WHOSE CLASSROOM IS IT?
UNPACKING POWER AND PRIVILEGE IN UNIVERSITY WOMEN’S STUDIES
CLASSROOM SPACES

by

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Abstract

Women’s Studies students’ accounts of their experiences academically, emotionally and politically in feminist university classrooms will be investigated in this thesis. Central to my work, through an anti-racist feminist and intersectional analysis, is to demonstrate the ways in which Women’s Studies university classroom spaces are neither ‘innocent’ nor are they devoid of racism/white supremacy as it is present in the bodies who are allowed to enter the space, voices allowed to speak and knowledge being taught. As this research is informed by a personal experience in an undergraduate Women and Gender Studies course at a local university, I will use both auto-ethnography and interviews as method in and through anti-racist feminist research methodology. Highlighting the importance of anti-racism education as a call to action in attending to this disjuncture and also to erode superficial notions of sisterhood will demonstrate white feminist supremacy as an implication for the sociology of race.
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Dedication

For my maternal grandmother – Grace Eileen Noel
Thank you for being a mother, a grandmother and the greatest teacher I have ever known.
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Chapter One:  
Introduction

Frequently, white feminists act as if black women did not know sexist oppression existed until they voiced feminist sentiment. They believe they are providing black women with “the” analysis and “the” program for liberation. They do not understand, cannot even imagine, that black women, as well as other groups of women who live daily in oppressive situations, often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience, just as they develop strategies of resistance (hooks, 1984, p. 10)

Rationale

Whose University Is It, Anyway? Power and Privilege on Gendered Terrain (2008), looks at space in a rather critical way, whether intentional or not. Although their focus is on gender particularly, it asks an important question, namely: Whose university is it, anyway? This thesis furthers their work by asking: Whose classroom is it?, which seeks to illuminate the ways in which Women’s Studies university classroom spaces are claimed by whiteness.

Under the guise of being ‘feminist’, ‘respectable’ and ‘progressive’, it is assumed that feminist spaces are ‘innocent’, free from racism/white supremacy and other “-isms”. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack (1998) in The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchal Relations among Women argue that this “race to innocence” has dire consequences. In feminist classroom spaces for instance,

When we view ourselves as innocent, we cannot confront the hierarchies that operate among us. Instead, each woman claims that her own marginality is the worse one; failing to interrogate her complicity in other women’s lives, she continues to participate in the practices that oppress other women (p. 335)

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1 Like Grillo and Wildman (1991) in “Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implication of Making Comparisons between Racism and Sexism (Or Other –Isms)”. I will employ the term racism/white supremacy as a reminder that the perpetuation of white supremacy is racist

2 Examples of “-isms” include: racism, classism, sexism ageism, ableism, heterosexism, and so forth
I argue that in feminist classrooms, “-isms” operate without accountability as it is assumed that the space does not produce, reproduce or protect whiteness. However, more often than not, it is Black women and other women of colour that are at the brunt of silencing and violence by white women. It is in fact this race to innocence that white women employ to erase accountability in, and benefit from, white power and privilege.

bell hooks (1984) in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* writes:

> Attempts by white feminists to silence black women are rarely written about. All too often they have taken place in conference rooms, classrooms, or the privacy of cozy living room settings, where one lone black woman faces the racist hostility of a group of white women (p. 12)

Here, hooks (1984) has signalled the necessary urgency to establish a feminist critique of classroom spaces. Thus, this thesis seeks to respond to hooks’ call and to critically examine racism/white supremacy in Women’s Studies university classroom spaces and how it manifests itself in spaces as silencing, oppressive, and emotionally taxing on women of colour particularly. Recognising that feminist theory has had a long history of exclusivity and fragmentation from Simone de Beauvoir (1989) in *The Second Sex* to Betty Friedan (2001) in *The Feminine Mystique* to current attempts at challenging and depoliticising feminism eluding to the idea that we are in a post-feminist era, I will illuminate that spaces are neither natural, apolitical nor neutral and that feminist spaces specifically, are a contested space claimed by whiteness.

As this analysis is informed by an experience I had in an upper-year undergraduate Women’s Studies classroom, I will use auto-ethnography as method and interviews in and through an anti-racist feminist lens in order to triangulate my assertions by questioning the kind of experiences students have in Women’s Studies university classroom spaces academically,

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3 Throughout this analysis, ‘Black’ will be capitalized as resistance to the dominant culture which attempts to place Black bodies and other racialized bodies as members of a sub-race
politically and emotionally and what it means for “sisterhood” and community as a result. By illuminating the disjuncture between theory and practice (feminist theory and feminist pedagogy), I will propose recommendations for the ways in which this separation can be attended to.

Thus I question, how can we challenge systems of oppression and racism/white supremacy “out there”, if we cannot acknowledge how deeply embedded racism/white supremacy is in the space of the classroom? How can we come to understand the classroom as a space that is neither natural, apolitical nor neutral when the knowledge constructed in such space have direct implications on the ways we read the world and make meanings to our lived realities? Why are these conversations more often than not separated by race? How can conversations and intellectual work mobilize on the complexities and the reality of women’s lives differently located in systems of power and privilege for students, teachers and various learners? These are some of the questions that I wish to explore, building on Sherene Razack’s (2002) notion of how “place becomes race”.

**Discursive Location and Formation**

During the academic year of 2008 to 2009, I took a feminist seminar course in the Women and Gender Studies department at a local university on the politics of development. The reason for such course is that I had just returned to Toronto from a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) sponsored research project in Grenada, a country that I call my home. By unpacking the complexities of feminist research, my experience revealed the intricacies, axes of power and opportunities involved in international work on both an academic and individual level.
Because Women and Gender Studies is said to be a very progressive and critical department, I was excited to be in a space where I could analyze and deconstruct my experience abroad, the ethos of ‘helping’ and ‘saving’ and how it is linked to power, privilege, racism/white supremacy and colonialism. Moreover, as a Black female student who is committed to challenging power and privilege, I look to critical disciplines such as Women and Gender Studies and Equity Studies as places to challenge dominant narratives and to create a space for counter hegemonic work whereby students are critically engaged in pedagogy that is anti-oppressive and anti-racist. That is to say, a classroom space where systemic inequities, racism/white supremacy, power and privilege are consistently and constantly disrupted. I see such classroom spaces to learn and unlearn, to build community and solidarity across and between differences and to engage in critical self-reflection and dialogue with each other.

However, I found an emerging divide based on race in the conversations that occurred in these spaces as women of colour and white women were often at opposing praxes on issues such as race, racism/white supremacy, whiteness, power, privilege, oppression and white feminism. In these spaces, intersecting forms of oppression were assumed to be separate from the “neutrality” of the classroom, although it has presence in and through the classroom space. When this became evident to me and to other women of colour in the classroom, the importance of examining the politics in school settings and international development programs and how they allow axes of power and privilege to operate without accountability became imperative.

As an action project in collaboration with another student, we spearheaded a group called “Challenging Privilege in the Classroom”. We organized a group of students to continue the discussions we sought inside of the classroom, beyond the space of the classroom. Some of the questions we discuss include: how does power and privilege operate in the classroom? Why is it
so difficult to talk about this? How can teachers and students challenge these power dynamics? How are students acting on what they have learned? What are the challenges? What can we do to continue this dialogue? When presenting this project to the classroom, there was a lot of backlash from white students who often employed an understanding that power and privilege is everywhere and that power and privilege is constantly shifting. These comments and ideologies were not only problematic but violent to all people of colour as it was an erasure of difference and also of accountability. This experience reinforced to me the necessary urgency to critically examine the politics of the classroom.

*The Personal as Political*

The subject of my thesis is both personal and political as it has manifested itself in and through my first experience in a Women and Gender Studies classroom space. Although the course brought forth tears, discomfort, rage and anger, and later trauma and spirit-injury⁴, I was never able to articulate these experiences. I remember leaving the Women’s Studies course exhausted and confused, vowing never to think about feminist theory again.

I then entered graduate studies a few months after the course finished only to be reminded of my experience through taking courses on the sociology of race, Black feminist thought, the school and community, marginality and the politics of resistance. I learned that the individual cannot be separated from one’s experiences and that too; one’s experiences can become a critical pedagogical tool for learning, unlearning and coming to know. It was through learning this that I realized that I could not escape this experience, but also, that I did not want to.

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⁴ Spirit-injury can be defined as moments when your spirit is injured, broken or harmed based on traumatic experiences
Politically, this project will look at the didactic and dialogic moments in Women Studies university classroom spaces that perpetuate racism and white (feminist) supremacy. Some of the participants of my study have made clear that feminism and feminists constantly speak about the struggles and/or marginality, but rarely link the discussion to resistance and action such as instances when women of colour named power and privilege and where women of colour were/are actively engaged in projects that sought to challenge hegemony. Informal conversations with some students of the course revealed to me that over-theorizing took the place of political action. This thesis is thus a project of action and resistance, valuing diverse voices, knowledges and bodies. Moreover, this thesis seeks to make visible the invisible and open up the conversation to all of those who are truly committed to the politics of change.

There is a great need for feminist research in the Canadian context on the politics of Women and Gender Studies classroom spaces and the experiences of students therein. I hope to contribute to this conversation and link it to the larger conversation; “[...] feminist theory is losing its vital connection to feminist struggle and that connection must be firmly reestablished and understood if our work is to have significant political impact” (hooks, 1988, p. 41). That is to say, as feminist theory has direct implications on feminist pedagogy, there is a need to go beyond questioning mainstream feminist theory and to re-think it. I argue that intersectionality and anti-racist feminism has been useful in addressing some of these feminist pedagogical tensions, and in a classroom spaces, can in turn create a space that is anti-racist.

**Thesis Roadmap**

The second chapter, *Literature Review and Discursive Framework*, looks at spatial theorists such as Radhika Mohanram (1999), Sherene Razack (2002), Carol Schick (2002) and Nirmal Puwar (2004), and how they speak to the complexity of space. I will proceed to provide
a thorough evaluation of their concepts and highlight the gaps in their analysis and how my research hopes to both fill in those gaps and extend their discussions. Secondly, this chapter will demonstrate how anti-racist feminism and intersectional theory can lend themselves as a discursive framework to make sense of Canadian feminist university classroom spaces. I will also look at the value of Whiteness as a concept in this thesis project.

The third chapter, *Research Methodology*, uses anti-racist research methodology through a feminist lens and looks at how it informs autoethnography and interviews as method. I will examine the limitations and possibilities of such methods by exploring emotionality, the politics of participation and the challenges of researcher embodiment as a Black woman.

The following chapter, *Data Analysis*, will present the data collected of the eight interviewed student participants of my project and will reveal my interpretation and analysis of my findings in relation to discussions in my *Literature Review* chapter. I will focus on feminist theory and feminist pedagogy with a particular emphasis on feminist space.

The fifth chapter, *Discussion*, connects themes raised in the *Data Analysis* to the larger socio-political context. This section will look at feminist theory, space, emotionality and acts of resistance and how it is linked to what I name as white feminist supremacy. I will conclude the chapter by providing a numerated list of recommendations created by myself along with the contributions of the participants in my research.

The final chapter, *Conclusion*, will begin by looking at how anti-racist education can bridge the gap between theory and practice. I will then look at the implications for theory and what this means for sisterhood and community. I will also propose future directions and areas of research that might be useful to further unpack feminist classroom spaces.
Chapter Two:
Literature Review and Discursive Framework

Space as a major metaphor in participant discourses is indicated by the often repeated expressions “fit in” and “out there”. The desire to fit in is protected against the unconstrained, illogical space where unpredictable, potentially harmful, outdated, and contrary knowledge resides (Schick, 2002, p. 107)

Introduction

The dearth of research about the academic, political and emotional realities of racism/white supremacy on racialized, gendered bodies in Canadian university Women’s Studies classroom spaces suggests that this is a relatively new field worthy of exploration. Reviewing existing literature on the politics of space is a useful starting point for this discussion since the politics of space informs discussions of racism and white (feminist) supremacy. Literature on the politics of space encompasses work that seeks to understand the complexities of space; to come to understand space as a site of power, space as a place claimed by whiteness, space as raced and gendered (as well as classed, sexualized et cetera), spaces as political, spaces as sites of resistance and so forth. This chapter will look at works by Radhika Mohanram (1999), Sherene Razack (2002), Carol Schick (2002) and Nirmal Puwar (2004) to inform the complexities of feminist classroom spaces. I will then proceed by looking at how anti-racist feminism and intersectionality can operate as a discursive framework in this thesis.

Literature Review of Space

In *Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space*, Radhika Mohanram (1999) expresses the concept of racial difference functioning along with spatial difference. She discusses the intersection of race, place and gender through looking at the cartography/mapping of bodies, the embodiment of Blackness and woman’s relationship to body, nation and space. To make
meaning of embodiment and disembodiment, Mohanram uses Claude Lévi-Strauss’ piece entitled “The Science of the Concrete” to (un)map bodies. Lévi-Strauss makes a distinction between the ‘engineer’ and the ‘bricoleur’ (p. 7), where on one hand, the engineer is capable of abstraction, concepts and scientific knowledge and the bricoleur is the Indigene capable of mere imagination. The connection she attempts to draw is that of place and embodiment, where the engineer is synonymous with the white body, mobility, scientific proof, power, master, Cartesian subject and as also the ‘all-knower’. The bricoleur, however, is defined as the Black body which is presented as a body out of place, one whose ‘tribal’ knowledge is grounded in nature and intuition, one that can be controlled by the engineer, one that is a prisoner of mode of thought, inferior, pre-capitalist and locked in space.

She then turns to Alfred Crosby’s notion of mobility posing the question, “how are whiteness and nature represented?” (p. 12). She writes:

Once again the indigene and his environment are held immobile against the repeated onslaught of the settler, who alone has the ability and freedom to move and change his landscape ... The Caucasian is disembodied, mobile, absent of the marks that physically immobilize the native (pp. 14, 15)

Accordingly, the Indigene functions as the body while the Caucasian functions as the mind (p. 16). Here she is alluding to the fact that the white body is analogous to ‘mobility’ and ‘disembodiment’ while the Black body represents ‘immobility’ and ‘embodiment’ (p. 15).

Essentially, the white body is one that can take anyone’s place and, is free and modern, whereas the Black body is seen as trapped, disempowered and pre-modern. The duality of the disembodiment of the white body is that dematerialization and unmarking is only possible for some. This analysis is further complicated when the embodiment of Blackness is intertwined with gender.

Mohanram argues that the raced/sexed body is a burden, writing:
Through carrying the burden of race and gender, the (unsexed) black body and the (unraced) woman’s body are really not there, but are rather the constructs by which male Viennese identity can come into inscription. Both the black and the female bodies are very much social, political and racial constructions (p. 45).

Her focus here is on the temporality of the raced/sexed body and the way in which it is displaced. Putting this discussion in the context of the nation, she asserts that the nation is also embodied as well as gendered. That is to say, the woman is (historically and presently) central to the nation as she plays a role in reproducing it. At the same time, the woman’s role is also marginalized as she is seen as without agency (p. 59). As a result, to say that the racialized and gendered body is a burden erases the roles performed by these women as well as their contributions.

Mohanram’s analysis and historical linkage of the body, geography/place/space, race, embodiment and gender is useful for thinking through power which has been anchored spatially. Through post-colonial and psychoanalytic theory, she contextualizes how embodied identity within liberal democratic discourse reveals the Black (as well as female) body as out of place. Furthermore, her discussion illuminates issues of citizenship/belonging, mobility and entitlement. One of the gaps in her work has to do with overemphasizing issues of marginality and glossing over the counter story of resistance and agency. The irony in her analysis is that she discusses women in relation to nation as having no agency, but fails to highlight explicitly, the agency of racialized women in her own work.

Similar to Mohanram, Sherene Razack (2002) also focuses on locations situated outside the classroom by specifically looking at national space in relation to law. In her introductory

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5 This similar dismissal of agency was taken up in the context of Native agency in a piece titled “Desperately seeking absolution: Native agency as colonialist alibi” by Robin Brownlie and Mary-Ellen Kelm (1994). They argue for Native self determination writing, “[...] the right to political and moral self-determination, [is] arguably the most significant form of agency [...]”. That is to say, Native peoples in this case, or racialized men and women more broadly, deserve the right to self-government and decision-making without interference by colonial powers.
chapter entitled *When Place Becomes Race*, Razack examines the politics of space, building on and extending Mohanram’s (1999) examination of race and space. Mohanram does not go deep enough in critically examining how “place becomes race” and Razack’s more contemporary analysis begins by underscoring that spaces reproduce racial hierarchies (p. 1). To speak to this point, Razack states that it is a national mythology that white people first developed the land without reference to Aboriginal peoples or other people of colour. In so doing, to deny Indigeneity of Black and brown bodies is the disavowal of imperialism, genocide, slavery and exploitation (p.2)

She goes on to explain:

In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus become the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship (p. 2)

She continues that although the ‘spatial story’ changes, at each stage, the white body is constructed as entitled to land. Thus, Razack raises important questions to consider. She asks:

In unmapping, there is an important relationship between identity and space. What is being imagined or projected on to specific spaces and bodies, and what is being enacted there? Who do white citizens know themselves to be and how much does an identity of dominance rely upon keeping racial Others firmly in place? How are people kept in their place? And, finally, how does place become race? (p. 5)

In response to these questions, Razack seeks to illuminate that spaces are not innocent, natural nor neutral. For Razack, this becomes clear if we consider how spaces are socially produced and reproduced, how people come know themselves in spaces and how they are by virtue already known in spaces, what spaces are in relation to other spaces as well as how spaces are represented. To stress this point, Razack argues that space is a social product that both uncover how bodies are produced and how spaces produce bodies (p. 17). As a result, some bodies are disciplined to keep particular bodies in place. Such disciplining needs surveillance
and “by means of such surveillance, two kinds of bodies are produced: the normal and the abnormal body, the former belonging to a homogenous social body, the latter exiled and spatially separated” (p. 11).

