

Methodology of the Privileged: White Anti-racist Feminism, Systematic Ignorance, and Epistemic Uncertainty

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This article addresses the impact of systematic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty upon white Western women's participation in anti-racist and transnational feminisms. I argue that a "methodology of the privileged" is necessary for effective coalition-building across racial and geopolitical inequities. Examining both self-reflexivity and racial sedition as existing methods, I conclude that epistemic uncertainty should be considered an additional strategy rather than a dilemma for the privileged.

All my ways of knowing seem to have failed me—my perception, my common sense, my goodwill, my anger, honor, and affection, my intelligence and insight. Just as walking requires something fairly sturdy and firm underfoot, so being an actor in the world requires a foundation of ordinary moral and intellectual confidence. Without that, we don't know how to be or how to act; we become strangely stupid; the commitment against racism becomes itself immobilizing. (Frye 1992, 148)

There are countless examples of how racialized ignorance and Western ethnocentrism influences the production of feminist theory and praxis.¹ In particular, women of color both within and outside the Global South have highlighted the racial bias and cultural ignorance of feminist knowledge produced by white Western women. From Sojourner Truth's double-edged question "ain't I a woman?" (Truth 1992) to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's powerful injunction against the discursive colonization of Third-World women enacted by hegemonic white Western feminisms (Mohanty 2003), there is a long history of critique against certain feminist knowledges as unknowingly Anglocentric, if not persistently

racist and imperialist.² bell hooks contends, “many white women who daily exercise race privilege lack awareness that they are doing so,” and “may not have conscious understanding of the ideology of white supremacy and the extent to which it shapes their behavior and attitudes towards women unlike themselves” (hooks 1984, 56).

Regardless of some advances in white Western participation in anti-racist and transnational feminisms during the past decade or so, the damaging consequences of such ethnocentric universalisms and arrogant perceptions are not a thing of the past. Many continue to point to the white Western bias of dominant feminism, citing its inapplicability and insensitivity to the cultural contexts of non-white and non-Western women. For example, Haunani-Kay Trask characterizes the contemporary relationship among indigenous Hawai’ian women and “haole” (white Western) feminists as fractured by ignorance; she writes:

[G]enerally, haole feminists in Hawai’i are ignorant of, or indifferent to, the causal connection between our oppressed life conditions—poverty, poor housing, high levels of imprisonment, low educational attainment, an enlarging diaspora—and our status as colonized people. The feminist failure of vision here is a result of privilege—an outright insensitivity to the vastness of the human world—because they are white Americans. (Trask 1996, 911)

Trask argues that a skewed worldview—a “feminist failure of vision”—results from the privileges afforded to white women in the United States. Using an intersectional understanding of identity, Trask recognizes that vectors of racial and geopolitical privilege often produce radically divergent perspectives among women on the sources and solutions to our oppression.

This is not to say that individual white Western feminists have not responded to the challenges of women of color or have always failed to produce anti-racist knowledges successfully. There are those who attempt to refuse the privileges that underwrite normative whiteness—including the privilege of remaining ignorant of racial realities. In *The Racial Contract*, Charles W. Mills acknowledges such dissident forms of whiteness, saying “there have always been praiseworthy whites—anticolonialists, abolitionists, opponents of imperialism, civil rights activists, resisters of apartheid—who have recognized the existence and immorality of Whiteness as a political system” (Mills 1997, 107). Certainly, those with white privilege are not completely incapable of unlearning racism. However, standpoint theorists generally agree that liberatory cognitive achievements among the privileged are *possible* but unlikely and difficult to maintain (Harding 2004). Uma Narayan, for instance, warns that “understanding, despite great effort and interest, is likely to be incomplete or limited” even among sympathetic members of privileged groups (Narayan 1989, 265). The repeated inability

of white Western feminists to achieve and sustain anti-racist theory and praxis points to the systematic nature of ignorance.³

