sociologist Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* expands on the explanations Davis provides us in her talk on how ideas of a post racial world continue to disadvantage people of colour. DiAngelo emphasises the institutional structures of our society, institutions built by the state, designed by and to measure the success and validate the accomplishments of the white population. “To say that whiteness includes a set of cultural practices that are not recognized by white people is to understand racism as a network of norms and actions that consistently create advantage for whites and disadvantage for people of colour” (DiAngelo, 51). DiAngelo is describing the functions of bio-politics. Invisible, structured systems which are designed to benefit those with white skin, and harm those without.

White Fragility

Through biopower, Foucault provides me with the ability to see the invisible structures within our institutions designed to advantage white people, and further subjugate people of colour. I also believe that the actions of white fragility as proposed in DiAngelo's book have the qualities biopolitical power in practice, ingrained behaviours which act to correct discourses which challenge white supremacy. DiAngelo describes white fragility as the adverse emotional reaction experienced by white people due to what she calls the “good/bad binary (DiAngelo, 50). The good/bad binary is a simplistic worldview that certain people are ‘good’, law-abiding, kind, and moral, while people who are sexist, homophobic, or racist, are ‘bad.’ In this dichotomy, all discrimination must be

explicit, intentional, and with the goal of causing harm. Due to our commitment to viewing ourselves as moral and good, according to DiAngelo, “we perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as an unsettling and unfair moral offense” (26). DiAngelo also focuses on what she refers to as *white progressives* as the main group vulnerable to white fragility; white progressives are white people who believe they are not racist, less racist, and are already allies to the cause (29). This group are even more likely to react negatively to accusations of racism because in their mind, they are ‘one of the good ones,’ and are very concerned with being perceived as such. DiAngelo says “I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of colour” (29), because, based on the good/bad binary, as good people, nothing they do could be considered racist. Casual racism and microaggressions are invisible to those who refuse to accept the reality of internalized racism. White feminists I believe would fall under the umbrella of *progressive whites*, as they view themselves as already committed to the anti-oppression cause. In terms of biopower functioning to protect white supremacy, white fragility is an insidious and effective way to keep even the most progressive white people in line to inadvertently protect racial superiority.

While DiAngelo offers useful terms to help describe some of the bio-political functions of white feminism, the problem is more complex than simple miseducation and hurt feelings; the solution more complex than appealing to white people to become radically self-aware. The suggestion that racism is a result of misunderstanding and poor self-reflective skills and regarding casual racism as inadvertent feels like a gentle attempt to lead white people towards anti-racist work, while simultaneously exonerating us from responsibility.

White fragility is a term I would apply to *behaviour*, however we're still lacking an understanding of *why* we see this behaviour, and why are white feminists prone to it? In the 2012 book *Leadership by Resentment*, Dr. Ruth Capriles takes on the philosophical challenge of understanding the pathology of resentment. According to Capriles, resentment (or ressentiment, a linguistic choice in the text) "is understood as a phenomenon and an emotional process that proceeds by phases of repression and transformation of emotions which sink deeply into the centre of the personality until they are removed from consciousness and rational control. When the emotion surfaces it is experienced as a renewal of both the original grievance and the feeling of impotence" (20). Capriles metaphorically describes resentment as an illness; something that can grow in an individual, a community, or even a society. Resentment, more than an unconscious bias, is what I would argue is a more accurate explanation of the phenomenon of white fragility as is proposed by Robin DiAngelo. Since resentment is common among those who consider themselves to be disenfranchised (20), I can start to understand why white women and white feminists have always struggled with intersectionality and exclusion. In a world of 'have' and 'have nots' racism is not only a symptom of oppressive governments; racism is a symptom of a larger pattern of oppression and a capitalist system which by necessity of function creates social stratification. Nobody wants to be on the bottom. For white feminists, who have taken up the mantle of activists against sexism, we start to understand why other groups are ignored: discussions of race, sexuality, and gender might eclipse the issues which seem most urgent to heterosexual white women. Rather than place anger and resentment towards those who *cause* the oppression, resentment is most often directed towards

other oppressed people who are perceived to be getting ‘more’ – social programs, equal opportunity initiatives, legal protections, etc (21).

Feminista Jones, an African American social worker, author, and community activist echoed this sentiment on an episode of the podcast *Just Between Us* in July 2019. When asked why she thought white women vote against their own best interest (in reference to the statistic that 53% of white women votes for Donald Trump in the 2016 American Election), Jones provided an answer that captured the complexity of female oppression.