Similar to the analysis of the Cartesian subject as mentioned by Mohanram (1999), Razack (2002) also takes up cartography (the science of mapping) by looking at the mapping of the subject. She writes:

The Cartesian or the mapping subject achieves his sense of self through keeping at bay and in place any who would threaten his sense of mastery. Maps sought to measure, standardize, and bind space, keeping the environment on the outside (p. 12)

Razack’s analysis of the Cartesian subject furthers Mohanram’s discussion on race in relation to mobility/immobility by looking at the construction of masculinities and femininities. Razack (2002) argues that we typically speak about spaces as profoundly shaped by patriarchy and although this is so, she posits that “it is not only that men and women come to know themselves as dominant or subordinate in different ways. It is also that dominant masculinities and femininities exist symbiotically” (p. 13). For Razack, white femininities and white masculinities are constructed in relation to the Other through movement from spaces of respectability to spaces of degeneracy which are occupied by the racial Other. It is in such travel to spaces of degeneracy that the white body comes to know itself as white, superior and civilized.

In furthering the argument of identity-making processes through journeys from one space to another, Razack writes:

To interrogate bodies travelling in spaces is to engage in a complex historical mapping of spaces and bodies in relation, inevitably a tracking of multiple systems of domination and the ways in which they come into existence in and through each other (p. 15)

Razack argues that an interlocking approach is important to understand as it implies that systems of oppression come into existence in and through each other so that classism could not
exist without gender and racial hierarchies and so forth. Because systems rely on each other in such multifaceted ways, it is impossible to attempt to disrupt one system without simultaneously disrupting another (pp. 16-17).

Carol Schick (2002) in *Keeping the Ivory Tower White: Discourses on Racial Domination* builds on Razack’s (2002) discussion of how space produces subject identities of both privilege and degeneracy by exploring what that looks like in the university space (p. 102). Schick begins her analysis by positing that spaces are not legitimate as they remain dominated by white bodies, and that furthermore, security of white identity is dependent on the construction of the white body as non-Other (pp. 101, 104). In the context of the Canadian university classroom space, she argues that space is a major metaphor that represents the classroom as a space “[…] protected against the unconstrained, illogical space where unpredictable, potentially harmful, outdated, and contrary knowledge resides” (p. 107). Moreover, educational institutions also function to benefit as well as form white entitlement. Schick goes on to say:

In Western Canada, both degeneracy and privilege are produced as effects of spatialization. White entitlement is produced and rationalized as survey lines, deeds, boundaries, purchase prices, and mortgages – signs of ownership and belonging. White entitlement is also produced relationally against Otherness of original inhabitants. Production of the space as white, therefore, is never complete, and the identities that depend on the legitimacy of domination are forever insecure (p. 106)

Thus, in order to secure white entitlement, spaces create rules based on what is considered “rational” and second; construct white bodies as the ‘rightful occupant’. To create rationality rules (vis-à-vis white male legitimacy), white bodies seek to create a distinction between “us” and “them” around ownership and distribution of intellect and emotions (p. 108). Therefore, by rejecting counter knowledges in the classroom space, white bodies “[…] declare authority or superiority over it [knowledges and space]; similarly, their performance of a
credible, dominant identification includes the authority to pronounce that their own extreme actions are reasonable” (p. 109). Schick (2002) goes on to say, 

These discourses rely on the university as the home of official white rationality and knowledge –the markers by which a taxonomy of difference may be established and where “different from” means “unequal to”. Here is the mythological, safe, and pure place of abstraction and objectivity; the world of knowledge and theory; a place for the “disembodied” mind. There is no awareness of the university as a site where power relations exist. The assumption is that knowledge and intellectual teachings are objective and neutral and need not be challenged (p. 110) 

Schick’s second point in regards to white bodies being rendered as ‘rightful occupants’ is articulated counter to “the attendance of people who do not fit any of those categories [and] does not belie the claim that the university is a white, elite, male-dominated place (p. 110) . She continues to say that white bodies have not only positioned themselves, but have been positioned by the university, as centre of ‘place-knowledge-privilege’ (p. 115). For Schick, the performance of whiteness as well as the surveillance of whiteness is to prevent its loss and respectability. Furthermore, performing whiteness becomes imperative to assure that the ‘place-knowledge-privilege’ cycle of whiteness is not disrupted as the university is seen as a space of which has been invaded and contaminated. 

To speak to this point Schick writes: 

That the university space has been invaded and contaminated by unreliable characters is an indication that white privilege and its power to exclude and define are continuously under siege. The contamination is an exception in this place where the walls typically act as borders between space that is rational and the space “out there” where disorder cannot be contained … Because whiteness signals innocence, it is inconceivable that this contagion could be from someone who “belongs” here. The notion of secure spaces for the production and control of identities is a myth and an impossibility (p. 116) 

Schick concludes in her piece that white bodies desire “incessant purification” as a justification for their claim to innocence (p. 118).
Schick’s (2002) piece focuses on the experiences of white students in the university and although this is important, the effect that white dominated spaces have on racialized (and female) bodies needs to be highlighted as well. Throughout her analysis she uses Fellow and Razack’s (1998) concept of the ‘race to innocence’ but neglects to include a conversation about the emotional attachment to innocence that Fellow and Razack (1998) talk about. Her discussion on emotion seems to gloss over emotions such as anger, rage or discomfort and how it is (en)acted and/or plays out in the university space when power and privilege are threatened.

Nirmal Puwar’s (2004) discussion of space is critical to any of the concepts and ideas previously discussed as it builds on Mohanram’s (1999) concept of racial difference as spatial difference, Razack’s (2002) concept on how place becomes race and Schick’s (2002) concept of ‘rightful occupants’. In *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Puwar (2004) begins by stating,

> The arrival of women and racialised minorities in spaces from which they have been historically or conceptually excluded is an illuminating and intriguing paradox. It is illuminating because it sheds light on how spaces have been formed through what has been constructed out. And it is intriguing because it is a moment of change. It disturbs that status quo, while at the same time bearing the weight of the sedimented past (p. 1).

In her analysis, she begins by questioning what happens when bodies that are not expected to occupy particular spaces do so, as well as what happens when women and racialised minorities take up ‘privileged’ spaces of which have not been ‘reserved’ for them (p. 1). She argues that as spaces are not a fixed entity, such an encounter causes disruption, requires negotiation and involves complicity (pp. 1-2).

Puwar states that shifts in bodies/space are minimal. While the ‘glass ceiling’ has cracked for gender, for race, the ‘concrete ceiling’ has merely been chipped (p. 7). So although
racialized women, for instance, can enter spaces of exclusion, there is a real connection between bodies and space. Puwar writes:

While all can, in theory, enter, it is certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the ‘natural’ occupants of specific positions. Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being ‘out of place’. Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders (p. 8).

She goes on to say that racialized women occupy insider/outsider\(^6\) positions. That is to say, although they are in an elite space, they do not have the right to occupy such space as they do not resemble the somatic norm which is invisible, unmarked and undeclared (p. 8).

Citing Henri Lefebvre, Puwar (2004) writes that bodies do not simply move in and through spaces, but produce and are produced by them (p. 32). So, it is clear to see that “normative” bodies would thus become disturbed when racialized bodies come to be in spaces that are not conceptually their ‘natural’ domain. She furthers her argument by positing that disorientation occurs then when the white body sees the racialized body in such space. She writes:

[….] The white gaze itself is disoriented by the close proximity of these foreign bodies. Their very presence, as ‘equal’ members rather than as service staff (porters, cleaners, clerks and nannies), who take up a different rhythm in the occupation of space, challenges the ways in which racialised bodies have been categorised and fixed. Significantly, both the way in which the ‘other’ has been fixed and the construction of self in relation to this image are troubled; there is a disturbance of a certain order. A racialised episteme is disrupted (p. 42).

She purports that this is further complicated in the realm of academia where whiteness becomes threatened as racialized bodies are also purveyors of knowledge and intellect (p. 46). It then becomes an uncomfortable encounter for white bodies to be in such proximity to the racialized body.

\(^6\) Term originally coined by Patricia Hill-Collins as ‘outsider-within’
Like Schick (2002), Puwar (2004) states that super-surveillance comes into play when racialized and minoritized bodies are present in white spaces. Racialized and gendered bodies are forced to perform whiteness as, “existing under pressures of a microscopic spotlight of racialised and gendered optics, the slightest mistake is likely to be noticed, even exaggerated, and then taken as evidence of authority being misplaced” (p. 61). Thus, this violent performance, as she puts it, is like an ill-fitting suit.

Concluding her piece, Puwar extends the discussion to talk about ‘space invader’ as connected to institutional racism and whiteness, arguing that the discussion is always about the racialized body, while the culture of whiteness is left unseen (p. 135). She stresses that it is important to condition ourselves to learn to see and to recognize whiteness as embedded in the institutional culture (p. 135). She also acknowledges, however, that making visible the invisible is difficult in the liberal ideology of colour-blindness and the myth of sameness (p.136). She writes:

The systemic fantasy of imagined inclusiveness makes it difficult to see racism. People are reluctant to confront the uncomfortable fact that racism is endemic to organisations and professions. The denial of racism places emotional and psychological pressure on black people in public institutions (p. 137)

Consequently, ‘space invaders’ who seek to challenge and name colour-blindness further mark already marked bodies and risk being labeled as deviants.

Puar’s analysis ends at this point, with only initial discussion of the ways in which racialized and minoritized bodies resist. In some respect, she seems to delegitimize resistance practices by racialized and minoritized bodies, stating that we must be strategic or only speak when we have the support of people who carry weight (p. 155). This becomes problematic as it again, puts racialized and minoritized bodies in positions that are dependent on another body, typically the white body. That is not to say that her analysis is not useful; her concept of ‘space
invader’ is an important point of departure for examining how anti-racist feminism, as characterized by intersectional theory, can lend itself to this analysis. For instance, her analysis points to questions such as: how does the interlocking of racism and sexism interact/intersect with other “-isms” in spaces permeated by structures of white dominance and oppression? Furthermore, how does a black woman experience sexism compared to a woman who enjoys white privilege?

**Significance**

The significance of examining the politics of space is that it illuminates the complexity of spaces; that space is a place both of marginality but also that of resistance. Mohanram’s (1999) discussion on Lévi-Strauss and Crosby’s concepts particularly speak to my topic, as it makes sense of feminist knowledge production. That is to say, when situated in the context of feminist theory, Mohanram’s argument lends itself to understanding why other feminist theories such as Black feminism, anti-racist feminism or Native feminism are not considered valid and are therefore displaced. If we take on Mohanram’s analysis, it speaks to the fact that as “other” feminisms are embodied as non-white, it is considered incapable of abstraction (“intellectual” knowledge), therefore justifying its marginality.

Razack (2002) in her introductory chapter, *When Place Becomes Race*, is relevant to my research as she underscores the notion that space produces bodies and that bodies are produced by spaces. Consequently, she argues that surveillance occurs as a result. Her point aids my research project as it illuminates whiteness as deeply entrenched in space. Furthermore, it makes sense of why resistance is shut down, as it is seen as disrupting the re/production and maintenance of whiteness in spaces.
Schick’s (2002) work is quite helpful as it situates concepts as articulated by Mohanram and Razack in the context of the university space. Schick’s argument of who is considered ‘rightful occupants’ speaks to my research as it demonstrates the power of whiteness within identity politics. Moreover, her argument of whiteness at the centre of ‘place-knowledge-privilege’ is particularly useful. This idea speaks to how whiteness manifests itself in space and knowledge production and how that accounts for white privilege. Her examination of whiteness is of particular use as it makes clear that we cannot take on discussions about racism without talking about whiteness and white supremacy.

Puwar’s (2004) idea of ‘space invaders’ ties in much of the earlier discussions made by Mohanram (1999), Razack (2002) and Schick (2002), by looking at the “systemic fantasy” of inclusivity. This speaks volumes to my research project as under the fantasy of feminism, it is assumed that divides between and among women do not exist. It is assumed that spaces are safe, spaces are shared and that spaces are inclusive.

My divergence from these theorists is that I will be looking at space in a different context, namely feminist classrooms in the Canadian university, as this is missing in literature. It is important to look at Women’s Studies classroom spaces as the feminist movement has not been sympathetic to issues of space. Devoicing in terms of knowledge production, epistemic saliency and resistance have all occurred in feminist spaces without being questioned, illuminating how white bodies coalesce around whiteness. For instance, when it comes to issues of racial domination and white privilege, white women often side with white men than they do with women of colour. So what does this mean for sisterhood? In effect, it is the combination of

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7 Devoicing can be defined as taking away the legitimacy, right or value of one’s voice.
patriarchy and racism/white supremacy that has constructed women of colour as subordinate to white women. Here, we can see that race indeed transcends gender.

Finally, analyses made by Mohanram, Razack, Schick and Puwar bring to light issues of marginality, but do not necessarily look at how emotion operates in spaces, and how that too is a form of resistance. Thus, in this thesis I will also look at how anger and rage (à la the angry Black woman) is a form of resistance in feminist spaces. In essence, this thesis seeks to illuminate feminist spaces as claimed by whiteness and its implication(s) for sisterhood. Finally, my thesis will also look at the idea of resistance as spatial practice. Women of colour making sense of their own realities within space and acting on it, is in fact a form of spatial practice and a re-claiming of space.

**Anti-Racist Feminism and Intersectionality as a Discursive Framework**

In this section, I will use a discursive framework as it is both grounded in ‘high’ theory, but also connects theory to the broader social-political context. Moreover, a discursive framework is useful as it moves the conversation from ‘what is’ to how one makes sense of ‘what is’\(^8\). Using anti-racist feminism and intersectional theory as a discursive, I will think through Whiteness (white power and privilege) as a concept to illuminate the analytical lens through which this thesis will be undertaken.

**Anti-Racist Feminism**

Anti-racist feminism is important in this study as it provides the discursive boundaries within which to take up concepts of race and racism/white supremacy which are central to my

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\(^8\) Mentioned by George Dei in a study group discussion on Friday March 26, 2010
analysis of feminist university classroom spaces. In her piece titled *Canadian Anti-Racist Feminist Thought: Scratching the Surface of Racism*, Enakshi Dua (1995) writes:

> […] defining what constitutes anti-racist feminist thought is a contentious task. While anti-racist feminist thought is generally defined as an attempt to theorize the interconnections between race, class and gender, there are different interpretations of how to go about this (p. 9)

As a result, what I seek to do here is to look at how different undertakings of anti-racist feminism have/will influence this work, rather than articulating any particular discourse of anti-racist feminism as truth.

Among those that have influenced anti-racist feminism, one can cite Audre Lorde (1984), bell hooks (1981; 1984; 1989), Roxana Ng, Pat Staton and Joyce Scane (1995), George Dei (1996), Sherene Razack (1998), Enakshi Dua and Angela Robertson (1999) and Agnes Calliste and George Dei (2000). These scholars have made efforts to deconstruct the intersectionality of race, class, and gender relations. Moreover, they have been sound in challenging the essentialism of woman as taken up by many white middle class women during first and second wave feminism as well as presently.

In *Anti-Racist Feminism: Critical Race and Gender Studies*, Calliste and Dei (2000) set the stage for defining anti-racist feminist writing, “critical anti-racist feminism locates the dialogue in the reality of women’s lives and at the intersection/s of race, gender and class” (p. 15). That is to say, it challenges the notion of an essentialist woman that is void of multiple identities. Moreover, by acknowledging that we are raced, classed and gendered, it exposes the power and privileges of those identities.