The fact that ignorance is not easily overcome, notwithstanding individual goodwill or political commitment, makes it necessary to examine more carefully white anti-racist feminism and its epistemological challenges. Given the persistence of ignorance as an emotionally and politically damaging obstacle among feminists around the world, we must ask: how can white Western women act more responsibly as cognitive agents within anti-racist and transnational feminisms? Whereas Chela Sandoval describes a theory and method of differential consciousness enacted by U.S. Third-World feminists as a “methodology of the oppressed” (Sandoval 2000), I seek a correlative “methodology of the privileged” for white women that offers strategies for effective coalition across racial and geopolitical inequities. What most concerns me is the self-doubt—not to mention emotional pain, anger, embarrassment, and frustration with one’s harmful impact upon other women—that can result from the confrontation with one’s ignorance and the repeated failure to maintain an anti-racist standpoint. This being the case, I am especially interested in locating a methodology of the privileged that addresses the likelihood of “epistemic blank spots” and the uncertainty that attends knowing ignorance.⁴

To develop a methodology of the privileged, I first return to Minnie Bruce Pratt and Adrienne Rich as two noteworthy white U.S. feminists who document their struggle against racist indoctrination and Western ethnocentrism in the service of creating a less hegemonic and oppressive feminism (Pratt 1984; Rich 1986). Their method rests upon making their whiteness intelligible through protracted self-scrutiny. In giving an intersectional account of their identities as simultaneously oppressed and privileged, Pratt and Rich attempt to locate their whiteness but end up discovering ignorance as a recurring obstacle to intellectual production and coalitional politics.⁵ In addition to providing powerful examples of self-reflexivity as a method, Pratt and Rich illustrate systematic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty as common concerns or obstacles for contemporary white anti-racist feminists in the United States.

Next, I turn to other influential feminist critics such as Marilyn Frye and Sandra Harding to explore a methodology of the privileged that advocates the cultivation of “unwhitely” or “traitorous” identities (Frye 1983; Harding 1991; Frye 1992). As proposed by Frye and Harding, racial disaffiliation or sedition challenges whiteness as a fixed epistemic location and thereby might seem to end systematic ignorance and resolve epistemic uncertainty. Although I conclude that racial disaffiliation does not entirely remedy ignorance or uncertainty, theories of racial sedition can be used to promote epistemic uncertainty as an effective strategy rather than a dilemma or obstacle for the privileged. I propose epistemic uncertainty as a method that has the potential to disrupt cognitive manifestations of white privilege wherein white knowers expect epistemic

comfort, confidence, and mastery. Examples from the film *The Color of Fear* (1994) as well as the methods described by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chela Sandoval support the conclusion that epistemic uncertainty is an important skill within anti-racist and transnational feminist movements for worldwide justice (Reagon 1983; Anzaldúa 1987; Sandoval 2000).

SELF-REFLEXIVITY: MAKING WHITENESS VISIBLE

Although first published in the 1980s, Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" (1984) and Rich's "Notes towards a Politics of Location" (1986) remain significant to any contemporary discussion of feminism and the negotiation of privilege. These influential essays document Western whiteness and its ethnocentric ignorance as challenges to the successful operation of feminism across differences. Pratt and Rich demonstrate an intersectional analysis of identity whereby they attempt to better understand themselves as multiply situated knowers. They share their personal struggle with the pain and uncertainty that results from the failure to fully understand their privileged identities as white and Western. Through their deployment of self-reflexivity, Pratt and Rich issue powerful guide points for a methodology of the privileged.

Both Pratt and Rich use experiential knowledge in their essays, but their use of self-reflexivity as a method doesn't assert epistemic advantage or authority. Instead, self-reflexivity is used to probe the unintelligibility of whiteness in their lives. Many anti-racist theorists, including critical whiteness scholars, point out that whites frequently have a limited understanding of whiteness and misperceive themselves as unmarked by racial difference (Morrison 1992; Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997; Roediger 1998). Consequently, whites like Pratt and Rich are first advised to learn to recognize their own racial identity in order to disrupt the normativity of whiteness. Frances Kendall, for example, situates self-reflexivity about whiteness as a foundational principle of white anti-racist methodology in her book *Understanding White Privilege*. Explaining her focus on the "personal work" of self-exploration, Kendall writes, "as those of us who are white begin to examine racial privilege, our first and perhaps most important task is to explore what it means for each of us, personally, to be white" (Kendall 2006, 2). Mab Segrest's *Memoir of a Race Traitor* (1994) is an especially well-received example of this type of activity. Along with Pratt and Rich, Segrest and a host of other anti-racist white writers demonstrate the methodological principle of making (their) whiteness visible through self-reflection.