Most oppressed people vote against their own interests, and white women are oppressed... And I think a lot of times when people are oppressed, they can act out towards others, nobody wants to be at the bottom. I also think that white supremacy and white privilege is like currency, right? So, I always say this, and I challenge you all to think [about] this. If I am with my 12 year old son, and you are with your 12 year old son, as a white mother, and somebody’s standing in front of us, and pointing a gun at us, who’s child would you want to be shot? Not yours. And that’s the position that people end up being in. I am going to do whatever I can to live and to survive; and if it means relying on some of the most evil things in our society, when it comes down to it, I want to live and I want to survive. And I think that’s where ‘isms’ come from: it comes from survival, it comes from greed, it comes from the need to survive and as altruistic as you may be, you’re going to go for your own self-interests first... So when white women are voting, they know the strongest currency they have is whiteness.” (Jones)

Jones touches on something that DiAngelo overlooks in her book; fragility doesn't *only* stem from imagined threats to power; those who are oppressed in other ways are sometimes even more prone to protecting whiteness as a means of survival. When put next to writers such as Cargile and Jones, DiAngelo's explanation for white fragility falls flat. As I will explore further in the next chapter, unconscious social bias is *one* possible explanation; however, it also serves to downplay the intention of racist behaviour.

Angry White Women: White Feminist Resentment

White feminist resentment is especially acute in those who consider themselves as virtuous, or as DiAngelo would describe, one of the *good* white people. By denying complicity with white supremacy, white feminists continue to perpetuate institutional racism against women of colour. While there is no shortage of examples of WFR, a higher profile example is the response to a series of social media posts by Black activist and writer Rachel Cargile following the 2018 racially motivated murder of Nia Wilson. Wilson was murdered by a white supremacist while taking public transit in Oakland, California. (Cargile)

In the days following Wilson's tragic death, Cargile took to her social media to challenge white feminists by asking "where are the voices of all my white feminist friends when a black woman had been tragically murdered"(Cargile)? Some of Cargile's white followers took this as an opportunity to show solidarity with the black community, however, according to Cargile, just as many responded with resentment.

Instead of sharing in the outrage of Nia's brutal murder, they came with fury for being tagged in a post that they felt challenged their own perceived feminist accomplishments. There were grand displays of defensiveness,

demands that they be acknowledged for all the things they had done for black people in the past, and a terrifying lashing out that included racial slurs and doxing. (Cargle)

To Cargle, this reaction is indicative of the deep seeded problems within White Feminism – the need to protect whiteness overpowers their self-proclaimed desire to protect women. These attempts at discourse correction is an exercise in bio-politics; the goal of this behaviour is to protect their perception of identity and morality at the expense of people of colour, and at the expense of denying Nia Wilson the most basic respect of acknowledging the forces which lead to her death. Cargle refers to this expression of resentment as ‘white toxic feminism’, because the aim is not to engage in a meaningful discourse, to advance women in society, or advocate for any kind of equality; this expression of ‘feminism’ is aimed at actively harming women of colour for challenging the status quo. ‘White toxic feminism,’ ‘white feminism’ and ‘white feminist resentment’ are part of the same phenomenon.

Chapter 4: The Functions and Failures of White Feminism

In my previous chapters, I discussed the *what* and the *why* of white feminism. Here, I will explore the *how* of white feminism – the strategies, tools, and actions which continue to perpetuate the practice far longer than the black feminists writing in the 1970's and 80's could have imagined. Returning once again to Audre Lorde, in the following passage Lorde explains one of the most basic – and ongoing – strategies white feminism deploys which prevents adequate intersectionality in feminist practice.

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of colour to educate white women – in the face of tremendous resistance – as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. (Lorde, 21)

The 'tremendous resistance' Lorde speaks of is the fragility Robin DiAngelo defines of in her book; the resentment Capriles speaks of; Lorde is identifying the struggle to engage white feminists with topics of race; topics which challenging white supremacy. What Lorde is proposing, and what disenfranchised people have reiterated and repeated over the last century, is that it is *not* the responsibility of women to educate men, for black women to educate white women, for queer people to educate heterosexual people. White feminism exists to protect power by denying the existence of difference, to deny other ways of knowing, and other ways of living as a global community. Moreover, by playing into a system which continues to 'other' members of the population, the power

of feminism becomes diluted. Rather than accepting and embracing our points of difference, white feminism is reinforcing the patriarchal system it seeks to dismantle.

How can feminism overcome this history of exclusion and fragility? DiAngelo's solution of radical self-reflection is only one small part of the potential cure. Unpacking the discourse which has been formed by a century of bio-politics aimed to subjugate certain members of society in order for other groups to flourish is no simple task. As Marilyn Frye writes "Race is a tie that binds us to men: "us" being white women, and "men" being white men. If we wish not to be bound in subordination to men, we have to give up trading on our white skin for white men's race privilege" (151). Here, Frye is explicitly tying sexism and oppression to whiteness. When considering feminism in this way, it becomes very clear that white women must extricate themselves from white supremacy before they engage with even the basic principles of feminism, or else their ability to fight oppression will be extremely limited. In order to take on this work, we must first understand the toolkit and strategies of white feminism, to learn to recognize red flags and disrupt the discourse.