An important feature of anti-racist feminism is that it uncovers power relations. Calliste and Dei (2000) write:

> A critical reading/writing of “anti-racism experience” in part means re-reading “gender” and “race” from subordinate perspective(s) in terms of the ways in
which dominant or normalized notions of “gender” and “race” correspond with dominance, or in terms of the dynamics at the nexus of “gender,” “race” and other “forms” of social organization which sustains racialized heterosexual privilege through the mobilization of authority to regulate and subordinate women’s bodies in terms of “female innocence” (p. 13)

This is an important point as it challenges female innocence and for instance, makes sense of white feminist supremacy beyond (re)invoking the notion of women as the archetypal victim.

An important aspect to highlight in the anti-racist feminist project is that it not only entails a process of exposing racist/white supremacist structures, but also looks at sites of resistance and transformative possibilities (p. 13). Calliste and Dei (2000) write:

Critical anti-racism seeks to affirm agency as both the possibility and necessity of racial minorities to actively determine the direction for social change through participation in the sites and the structured settings of local resistance and political, economic and social transformation (p. 15)

They go on to say:

Critical anti-racist feminism must seek to support possibilities for those minoritized as actors and agents of change with reference to the specifics of the everyday reality of women, to ancestral histories, critical traditions and local knowledges through the struggle for identity, power and possibility in the context of externally-regulated social demands (p. 15)

This point highlights how feminist discourses can be not only resistance to feminist discourse of which has been mainstreamed, but is also capable of creating strategies for resistance in practice. Because ancestral histories and other local knowledges have not had much attention in Western scholarship, to promote transformation and a politics of change, exploring the ways in which racialized, sexualized and classed minorities makes sense of their lived realities is important (p. 15).

Speaking to our lived experiences, Audre Lorde (1984) in *Sister Outsider* writes:

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 ... now we hear
that it is the task of black and third world women 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 (p.113)

Here Lorde disrupts the notion that anti-racist feminism is simply that of “talking back”. Anti-racist feminism is not a discourse that seeks to engage in high intellectual debate/battle with Western feminism, but instead is there to present an alternative feminism that includes those who have been left out of Western feminist discourse.

**Intersectional Theory**

Those who have made heed in intersectional theory include: The Combahee River Collective (1982), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Patricia Hill-Collins (2000) and Leslie McCall (2005). Intersectionality as a feminist theory, methodology for research and a catalyst for social change begins from the premise that people have multiple and layered identities (AWID, 2004, pp. 1-2). Thus, intersectionality aims to reveal how the multiple identities that we embody possess opportunities for advantage and disadvantage. However, it is important to note that intersectional theory does not necessarily seek to create a hierarchy of oppression, but instead, posits that our different identities account for our different experiences (AWID, 2004, p. 2). Essentially, the usefulness of intersectional theory is that it is a strategy for linking grounds for oppression to institutional processes (AWID, 2004, p. 5).

Although the term ‘intersectionality theory’ was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectional analyses have a theoretical historicity. The Combahee River Collective, a Black lesbian feminist organization active in Boston since 1974 clearly centralized racial-sexual

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It is important to note that while many women of colour scholars adopt an intersectional approach in their analyses, many First Nations women have not. This is as a result of calls for an analysis of status not being taken up critically enough, or, at all. Verna St. Denis in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* points out that for Aboriginal women, the intersection of race, class and nationhood is important in, and for, feminism (p. 47).
oppression, but also looked at the ways in which this intersected as well as interlocked with other identities. In *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*, the Combahee River Collective (1982) wrote:

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexuality, and class oppression and see our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking (p. 13)

They continue,

> It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of Black and white men (p. 14)

Here we can see that as Black feminists, it was important to create a feminism for Black women as mainstreamed feminist knowledge production as taken up by middle-classed white women did not accept, address or acknowledge that intersectionality of identities and its matrix of domination.

Thus albeit its history, it was not until the 1990s that intersectional theory gained prominence as a language for identity forged through systemic social and political relations of power and privilege. While Crenshaw (1989) made a name for intersectionality, it was Patricia Hill Collins (1998; 2000) who resurrected this theory as a part of her discussion on Black feminism. One of the central tenants of Black feminism is that race, class and gender are inextricably linked.

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10 There are/were Black women that do/did not define themselves as Black feminists but have also experience racial-sexual oppression.
Black feminism addresses the intersectionality and the reality of women’s lives as it looks at the race, class and gender relations, other identities, as well as the importance of experiential knowledge. Wane (2002) speaks to this and affirms that Black feminism “places Black-Canadian women’s experiences and ideas at the centre of analysis ... the utility of Black feminisms in progressive movements is largely determined by our capacity to illustrate and analyze the intersections and multi-dimensionality of oppression and freedom” (pp.36-45). As such, Black feminism is useful in understanding the complexities of privilege and oppression in Black women’s lives.

Although I have focused on intersectional theories as proposed by Black women particularly, that is not to say that calls for intersectionality have not been made by other groups as well. In fact, Patricia Monture-Angus is one the major Aboriginal feminists in Canada who has extended the theory of intersectionality and has included the notion of status and colonialism. In *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks*, Monture-Angus (1995) writes:

Understanding how patriarchy operates in Canada without understanding colonization is a meaningless endeavour from the perspective of Aboriginal people. The Canadian state is the invisible male perpetrator who unlike Aboriginal men does not have a victim face. And at the feet of the state I can lay my anger to rest. Being able to name the state as my oppressor has allowed me to sit outside the personal cyclone of pain that once raged out of control in my life. [...] colonialism must be incorporated in feminist analysis. The women’s movement has never taken as its central and long-term goal, the eradication of the legal oppression that is specific to Aboriginal women (p. 175)

Adding onto the arguments made by Monture-Angus (1995), Lee Maracle (1996), like Collins (1986), talks about the complexities of being raced and erased. In her piece titled *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*, Maracle (1996) posits:

The denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals. The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women. No one makes the mistake of referring to us as ordinary women.
White women invite us to speak if the issue is racism or Native people. We are here to teach, to sensitize them or to serve them in some way. We are expected to retain our position well below them, as their servants. We are not, as a matter of course, incited as an integral part of “their movement” -- the women’s movement (pp. 17-18).

Here we can see clearly that calls for intersectionality have been made by many racialized women and that this call is not in vain, but is based on our shared minority status of being marginalized within feminist theory. It is also important to note that beyond race, class, gender, status and colonialism, calls for an intersectional analysis of sexuality and ability have also been made.\textsuperscript{11}

This goes without saying that there are also complexities within intersectional theory. Leslie McCall (2005) in *The Complexity of Intersectionality* notes that there are three complexities: the anticategorical complexity, intercategorical complexity and intracategorical complexity. The anticategorical complexity deconstructs analytical categories; the intercategorical complexity requires that scholars adopt existing analytical categories strategically and the intracategorical complexity acknowledges the stable relationship that social categories represent, but also maintains a critical stance toward categories (pp. 1773-1774).

What Leslie McCall makes clear, like Dua (1995) has done for anti-racist feminist thought, is to demonstrate that there is no one size fits all for intersectional analysis and that theory cannot exist without complexity and contradiction.

Although gender is central in intersectional theory, and is essentially the bedrock of that work, race will be particularly salient in this analysis. It is important to note however that making race salient does not imply race reductionism as it is dangerous intellectual grounds to say that other identities are less important than others; it is even more dangerous to imply that

\textsuperscript{11} On sexuality, see: Judith Butler (1999) and for ability, see: Rosemary Garland Thomson (1997).
one has the same experiences based on the same oppression. Like Dei’s (1996) concept of integrative anti-racism, anti-racist feminism and intersectionality use particular lenses to interrogate asymmetrical power relations, whether it is race, class, gender, sexuality and so forth. As there is a saliency of difference within any identity politics, race will be central in this work.

**The Concept of Whiteness**

A central tenant of my thesis is to illuminate how whiteness has infiltrated feminist theory and practice. As a result, I carefully engage with Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) being mindful, however, that critical to anti-racist (feminist) work is to examine the construction and implications of whiteness. The examination of whiteness is important as it involves understanding how whites come to know themselves and how their whiteness accounts for racial domination. Moreover, the examination of whiteness is relevant as it also includes present colour-blind discourses which make sense of the invisibility of whiteness and white supremacy.

Critical Whiteness Studies’ work overlaps the anti-racist understanding of race, as it defines whiteness as a socially constructed dominant racial identity. The utility of Critical Whiteness Studies then is that it focuses on whiteness as a phenomenon that confers whiteness on particular bodies but also looks at ways in which to eradicate racial dominance without dismissing how whiteness is implicated in racial inequity.

bell hooks (1989), Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and Peggy McIntosh (1997) are among a few feminists who have been significant in critically examining whiteness. In *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Frankenberg (1993) writes:

Calling the project a study of white women and racism marked out the set of concerns that motivated me to begin it, emphasizing that racism was and is something that shapes white women’s lives, rather than something people of color have to live and deal with in a way that bears no relationship or relevance to the lives of white people. For when white people--and I was especially concerned
about white feminists, since the project had its origins in the feminist movement—look at racism, we tend to view it as an issue that people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issues that generally involves or implicates us (pp. 5-6)

Along similar lines, McIntosh (1997) writes:

Through work to bring materials and perspectives from Women’s Studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged in the curriculum, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women’s disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully recognized, acknowledged, lessened, or ended. Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon with a life of its own, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege which was similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects (p. 291)

In these two excerpts, these feminist authors seem to grapple with how they are implicated in whiteness and white supremacy, while at the same time, exposing Women’s Studies as essentially white Women’s Studies. However, both scholars have failed to talk about responsibility. Acknowledging white privilege is important, but what happens after acknowledgement? Where is the action?

Nevertheless, such analyses are important, and also relevant, to contemporary colour-blind discourses. In that whiteness is normalized, it becomes invisible to those who enjoy and benefit from it. Bonilla-Silva (2003) however cautions that the “color-blind script [...] is in fact used to deflated charges of racism” (p. 277). Patricia Williams (1997) picks up this point too writing, “this scripted denial ultimately allowed visual images to remain in the realm of the unspoken, the unsaid filled by stereotypes and self-identifying illusion, the hierarchies of race and gender circulating unchallenged” (p. 16). This failure for whites to acknowledge as well as challenge the materiality (in many forms) of their white-skin privilege and to understand its relationship to the oppression of people of colour is of important relevance to this thesis.


Significance

I view each of these theoretical frameworks to be useful for this thesis as no single one of them is able to stand on its own for the purpose of this research project. Anti-racist feminism provides a sound analysis for articulating the intersectionality of race, class and gender while at the same time making race salient. In conjunction, as intersectionality is important to feminist theory, it underscores that our many identities do not in fact act independently from one another. The concept of whiteness within Critical Whiteness Studies ties these frameworks together and focuses our gaze upon sites of dominance. It interrogates the ways in which white bodies normalize white supremacy and provide tools for understanding the complexities of white identity.

My divergence from anti-racist feminism and Critical Whiteness Studies is that although it takes up race and the latter, that of whiteness as social, political and so forth, it does not necessarily take up what that means emotionally and spiritually\(^\text{12}\). Important questions to consider include: What are the emotional effects of racism/white supremacy, institutionally/systemically and on a societal level? What are the spiritual consequences of white dominance on the racialized body? My divergence from intersectional theory is that it does not make any particular identity salient. However in this thesis, through a gendered perspective, race will be particularly salient in my analysis. Moreover, it is also important to look at intersectionality as mobilized. Specifically, what does intersectionality mean for praxis? How

can intersectionality be put into action? A feminist theory that would not only encompass, but address these complexities, is called Critical Intersectional Anti-Racist Feminism\textsuperscript{13}.

\textsuperscript{13}“Critical Intersectional Anti-Racist Feminism” is a term I coined that stays true anti-racist feminist theory and intersectionality, but also cements critical whiteness studies in a way that brings strategies for action and resistance that address gendered racism/white supremacy.
Chapter Three:
Research Methodology

A methodology that allows for women studying women in an interactive process without the artificial object/subject split between researcher and researched (which is by definition inherent in any approach to knowledge that praises its ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’) will end the exploitation of women as research objects. It thus transforms a *psychology/sociology/biology OF women to a psychology/sociology/biology FOR women*. Women are at the center of the study and they are neither compared to nor measured against normative (male) standards. What counts are our own experiences. The theory and practice of a woman’s experience is not split. (Duelli-Klein, 1983, p. 95)

*Introduction*

George Dei reminds us that we cannot adopt simplistic methodological processes. As such, this chapter goes beyond spelling out my data collection tools and processes and bridges theory and concepts with method and data. Using anti-racist research methodology in and through a feminist lens, I will go beyond ‘traditional’ research methodology that does not implicate the nexus of the mind, the body and the spiritual. Using the self as a methodological feature, the epistemic saliency of the Black female body, myself, will be highlighted. Although it is important to privilege the voice of the oppressed, the voice of the oppressor, namely white women, will also be accounted for through interviews in order to triangulate my assertions.

I will provide both critiques and critical interrogation of my methodological choices by asking pertinent questions. Specifically, I will consider questions that Dei has cautioned anti-racist researchers to bear in mind, such as: How do we engage the subjective knowing? What histories are being brought into the encounter during the interview process? How do we capture racist encounters? What is the end goal of your research? How do the participants see change?

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How does the research help improve the lives of others? Finally, how do we abstain from presenting racialized bodies as simply passive?

One of the goals of my research is to shatter the myth that present racialized bodies as having no agency by capturing instances of resistance to subordination. I hope to improve the lives of the participants, and others, who have experienced spiritual trauma in feminist classroom spaces, by providing tools in which to articulate and make meaning of racist encounters. More than that of ‘giving back’ which is indeed important for reciprocity in anti-racist research, my work as an activist researcher functions as a form of resistance to white bodies who have benefited from silencing the voices of oppressed peoples. In Dis-stance and other Stances: Negotiations of Power Inside Feminist Research, Michelle Fine (1994) writes, “A move to activism occurs when research fractures the very ideologies that justify power inequities. In such work, researchers pry open social mythologies that others are committed to sealing” (p. 24). With that being said, my research seeks to unsilence marginalized voices and give authenticity to diverse voices.

**Doing Anti-Racist Feminist Research Methodology**

According to Dei (2005), one of the principals of anti-racist research methodology is that “Our theoretical conception and political praxis of engaging in critical research is anchored in an integrative anti-racism discursive framework, a recognition of the pervasiveness of power and its dominance in a racialized, gendered, and classed society” (p. 5). That is to say, anti-racist research methodology moves away from a prescriptive discourse toward one that is integrative and escapes the dangers of the post-modern trap. It also goes beyond insider/outsider splits and toward shared knowledge and an epistemic community in order to bring about action and
change. That is not to say assume that there isn’t any limitations. Dei (2005) also points out that:

There are risks involved in pursuing anti-racist research. There is no end to the constantly emerging questions about ethics and the ethicality of anti-oppression research. Anti-racist research does not claim that the only valid knower is one who has experienced the fact. However, anti-racism problematizes any attempts to de-racialize the subject as a legitimate knower, particularly if the politics of de-racialization are aimed at subverting the power of subjectivity and subjective knowing in order to make room for a so-called objectivity and/or objective knowing (p. 8)

The value of anti-racist methodology in and through a feminist gaze is that adopting this position means taking on an approach that does not merely mirror an additive framework of women, but rather, begins from our perspective. Feminist research implicates the self, shatters the idea of woman as ‘Other’ and considers issues of power and responsibility. Essentially, doing feminist research shifts from objectivity to conscious subjectivity that implicates the self.

Situating the self is essential for critical anti-racist feminist research as an entry point for analysis. That is to say, the self must be implicated as we cannot be disembodied from our research. Gayle Letherby (2003) builds on this point and provides an extensive list for ‘good’ feminist research and writes:

give continuous and reflexive attention to the significance of gender as an aspect of all social life and within research, and consider further the significance of other differences between women and (some argue) the relevance of men’s lives to a feminist understanding of the world;

provide a challenge to the norm of ‘objectivity’ that assumes knowledge can be collected in a pure, uncontaminated way;

value the personal and the private as worthy of study;

develop non-exploitative relationships within research;

value reflexivity and emotion as a source of insight as well as an essential part of research (p. 73)
It is thus the weaving of the emotional, spiritual, material and physical that such research is so strong.

Feminist work is also cognizant of the language used as to not ‘Other’ women who are involved in the research. Words such as: informants, respondents, subject and participants are typically used to address those who are a part of the research project. Letherby (2003) in *Feminist Research: Theory and Practice* cautions that “some researchers (feminists included), with the aim of equalizing the researcher/respondent relationship, have begun to refer to the researched as ‘participant’” (p. 7). Although there are obvious critiques to this stance where it can be deemed problematic as this assumes that power relations therein are equal, I choose to employ the term ‘participant’ as the women involved in the research has the power/control to participate or not.

Power and/or responsibility must not be overlooked in feminist research. When entering a researcher/participant relationship, power relations change. It is often assumed that the researcher holds ultimate power throughout the research process; however, the participants hold power as well. Not only in terms of the participation in the research project being voluntary, but there is also power in terms of the questions they respond to or do not, how little or how much information they divulge, how truthful and/or honest their responses are and so forth.