Of course, taking personal account of whiteness or "making whiteness visible" is not an especially easy task given the stubborn persistence of ignorance and misperception regarding race and racism in the lives of white people. Ruth Frankenberg confirms the likelihood of systematic ignorance among even the

most self-conscious of anti-racist whites. There is frequent “slippage,” according to Frankenberg, “from race-consciousness to unconsciousness and from antiracism to racism, whether from year to year, situation to situation, or sentence to sentence” (Frankenberg 2001, 77). In fact, Pratt and Rich both spend considerable effort analyzing ignorance as a specific condition of their identities as white Westerners. Rich concludes that “all privilege is ignorant at the core” (Rich 1986, 226), and Pratt bestows the following epistemic paradox as a final lesson: “I’m learning that what I think that I *know* is an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie” (Pratt 1984, 17). These revelations about the intractability of ignorance among whites suggest that self-reflexivity is only partially successful as a method insofar as knowledge of one’s privileged locations and their myriad meanings is limited. Lisa Heldke explains that white anti-racists “must recognize that they cannot ‘eradicate’ their ignorance of their social location ... [and that] tackling one’s ignorance is thus an incompletable project” (Heldke 1998, 98). According to Heldke, white anti-racists can commit only to “ferreting out ever-new ways [in which] one is ignorant” (98).

Although self-reflexivity does not put an end to one’s ignorance, trying to maintain an active awareness of privilege and the ignorance it engenders should be considered the “minimum requirement” for white Western feminists (Heldke 1998, 97). Yet it is important to consider the impact that such a practice has upon white Western feminists and their participation in anti-racist and transnational feminisms. Keen awareness of the probability of ignorance and self-deception encourages the cultivation of endless self-suspicion among white anti-racists, which certainly can be useful. Nevertheless, personal experience within white anti-racist feminist communities has fueled my interest in situations where self-reflexivity and epistemic uncertainty can validate counter-productive behaviors. In addition to protracted navel-gazing and stagnating emotional turmoil, fellow white activists in my community undermined, manipulated, and damaged one another by taking advantage of self-doubt exhibited by those within our ranks. This problematic behavior seemed to substantiate Frye’s lament that without “a foundation of ordinary moral and intellectual confidence ... we don’t know how to be or how to act; we become strangely stupid; the commitment against racism becomes itself immobilizing” (Frye 1992, 148). Dedication to self-reflexivity may be essential to white anti-racists and others with privilege, but learning how to deal effectively with the epistemic uncertainty, self-doubt, and cognitive anxiety that often follows is perhaps the more significant challenge for a methodology of the privileged.

RACIAL SEDITION: UNLEARNING WHITELINESS AND OTHER TRAITOROUS ACTS

When one is dedicated to extensive self-scrutiny, systemic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty can be frustrating, depressing, and painful. Frye acknowledges

that many self-reflexive white anti-racists end up feeling that “racism is so systematic and white privilege so impossible to escape, that one is, simply, trapped” (Frye 1983, 126). Even while trying to organize with other white feminists to discuss the very problem of blocked understanding, Frye finds herself guilty of exercising white privilege (111–12). Bewildered by her own limitations, Frye asks: “does being white make it impossible to be a good person?” (113). The significance of Frye’s question should not be dismissed, insofar as she captures the distress, self-doubt, and hopelessness that can attend white anti-racist confrontations with ignorance and the seemingly fixed cognitive limitations engendered by privilege.