White Supremacy and Me: Radical De-Colonization

Layla Saad is an author, activist, and teacher. Saad, who is an East-African, Arab, British, Black, Muslim woman, uses her uniquely intersectional identity to study and analyse the functions of white supremacy. Over the summer of 2018, Saad challenged her social media followers with the following post:

White Folks: time for some radical truth-telling about you and your complicity in white supremacy. Not those white people 'out there'. Not white people as a collective. But you. Just you. We start tomorrow. 28 days of simple

yet direct questions for you to share where you are at in your journey so far of understanding and owning your racism. This is not me educating you. This is you being honest about the work you have been doing so far, and how you have been internalising that work. Don't comment unless you are willing to be all the way honest. I don't care about perfectionism. I care about truth, because truth sets us free and makes us better. Use the hashtag #MeAndWhiteSupremacy if you want to share. See you tomorrow. (LaylaFSaad)

What started out as a social media challenge evolved into what is now titled the “Me and White Supremacy Workbook,” available as an online PDF, and to be published in print in 2020. Saad takes the proposal DiAngelo makes about personal responsibility for racism to another level, turning anti-racist work from a passive and reactive activity into an active and productive exercise. The next 28 days, Saad provided followers with simple yet complex prompts, which include: You & White Fragility, You & Tone Policing, You & White Centering, and You & Optical Allyship (Saad). The language Saad uses here is important, and these concepts are a common thread among academics and writers focusing on anti-racism and whiteness. When Rachel Cargile wrote her piece for *Harper Bazar* addressing white feminism following the death of Nia Wilson, she included a list of behaviours white feminists engage with as defence mechanisms. Before elaborating on these concepts, I have included a sampling of comments on Saad's Instagram channel which highlight four major strategies identified by Cargile and Saad, which are commonly utilized by white feminism: Tone Policing, Spiritual By-passing, White Savior Complex, and Centering.