It is also important then to consider the positionality of the woman being interviewed. Due to her race, class or sexuality, she may feel more secure in her own ‘power’. As such, to try to disrupt dominant power relations as much as possible, the location of the interview conducted

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15 I also extend the notion of language and would like to note that throughout this thesis, I am cognizant in my writing of discursive capital as mentioned by Mary Kosut (2006) in *Professorial Capital: Blue-Collar Reflections on Class, Culture, and the Academy* as it is very classist and elitist in nature. In this thesis, I choose to write in a language that is accessible.
is also significant to highlight. In the section titled “Feminist Research in Action”, Letherby (2003) writes:

Space and place are also important in research terms. When doing research on emotive or sensitive issues, respondents may or may not feel more comfortable when the research takes place in their own home, workplace, social club etc., and it may be important to offer an alternative venue. Doing research in a respondent’s own space will usually make them feel more in control and when this involves visiting respondents in their own homes the research relationship is also likely to be affected (p. 108).

I further this point by connecting space to the politics of safety. Being in a space that is not only comfortable, but safe, can possibly lead to more ethical research.

The Human Side: Emotionality in Research

There are strong critiques on whether emotion should be separate from research and some argue that “[...] displays of emotion can be difficult and even dangerous for both the researcher and the researched [...]” (Letherby, 2003, p. 111); however, I argue that emotion should not be separated from feminist research as when dealing with such an emotive topic such as racism/white supremacy, it is impossible not to experience pain, anger, discomfort or rage. So, although the management of emotion is complex and difficult, emotion is central to the whole issue; emotion is linked to the research project. Karen Ramsay (1993) speaks to this point stating:

Attending to emotional responses to experiences in the field is a method of finding out where the researcher stands in relation to those being studied ... and exploration of the level of emotional management required in the relationship between researcher and respondent places the researcher clearly within the research process ... viewing qualitative research ... as emotional labour locates the process clearly within a discussion of the academic mode of production. (as cited in Letherby, 2003, p. 110)

It is this point that makes clear that the trouble with emotionality in research is that it is not ‘typical’. It is however this ‘atypical’/alternative research that presents research with soul in
mind. Furthermore, it is such emotion that gives authenticity to research methodology. Although there are other possibilities for the challenges of emotionality in research such as the interpretation of emotion, emotion used for consumption and the performance of emotion, I argue that this emotional danger can also be used as a pedagogical moment for learning.

**Autoethnography as Method**

Autoethnography is a method that explores self-self narrative which in turn validates one’s lived experiences. Different from conventional qualitative research methods, which require observation of ‘subjects’, autoethnography relies on a critical observation of the self, the personal. In autoethnography then, the researcher becomes the primary participant/subject of inquiry; instead of creating a portrait of the Other, autoethnography creates a portrait of the self.

In *Autoethnography as Method*, Heewon Chang (2008) writes, “Methodologically speaking, autoethnography is researcher-friendly. This inquiry method allows researchers easy access to the primary data source from the beginning because the source is the researchers themselves” (p. 52). Due to such easy access to primary data, first-hand, uninhibited information can be disseminated. Moreover, as autoethnography uses narratives as anecdotal contemporary history, there are a lot of benefits in regards to what this method allows for in terms of reflexivity, diasporic memory, the use of emotion, oral narratives of body and memory, critical self-reflection, deep questioning, telling untold stories/story-telling and poetry.

Autoethnographic information can also be contextualized; rather than being objective, neutral or distant, it is subjective, political and specific based on positionality, signaling the point that the personal is political. This subjective knowing allows for the reflection on/of particular moments, geographic locations, race and ethnicity, class, gender and education and how this informs particular understandings and processes of coming to know. As an Afro-Caribbean
(with Grenadian and Trinidadian ancestry), queer, currently able-bodied, educated, middle-classed woman living in the Canadian nation-state, I am able to reflect on my occupation in this position and how this manifests itself in different spaces, visibly and invisibly and how too this makes meaning of my lived realities.

Auto-ethnography also has a spiritual element. Through unpacking particular experiences and emotions as a result, autoethnographic research makes possible for the researcher to address issues of colonial injuries, trauma, spirit-injury and/or spirit murder where the soul is scarred from the coloniality of education, for instance. Based on its highly subjective nature, it allows for one to speak for one self, rather than being spoken for. Essentially autoethnography can disrupt and dislodge the notion of subject producers and object performers by illuminating the importance of voice and embodied knowledge.

In *Autoethnography as Method*, Chang (2008) posits:

> When manifested in increased self-reflection, adoption of the culturally relevant pedagogy, desire to learn about “others of difference”, development of an inclusive community, or self-healing, the self-transformative potential of autoethnography is universally beneficial to those who work with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through the increased awareness of self and others, they will be able to help themselves and each other correct cultural misunderstandings, develop cross-cultural sensitivity, and respond to the needs of cultural others effectively (p. 54)

As autoethnography allows for a process of learning and unlearning\(^\text{16}\), one can come to know how the ways in which we read the world may influence and inform our understandings of others and so forth. Renate Duelli-Klein (1983) in *How to do what we want to do: thoughts about feminist methodology* remind us that:

> [...] if what we want is research that will contribute to women’s liberation, we have to scrutinize our methods more carefully to see if they are in fact congruent

\(^{16}\) Unlearning is the process in which to question and challenge the ways we have been conditioned by the dominant culture to think
with our feminist principles. Thus, the claim that research on women is conducted with a feminist perspective can be made only when the methods applied take women’s experiences into account (p. 91)

As a result, such ontological thinking is useful for methodological lessons in feminist research.

**Limitation of Autoethnography**

Some argue that there are constrains to the validity of autoethnography as it is a one-sided perspective, biased and may not be truthful. Moreover, some posit that there may be some ‘anthropological inference(s)” as assumptions are being made about other people in reflective interpretation, for instance. Chang (2008) speaks to these constrains and provides a detailed outline of the pitfalls involved in autoethnography, stating:

> Although autoethnography has many benefits, it can also become a research method with little social impact if several pitfalls are not carefully avoided. They include (1) excessive focus on self in isolation from others; (2) overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation; (3) exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source; (4) negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and (5) inappropriate application of the label “autoethnography” (p. 57)

Furthermore, there are also limits and particular challenges in writing the self into text. It is possible to play the victim and deny accountability. It is also possible to focus the self and not connect the self to the broader social-political context. Being cognizant of the cautions of autoethnographic research, I have attempted to create a balance in my research that is mindful of these possibilities.18

17 Mentioned by Paul Olson in a Introductory Sociological Research Methods lecture on Monday January 18, 2010

18 Another point about autoethnography is that the racialized body may be read as the ‘native informant’ by providing insider information in order for the dominant body to “understand” or come to “know” the Other, see: John, M.E. (1996), “Postcolonial Feminists in the Western Intellectual Field: Anthropologists and Native Informants” in Discrepant Locations: Feminist, Theory, and Postcolonial Histories.
Autoethnography in Interview Research

Interviews not only allow for growth in knowledge (co-producers in knowledge production) through its two-way learning capacity, but its content can lead to transforming the academy and/or re-envisioning the institution. Chang (2008) in Autoethnography as Method writes:

The interview is not commonly associated with autoethnography because this research method focuses primarily on one’s own life, while interviews are usually used to draw out life experiences from other people. Therefore, you would not think of the interview first when looking for data collection strategies for your autoethnography. Despite this perception, interviews with others are still useful for this research method for various reasons: to stimulate your memory, to fill in gaps in information, to validate your personal data, and to gain others’ perspectives on you (p. 106)

In conjunction with autoethnography then, interviews are useful for cross-examining and methodological triangulation purposes to ensure credibility, reliability and validity. Staying true to the criteria for quality research as mentioned by Zina O’Leary (2004) in The Essential Guide to Doing Research, in unison, these methodologies result in objectivity, neutrality and subjectivity with transparency, reliability and dependability, validity and authenticity, generalizability and transferability as well as reproducibility and auditability.

For my data collection tool, I opted for one-on-one, informal, semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Not only are interviews unique as they value orality over written text which is quite classist in and of itself, this design for conducting interviews allows for genuine, organic and honest dialogue. However not without limitations, it can be questioned to what extent how ‘genuine’, ‘organic’ and ‘honest’ these conversations can be.

Sara Ahmed (2009) in Embodying diversity: problems and paradoxes for Black feminists, cautions that as Black female bodies, “We symbolise the hope or promise that whiteness is being undone” (p. 41). Not only do our bodies matters as a methodological feature but our bodies then
become a threat (as well as many other things) in the interview encounter. Thus, our work becomes doubly hard as we have to both challenge the way in which negativity is associated with our bodies as well as the notion that we are angry Black women. The paradox in the interview process is that,

Some bodies become blockage points, points where smooth communication stops. Our anger becomes a blockage point. We need to say ‘yes’ here. We need to say, yes, Black people are angry: we are angry about racism, about forms of violence and power that are hidden under the signs of civility and love. We are angry and yet Black anger is also a fantasy that allows the dismissal of we might have to say. Your reasonable thoughtful arguments are dismissed as anger (which of course empties anger of its own reason), which makes you angry, such that you response becomes read as the confirmation of the evidence that you are not only angry but also unreasonable! (Ahmed, 2009, p. 49)

Here, Ahmed (2009) demonstrates that although our Black rage and/or anger suggests that we are the source of the “fragmented” sisterhood, that the Black female body in feminist circles is seen as the killjoy feminist for bringing up the (“obvious”) issue of racism/white supremacy as a research topic and that we are a “problem” for being emotive and for simply killing the joy, we must still speak up. Our racist-colonial and imperial relationships with white women will always be complex, but it is such encounters that need to be had nonetheless.

The interview process as a Black female researcher is a challenging one. Uvanney Maylor (2009) in *Is it because I’m Black? A Black female research experience* writes:

Being a Black female researcher can be tiresome particularly when you have to constantly ignore the fact that you are being ignored or not recognised (either by prospective Black or White respondents) because you are Black. Moreover, it is frustrating trying to demonstrate that you are a good researcher by getting the job done and not reacting to any negative comments, glances or stares that might come your way (p. 60).
But on the other hand, I purport that the Black female researcher experience is also a necessary spiritual journey that must be undertaken in academia; “research can manifest itself as a recovery of one’s humanity and personhood”\(^{19}\).

**Limitation for Autoethnography in Interview Research**

A limitation on the topic of interviewing is the way in which participants proceeded to respond to questions. During the interview process, at times it seemed that students provided answers that they believed were ‘politically correct’ or ‘appropriate’ which led me to question whether the responses given were truly genuine. On the other hand, some questions were so open and honest that it brought up experiences that were too traumatic and/or emotionally scarring that some responses were left up to interpretation because participants could not continue. In “That’s Not What I Said” Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research, Katherine Borland (1991) writes,

> To refrain from interpretation by letting the subjects speak for themselves seems to me an unsatisfactory in not illusionary solution. For the very fact that we constitute the initial audience for the narratives we collect influences the way in which our collaborators will construct their stories, and our later presentation of these stories ... (p. 64)

Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack (1991) in *Learning to Listen: Interview techniques and Analyses* provides an interesting response to this point stating, “To hear women’s perspectives accurately, we have to learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them” (p. 11). That is to say, we must (learn to) read between the lines.

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\(^{19}\) Mentioned by George Dei in an *Advanced Seminar on Race and Anti-Racism Research Methodology in Education* lecture on Saturday May 8, 2010
Although there are limitations to both autoethnography and interviews, no research is without risks or limitations. Daphne Patai (1991) reiterates this point and reminds us that:

The self-righteous tone that at times characterizes feminist work may be merely a capitulation to feminist discourse, which, like any other discourse draws boundaries that define what we see and fail to see, what we accept and contest ... Neither purity nor danger resides in calling one’s research ‘feminist’. But no controversy attends the fact that too much ignorance exists in the world to allow us to await perfect research methods before proceeding. Ultimately we have to make up our minds whether our research is worth doing or not, and then determine how to go about it in ways that let it best serve our stated goals (p. 150)

Thus, any researcher who explores the experiences of women and attempts to theorize it will obviously encounter challenges. It is however how we respond to the challenges that must be analyzed.

**Case Study**

For the purpose of this research project, the participants are a part of a hand-picked case study. Because this research project is informed by a particular experience, I opted to interview an upper-year undergraduate Women’s Studies course of which I was a student. A case study is useful as it deters from making assumptions about an entire situation, but instead focuses on a particular case, drawing conclusions from that scenario. In this particular case study, it is also beneficial as there is an element of personal implication.

O’Leary (2004) describes a case study as,

A method of studying elements of the social through comprehensive description and analysis of a single situation or case, for example, a detailed study of an individual, group, episode, event, or any other unit of social life organization. Emphasis is often placed on understanding the unity and wholeness of the particular case (p. 115)

She continues, “Handpicked sampling [...] [w]hile not likely to be representative, the selection of such cases allows researchers to study intrinsically intersecting cases, or enhance learning by exploring the limits or boundaries of a situation or phenomenon” (p. 110). As such,
a handpicked case study allows for specificity of a particular case and how this micro situation can be theorized and connected to macro issues.

Particularly, this case study is of an upper-year undergraduate Women and Gender Studies course taught at a local university during the academic year of 2008 to 2009. The course consisted of twelve female students including myself: six students of colour and six white students as well as a white female instructor. The students all have various backgrounds sexually, academically, politically and racially among other things. All of the students consider themselves to be feminist and have a great interest in women’s issues locally and globally. The course focused on the politics of development while also examining the feminist relationship and realities of (neo)colonialism, imperialism, “development” and (anti)globalization. The course was a year-long seminar exclusive to students with a background in Women and Gender Studies and/or Political Science.

This case-study will be looked at holistically. That is to say, I will not be examining a specific situation or episode in the class, but rather, I will look at the classroom space and setting as a whole. Aspects that I will consider include: which bodies occupied the space, what kind of knowledge was constructed therein, what kind of knowledge was left out, who was reflected in the course, who was not, what was taught, what was not, the politics of silencing and voicing as well as what emotions developed as a result.

**Limitation in Case Study**

The limitations of interviewing a case study are twofold. First, the students know of each other from being in the same course. However, I made it unlikely that the participants will recognize other participants’ contributions due to anonymity, though they may recognize their own contribution as their perspective will be used in the study. Second is that of generalizability
and transferability. A complexity to unravel is that situations change, so, this may not be the same scenario in previous years or in forthcoming years based on different students, professors and approaches to course content. I argue, however, that situations are rarely ever the same, but there is a degree of transferability and generalization as myself and the participants in this study have had similar experiences in other (feminist) university classroom spaces.

Another limitation is the absence of naming race. For oppression to occur there is also an element of self-implication. As a result, failure to name race may be due to this discomfort. Furthermore, it is also difficult to capture asymmetrical power relations (as power is not symmetrical but rather hierarchal) between students and teachers and among students themselves. There are invisible markings that give white bodies the power to speak and take up space which then becomes difficult to discern by virtue of being made invisible.

**The Politics of Participation**

It is important to consider the politics of participation, namely who participated and who did not, being careful not to partake in any form of ‘statistical genocide’\(^\text{20}\) where bodies are strategically forgotten, excluded or are unaccounted for. Although there was a total of eleven students (excluding the teacher and myself) of which I could approach to interview, only eight students agreed to participate. These eight students who participated accounted for 73% of my case study population, representing a majority, leaving 27% of the population unaccounted for due to not wanting to participate in this study, not because they were not approached.

Out of the eight students that agreed to participate in my research study, four are women of colour (50%) and four are white women (50%). This is important to note as the research

\(^{20}\) Mentioned by Paul Olson in a *Introductory Sociological Research Methods* lecture on Monday March 22, 2010
allows for equal space for the women in my research to voice their opinions. This also deters from any biases of women of colour, or white women particularly, taking up too much space in my research.

**Meet the Participants**

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms, chosen by myself, were used\(^{21}\). The descriptive analysis of each woman is created on her own terms and discloses how she self identifies (race, class, gender et cetera). The analysis also locates each participant by stating whether or not she was in the Woman and Gender Studies department, or in a department that addresses/addressed feminist issues. I protect the confidentiality and identity of the research participants by not including discernible characteristics such as her specific ethnic or racial identity, age or real name.

**Samra**: woman of colour (who does not identify as Canadian), heterosexual and is currently in the undergraduate Women and Gender Studies program.

**Cruzette**: woman of colour, queer and graduated with a minor in the Women and Gender Studies program.

**Cherelle**: woman of colour, straight and graduated with a major in the Woman and Gender Studies program.

**Miranda**: white woman, able bodied, bisexual and is currently pursuing a minor in the Women and Gender Studies program.