Not surprisingly, methods other than self-reflexivity have been proposed for the privileged, especially in response to frustrations with systematic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty. For example, Frye and Harding have suggested analogous methods of racial sedition—“unlearning whiteness” and developing “traitorous identities,” respectively—that offer possibilities of action beyond self-reflexivity for white feminists with anti-racist goals (Frye 1983; Harding 1991; Frye 1992). Racial sedition is not without complication; however, it does offer perspectives that are useful to a methodology of the privileged that can effectively address systematic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty.⁶ First, theories of racial sedition or disaffiliation disrupt the naturalization and biologization of racial identities, thereby offering the possibility of epistemic transformation. Second, theories of sedition reveal how the expression of epistemic confidence among white Westerners is tied to racial privilege and global hegemony.

Departing significantly from the insights of Rich and Pratt, Frye concludes that whiteness itself must be resisted. She boldly pronounces that “the obvious way out of the relentless logic of my situation is to cease being white” (Frye 1992, 115). If we rightly consider race a political concept rather than a biological characteristic, Frye’s proposal that she can stop being white is logical (at least theoretically). As she explains,

[white people] are not white by nature but by political classification, and hence it is in principle possible to disaffiliate. If being white is not finally a matter of skin color, which is beyond our power to change, but of politics and power, then perhaps white individuals in a white supremacist society are not doomed to dominance by logic or nature. (Frye 1983, 118)

Frye offers an important reminder that race, including whiteness, is not a biological given but a social construction. In Frye’s deployment of social-constructionist theory, race is performative, and, as such, the scripts that animate racial belonging can be troubled, resisted, and perhaps even abolished.

More specifically, Frye’s methodological directive calls for sedition or disaffiliation from the collection of ascribed behaviors she calls “whitely” and

"whiteness" (Frye 1992, 151). Just as men are socialized to become men through masculinity, whites are compelled to become white through the adoption of "whitely" behavior that becomes ingrained (151). She claims, "If I can manage to refuse to enact, embody, animate this category—the white race—as I am supposed to, I can free my energies and actions from a range of disabling confinements and burdens" (164). Instead of arguing for a new and improved manifestation of whiteness, Frye advocates its dissolution, instructing white women to "try to abandon the white race and contribute to its demolition" (165).

Although she does not go so far as to argue for the "demolition" of white identities, Harding also presents a course of action for white anti-racists that calls for racial disaffiliation (Harding 1991). Much like Frye, Harding intimates that whiteness is a collection of epistemic situations and cognitive behaviors that are transformable. For the betterment of feminism, Harding hopes that the meaning of whiteness can be revised through the enactment of "traitorous" identities. According to Harding, being a traitor requires one to "learn to think and act *not* out of the 'spontaneous consciousness' of the social locations that history has bestowed on us but out of the traitorous ones we choose" (Harding 1991, 295). Such "spontaneous consciousness" can be replaced by a new consciousness that relies on information provided by the marginalized who are more advantageously situated as knowers. Through this learning process, traitorous whites do not give up white identity but alter the epistemic foundations of whiteness to "become marginal" and "reinvent ourselves as 'other'" (289; 295). Whiteness is not abolished *per se*, but it is significantly transformed.

By denaturalizing whiteness as a transhistorical, biologically fixed location, Frye and Harding forge new cognitive opportunities for feminists with racial privilege. However, racial sedition as a methodology of the privileged is complicated by systematic ignorance. Ironically, systematic ignorance among white anti-racists is precisely what prompts Frye and Harding to propose sedition as a methodology of the privileged, but racial disaffiliation seems to rely on the ability of whites to accurately identify and confidently combat whitely behaviors. But how to "stop being white" if we have trouble understanding exactly what white is? Even with the help of others who possess more insight, recognizing behaviors as "whitely" is extraordinarily difficult for those of us conditioned to view whiteness as an unremarkable norm. Moreover, lingering self-doubt about the accuracy of one's perspective can make some white anti-racists extremely apprehensive about acts of racial sedition, especially insofar as unlearning whiteness and other traitorous behaviors seems to rely upon advanced understanding.