Fig. 2a

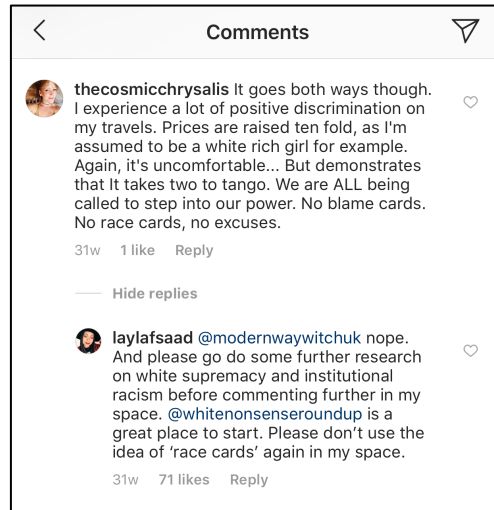


Fig. 2b

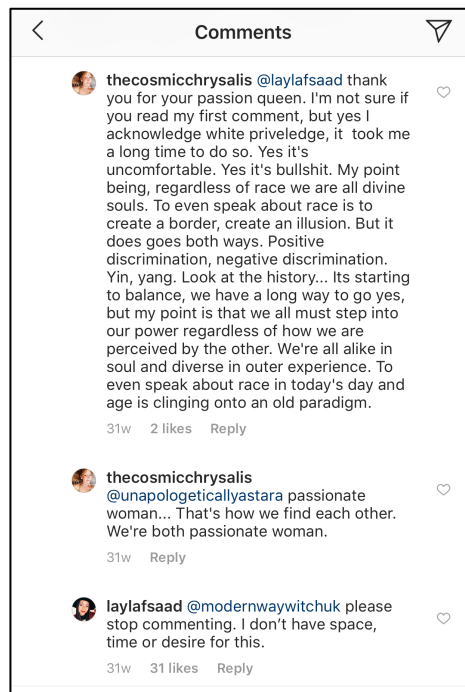


Fig. 2c

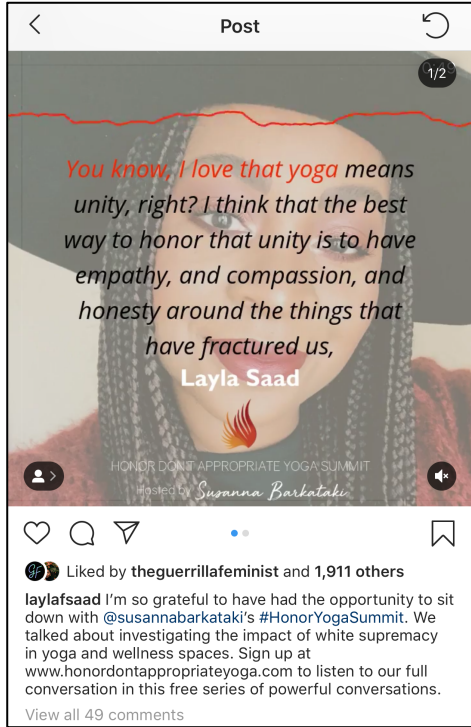


Fig. 3a

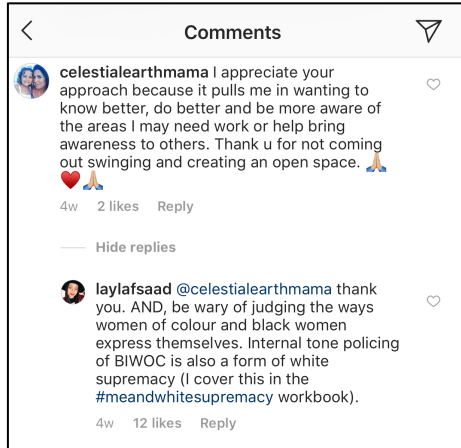


Fig. 3b

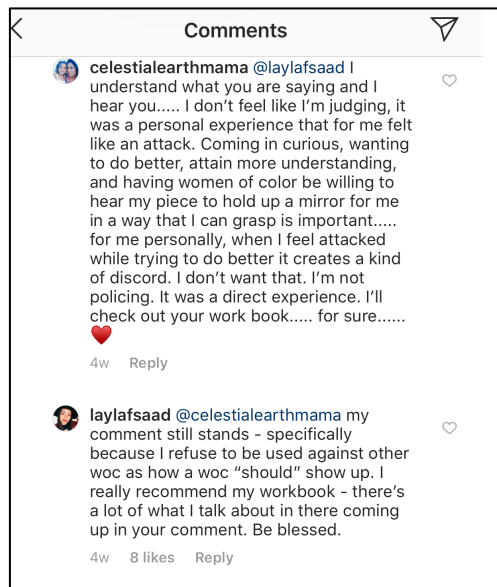


Fig. 3c

In the first set of images (Figure 2a-2c), Saad posts a quote which speaks about 'spiritual white women' who are lacking an intersectional approach to their feminism. Instagram user Thecosmiccrysalis, a self-identified spiritual white woman", chimes in claiming that racism 'goes both ways' and that she too experiences 'positive discrimination' (price gouging due to the perception that she is a wealthy white person). The comment ends with a call to action; 'No blame cards, no race cards, no excuses.' Saad's gentle suggestion that Thecosmiccrysalis should educate herself on institutional racism is essentially ignored, as Thecosmiccrysalis rejects this suggestion and continues down the path of spiritual bypassing.

Spiritual Bypassing: "We are all alike in soul and diverse in outer experience".

What is 'spiritual bypassing'? Influential Psychologist John Welwood, who has advanced studies of including spirituality in psychological practice, first coined the term 'spiritual bypassing' in 1984 to define the use of spiritual practices and beliefs as a way of avoiding dealing with unresolved psychological issues (69). The term is common with psychologists who incorporate religion and spirituality into their practice. As Welwood explains, "Spiritual bypassing often adopts a rational based on using absolute truth to deny or disparage relative truth. Absolute truth is what is eternally true, now and forever, beyond any particular viewpoint" (70). In an interview originally published in *Tricycle Magazine*, Welwood elaborates on the concept and how it can function in interpersonal relationships: "When we are spiritually bypassing, we often use the goal of awakening or liberation to rationalize what I call premature transcendence: trying to rise above the raw and messy side of our humanness before we have fully faced and made peace with

it” (Welwood). When applied to the functions of white feminism, the “raw and messy side of humanness” Welwood describes is the latent white supremacy Cargile and Saad are calling on white women to disrupt.

In Cargle’s article, she applies the term specifically to white feminists, making the observation that “the easiest way for white women to skirt around the realities of racism is to just “love and light it away.” When confronted with ways they have offended a marginalized group with their words or actions, they immediately start to demand unity and peace; painting those they harmed as aggressive, mean, or divisive (Cargle)

Cargle summarizes the phenomenon of Spiritual Bypassing in the context of white feminism quite concisely: When we look to the exchange in figure 2c, Thecosmiccrysals demonstrates all of the above: “My point being, regardless of race we are all divine souls. To even speak about race is to create a boarder, create an illusion.” Thecosmiccrysals dismisses the concept of race entirely due to the fact that we are all divine souls. Though Thecosmiccrysals is clearly trying to relate to Saad on a level *above* our physical plain, what this Instagram user accomplishes is perpetuating one of the main functions of white feminism; denying the race-based discrimination experienced by many women of colour. Rather than listening and benefiting from the resources, discussions, and opportunities Saad provides Thecosmiccrysals to evolve her thinking, Thecosmiccrysals chooses to remain committed to her ignorance. Spiritual Bypassing is an elevated version of ‘I don’t see colour’ – it’s a strategy designed to relieve white of their complicity with systematic racism – you cannot see something you refuse to acknowledge.

Tone Policing: “Thank you for not coming out swinging”.

The exchange Saad engages with in the second set of screenshots (fig. 3a-3c) with Instagram user Celestialearthmother at first seems rather innocuous – the comment is praising Saad for her approach, tone, and gentle nature. Saad, however, is quick to draw attention to the practice *tone policing*. When Celestialearthmother says “thanks for not coming out swinging” this is a reference to ‘angry black women’ – a stereotype. In 2017, academics Trina Jones and Kimberly Jade Norwood published the paper *Aggressive Encounters & White Fragility: Deconstructing the Trope of the Angry Black Woman* specifically to deconstruct this stereotype. They describe “the angry black woman” as the “the physical embodiment of some of the worst negative stereotypes of Black women—she is out of control, disagreeable, overly aggressive, physically threatening, loud (even when she speaks softly), and to be feared. She will not stay in her “place.” She is not human” (2032). As Jones and Norwood explain, the ‘Angry Black Woman’ stereotype has contributed to high levels of incarceration, increased instances of police brutality, and an overall dismissal of black women’s voices (2032).