**Rehana**: woman of colour and has taken some courses in the Women and Gender Studies program.

\(^{21}\) It is also important to note the importance of informed consent in terms of ethics. See Appendices for Ethical Approval (Appendix A), Informed Consent for Student Participant (Appendix B) and Interview Guide for Participant (Appendix C).
Stephanie: white woman, non-disabled, educated, well-off, passable as straight but identifies as queer and graduated with a major in the Women and Gender Studies program.

Ashley: white woman, feminist, able bodied, working class, bisexual and educated who graduated with a specialist in the Women and Gender Studies program.

Kara: upper-class white female, straight and has taken some courses in the Women and Gender Studies program.

Complexities and Possibilities of Research

For the purpose of this research, my work is centered in and through the interlocking of race and gender to highlight the confluence between these identities. That is not to say that I am ignorant of other scripts as I am well aware of the intersections of other identities such as class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, education and so forth. However, due to the spatial constraints, I chose to focus on the lens in which I see through particularly. This work is by no means an attempt at essentialism. Instead, I am only speaking on behalf of my particular experiences and giving the other students in the class the space to talk about how their racial and gendered identities shape their experiences; in this particular case, I will not speak on behalf of all women who have the same/similar identities as me, or that of the participants.

Doing feminist research illuminates the possibilities of my work. Holistically speaking, this research can lead to possible changes in Women and Gender studies programs. ‘Feminist’ for me implies taking up the standpoint in which women’s lived experiences, ways of knowing and thinking, being, seeing and feeling, although different, are at the centre of analysis therefore disrupting (racist), classist androcentricity. In taking up this project in true critical anti-racist feminist fashion, this project also then manifests itself as a work of resistance; resistant to
‘traditional’ racist patriarchal methodology and methods that are rather exclusive and oppressive to women of colour and other minority groups.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Historically, safe spaces were “safe” because they represented places where Black women could freely examine issues that concerned us. By definition, such spaces become less “safe” if shared with those who were not Black and female (Collins, 2000, p. 110)

Introduction

For the purpose of this chapter, I will look at what participants have said about feminist theory; how it informs pedagogy (practice), the type of space that is created and the emotions that surface as a result. The accounts of all eight Women and Gender Studies students’ voice will be included in this analysis. Particular emphasis will be placed on the politics of space. As a prelude to this chapter, I will also look at why the participants took the course as to not make assumptions about their presence in the class; as for some, they were students in the course to become politically conscious, for others, they were just there for a grade.

Why did you take the course?

I have opted to include a section in my thesis that gives the participants space to articulate why they decided to take the course. This will aid me in my analysis to understand the tensions between those who wanted to develop the tools to become (more) politically active and those who took the course for solely academic purposes. Below are direct quotes from the participants.

Samra: Originally I thought that it was just going to be a full-year course ... you know, it sounded interesting, the topic at least. And I thought it would have been a great learning experience because I don’t have any necessary background in international development or that kind of stuff.

Cruzette: [I took the course] to graduate and I thought it would have been interesting but it just wasn’t what I thought it was.
Cherelle: Well, I took that course because I thought it was interesting.

Miranda: I took the course because I wanted the experience of taking a yearlong Women’s Studies course. I’m uncomfortable with international work; I’m uncomfortable with this idea of even going into communities that I don’t self-identify with, so I wanted the opportunity to unpack where my uncomfortability came from. That class didn’t provide a “period” to that thought; it provided a “comma”.

Rehana: It was actually recommended to me by one of my friends, she said it was one course that she would remember once she left the university. That’s kind of a powerful statement to make and I really wanted to try it out.

Stephanie: It looked really interesting; the subject matter looked pretty interesting.

Ashley: I was interested in exploring international development from a feminist perspective. I also needed a Women Studies credit to graduate.

Kara: I thought that it would look at diverse feminist theory from around the world.

**Feminist Theory**

When asked about their understandings of feminist theory, the participants responded by addressing what feminism ‘is’ as well as what feminism ‘should be’. In most cases, participants’ accounts of feminist knowledge production were discussed within the constraints of white/liberal/Western feminist discourse. For example, Samra says:

**Samra:** Feminist knowledge production caters toward particular bodies in the sense that in most education facilities, it is mostly catered toward white women. I find that sometimes when we are in class, the way that things are described don’t necessarily apply to my own experiences or realities.

Among similar lines, Cherelle states:

**Cherelle:** Feminist knowledge production is constructed in such a way that it is fair, equal and that all voices are heard. How it is now, obviously it is not inclusive. White women are on the top and Black women on the bottom. The purpose of it should be inclusive, but it’s not.

Rehana’s relationship with, and frustration toward, feminist theory is particular clear. She says with much irritation:
Rehana: I think for the most part, my experience with it has been a bit disappointing because there’s a lot more emphasis placed on liberal feminist theory and sometimes there is a very radical wing that people turn to in order to expose and try to create interest sometimes. What hasn’t really been there or has been there but to a limited extent, has been the aspects of the production of feminist knowledge which integrates struggles of class, integrates struggles of race ... and I think that’s something that’s only going to happen through continued engagement in practice with these questions and knowing how they all come together and really interact with each other. I think there needs to be a continued focus on Marxist feminism. I think that’s where it needs to be headed.

What is interesting about Rehana’s account is that she links marginalization to resistance, highlighting the fact that feminist scholars have resisted dominant feminist discourses by looking at the intersections of race and class which is different from Samra and Cherelle’s comments. Whether it is anti-racist feminism, Black feminism, or Marxism feminism as Rehana points to here, there have been scholars who have tackled the rigidness of mainstream feminist knowledge production. Thus, what Rehana is alluding to is the need for diverse voices in feminist theory, which, in a sense, seems to point us to the value of other bodies (of knowledge).

Differently, Ashley sees feminist knowledge production as a theory and a practice rather than that of marginality. She states:

Ashley: I would firstly say that feminism is both a theory and a practice, so in examining feminist pedagogy, the academic or theoretical aspects cannot be examined separately from the emotional or political. We say the personal is political – and feminist pedagogy should be all about this – but I am not sure that the meaning of this is clearly understood when it comes to practical application. I believe that the course we are discussing was not able to integrate the academic/emotional and political in a practical sense.

Here we can see how Ashley moves the discussion from what feminist theory is to what feminist theory should be – a theory and a practice. More than that, Ashley also links the discussion to feminist pedagogy arguing that theory and practice/pedagogy are inextricably linked.
Feminist Pedagogy

Students’ pedagogical experiences were particularly highlighted when asked about their experiences academically and politically in the Women’s Studies course. Stephanie enthusiastically notes:

**Stephanie:** It was my favourite course of my entire U of T years! I learned so much in that course from everyone who was in it; it wasn’t that I was learning it from the material we were reading or from the professor, but it was the people in the classroom. It was an extremely valuable experience.

Similarly, Miranda says:

**Miranda:** It was definitely a learning experience and I appreciated the fact that [the professor] really tried to present a different pedagogy and that she really followed through with that.

Along the same lines, Ashley says:

**Ashley:** The course was first and foremost an academic one. I enjoyed the readings and the discussion of these when this occurred. The most valuable part of the course academically, for me, was the final project, a work I produced myself.

And finally, Kara simply concludes that her academic experience was a “leaning” one and an “eye opener”. Here we see that all four of the white women of the course seemed to have quite positive experiences academically. On the other hand, women of colour seemed to have quite opposite experiences.

Cruzette states:

**Cruzette:** Academically, I didn’t touch the book. I feel like I didn’t really learn much in terms of academia other than really addressing dynamics in the course. In terms of the course outline and stuff like that, I have no clue what we learned.

Samra states that she did learn some things; however, it was rather limited. She says:

**Samra:** Well first of all, I felt like I didn’t learn a lot because very quickly, as the weeks progressed, we stopped discussing a lot of what was mentioned on the syllabus. We kind of bridged off and have people get all emotional and that kind of stuff about how they weren’t feeling included or they had misperceptions of themselves.
For Rehana, she enjoyed some aspects of the modes of teaching, but felt that boundaries were not necessarily pushed enough through class projects and assignments, stating:

**Rehana:** I think the projects were definitely somewhat different from what I have been used to; the whole diary element and the kind of self-reflections. But the extent to which it became the expression of class projects or knowledge, I don’t know if that suited my way of conducting that analysis. [However,] we really tried to push the boundaries within which academia generally is practice and that class was powerful because of that to a certain extent.

Both Cruzette and Samra agree in their comments that the text books did not necessarily teach them much; but Samra’s comment particularly seems to point us to multiple concerns about feminist pedagogy in terms of how it manifested itself in the classroom space.

First, Samra’s comment, like Cruzette’s, seems to demonstrate the limitations of feminist pedagogy as while the white students seemed to learn a lot and had many “ah ha!” moments, women of colour did not. This was demonstrated to the extent in which some women of colour did not even care to open their books. However, I would disagree with Samra’s second point in respect to the instructor seeming to depart from discussions that were “supposed to be” had in the classroom as noted on the syllabus. In my perspective, the beauty of feminist pedagogy (notwithstanding its limitations) is that it diverges from the rigidity of “traditional” instructive practices as it does not follow a systematic order and moves in different directions depending on the flow of the discussions. The third part of Samra’s comment about student’s getting “all emotional” is a rather interesting comment that will be addressed later in this chapter.

As questions of academia and politics are linked, student’s experiences with feminist pedagogy were also made clear when asked about their experience in the class politically. Miranda states:

**Miranda:** I found that it gave me the tools on how to be a better ally and I think that’s an important skill to learn politically. Again, I learned to situate myself which is the first thing I think about before I can do work with anybody else. It’s
the idea of the personal and political as well as the power and privilege implications.

Rehana agrees, stating:

**Rehana:** Politically, I think when I entered the course, my knowledge of feminism was limited and it brought out the real consequences of not having race politics or class politics and how all of that plays together. I saw what ignorance leads to and I didn’t want to be a part of that ignorance; the emotional and the political were not separate.

For Miranda and Rehana, we can see that the instructor was valuable in providing the academic tools to create allies. By extending analysis of feminism to include race analysis, it was helpful in learning how to build feminist relationships. Moreover, such learning tools were useful in illuminating the connection between the emotional and the political.

There are however exceptions as Ashley, Cherelle, Samra and Cruzette did not have positive experiences politically as they felt that theory and practice were not bridged. For instance, Ashley states:

**Ashley:** Politics, in my opinion is the integration of the theory and the action. Our action was our discussion since we did not use our acquired or produced knowledge for any other action. Our political analysis was forwarded in our academic work. I do not believe that substantive politics, theory integrated with action, was embedded into the class experiential portion. I know that the goal of class discussion was to embed political analysis into interpersonal dialogue but I do not believe that this was achieved.

On the other hand, Samra believes that theory and practice were bridged, but only by women of colour, noting:

**Samra:** Politically, I think I was committed to actually changing the power dynamics in the course and I mean often times, women of colour would reflect that we are here because we are committed to the project of change. It is necessary for us because these things affect us much more than it does white women.

Samra seems to be challenging Ashley’s comment. Although she agrees that theory and practice were not bridged, she argues that theory and practice were not bridged by white women.
particularly. Her comments seem to allude that women of colour have to bridge theory with practice as “-isms” affect us more than they do white women.

**Feminist Space**

The politics of space is informed by theory and pedagogy. The participants’ explanation of the dynamics of the classroom space made reference to safety, spatial arrangements and emotion through their understandings of feminist theory and pedagogy. For Rehana, her memory of the space was quite positive, she notes:

**Rehana:** The space was –and I think the professor played a great role in this – quite inclusive. She definitely made an effort even though that’s not how it always played out.

For Stephanie,

**Stephanie:** It was different for each person. For me, it was a much safe space than I think it was for other people. It was also sort of scary there. It felt a bit oppressive in the beginning as there were things going on that people weren’t talking about.

Oppression and safety also came up by Kara and Miranda, but it was Cruzette, Ashley and Samra that seemed to really further the discussion of space. For Cruzette:

**Cruzette:** People would have liked to think that it was a feminist space but it definitely wasn’t a safe space. I mean, [the instructor] tried to make it a safe space by having these discussions, but I think what ended up happening was that it just fleshed out the fact that these conversations are way too hard to have. Obviously it wasn’t a safe space because people admitted that they didn’t even want to come to class; people just thought that it was way too much. I didn’t even want to go to class because I didn’t want to talk about my wounds and open them up again and shit.

Ashley moves to the discussion of space to spatial arrangements, stating:

**Asley:** We sat in a circle, if you are asking about the physical space. This actually frustrated me a bit because there was no reference made to the fact that is
actually an Indigenous practice. In terms of structure, I think this was lacking. In non-hierarchal collectives, feminists before us have implemented constructive feedback methods that ask all involved to name behaviour without accusation, offer personal and political analysis, and follow up suggestions for future behaviour change. This course required more of this component.

Sanra builds on Ashley’s point, saying:

**Samra:** I think it was a very hostile environment. I’m thinking even about seating arrangements. Like physically sitting there, first of all, we sit separated. So women of colour would sit on one side and white women would sit on the other and you know, we would be facing each other and so you can see everyone’s body language, you can see, like, ok, even if they aren’t saying necessarily how they feel, you can just look at their body language and understand, ok, this person thinks that what we’re saying is a load of shit, just by them rolling their eyes at us, smirking, whatever it may be. And then we’d have people who just come in whenever the hell they wanted to come in and completely just disrupt the learning environment or whatever conversations we were trying to have.

All of these accounts of the classroom space are important to unpack. Rehana’s comment is important to begin with as she links pedagogy and the role of the instructor with the type of space that was created. And then Stephanie (as well as Kara and Miranda who were not quoted) furthered this by acknowledging that although attempts at creating a safe space were made, it was only safe for white bodies, and was rather unsafe, oppressive and even scary for other bodies.

However, it was Cruzette, Ashley and Samra who moved the discussion of space in an interesting direction. In Cruzette’s account, she seems to challenge the idea of ‘feminist’ as synonymous with ‘safe’ as her comment demonstrates that the space was not quite as “feminist” as it may have liked to come across. Ashley’s comment was particularly valuable. In the first part of her remark, she has clear frustration with the fact that not only is there no

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22 There are/have been some unanticipated outcomes of my research which has made comments that focused on Native/Aboriginal perspectives. While it is outside the scope of this thesis/analysis, one is compelled to in fact consider the nature of space in terms of territoriality and spatiality.
acknowledgement of the fact that the university is located on Aboriginal land, but that the feminist classroom participates in/performs Indigenous practices with no reference to that either.

Ashley also continues on that there was no structure or suggestions in terms of how one is to “behave” in the classroom space. Samra furthers Ashley’s comment by making specific references to classroom behaviour when she notes that there were “smirks” and “eye rolling”, but yet there was no follow up or suggestions for “future behaviour change”. In turn, this contributed to the hostility of the classroom environment.

Classroom Discussions

As I have connected theory with the way in which feminism is taught (practice) and how it informs the classroom space, it is now important to look at the type of the conversations that were/were not had. When asked whether they were able to talk about “-isms” in the space of the classroom, Rehana said:

Rehana: I think in a way that was the heart of the class. It was looking at the politics of power. I think it was far easier to talk about it at a political level than a personal level, right? Not just a personal level, but a classroom level.

Cruzette seems to agree with Rehana’s comment stating, that “theoretically, yeah. In the discussions, people just spat them out”. However Cherelle didn’t believe this to be so, stating, “No not really. I didn’t feel like there was space to talk about it. It wasn’t really allowed. It did come up on the periphery, but it wasn’t really dealt with”.

For Ashley and Samra particularly, they felt that attempts were made to talk about “-isms”, but in most instances they were shut down. Ashley said:

Ashley: No. Eventually not all “-isms” were up for discussion. It appeared that women began to fight over which “-ism” was more important which was based, naturally, on their personal experiences. It was also sad to see that some women thought they were doing really good feminist work when they were actually pointing fingers at individual women, whom they did not actually know. In this regard, there were a lot of prejudices directed towards the visible
oppressions/differences of the specific women in the class. At times it felt like a debate over who had more or less privilege and then based on those privileges, who should or should not have a voice.

Samra also voices frustrations about being shut down, saying:

**Samra:** There were attempts made I think to talk about “-isms” and a lot of times when we did talk they would be shut off automatically. So, there would be times when we’d raise, you know, like racism, several times actually, and we’d get students rolling their eyes at us or pretending they understand what we’re trying to say and then talk over us, not giving women of colour enough space to talk. Even just certain “-isms” would get employed to show that we’re all the same. For example, sexism; one woman would be like, “well, we’re all oppressed the same way” or something, but not understanding how much violence goes into saying that we’re all the same. Like, we’re not all the same; we don’t have the same life experiences. Certain “-isms” would become used strategically and other “-isms” would be used by women of colour to really unpack the dominant discourse but it was shut down.

Here we can see the difficulty in connecting the personal and political. Theoretically speaking, discussions about “-isms” were “spat out”. However, when important connections were made about lived experiences of racism for instance, the conversation was shut down by white women who would talk over women of colour. In other instances, conversations were shut down by trying to erase difference by equating racism with sexism. By Ashley’s comment, her frustration with racism as always being the central oppression discussed in the classroom may be the reason why less visible oppressions were equated with racism to show that “we’re all the same”.