In fact, we might consider whether theories of racial sedition rest upon white people's overconfident belief in their ability to reject systematic racism, including whiteness and its privileges. For example, whites might mistakenly think that we can refuse white privilege by choosing to live among, work with, and form

friendships exclusively with non-white people, all the while failing to recognize how having a choice is an expression of our privilege. Misguided acts of racial disaffiliation may also reauthorize cultural appropriation whereby whites claim disloyalty to whiteness by co-opting the music, foods, languages, fashions, and/or religions associated with non-white cultures. Admittedly, my own sense of hope as an educator has often rested upon the overconfident belief that racism or Western hegemony could be eliminated if other white people and I could only produce accurate information and act accordingly. I recognize that this naive belief in some ways motivates my interest in a methodology of the privileged wherein systematic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty are eliminated.⁷

If we rightly understand overconfidence as an expression of whiteness, however, racial sedition can help identify and perhaps even disrupt the cognitive behaviors that characterize normative whiteness. Indeed, even while whites are socialized through an epistemology of ignorance, we are also expected to behave as authoritative agents of knowledge. For example, Frye was taught as a girl to exercise race privilege through intellectual confidence and moral superiority: "I learned that I, and 'we' knew right from wrong and had the responsibility to see to it that right was done, that there were others who did not know right from wrong and should be advised, instructed, helped, and directed by us" (Frye 1992, 153). She even suggests that epistemic authority and confidence have a cross-class character:

Many poor and working-class white people are perfectly confident that they are more intelligent, know more, have better judgment, and are more moral than black people or Chicanos or Puerto Ricans or Indians or anyone else they view as not white, and believe that they would be perfectly competent to run the country or to rule others justly and righteously. (158)

Of course, examples of epistemic confidence, moral authority, and assumed leadership are also regrettably common within feminist organizing. Providing a historically significant example, Angela Y. Davis demonstrates how Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton used their racial privilege for power and control within the women's suffrage movement (Davis 1983). Ongoing white Western feminist interest in "saving" Third-World women from any number of perceived threats—female genital cutting, sex work, hijab—without considering the agency of these women is likewise expressive of the intellectual confidence and moral arrogance characteristic of the privileged.⁸

It is likely that the desire for epistemic confidence and mastery among white Western feminists is related to the epistemological entitlements that underwrite normative whiteness. Shannon Sullivan confirms that the "psychological privilege ... of always feeling ... in the right" is characteristic of the "unconscious habits" of white privilege (Sullivan 2006, 184). Jane Haggis and Susanne Schech add, "the all-knowing Western (white) subject ... cannot imagine not being able

to understand something, and perhaps never to understand it" (Haggis and Schech 2000, 392). Accordingly, a methodology of the privileged should not *resolve* the self-doubt of white anti-racists but rather *strategically deploy* epistemic uncertainty as a treasonous act against the cognitive privileges that support white Western hegemonies.⁹ In other words, we might more productively view epistemic uncertainty as a viable method rather than as a negative by-product of knowing ignorance.

EPISTEMIC UNCERTAINTY

Although epistemic uncertainty can be an obstacle to effective anti-racism, it can also offer opportunity for greater connection across the ideological chasms created by oppression and privilege. For instance, the film *The Color of Fear* (1994) depicts how epistemic uncertainty is deployed effectively within a group of racially diverse, North American men gathered together to discuss their experiences with race and racism. Often used in diversity training, *The Color of Fear* emphasizes dialogue and understanding across racial differences, skills that are immediately necessary for coalition-building and effective alliances. Although optimistic about the future of race relations, *The Color of Fear* highlights ignorance among whites as a formidable obstacle. It is David Christensen, one of the white men featured in *The Color of Fear*, whose behavior illuminates how ignorance and cognitive authority function simultaneously; David takes it upon himself to adjudicate the validity of the claims of men of color, expecting them to explain themselves repeatedly, only to dismiss their viewpoints as inaccurate.¹⁰