Tone policing is the practice of discourse correction; it limits how women of colour speak, what they can say, and controls much emotion is deemed acceptable. Cargle introduces this idea by emphasizing the many reasons black women have to be angry, “when women of color begin to cry out about their pain, frustration, and utter outrage with the system that is continuing to allow our men to murdered, our babies to be disregarded, and our livelihood to be dismissed, we are often met with white women who tell us perhaps we should “say things a little nicer” if we want to be respected and heard.”

With the added context of the damaging history of stereotypes, the comment from Celestialearthmother in fig 3b takes on a new weight. Not only is applauding Saad for her restraint condescending, but she is enforcing the subjugation of black voices. This exchange is significant; Saad invites Celestialearthmother to educate herself on the concept of tone policing and goes as far as to provide her with a resource to assist. The irony of the response in fig 2C is obvious: Celestialearthmother claims that she wants women of colour to educate her – yet when Saad does try to educate her, Celestialearthmother doubles down and insists that since she is coming to the conversation ‘curious’ with the goal to attain a better understanding of racism, she would prefer a gentle approach, because “when I feel attacked when trying to do better, it creates a discord.” So not only does Celestialearthmother feel entitled to be educated by black women, she is diverting the conversation from racism to her own feelings. This is a white feminist strategy known as *centering*.

Centring: “It was a personal experience for me that felt like an attack”.

As Cargile explains, centring refers to the phenomenon of making issues of racism or intersectionality about themselves and their feelings. “White women get so caught up in how they feel in a moment of black women expressing themselves that they completely vacuum the energy, direction, and point of the conversation to themselves and their feelings” (Cargile). What we see in the comments by Celestialearthmother is a fairly direct example of centring. She seems unwilling to take feedback on what she felt like was a justifiable comment. Instead of doing the work to educate herself – which she claims she is there to do – Celestialearthmother defends herself by explaining that she has felt ‘attacked’ in the past (presumably by black

women), and other black women should speak more like Saad in order to make white women like her feel comfortable and receptive to their ideas. Instead of engaging Saad on the topic of the post (white supremacy in yoga), Celestialearthmother chooses to talk about the ways black women can be more palatable to well-meaning white women.

Upon first glance, there may not be anything in Celestialearthmother's initial comment that would seem problematic. That is why this type of racism is so insidious; white people often do not see it. This is why it is of crucial importance to recognize and understand systematic and institutionalized racism. The nuance added with a working knowledge of history, systems, and stereotypes make visible what many are blind to; racism does not exist in a vacuum. Racism and racist behaviour are sometimes not easy to define, but once armed with different ways of knowing, you know it when you see it.

These are just a handful of terms that allow us to better code and understand White Feminism. By codifying repetitive behaviours, the strategies of white feminism become easier to identify and articulate. Having vocabulary for these behaviours allows us to disrupt typical discourses and challenge conventional narratives.

Is it the task of women of colour to educate white women?

Celestialearthmother argues that "having women of color be willing to hear my piece to hold up a mirror for me in a way that I can grasp is important". It might be important, but this is placing an incredible amount of responsibility onto women of colour; why should women of colour hold space for her 'piece', and why is it their responsibility to 'hold up a mirror' and provide her with feedback that is a) easy for her to grasp and b) in a manner which is gentle, non-aggressive, and considerate of her

feelings. Rather than take responsibility for her own education, and taking advantage of the many free resources Saad and Cargle make available for white women, Celestialearthmother seems to be suggesting that by showing up and engaging people like Saad, that she's done her part. It is now the job of women of colour to tell her how to be a good white person.

Lyla Saad and Rachel Cargle both make it clear that the work they do is not *for* white women. Despite producing thoughtful and insightful resources, Saad and Cargle tackle white feminism as a strategy of anti-racist work. The resources are available – but it remains the responsibility of white feminists to do the work for themselves. Saad makes this very clear in her communications on social media, and in the *Me and White Supremacy Workbook*. Rather than taking apart these comments point by point (which I have just done), Saad offers the vocabulary and a link to her workbook – she offers a pathway to anti-racism consciousness raising. A recurring theme in Saad's work is to make clear she is not there to hold anyone's hand or comfort white women as they engage with anti-racist work. Cargle mirrors this attitude in her own work: she makes it explicitly clear that her work is about survival, and not about teaching white feminists how to be 'good white people'. A world with less racists is a safer world for people of colour.