Still, it is important to understand that all forms of discrimination are not the same nor are they felt the same; discrimination is different on different bodies. To say that we all experience sexism the same way is highly problematic as that differs based on race, and then if we include other analyses, experiences of sexism differ based on class, ability and so forth as well. Moreover, by white women shutting down conversations about racism, it reveals the discomfort in acknowledging their implication and participation in white supremacy.
To delve more deeply into unpacking these comments, I asked the participants whether they felt that important connections were made between racism and other forms of discrimination. For Ashley:

**Ashley:** In class, we argued the issue of visible and non-visible oppressions quite extensively and seemed to get stuck there. This created a hierarchical oppression frame among us that did not allow for a more complicated analysis. The face-to-face discussion took place more in the context of highly personal and non-constructive feedback and did not result in meaningful connection to an intersectional view of the ways that various oppressions, visible or not, affect and compound the position and condition of women at home or abroad. I think that our “connections” made were limited in the classroom.

Cruzette’s perspective was quite different as she noted:

**Cruzette:** I feel like racism was the central “-ism” that was discussed in the class. Sexism was brought out, so it’s like, “hey! We’re all women”. In that sense, we’re all oppressed in that way. Or, classism was used in a way to somehow balance the racism that happens. All the other “-isms” were used against racism as a ploy to play the game to the race to oppression. They were pitted against each other and used as excuses.

Samra seems to build on Cruzette’s comment about “the race to oppression”, noting:

**Samra:** No. To be honest, I think it’s just white women coming to justify why they’re there. There was no analysis and there was no critique that was allowed to be made. If it was made, then it was just like, “oh, we’re just trying to be your friend” or like maybe “you should just teach us what to do” and “let’s hold hands” and you know, not break bridges. And it was like, just honestly, come on; this is not first year Women’s Studies. Like, we’re in a fourth year seminar course. The analysis should be much more critical than this. Important connections *must* be made [emphasis added].

Here we can see Ashley’s frustration with the classroom emphasis on “visible” oppression juxtaposed with Cruzette and Samra’s frustration with Ashley not acknowledging the saliency of race. In Rehana’s response, she seems to appreciate this tension saying:

**Rehana:** I think that connections were made and this is what’s so beautiful about that classroom. It’s true that white women in that classroom did show a definite privileged way of being there, they definitely demonstrated that. But at the same time, the way in which the classroom ended where it’s at and peaked where it peaked too, it shows that the women of colour weren’t silent, right? It shows that the politics of resistance were definitely there, right? We sometimes ignore this.
We sometimes ignore this when we’re sometimes victimizing. We’re not really looking at the story that goes alongside that, which is the story of resistance. We were vocal and we were strong.

Rehana’s point is important to signal as continued focus of/on marginality, glosses over the story of resistance. So although Samra, for instance, felt like connections were not made, the fact that she kept talking about her experiences of racism/white supremacy demonstrated both a story and a voice of resistance. Moreover, her very presence as a racialized body in a feminist classroom space made it a site of resistance.

Still, some bodies felt that they could not talk about “-isms” within the space of the classroom. When asked whether she could talk about “-isms” outside the space of the classroom, Samra notes:

**Samra:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, even just reflecting back on the class, women of colour, at least, would often after the class is done, have our own class. Basically we would sit down and actually talk about the readings or talk about what occurred in the classroom and really critically engage with what racism is and how it affects us, what sexism is and classism and locate ourselves on multiple axes of power and privilege. White women found us threatening in that sense. I remember one person said, “Oh, well we didn’t feel like you wanted us there” or something like that. But beyond that, I think that with them dominating the conversation in most of the classroom discussions, women of colour need a space to talk as well, right? The classroom space is not safe. Like that’s just what it comes down to. We weren’t made to feel like we actually belonged in that classroom space. I also would blame the instructor a bit because as an instructor, you have a duty to facilitate the environment and if you claim that you’re critical and you’re, you know, practicing critical pedagogy and shit, then you need to practice what you preach, right? And that did not happen at all. So then why are you even here in the first place? We can have our own discussion, right?

For Cruzette she notes,

**Cruzette:** Yeah, I can talk about “-isms” outside the classroom but not inside because we had to see these same people for eight months. As much as we tried to generate discussion, it was hard because people had their academic hats on, you know what I’m saying? It just got personal. It’s like they had their academic hats on, but it was more like armour, to shield themselves from the shit that was going on. The white women were there; they had their anarchy, they had their space, they had their talking space, they had their looks, they had their demeanour, they had everything, so it’s hard to have constructive discussions in that way.
Basically it comes down to the fact that they don’t fucking understand our experiences as women of colour. I don’t want to have the same discussions we have around them because I don’t want them to analyze it or judge it from an academic perspective because that’s my life.

Cruzette’s frustration with the white gaze on racialized experiences speaks to why Samra argues that women of colour needed their own space. Because the classroom didn’t talk about issues that were important to women of colour and our communities, Samra, like Cruzette, needed a space that they felt safe and free from judgment. Thus, creating a safe space for women of colour to talk about our lived experiences without theorizing was a necessary component that women of colour felt was missing in the classroom discussions.

White women having their “academic hats on”, thus separating the emotional from political conversations, is an important comment to unpack. Some experiences simply cannot be theorized by anyone, feminist or otherwise. Some experiences needed to be hashed out through genuine dialogue in order to come up with some sort of political action. By white women strategically removing themselves from conversations about racism/white supremacy and replacing it with theorists, leaves little room for sisterhood and solidarity in feminist circles.

**Power Dynamics and Privilege**

For most of the participants, power and privilege were discussed through class activities and assignments. Cruzette notes:

**Cruzette:** It was through the line of privilege [activity]. After the line of privilege, I knew that this course was going to be fucking unreal. I just sensed so much tension even in something as simple as the line of privilege. I guess it exposed some people of where they were. And then not everyone explained themselves too which left a lot of open-ended questions that people had to solve for themselves.

She continues,

It was also through tears, through anger, through all of that stuff. Power was initially addressed through talking space. A lot of people were saying that white
women were taking up too much talking space which was silencing women of
colour and also women of colour internalized that which meant that they were
then silencing themselves as well, right?

Here we can see silence operating in two ways. First, exposing white power and
privilege was difficult for white women, which led to their silence, and ultimately, their
unaccountability. But also, when discussions were not about their power and privilege, they
seemed to take up a lot of talking space which then silenced women of colour. This
demonstrates how white women participate in keeping spaces as white by not discussing it or
challenging it, but also by silencing those who try to challenge and disrupt it.

Cherelle goes on to say:

**Cherelle:** Power and privilege were very big topics. It was said but still not said,
it was both seen and not seen, it was something that was assumed, implied,
whatever you want to call it where predominately, again, the white women in the
class, felt that they had the right to talk about certain things and it was ok because
ah, they’re white. It made me feel voiceless actually because I didn’t know what
to say. I mean, I wanted to say something but I was like ah, I’m kind of
outnumbered, maybe I shouldn’t say anything. I don’t want to get into the whole
battle field of the Black woman, again, trying to speak up about “crap” or
whatever. So I was like, ok, get your grade, and out the class.

Cherelle shows very clearly that by whiteness (white power and privilege) being
“assumed” and “implied”, it made it very difficult for women of colour to speak up, rendering us
voiceless. This unaccountability then led to Cherelle giving up on the class and simply wanting
a grade. This “giving up” and self-silencing is a direct implication of a classroom space that
does not allow for everyone to feel included.

For Samra, power and privilege was clearly embodied by the instructor. She states:

**Samra:** [The instructor] would try to be like “I’m the instructor and I got power
and blah blah blah”. The way that power and privilege were discussed was very
uneven in the sense that people would say, “look, I’m white, ok so I have power
and I have privilege” but at the same time, they’d just acknowledge that and that
would be the end of the discussion. They would think, “Ok, that’s enough”. You
know, I’ve said that I am white and I’ve got power, ok that’s it. That’s all I want
to do. It was very, like, superficial.
Kara’s memory of discussions on power and privilege was quite different as she simply states, “Questions of power and privilege were critical and genuine”. This leaves one to question what she defines as “critical” and “genuine”. Is it, as Samra points to, simply acknowledging white power and privilege? But then what? What happens after acknowledging this?

Emotion and Voice

Due to the way in which feminist theory, feminist pedagogy and feminist spaces were discussed, it is inevitable that particular emotions would surface as a result. When asked about their experiences in the classroom emotionally, Cruzette notes:

Cruzette: I felt like white women did not understand their privilege. They wanted the women of colour in the class to teach them about their privilege and that’s not our job. First of all, they need to understand that privilege is an ongoing thing. So clearly it was traumatizing because people were crying. That’s the first time I was in a class where people actually shed tears. It was a very organic way of it happening, but at the same time, it just opened a lot of wounds and with really having to discuss racism with people, I just didn’t feel comfortable doing that. {Pause} I keep taking these breathes because it’s like having to put myself back in that feeling again. This is totally the trauma coming back.

Samra experienced similar discomfort noting,

Samra: For me, reflecting back, it’s been a draining experience. Sometimes I’d be ambivalent about even just going to class in the first place. I mean, I went to class every single week, so obviously I was dedicated to what we were doing in terms of unpacking privilege and understanding power in the class. So in that sense, I was pretty dedicated. But, I mean, I had a lot of mixed emotions just because of a lot of the things that played out. I think it was mostly draining and uncomfortable mainly because of the white students in the class who would take up a hell of a lot of space and would make it so that basically you were sometimes left not being able to speak and actually contribute to the class environment.

Both Cruzette and Samra have voiced feelings of discomfort, trauma, silencing and feeling drained. Although discomfort can be a pedagogical tool for unpacking power and privilege (i.e. does your discomfort stem for your positionality of power and privilege?), trauma
and silencing are very strong emotions to be felt in the classroom, such feelings of trauma can trigger memories that may have had significant effects on their lives.

Although a lot of emotions were felt, Rehana saw this as being a learning experience. She says:

Rehana: It was definitely at times frustrating, at times very enlightening for me, and I hate to use that western, liberal term. It was something that left me with a lot to think about. I do remember a time when I don’t think I cry much in those kinds of formal settings, but at the same time, I think there was something about the way the togetherness with which we were all engaging in that sometimes the feelings that were coming out from each one of us, were definitely distressing. I do remember crying at one point and I think it was hard not to because all of us were both affected by the ideas which were coming out but also by each other.

Cruzette, Samra and Rehana demonstrate that emotion could not be separated from the classroom spaces as due to classroom discussions on power and privilege dynamics/relations, it was impossible not to feel something. For Miranda, on the other hand, her experience was positive as she felt like she mattered, saying:

Miranda: I felt that I mattered in that class and I don’t know if that’s appropriate or not to say. We all went through different but similar emotions where all of us had to face our prejudices, all of us had to deal with our own racisms, our ideas of privilege and these “-isms” that we walk into class with. I don’t think a lot of people wanted to do that, but I came to class wanting to do that because I felt that it was something that I needed to think about, especially in terms of this idea of “international development”. It became less about the outside world and more about our inside world.

Feeling like they mattered was not an emotion expressed by many, if not any, in the classroom space. Feeling like one is of importance should be an emotion felt by all; we should all feel like our voices, bodies and minds are valued. The fact that it was a white woman that felt like she mattered speaks to whom feminist spaces are created for.

On the other hand, Ashley seemed to have different experiences as she didn’t see the classroom as “emotional” but rather “emotive”. For Ashley,
**Ashley:** I found that the course was more emotive than emotional in that the expression of emotion was not framed in a constructive dialogue of meaningful consciousness-raising.

Ashley’s comment is quite problematic. First, she seems to equate emotion with irrational and unemotional as more “constructive” for meaningful dialogue. The fact that emotion did not promote consciousness-raising based on her definition; it was seen as counter-productive in the classroom. However, as we can see by the comment made by Rehana for instance, although it was frustrating, the display of emotions by each of the students in the course was and can be an enlightening experience.

To conclude this section, having spoken to the participants of the case study/students of the Women’s Studies course, they seems to illuminate the way in which feminist theory as constructed in Women’s Studies spaces seems to marginalize racialized bodies as well as racialized bodies of knowledge. Through which, feminist pedagogy (teaching and learning) becomes muddled in the ambiguity of feminist theory, creating a space that is rather exclusive. For white women, the exclusivity of the classroom manifests itself as oppressive and unsafe. For women of colour; the classroom is a space that is oppressive, unsafe but also racist/white supremacist – essentially a space claimed by whiteness. These complexities need to be attended to and will be further addressed in the next chapter in relation to the broader context of both the social and the political.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Feminist pedagogy, growing out of feminist theory and women’s studies, begins with the premise that men and women are unequal and have differential access to power structures. This has led to the distortion in the construction of knowledge itself, so that what counts as knowledge and much of what we learn in the formal educational process are one-sided and biased (Ng, 1995, p. 131).

In this chapter, I will connect discussions in the previous chapter to the broader socio-political context, filtering my experiences in the Women’s Studies course throughout. As the Data Analysis chapter focuses on marginality, in this chapter, I will also look at instances/stories of resistance – voices of resistance, sites of resistance, spaces of resistance and knowledge(s) of resistance. I will conclude this chapter by addressing the question: whose classroom is it?

**Why did you take the course?**

Although a small percentage of students took this course to graduate, a majority of the students took the course because the course material sounded interesting, because they were recommended to take the course and because they wanted to really investigate the politics of development through a feminist perspective. Because a majority of the students took this course out of sheer interest, it is safe to assume that this course was more than just a grade; this course was to ground them in the politics of development and to learn how to build solidarity with women across the North-South divide.

Even though there was an initial desire to take the course, students’ comments in the interviews reveal otherwise. For instance, white students’ inability to talk about the politics of development –race, class, gender, colonialism and so forth, and how that too manifests itself in the classroom space was clear. Thus I question, how could one say that they have a genuine interest in this topic and when conversations about particular “-isms” are later brought to the
table, they are either ignored or shut down? How can one identify as feminist while ignoring the multiplicity of female identities?

**Feminist Space**

In the beginning of this thesis, I posed the question: How can we come to understand the classroom as a space that is neither natural, apolitical nor neutral when the knowledge constructed in such space have direct implications in the ways we read the world and make meanings to our lived realities? The participants began to unpack this question by addressing the politics of space. For some, the space was ‘inclusive’ and ‘safe’, but for most, it was a very hostile environment, rather unsafe, silencing, oppressive and even scary. Much of this type of space, according to the participants, had to do with the type of feminist theory and pedagogy that was being practiced within the feminist classroom.

In my Women and Gender Studies classroom experience, I re-call the classroom space as being quite oppressive as well, but more particularly, I felt like I did not belong in that (white) feminist space as the feminist theory and pedagogy being taught was used to create a space that disconnected the classroom space and the “real world” – the emotional and the political. Although the course sought to discuss issues affecting women and international development, the conversations focused on injustices abroad, however it rarely discussed the ways in which we are implicated and complicated in these injustices. We often spoke of sexism, racism, patriarchal control, andocentrism, oppression and colonialism in the global South and in the global North (outside the borders of the classroom), but rarely spoke of how these “-isms” operated and manifested itself within the very walls of the institution, let alone the classroom. The classroom then was seen as a neutral space devoid of racism, whiteness, white privilege and power. Resonating this point, in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), bell hooks explains that no education is
neutral, that the classroom is not, nor should it be, a place of safety (p.37). This point however becomes even more difficult in that as racialized and minoritized bodies in white universities, women of colour are invisible and/or are often perceived as outsiders-within.

It is important to consider how bodies are positioned in the classroom space. Our presence in these spaces is seen as invading territory that is not naturally ours. Accordingly, our presence, at best, is seen as disrupting and challenging the whiteness that is so engrained and deeply entrenched within the fabrics of the institution; at worst, it is seen as contaminating and basically poisoning the university space. Carol Schick (2002) in Keeping the Ivory Tower White: Discourses of Racial Domination speaks to this contamination:

[The fact that] the university space has been invaded and contaminated by unreliable characters is an indication that white privilege and its power to exclude and define are continuously under siege. The contamination is an exception in this place where the walls typically act as borders between space that is ration and the space “out there” where disorder cannot be contained (p.116)

Schick’s point muddles the divide between the university as an institution, the classroom as a site of dialogue and “out there”. The classroom is then a contaminated and racialized space which cannot be separate from “out there” in that bodies constantly enter the space of the classroom with multiple identities and diverse histories and geographies, therefore challenging neutrality. As such, issues of colonialism, racism, whiteness, white privilege and power cannot be negated as it is present in the bodies that enter the space, Euro-colonial language of instruction, Euro-centric course content, Western grading system, white instructors and racist knowledge system. This challenges the assertion that “[the classroom] is a place characterized by abstraction, objectivity, and rationality; quite unlike “out there” where others belong and which [can be] described as political, embodied, and not necessarily rational” (Schick, 2002, p.101). On the contrary, the classroom is quite irrational, unreasonable and illogical.
The distinction placed between the classroom and outside of it is that “out there” is assumed to be the “real world” while the classroom itself is assumed to be a safe, undamaged and honest space. When this separatism is disputed, it often comes with resistance. According to Schick (2002):

The real-world politics of gender, culture, and classroom management are strongly resisted. When this intrusion happens—when an issue becomes too personal for comfort participants use their indignation to re-establish their dominant identities and central positions. The space must be maintained; the identities—those who are in control and those who are not—cannot be confused. If participants’ reactions are described as unreasonable, their authority and their ability to discern what is reasonable is undermined (p.110)

However, in re-positioning the classroom space to comfort white bodies, racialized and minoritized bodies often have to erase their identities, histories, and geographies even to their own discomfort. Who benefits from this erasure and discomfort of racialized bodies? Whose interest gets served most when the classroom is assumed and maintained as a “neutral” space?