However, something profound happens in *The Color of Fear* that troubles the epistemological arrogance and self-deception that epitomize normative whiteness. David frustrates everyone to the point where Victor Lewis, an African American man in the group, finally loses his patience and lashes out in anger at David's willful ignorance. This is a climactic moment in the film and one that I find instructive to white anti-racist efforts both feminist and otherwise. Lee Mun Wah, the filmmaker and facilitator of the discussion, gently but skillfully asks David what is keeping him from believing Victor's claims about pervasive racism: "So what would it mean David, then, if life really was that harsh? What if the world was not as you thought, that [racial injustice] is actually happening to lots of human beings on this earth?" He continues, "What if he knew his reality better than you?" What then occurs is best described as a "lightbulb moment": David says with uncharacteristic thoughtfulness, "Oh, that's very saddening. You don't want to believe that man can be so cruel to himself and his own kind." David's comment startlingly echoes what James Baldwin has described as the double-bind of white folk: "White America remains unable to believe that Black America's grievances are real; they are unable to believe this because they

cannot face what this fact says about themselves and their country" (Baldwin 1985, 536). David's newfound awareness not only challenges his self-assuredness—as Baldwin suggests—but also his very authority as a knower. In other words, David shifts from the cognitive comforts of *not knowing that he doesn't know* to the epistemic uncertainties of *knowing that he doesn't know*.

I admit that *The Color of Fear* has sometimes made me feel a depressing lack of confidence in the ability of the privileged (myself included) to achieve any kind of mutually reciprocal relationship with the racially and geopolitically oppressed. Yet I believe that it is more accurate to view *The Color of Fear* as an allegory of hope and possibility for the future of feminism without borders. Of course, it is still uncomfortable to watch *The Color of Fear* and recognize that I might think and act more like David than I can fully comprehend, that his ignorance is structurally related to my own, and that I will not always know better. Nevertheless, I remind myself that it is the very moment when David admits his ignorance that Victor extends the offer, "from here I can work with you."

David and Victor's breakthrough indicates that effective coalition across racial and other power inequities might actually benefit from epistemic uncertainty among the privileged. Of course, this observation will likely unsettle whites who are conditioned to assert epistemic mastery and authority. As Pratt admits, "to acknowledge ... that there are things that I *do not know* ... [is] an admission hard on my pride, and harder to do than it sounds" (Pratt 1984, 42). However, Bernice Johnson Reagon sagely reminds us that comfort is rarely part of coalition-building, as verified by the contentious conversations in *The Color of Fear*. Coalition work is "some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there" (Reagon 1983, 359). Accordingly, a methodology of the privileged might embrace the discomforts of epistemic uncertainty as an indication of effectiveness rather than failure within coalitional politics.

Perhaps more than self-reflexivity or racial sedition, epistemic uncertainty is a methodology that highlights the necessary interdependence of the privileged and the oppressed in struggles to eliminate injustice.¹¹ For instance, when David's intellectual confidence finally wavers, he must rely upon the knowledge claims of non-whites in the group. In other words, it is only through Victor's keen understanding of racial oppression and white privilege that David recognizes his ignorance. According to Harding, in order for anti-racist and transnational solidarity to flourish, white women's reliance on insights developed by women of color feminists is "not a luxury but a necessity" (Harding 1991, 282). This methodological directive is itself evidence of the instruction Harding takes from women of color who assert that the epistemic accomplishments of the oppressed hold the key to the eradication of ignorance within feminist theory and praxis (Collins 1986; Narayan 1989; Anzaldúa, 1987; Sandoval 2000).

Women of color consistently point out that the epistemic certainty and intellectual arrogance of white Westerners rests upon the institutionalization of racial and geopolitical hegemony. Thus, future development of a methodology of the privileged should be mindful of the ways in which white women's insistence upon epistemic comfort and confidence can reinforce oppressive structures of power wherein the insights of women of color are devalued, ignored, or co-opted. Indeed, when the privileged forgo epistemic mastery as necessary to our participation in anti-racist theory and praxis, women of color both within and outside the Global South are more fully recognized for their leadership abilities and epistemic accomplishments.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As women of the Global North retool for more skillful participation in anti-racist and transnational feminisms, the paradoxical act of recognizing one's ignorance and the uncertainty that follows will likely continue to pose some significant challenges. In addition to my review of self-reflexivity and racial sedition as methods, I briefly identified some of the benefits that will accrue when epistemic uncertainty is embraced as part of a methodology of the privileged within anti-racist and transnational feminisms. I anticipate that further investigation of the coalitional possibilities of epistemic uncertainty as a method will result in productive new opportunities for feminist alliance. For now, I hope I have offered a starting point for white Western women like me who struggle with systematic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty as a hindrance to effective participation in anti-racist and transnational feminist movements.