The expectation on oppressed people to educate oppressors has existed for decades. We now understand that this expectation is another exercise of bio-political power: if subjugated people would like to no longer be subjugated, it is *their* responsibility to advocate for themselves and lead through education. But as Lorde notes, when it comes to white feminism, even when education and knowledge is

offered, it is met with 'intense resistance.' The intersecting systems of white supremacy, resentment, and fragility that have been discussed in this paper are all designed so that privileged people and oppressors *reject* any knowledge offered, because it is not the responsibility of whites to be educated. To Lorde, "this is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought" (18). What Lorde means by this is that rather than accepting and celebrating our points of difference, the current expectation on women of colour to educate white women only serves to intensify white resentment, as well as reinforcing their allegiance to whiteness. The work that Saad and Cargle are doing is to disrupt this old paradigm by inviting white feminists to claim their own agency and take responsibility for anti-racist work themselves; the only way to disrupt the system is to reject it. The work these women are doing is subversive, nuanced, and critically important to advancing and creating a productive, intersectional, and cohesive feminist practice.

Chapter 5 Conclusion: Radicalizing Feminist Consciousness Raising

I am a white woman feminist. I differentiate myself from the topic of this work, white feminism, only by virtue of having begun the work to dismantle the internalized white supremacy which all white people raised in western colonial societies are bestowed with. After all, up until a few years ago, I would have been a near perfect match for the criteria I set in chapter 1 to identify white feminists: white, middle class, academic, and upholding sexism as the main tenant of my feminism. My only saving grace to keep myself from being the definition of a white feminist I have spent this paper criticising is that I am not a heterosexual. This work is uncomfortable, and I must admit I am guilty of utilizing many of the strategies of white feminism outlined in chapter 4 when I became uncomfortable or unsure of how to participate in conversations of race, let alone considering actions which may have caused harm to friends and colleagues. Marilyn Fyre said it best in her 1991 essay *White Woman Feminist*, when reflecting on her own journey towards deconstructing her own journey towards understand what it means to be a woman, a feminist, to be white. "These were very frustrating experiences: they played out and revealed the way in which the fact that I am white gave unbidden and unwanted meanings to my thought and my actions and poisoned them all with privilege"(Fyre, 147). This frustration is the experience of grappling with white fragility; the emotional reaction to racial confrontations as described by Robin DiAngelo in her book *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. As a feminist, I considered myself a *progressive white person*: someone who understood the systematic problem of racism, but was somehow untouched and unaffected by it. As a white feminist, it was my job to dismantle patriarchy, and

decidedly *not* my place to take on racism. The discomfort I felt was complicated: my understanding of racism up until this point was that racism was intentional, racist people were bad people, who truly believed in white superiority and intended to harm people of colour. By accepting my complicity with further subjugating and oppression women of colour by simply choosing to ignore the issues of racism, particularly within feminism, I experienced the list of emotions DiAngelo lists in her book as symptoms of white fragility: defensiveness, judged, misunderstood, angry, and guilty (143). However, if I have learned anything from my journey through anti-racism work, it's that *this work is not actually about me or my feelings*. The discomfort of knowing I likely caused pain to people of colour in my life is nowhere near the discomfort of *experiencing* that racism, inadvertent or not. In context of what drew me to feminism in the first place, the wish to fight injustice and dismantle systems of oppression, my mission had not changed, but it had to be deconstructed in order to acknowledge my own internalized racism and re-centre my feminist practice towards the work of anti-racism.

Understanding intersectionality is not enough: it is not enough for white feminists to look at a woman of colour and understand she experiences racism AND sexism. To be a meaningful ally, white women must engage with internal anti-racist work in order to disrupt the pattern of feminist discourse being dominated by the problems of the white, heterosexual, privileged women who are so often at the centre of the conversation. Throughout history, feminism has functioned in a way that always grants rights in an order of subjugation: white women won the right to vote before women of colour; granted access to university education first; went to space first; ran for political offices first (Franceschet et al. 33-44). Allowing women of colour to participate in all of these

institutions has always been an afterthought. Kimberlé Crenshaw called out how this approach is problematic in her influential paper *Demarginalizing the Intersection between Race and Sex*, where she initially identified the problem of white feminism and introduced the concept of intersectional practice. “It is somewhat ironic that those concerned with alleviating the ills of racism and sexism should adopt such a top-down approach to discrimination. If their efforts instead began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit” (167). This statement identifies not only the singular focus of white feminism, but also the inefficiencies of the practice itself. This conversation has been happening for long enough to realize that there is no such thing as trickle down liberation. Why, in a group of oppressed people (women), are the most well off prioritized? The ‘top down approach’ Crenshaw recognizes is still the practice of white feminism to this day. Writers and teachers Rachel Cargle and Layla Saad are currently challenging this practice, and challenging white feminists to do more than incorporate an overly simplified version of intersectionality into their activism. When Crenshaw first provided us with the concept of intersectionality in 1989, she wrote “It is enough, for now, that such an effort would encourage us to look beneath the prevailing conceptions of discrimination and to challenge the complacency that accompanies belief in the effectiveness of this framework” (170). This was 30 years ago. It is no longer enough to only look beneath prevailing conceptions – we’re been looking long enough. Intersectionality is not a theoretical concept – it must be lived. White feminists must go further and engage with the work or radical self-acceptance. Simone de Bouvoir,

celebrated French writer, philosopher, feminist, and author of renowned book *The Second Sex* (1949), wrote in her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "it is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting" (7). If white feminists can authentically and honestly do the work to understand the 'genuine conditions of our lives', which is to say, are able to say "I am racist" and accept that as a reality of being white, we soon will learn there is no need to guilt. Guilt is an unproductive emotion, and actions stemming from a desire to elevate that feeling of guilt are equally as inauthentic and unproductive.