Spaces engender both power and privilege. To protect this, white students and teachers often try to re-centre themselves when marginality has been centered or where there is an assumed threat to maintain whiteness. Racialized and minoritized bodies then are disciplined by white professors if we try to “take over” their space. White professors, in response, control the classroom space to ensure that whiteness is not only protected and safe from harm but also its power and privileges remain unthreatened. Schick (2002) speaks to this maintenance and engenderment of power and privilege, and asserts that continuous surveillance is essential to avert the loss of privilege and propriety. So, what does this mean for critical pedagogy, community and “sisterhood” if a space dominated by whiteness cannot be questioned, contested or challenged?

On many occasions, an “us” versus “them” mentality subsumes the space of the classroom where the finger is often pointed “out there” but hardly ever is the finger pointed back
at the individual. This speaks to individual/personal accountability. That is, how can we hold whiteness accountable? It is easier for certain bodies to blame and name racism, whiteness, white privilege and power as abstractness that takes place outside the borders of the classroom. This dichotomization of pure/tainted, good/bad, right/wrong is however idealistic and utopian. It is important to understand that the classroom is not fixed and rooted, but is rather fluid and changing. Schick (2002) speaks to this dichotomization stating that the “us” and “them” duality around ownership and distribution rings true particularly around knowledge production and emotion. Thus, defending the neutrality of space lies not only in the discomfort of the space being contaminated by many of the “-isms” that assume to only occur in the unsafe “out there” but lies in the discomfort that white privilege will be challenged.

**Feminist Theory and Pedagogy**

A majority of the participants of the study seemed to agree that the feminist theory taught in the classroom space was rather exclusive and leaned toward white western feminism. They argued that in turn, it put women of colour in marginal positions. This then silenced alternative knowledges and feminisms that were applicable to women of colour. So, even though legitimate questions surrounded race, class and gender as interlocking were voiced, whiteness was often the validated and legitimated voice. Thus we can ask, who has the power the power to refuse to listen? silence? dominate? Finally, who is given authoritarian control and who is assigned discursive authority around feminist theory?

In my experience, I felt that as students in the realm of academia, we were taught warped frames of knowledge that were entrenched in euro-centric ways of knowing. In dominant feminism, this leaves knowledge production as a paradoxical “liberating constraint”. Feminism is liberatory in the sense that as women, together, we attempt to free ourselves from the shackles
of patriarchy. However, white feminism is constraining in that there is little acknowledgement of how much patriarchy is deeply rooted in racism and racist ideologies, whiteness and white supremacy. According to Razack (1998), “this is the task of calling into question the knowledge and being of both the teller and the listener, and struggling for ways to take this knowledge and being out of the realm of abstraction and into political action” (p.53). Politically, we must attend to the dangerousness of colour-blind feminism; colour-blind discourses and knowledge production that is built on the politics of selective remembering and forgetting particularly when issues of race is tabled for discussion in dominant feminist classrooms. So I question, who benefits from colour-blindness and who benefits most when there is a deliberate evocation of a racelessness state in feminist dialogue?

White feminism has sought to establish itself as the only valid feminism in present political practice, often from a racist standpoint. Amos and Palmer (2001) in *Challenging \textit{Imperial Feminism} write:

\begin{quote}
There is little recognition in the women’s movement of the ways in which the gains made by white women have been and still are at the expense of Black women ... the ‘herstory’ which white women use to trace the roots of women’s oppression or to justify some form of political practice is an imperial history rooted in the prejudices of colonial and neo-colonial periods ... (pp.18-19)
\end{quote}

Thus, white feminist supremacy has pushed Black women and other women of colour out of mainstream rhetoric and has assumed a colour-blind politic thereby erasing different histories and neglecting the intersectionality and multiple identities of women. So, what does this means for feminist knowledge production?

Feminist knowledge production has been constructed in a way that has discredited indigenous/traditional knowledge and other ways of knowing. That is to say, “the methods used to validate knowledge claims must also be acceptable to the group controlling the knowledge validation process” (Collins, 2000, p.273). This is problematic as bodies are excluded in this
regard. Patti Duncan (2002) in *Decentering Whiteness: Resisting Racism in the Women’s Studies Classroom* speaks to this juncture and remarks, “neither this space nor this tongue are considered “ours”. Rather, we are visitors, allowed to share in the American dream and the English language as long as we remember not to overstep the boundaries of racist propriety” (p.41). Therefore, it can be argued that whites insist on themselves at the centre, and everyone and everything else is a deviation of such. Grillo and Wildman (1991) speak to this idea of “taking back the center” where they posit that there is a ‘center-stage problem’ where members of the dominant group try to re-center themselves when they feel de-centered, needing to be the speaker, knowledge bearer and so forth, rather than the listener and the learner. So, how do we attend to this sense of ownership and entitlement by dominant bodies? Ng (1995) contends that the challenge is:

Feminist pedagogy, growing out of feminist theory and women’s studies, begins with the premise that men and women are unequal and have differential access to power structures. This has led to the distortion in the construction of knowledge itself, so that what counts as knowledge and much of what we learn in the formal educational process are one-sided and biased (p.131)

As a result, we need to question mainstream discourses and rhetoric. As students and teachers, we have a duty and responsibility to challenge power, privilege and knowledge production regardless of resistance made by dominant bodies.


Where mainstream rhetoric might suggest that [anti-racism] is either reverse racism or weakness on our part, we assert that as a decision made in political earnest, such moves are part and parcel of a rational and empowering decision to heal and thrive within racist contexts (p.179)

This reinforces the point that, as students and teachers, we need to challenge the colour-blindness and racelessness that have infiltrated feminist scholarship. What is necessary is that we need to implicate white as a race and understand that it is a privilege that is exclusive to
dominant bodies. I question then, how can women of colour in feminist classroom spaces challenge racism if we are to speak in a colour-blind language? How can we challenge false claims that racism only exists outside the “protection” of classroom walls when it is clear that racism cannot be rendered invisible as it is deeply entrenched in the language being used, subjects being taught, knowledge production and so forth? As Williams (1997) asserts, “the very notion of blindness about colour constitutes an ideological confusion at best, and denial at its very worst” (p.2). Bonilla-Silva (2003) speaks among the same lines and argues that this ‘color-blind script’ is used to lessen the seriousness of racism. Thus, how do we address denial as a form of insidious racism? Moreover, how do we address denial to women that are supposed to be our allies?

George Yancy (2008) in *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* cites that we must come to know that white women are not only influenced by racism but participate, perform and preserve it. Lorde (1984) builds on this point and argues that “no woman is responsible for altering the psyche of her oppressor, even when that psyche is embodied in another woman” (p.133). So what does this mean for critical pedagogy (questioning and challenging the academy) and transformative education (the process of unlearning and relearning)? That is to say, how do we communicate with the oppressor? Or, is communication even necessary at all? The paradox, according to Dei (2004) is that racialized bodies are so blinded by the reality of power and privilege that we not only naturalize oppression as inevitable, but deny our own oppression. Furthermore Dei (2004) contends that “the “colorblind” prison in which we find ourselves secured—with little chance or avenue of escape” (p.90). Thus, to escape this colour-blind prison, one must implicate whiteness as a colour. Only
when we repudiate the colour-blindness discourse that genuine conversations about race can take place.

**Emotion and Voice**

The experiences that the students had in the classroom academically and politically had direct implication on the type of emotion felt in the classroom. Emotions such as discomfort, anger, rage, trauma and silencing were not rare in the classroom. In fact, a majority of the women, particularly the women of colour felt that these type of emotions daily in the classroom. However, although these emotions were portrayed as solely negative, these types of emotions can also be seen or used as a pedagogical.

I argue that we need to separate discomfort and anger from the urgency to talk about race and racism. Although discomfort and anger are necessary, it cannot override the saliency of racism/white supremacy. In critical anti-racist work, dominant bodies in particular need to feel discomfort, get angry but most importantly, act. Megan Boler (1999) echoes this point that a pedagogy of discomfort calls not only for inquiry but for action as a result of critical self-reflection and ‘learning to bear witness’. I further this point by positing that an anti-racism approach can be useful as it challenges the ways in which dominant bodies rationalize their racist behaviour without much responsibility and discomfort. Thus, discomfort is crucial in speaking, acting, and attending to, issues of race and racism in society. According to Boler (1999), “a pedagogy of discomfort invites students to leave the familiar shores of learned beliefs and habits, and swim further out into the “foreign” and risky depths of the sea of ethical and moral differences” (p.181). In furthering this point, I purport that it is also important for teachers to experience and engage in this discomfort as well. Patti Duncan (2002) in *Decentering Whiteness: Resisting Racism in the Women’s Studies Classroom* writes,
A tactic white students often employ is that of simple digression. When issues of race and white privilege are introduced in class discussions and readings ... some students move to bring up other topics–not to tie them to a discussion of race and racism, but simply to divert attention away from their own whiteness and white privilege ... white teachers (and some teachers of color) spend so much time worrying about how to make the white students in their classrooms feel comfortable and “safe” speaking about race and racism that it is often the students of color, again, whose identities and words end up elided, negated, or otherwise invalidated (pp. 44-5)

As such, we need to question comfort. Who has the luxury of feeling comfortable in the space of the classroom? How can discomfort become positive for those who often benefit from comfort? In attending to this discomfort, dominant bodies as well as racialized and minoritized bodies need to decolonize our minds in that our modes of seeing, knowing and being have been influenced by the ‘dominant culture of the historical moment’ (Boler 1999).

According to Boler (1999), in deconstructing discomfort, one must provide a distinction between spectating and witnessing. In view of that, spectating is a privileged stance that allows one to distance themselves, and essentially objectify, from a particular situation or discussion. On the other hand, witnessing does not allow one to ‘spectate’, as we become historically responsible and co-implicators in the discourse of discomfort; there are emotional implications that cannot be separated from this occurrence. Thus, recollecting personal stories are necessary in critical discussions and conversations about racism. However, it is important to note that one cannot come to know the Other simply through such discussions, nor can one feel empathy as a result; there are limitations and complexities to such pedagogical moments in education.

For Boler (1999), “learning the “untold” histories enables a recognition of how truths have been constructed in relation to particular silences” (p.185). However, in my Women and Gender Studies course, I reluctantly told my stories of racism/white supremacy only to be responded to by white guilt. I recall instances in the classroom where I spoke about feeling unsettled in the “neutral” classroom space. To speak this unsettlement, I would connect readings
to my experiences and so too I would link issues of racism/white supremacy, whiteness, classism, power, privilege and many other “-isms” to the classroom dynamic, structure, content and conversations which left white students and the white teacher confronted with their power, privilege and oppressive tactics. Often times white students would not return to class for weeks because they did not feel “safe” nor did white students feel that they could participate in conversations as they might offend students of colour. Instances like these led not only to white students and students of colour sitting at opposite ends of the classroom, but often left conversations unsaid and unfinished. Let me paraphrase Hunt (2009) who among others long ago has raised some important questions for us to think about: What is the “stake in keeping a lid on it”? Is there a fear that speaking up may “discredit” white students from being ‘feminists’ or ‘anti-racists’? Do they fear that they will have to admit their power and privilege? Do they “fear how much work there is to do” in the classroom and in the institution and education system at large, much less internationally?23

Boler (1999) asserts that in unsilencing these truths, “the student feels blamed, possibly defensively angry, and may refuse to engage in further complex self-reflection or critical inquiry ... the challenge within educational environments is to create a space for honest and collective self-reflection and inquiry rather than closing off discussion” (p.187). Critical white feminist Audrey Thompson (2003) speaks to this yearning to be seen as a good white person as problematic. She writes that although recognizing the problematic of whiteness is necessary, it can be shaky in that it may lead to guilt; however, the solution to white guilt should not be to

23 Questions from a poem entitled “Unlearning Privilege” by Krista Hunt (2009), at http://www.teachlearnchange.org/?p=364. It is important to note that women of colour, both known and unknown, have long raised the issue of betrayal/betraying by white feminists and what that means for feminism, solidarity and sisterhood when one stays silent and doesn’t speak up/out in the face of racism/white supremacy. See: hooks, b. (2000). Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics. London: Pluto Press.
help whites feels comfortable. Thus, what is needed is a pedagogy of truth-telling, witnessing and social justice.

It is important to also consider the uses of anger when responding to racism. Dominant bodies often feel anger once they begin witnessing these truths: women of colour often feel anger by having to expose ourselves in order for dominant bodies to bear witness to the precariousness of racism. Thus it can be questioned, what is accomplished when racism is voiced in the classroom? Furthermore, on what pedagogical grounds is the will (and expectation) to voice racism/white supremacy based? It can be argued that it is not simply that bodies are expected to conform to whiteness within the academy and be silenced as a result, but rather (and also) that they are expected to answer to whiteness and be consumed by it in the academy.24

We must also however distinguish positive anger from defensive anger; anger to being exposed to what we have been conditioned not to see is not the same as defensive anger that is used to protect whiteness and deny responsibility. Sara Ahmed (2004) in The Cultural Politics of Emotion calls for an anti-racist critique in terms of a politics of emotion. According to Ahmed (2004), “we need to contest this understanding of emotion as ‘the unthought’ just as we need to contest the assumption that ‘rational thought’ is unemotional, or that it does not involve being moved by others” (p.170). Ahmed (2004) continues that, “feminists who speak out against established ‘truths’ are often constructed as emotional, failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of ‘good judgment’” (p.170). It is then important to understand how in conjunction, discomfort and anger is useful in responding to racism, and is not irrational or un-thoughtful; we must come to understand that an action permeates a reaction, but that that reaction must be constructive to bring about political action. Hence, there is no

24 Questions taken from an e-mail conversation with Dr. Martin Cannon, August 22, 2010.
organic action which is outside an account of reaction. Mainstream feminism needs to make room for other ways of knowing, doing, thinking, seeing and feeling; if we do not attend to this displacement of feminism, women of colour will have to endure years more of being rendered invisible. It is thus necessary to examine the intricacies of knowledge production.

**Politics of Resistance**

It is important that this research does not lead into a state of victimhood as although marginality of women of colour in the Women's Studies classroom is clear, that is not to say that there were no acts of resistance. By women of colour speaking up, their voices were that of resistance. In turn, women of colour made that classroom and site and a space of resistance by challenging the politics of space. Furthermore, by questioning white middle-classed Western feminist discourse and proposing other feminisms, they presented knowledges of resistance, demonstrating that intersectionality and anti-racism is in fact resistance. Thus, it could be noted that the participants exhibited resistance in many forms.

Rehana, a participant in this thesis, made very important contributions to the discussion on resistance, stating that by women of colour speaking up the politics of resistance was present in the classroom. Her comment demonstrated that by making the classroom space political by questioning and by challenging, it makes certain bodies accountable; to be specific, it holds whiteness accountable which in itself is resistance. Rehana’s comment demonstrated that the classroom as a space of knowledge production is not neutral. Furthermore she made visible the agency within all of us, and the resistance within the dominance of whiteness.
**Whose classroom is it?**

The comments made by myself and other students of colour as well as the actions made by white students demonstrate that the classroom itself is a space claimed by whiteness and racism/white supremacy. Although Canadian university classrooms have become increasingly diverse racially, sexually, class-wise and so forth, the white middle classed female still lays claim to feminist spaces and classrooms. Thus, I would argue that this idea of “feminism” and “feminist” is superficial if certain bodies remain to be privileged while others are disadvantaged.

And although feminist spaces are claimed by whiteness, resistance as spatial practice still take place. In this particular classroom space, students of colour did not try to create “anarchy” in the classroom space, but instead, by questioning space, proposing alternative feminism and knowledges and by being in the space itself, women of colour therefore challenged “common” spatial practice which in itself is a form of resistance.
Chapter Six:  
Conclusion

Anti-racist education can be employed to attend to the displacement of feminism in ‘progressive’, ‘feminist’ classroom spaces. In integrating anti-racist education into the classroom space, an understanding of how race, racism/white supremacy, power, white privilege and whiteness operates within, between and outside of spaces can be addressed. In so doing, superficial notions of community can be deconstructed and (re)constructed to create a sense of solidarity, accountability and alliance.