The epistemic experiences and theoretical perspectives of women of color may offer future directions for epistemic uncertainty within a theory and methodology of the privileged. For instance, Sandoval argues that the oppressed have long been forced to live in unfavorable epistemic conditions that may resemble the more current experiences of the privileged who now face the loss of epistemic certainty (Sandoval 2000, 27).¹² Sandoval advises the privileged to learn from the survival tactics and epistemic strategies of resistance that characterize what she calls the "methodology of the oppressed" (27). Anzaldúa's theory of "mestiza consciousness" likewise describes the efforts of the oppressed to produce knowledge and engage in revolutionary action amid situations that are discomfiting, conflicted, and indeterminate (Anzaldúa, 1987). Future examination of a methodology of the privileged should consider the ways in which the privileged might also learn to transform painful confusion, self-doubt, and fragmentation into flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, and creativity for the betterment of anti-racist and transnational feminist alliances.

NOTES

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1. In addressing the epistemic contexts for white anti-racist feminism in the United States, my specific concern here is on white privilege and its imbrication with Western ethnocentrism. However, it should be noted that white privilege and geopolitical privilege are not entirely congruous. There are white people in the Global South who are oppressed by Western hegemony just as there are people of color in the Global North who exercise geopolitical privilege.

2. In recognition of the critical limitations of each and a lack of satisfying alternatives, I shift among terms—Global North/West and Global South/Third World—when describing geopolitical power arrangements and their impact upon feminist theory and praxis.

3. The term *systematic ignorance* is used to highlight the ways in which ignorance is not simply a lack of knowledge among individual white people. Rather, ignorance among the racially privileged is produced by and supportive of a system of white supremacy. As my argument later demonstrates, whites are systemically conditioned to be ignorant of racial realities and yet also possess full confidence in ourselves as thinkers. For more on ignorance as a systematic epistemic practice among whites, see Frye 1983; Mills 1997; and Outlaw 2007.

4. I borrow the phrase “epistemic blank spots” from Bailey 2007, 77.

5. In addressing the simultaneity of privilege and oppression, Pratt and Rich take their cues from U.S. women of color such as the Combahee River Collective, who pioneered intersectionality within feminist theory (Combahee River Collective 1983). Throughout my analysis, intersectionality is treated as a prerequisite for a theory and methodology of the privileged.

6. The phrases *racial sedition* and white *abolition* are commonly associated with the journal *Race Traitor: A Journal of the New Abolitionism*. Editors Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey propose that “treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity” (Ignatiev and Garvey 1999, 10). Their project of white abolition is distinct from the feminist methods proposed by Frye and Harding. I nevertheless recognize that each similarly explores the possibility of racial disaffiliation and the destruction of whiteness to which the terms *racial sedition* and *abolition* refer.

7. I realize now that my “whiteness” produced and reinforced the belief that I could figure out a way to relieve epistemic uncertainty. That I could do so through self-reflection, extensive research, and without the assistance of others, namely people of color, also points to problematic expressions of “whitely” behavior.

8. My use of the adjective “perceived” is not meant to suggest that women of the Global South do not suffer real harm. Instead, I wish to highlight the ways in which Western perception of harm is often conceived through ethnocentrism.

9. See Townley 2006; Bailey 2007; and Hoagland 2007 for strategic uses of ignorance.

10. For more on the resistance of white people to the knowledge claims of people of color, see Spelman 2007.

11. For a critique of the isolationist tendencies of white self-reflexivity, see Hoagland 2007. Racial sedition can also be similarly critiqued as an individualistic responsibility of white race traitors who need not establish accountability or connection to people of color.

12. More specifically, Sandoval argues that contemporary postmodern subjects face a “democratization of oppression” whereby the psychic terrain occupied by the oppressed now also belongs to (formerly) privileged citizen-subjects (Sandoval 2000, 35).

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