Radical Disloyalty to Whiteness

Frye, through self-reflection, self-education, consultation and conversations with feminist of colour came to the conclusion that in order for white feminists to be *truly* fighting oppression, we must break the covenant with whiteness we are raised with. She says "for many of us, resistance to white male domination was first, and quite naturally, action simply for our own release from degradation and tyranny we hated in and of itself. but in this racial context, our pursuit of our liberation (I do not say "of equality") is, whether or not we so intend it, disloyal to Whiteness"(165). What Frye is telling us, telling white women, is that it is a misguided hope to think white women can simply gain *equality* with white men. Equality implies 'sameness,' and a white woman achieving equality with white men would just mean that white women have now become a more powerful oppressor of everyone else. White feminists must extricate themselves from the loyalty expected of white people to protect white supremacy. This is not to suggest that white women somehow become un-white – the level of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual bypassing this would require is almost laughable. It is simply not possible to

no longer be white – in our deeply racialized society, it is impossible to get through a day without benefiting in some small way from white privilege. What Fyre is suggesting, and what activists Layla Saad and Rachel Cargle are asking, is that white women take on the responsibility of dismantling racism. This means speaking up when other white people show racism, be it over the family dinner table, or in your place of work. Even if it is awkward, even if it's uncomfortable. Sitting in silence is a privilege only granted to white people. White feminists must position anti-racism work at the forefront of their practice and discourses.

Power to embrace our Difference

To return once again to Audre Lorde's powerful words in *The Master's Tools*, I want to emphasise that the focus on difference, and the fractures racism has caused between feminists – this is the tool of the oppressor. Women and feminists should not be causing harm, silencing, and further oppressing one another. The white feminist commitment to dismantling sexism before all else is an exercise in repetition; over and over, decade after decade, a new generation of women attempt to dismantle the patriarchal system. However, white feminism, which continues to dominate mainstream feminist discourses and conversations, can no longer afford to view systems of oppression as a two-pronged approach. There can be no hierarchy of need when it comes to liberating the oppressed. Racism and sexism go hand in hand, and by denying the power and influence of white supremacy, we doomed to repeat ourselves. This cycle of white women centring the problems of white women, followed by women of colour demanding to be heard has to end. Unless anti-racism work becomes central to the feminist fight, then the progress being made to dismantle the patriarchy is severely

limited. Crenshaw tried to tell us that the power of difference is a force of good, one to be embraced and celebrated. “Implicit in certain strands of feminist and racial liberation movements... is the view that the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of political empowerment and social reconstruction” (171). What Crenshaw is telling us is that if feminists embrace difference, and stop letting it be the cause of division, the work to dismantle all poles of oppression can begin in a meaningful way and one day the work may lead to the reconstruction of a society based on social justice.

Pathways to a Wholistic Feminist Consciousness

The most challenging hurdle to a mainstream feminist practice that centres anti-racism is that for many white women who wish to be feminists, the pathway to our education is dominated by the mainstream version of white feminism. While arguably the acknowledgement of Tarana Burke and her work during the #MeToo movement is a step towards inclusivity of subjugated voices, this correction was still reactionary; after the fact. Indeed, why did it take the most elite white women in North America speaking out against systematic sexual abuse for any kind of large-scale conversation to take place? Why do white women need to be *told* to listen to the voices of activists of colour, why must they always be an afterthought?

It is here that I must call upon the gatekeepers of feminism to do the radical work of de-centering their own perspectives from their work in favour of centring the work and voices of women of colour. To the vloggers like Jessica Valente, editors of influential magazines like *Teen Vogue* and even *Cosmopolitan*, university lecture halls and feminist bookstores – the places women seek out the words and advice of other

women. These are the places these conversations must begin to take place. It is unacceptable that in 2020, activists like Saad and Cargle are still working so hard to get through to white feminists how much damage the erasure and ignorance to racism can cause women of colour. The emotional and intellectual labour required of these women to engage in this work, to offer white women the opportunity to learn, is incredible. And once again, I return to the most important lesson here: the work they are doing is not *for* white women. The work they do is part of the larger battle to protect and empower people of colour. Less racism in the world makes for a safer world for women of colour.

The sooner this intervention can take place – the less time women of colour must spend trying to convince white feminists to pay attention to the structural role racism plays in the patriarchy, the stronger the movement will get as a whole.