According to George Dei (1996), anti-racism in education contextualizes differences within racialized discourses and develops an understanding of the institutionalization of differential power relations in school settings. Thus, the importance of anti-racist education is to remove our colonial lens/gaze, and to see and respond to the ways in which certain bodies benefit from power in relational terms; as one is privileged, the other is oppressed. In so doing, experiential knowledge should not be void of this education and understanding. In Anti-Racism Education in Theory and Practice, Dei (1996) posits:

The second and related issues of interest in integrative anti-racism studies is the relevance of personal experiential knowledge and the specific ways our multiple subject position and identities affect our ways of creating knowledge. Knowledge is produced out of a series of socio-political arrangements, such as the particular intersections of social oppressions (p.63)

That is to say, in engaging in organic and genuine dialogue across racial divides, it is important to recognize the authenticity of experiential knowledge and oppositional ways of knowing in academia; the individual cannot be separated from their lived experiences. In essence then, Afrocentric pedagogy and values need to be applied in the space of the classroom as this will attend to dismantling the master’s tools which have been and are currently used to
maintain a certain type of classroom space. According to Nancie Caraway (1991), “Afrocentric collective values provide an important standard from which to critique both masculinist culture and mainstream feminist practices” (p. 62). Thus, an African-centered pedagogy is necessary to not only promote critical consciousness, but to also legitimize African worldviews and knowledge production (experiential or otherwise) regardless of its otherwise marginal standpoint.

In *Reconceptualizing our Classroom Practice: Notes From an Anti-Racist Educator*, Grace Mathieson (2002) claims that “we can no longer deny, dismiss and ignore how an oppressive educational system affects students of colour” (p.158). Njoki Nathanie Wane (2002) furthers this point by affirming that “it is therefore important to note that many marginalized groups that have been historically disempowered have been instrumental in bringing to light the ways in which theory has been applied in a hierarchal way and used to promote a type of academic elitism that embraces traditional structures of domination” (p.49). Thus, the ongoing study of anti-racism is necessary in understanding how both individually and collectively, one can engage in addressing the myriad of ways in which the school has become a site for (re)producing social inequalities, oppression and racism/white supremacy.

It is also important to note that anti-racism instructive practices cannot be a one-off, never to be repeated effort. In “Where is Your Sandwich?” *Situating anti-racism possibilities in Canadian high school classroom spaces*, Thijiba Sinnithamby and Samantha Peters (2010) underscore this, writing:

> topics such as colonization (historical and ongoing), hegemonic masculinity and femininity, race and class cannot be excluded as many students live these identities and experience the repercussions of these processes on a daily basis. Moreover, these topics cannot become an isolated “one-off” lecture as this deems these subjects as tokenistic (p.174)
Dei (1996) also speaks to this point and states that we must deter from a “politics of the moment” or situational politics and must engage in a politics of change. The classroom must not only become a site of radical change, but also of resistance. In resisting and challenging racist/white supremacist practices and spaces, solidarity and community can manifest itself accordingly.

Kevin Kumashiro (2009) in Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice, also provides useful approaches that can be integrated with anti-racism education to create a positive space. Kumashiro has four approaches to anti-oppressive education. The first approach focuses on improving the classroom experiences of students who have been and currently are treated in unpleasant ways, the second approach focuses on challenging mainstream knowledge production and how it constructs racialized and marginalized bodies as Other, the third approach attends to the invisibility of power and privilege in society that disadvantage most while benefiting some and the forth approach addresses the challenges of “teaching” anti-oppressive education; “educators need to address their own desires and resistances to teaching and learning certain things, and refuse to place certainty in any one way of teaching and learning” (pp. xxxvii - iii). Kumashiro’s approaches to anti-oppressive education clearly overlaps with Dei’s (1996) approaches to anti-racist education. In conjunction, these practices can create a space of resistance, of learning and unlearning.

**Implications for Theory**

Mainstream feminism needs to be (re)assessed. It is not enough to “save” or “help” the global South if we are not accountable to the saliency of racism, white privilege and power that has invaded the global North, let alone the pervasiveness of racism/white supremacy, whiteness, white privilege, power and oppression that go uncontested, unquestioned and unchallenged in the
space of the classroom. Hence, feminism has a long way to go. Usha George (2000) in *Anti-Racist Feminism: Critical Race and Gender Studies* echoes this point stating, “feminist ideas have tremendous possibilities for combating racism” (p.119). In attending to these responsibilities, integrating anti-racist education and an anti-racist feminist framework can be useful. In so doing, student and teachers can come to an understanding that the classroom is neither natural, apolitical or a neutral, recognizing that social inequities and inequalities transcend borders and spaces.

In being cognizant of the ways in which school settings and classrooms (re)produce many “-isms”, engagement and the practice of critical pedagogy must take place regardless of discomfort, anger and dis-ease in that “there is no single truth about racism, that only Blacks can know” (Miles, 1989, p.6). Therefore, it is important that minoritized and racialized bodies as well as dominant bodies counteract silence. Boler (1999) speaks to this point and posits that “silence and omission are by no means neutral. One of the central manifestations of racism, sexism and homophobia is “erasure”: omissions and silences that often stem from ignorance and not necessarily from desires to hurt or oppress” (p.184). Thus, in acknowledging and becoming aware of racism/white supremacy, we cannot respond to it with silence as when we speak about race, we are talking about power and white privilege. That is to say, we are all implicit, implicated and have a responsibility to attend to the saliency of racism/white supremacy.

Transforming the institution is also a necessary step. We need to fight structures of oppression that underpin the western, Euro-centric and even andocentric frameworks of the education system and integrate an alternative structure that is not oppressive, racist/white supremacist or exclusive. Thus, challenging power and privilege must occur in all spaces and at all levels. It can be argued that today, systemic and institutional racism is the most dangerous
forms; the “invisibility” and hidden forms of racism allow for it to go unquestioned, particularly by those who are enjoying and benefiting from it.

Ideological and physical/material removal of Native peoples from the classroom has a long history. As a result, making space for Native feminism cannot be neglected in this discussion about feminist theory. In a piece titled “Alienation and Isolation: Patterns of Colonialism in Canada’s Education System”, Patricia Monture-Angus (1995) writes:

Re-claiming our place in formal educational institutions is going to be a very difficult task and it is going to require a lot of patience. We must remember that schools in Canada were once part of the government’s plan to assimilate us. We must question if education institutions that were founded on a belief in our Aboriginal inferiority are part of the answer or has education been part of the problem? (pp. 79-80)

Monture-Angus’ argument goes beyond suggesting making room for other ways of knowing but questions the educational structure in its entirety. Her argument can be easily adapted to Black feminism, anti-racist feminism or any other critical feminist discourse questioning what the true goal, as racialized and minoritized feminists should be. Should we create an alternative space or challenge the existing space? Alison Jones (1999) furthers this question in her piece titled “The Limits of Cross-Cultural Dialogue: Pedagogy, Desire, and Absolution in the Classroom”, writing:

When the marginalized other desires separation, rather than sharing, liberal and radical teachers’ and students’ taken-for-granted principles of benevolent or even critical equality are troubled and shaken [...] the sense of loss and grief experienced by dominant group members in the liberatory classroom where strategies for emancipation are defined [is] in a way that apparently excludes their desires for dialogue (p. 300)

Thus it can be questioned, what is the dominant group’s desire and hunger to come to know the racialized Other all about? And furthermore, structurally speaking, what is it about academic institutions that reproduce this desire? It can be argued that beyond silencing, there is a
level of consumption by dominant bodies to come to know the oppressed which rather than creating empathy, reproduces power relations.  

**The Question of Sisterhood**

So, what does this mean for community in feminist classroom spaces? According to Liston and Al Salim (2000) in *Race, Discomfort and Love in a University Classroom*, as students of color struggle to make meaning in white classrooms, they are often asked or expected to do the majority of the work—to shoulder the responsibility when it comes to grappling with issues of race and racism [...] until white people begin doing the majority of the work of eradicating white supremacy, racism is likely to remain a permanent feature in our classrooms and society (p.248)

In a chapter titled *Notes on Feminism, Racism and Sisterhood*, Charmaine C. Williams and Shirley Chau (2007) build on Liston and Al Salim’s point writing:

Sisterhood with white women seems to be a set-up for betrayal and disillusionment ... [thus] we need to stop looking for sisters and start looking for collaborators. These would be people who share our political vision and are willing to participate in collective political action (pp.292-293).

Thus, community cannot exist as mainstream white feminism has been based on superficial notions of “sisterhood”. If we are truly committed to creating solidarity, we must link that which has been made separate in order to build communities that are committed to social change; we must exceed the pessimistic, be pragmatic and demand the possible. As bell hooks (2003) states, “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (p.36); the individual must both reflect and act for a sisterhood across racial ties to form. A Frierian pedagogy must be taken into account as there can be no transformation without action.

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25 Questions taken from an e-mail conversation with Dr. Martin Cannon, August 22, 2010.
Recommendations

At the initial part of this work, I posed the question: Whose classroom is it? The literature demonstrates that the classroom has been historically and is presently, claimed by whiteness. In reflecting on my feminist space classroom experience then, I provide a list of recommendations with the help of the participants to challenging hegemonic practices, euro-centric knowledge production, whiteness and racism/white supremacy in the classroom as well as to address the current state of Women’s Studies at the University.

1. I would structure the course a bit more and I would take a bit more control and moderate the discussion (Kara)

2. I wish the professor would also have a bit more voice ... maybe monitor discussions a bit (Cherelle)

3. I’d like to see the professor or the teacher not be white and I’d also like the teacher to be more active in space ... you know, moderating space (Cruzette)

4. I would have on the first day let people know what was required for their participation in the class so that people will know that it’s going to be emotionally taxing but also that that’s ok (Miranda)

5. I believe that it is sadly but often thought that no structure is best for “feminist” discussion. I am in favour of beginning with no structure so that a group (on equal footing) can create this. But our course could never have equal footing at the outset, given the academic structure, therefore, some structure, taking an intersectional view, for class discussion would have been helpful and would have gone a long way to support members whose voices were silenced (Ashley)

6. If I was the white instructor, I would call out white students on their shit because a large focal point is the instructor. Introducing theories about power and privilege and really
implicating students to think critically and actually engage in constructive dialogue is important. Even more important would be that the teacher facilitates because in my experience, she wasn’t doing her job properly. Attendance is also a component that needs to be improved upon. If we’re committed to actually changing feminist pedagogy, then we should all make a commitment to actually be there. I would expect 100% commitment, and whoever doesn’t want to be there can leave (Samra)

7. Activism was lacking. I would have preferred much rather that we were given the chance to work with organizations, we were given the chance to work within activist circles, we were encouraged to take part in protests ... something like that. I would have liked a more richer activism being practiced, not just one that is at the level of discourse but at the level of practice (Rehana)

8. I think it was a good thing that our discussions were not moderated ... well a good thing and a bad thing because it allowed for certain people to talk and certain people to not talk. I think that if [the professor] was more active in playing an authoritative role, I don’t think that we would have had as genuine political discussions perhaps. It’s kind of hard to say that the classroom needed something different because it shaped me in the way that it did; it played its part in my life (Stephanie)

9. The politics of voicing is very important. Those who have been historically, and are presently silenced, should be given space to speak

10. Silence is also a form of resistance

11. A conscious awareness of the power dynamics that exist in the classroom must be actively challenged and made verbal

12. Racism and white privilege does in fact exist, even in spaces that are supposedly feminist
13. Dialogue is necessary, but it must also be understood that at times, the racialized Other wishes to have no dialogue or encounter, or to engage with, the “empathetic” white body.

14. It is not enough to acknowledge one’s privilege and be silent if one is truly committed to social change and racial justice.

15. It is not women of colour’s job to call out white women on their privilege or tell them what to do with it or how to change as we all have self-agency.

16. White women need to and should call out other white women on their privilege and should be working towards challenging it.

17. Anti-racism education and Black feminism must be integrated in feminist classroom spaces if we truly want “sisterhood” and solidarity.

18. Institutionalized and systemic racism/white supremacy must be attended to without ado.

Future Areas of Research

My data analysis revealed some holes that would be useful for future research. First, it would be beneficial for future research to include a sound analysis of class and sexuality to see how such identities intersect with race and gender and in turn, how such identities also complicate the feminist classroom space and experience. Second, a lot of discussion came up about feminist pedagogy; however, I did not interview the instructor. Crucial for those engaging in similar research would be to interview the instructor to learn about their teaching style first hand and how that is linked to the type of classroom space that is created. Third, participants

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26 These recommendations are by no means complete. It is a working list.

27 I however chose not to interview the instructor as I felt that it would colour the way that the classroom would have been viewed in that the instructor’s voice would have overshadowed the core/crux of what good feminist pedagogy is about: valuing and giving space to diverse voices and knowledge(s). Moreover, because of safety issues, I felt that it would be unwise to divulge students’ personal feelings as well as my concerns and traumatic incidences with the instructor as a result of my experiences before, during and after the course.
felt distanced from the other participants of the research. Thus, it would have been interesting to follow-up the one-on-one interviews with a focus group/round table discussion so that dialogue between participates could also take place more openly. Fourth, a more sound focus on resistance practices should be explored. In and beyond the classroom, students have found ways (through the arts, through social media, through their chosen careers and so forth) to resist racist/white supremacist, sexist, colonialist and other “-isms” in creative and healing ways that should be highlighted and further explored. Finally, as time did not permit, I was not able to create a new syllabus and course outline for this class. It would be interesting for someone doing similar research, to propose a course outline and syllabus that they believe would help foster a safe(r) feminist classroom space.

This thesis by no means is to be considered “the end”. The analysis that is provided here reflects my experiences as well as the experiences of the participants. This thesis demonstrates the complexities of space and what that means to others. In so doing, it has allowed me and the participants to come up with ways in which marginality, oppression and silencing can be attended to. Opening up a space for critical dialogue where “the race to innocence” is rejected, is important in feminist circles. Moreover, opening up a space where racism and white supremacy is made accountable in feminist spaces is truly important for political action, resistance practices and social justice in Women’s Studies classrooms. In so doing, the classroom can be made a space that is accessible, safe and open to and for all.
References


Appendix A:

Ethical Approval

University of Toronto
Office of the Vice-President, Research
Office of Research Ethics

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #26030

March 10, 2010

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Ms. Samantha Peters
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Dear Dr. Dei and Ms. Peters:

Re: Your research protocol entitled "Unpacking Power and Privilege in Women’s Studies University Classroom Spaces"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: March 16, 2010
Expiry Date: March 15, 2011
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s delegated review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry, as per federal and international policies.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Gyewu
Research Ethics Coordinator
Appendix B:

Informed Consent for Student Participant

QISE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
CIS, 605 Spadina Ave.
Informed Consent for Student Participant

I am a student in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and currently in the process of writing a thesis proposal for my Master's program supervised by Dr. George F. Leslie. I am the Director of Women's Studies at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. My proposed methodological approach will be a case study of gender, race, and class, and will be conducted in the context of course evaluation. The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between theory and practice in educational settings to better understand the way in which the information presented on the course level can be understood by students. The study is intended to be conducted in a manner that will ensure the confidentiality of all participants. It is important to note that the information provided will only be shared between myself and the student, and will not be shared with any other entity without the consent of the student.

You are free to continue and withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. In the study, you may feel fundamentally and ethically asking to provide feedback from your experiences in the classroom. I will not pressure you to do anything that you feel uncomfortable with, and will ensure that your confidentiality will be maintained. Your contributions and recommendations may be shared with other researchers.

Any questions, complaints, or concerns can be directed to the Office of Research Ethics at 132 Queen's Park, Suite 410, Ottawa, ON K1N 8L7, Toronto. The study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set forth by the University of Toronto.

Thank you for your participation and cooperation.

Sincerely,
[Signature]
Date

Please note that all respondents are expected to participate in the study. The data collected from the study will be anonymized and will not be used for any other purposes.

Sincerely,
[Signature]
Date
Appendix C:  
Interview Guide for Participant

Interview Guide for Participant

1. How do you self-identify?
2. What program are you in / what program did you graduate from?
3. What are your understandings of feminist knowledge production?
4. Why did you take the course?
5. What was your experience in the course academically?
6. What was your experience in the course emotionally?
7. What was your experience in the course politically?
8. How would you explain the classroom space?
9. Were you able to talk about “-isms” within the space of the classroom? Why?
10. Were important connections made between racism and other forms of discrimination? In what ways?
11. How were questions of power and privilege engaged in discussion?
12. Are you able to talk about “-isms” outside the space of the classroom? Why?
13. What recommendations would you provide for the course?