Radical White Feminists

This work has spent a great deal of time talking about the damage caused by white feminism, but I would like to propose a radical challenge to all feminists who are white: become *radical*. Be a radical ally. Use the privilege the colour of our skin affords us to lift up and amplify the voices white supremacy tries to silence. Be radically honest: do the work to deprogram yourself, accept that racism is in each of us, and live up to the challenge of accepting this truth as part of the bigger journey to the deconstruction of racism. You cannot dismantle something you cannot see – therefore you *must* acknowledge it in order to intervene. Remember that the fight against oppression is not only one kind– your oppression as a white woman is valid, but it is not the only oppression in this world. Accept anger. Those who are oppressed are *allowed* to feel angry at their oppressor. Women as a group can be angry towards men, as a group.

Indigenous people are allowed to be angry towards colonists and settlers. Women of colour are allowed to be angry with white women. Finally, *transform your consciousness*, and make it your responsibility to raise the consciousness of those around you. As Frye writes in the conclusion of her essay, “seasoned feminists (white feminists along with feminists of other races) know how to transform consciousness. The first break-through is the moment of knowing another way of being is possible. In the matter of a white woman’s racedness, the possibility in question is the possibility of disengaging (on some levels, at least) one’s own energies and wits from the continuing project of social creation and maintenance of the white race, the possibility of being disloyal to that project by constantly making oneself whitely” (166). Though I wish to mirror Frye’s sentiment, I will argue that 30 years later, the up taking of this task is even more urgent. White feminists *need* other women in this battle. Whiteness is the master’s ultimate tool, and we should know by now, after so many years, that it has not even come close to dismantling it.

Radical transformational consciousness raising is the only way forward. It is the responsibility for white woman feminists to take up this task in earnest, so that we can stop spending time trying to convince each other of our intersection oppressions and finally work together towards the common goal of racial and sexual liberation.

At the beginning of this paper, I described my own journey to becoming a white feminist – and now I hope I can evolve my own definition of white feminists, to become a *radical* white feminists. The first step in my own journey – the journey which lead me to researching and writing this paper – was to seek out knowledge beyond that offered by the white women who I looked up to. The same feminists who helped guide my feminist

consciousness did not have all the answers, and by looking to them and the women around them – more white feminists – I was only reaffirming a singular perspective and way of knowing. This comes back to the notion that it is *not* the responsibility of women of colour to educate white women. If I continued to stay in my lane, meaning only taking up causes relevant to me and my life, how could I really be dismantling oppression? Once I made the simple effort of seeking out the work of feminists of colour, I realized the incredible wealth of knowledge I had been missing all along – knowledge that is nuanced and important, that offered me a window to perspectives and voices which completely changed how I approach complicated issues of oppression. Something else this exercise made me realize – a realization that was reaffirmed as I researched this paper – is that feminists of colour have been imploring white feminists to listen over, and over, and over again. Despite not having any obligation or responsibility to education white women, many feminists of colour have still taken the time to create resources, hold discussions, and engage with white feminists – even in the face of extreme resistance. Layla Saad explains in the introductory chapter of the *Me and White Supremacy Workbook* that she does not do this work *for* white women; she does this work because a less racism makes the world a safer place for people of colour(1). I will also say that Saad’s workbook is an invaluable resource – to anyone seeking to dismantle internalized racism on a deeper level, I highly encourage them to take up the 28 day challenge. Before one can begin to challenge *external* racism, one must have a nuanced and meaningful understanding of internalized racism.

In addition to the rather rudimentary choice to seek out the writing and knowledge of feminists of colour, I will be answering Frye’s call to be disloyal to whiteness – this is an

ongoing project, and an exercise that will require a great deal of humility and accepting that from time to time I will be wrong; my reactions, instincts, and emotions will still be subject to the filter of white privileged and the good/bad binary. However with practice and self-reflection it becomes easier to recognize you own internalized racism.

Disloyalty to whiteness also involves speaking to other white people, be they feminists, family, friends, or coworkers about racism, and speaking up when racism occurs.

Finally, what I feel will be the most meaningful and impactful strategy to becoming a radical white feminists is to learn how to be an active and committed ally to women of colour. This involves learning the difference between speaking *for*, and speaking *about*. It involves *amplifying* the voices of feminists of colour – who have been there all along – rather than using white privileged to take up space on a platform already full of similar voices. This means sharing, linking, and referencing the work of women like Cargle and Saad, rather than retweeting those like Jessica Valenti and Alyssa Milano.

Feminism is not static, and what feminism looks like and how it is practiced can and should evolve. White feminism doesn't have to be the frustrating example of what happens when people with privilege stay committed to that privilege; if enough feminists who are white take on this task, and disrupt the pathways to feminist consciousness raising which continue to centre whiteness, then perhaps we can finally answer the calls of Lorde, Davis, and Crenshaw (to name a few). Together, feminists can unite in our difference, and in that difference move together to dismantle the systems of power which seek to oppress the many in order to preserve the power of the few.

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