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Two Woke Beckys?

A Fan Fiction Conversation and Critique of Derek Bell's White Women

Naomi W. Nishi, Tonia Floramaria Guida, & Danielle Walker

Abstract

Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as method, through counternarrative and fan fiction, two prominent white women characters from Bell's 1992 book, *Faces At the Bottom of the Well*, engage in discussion and reflection around their whiteness, anti-racist work, and experience with patriarchy. Through radical contextualization, their narrative is ultimately addressed by a Black woman character from Bell's same book to re-center a Black woman's critique. We address white savority, white complacency, and white innocence and how they manifest in white women's performance of whiteness, and complicate their role as oppressed oppressor, as they are oppressed by patriarchy and oppressors in white supremacism.

A Fan-Fiction Counternarrative

Sheila Warfield parked her rental car in one of the many open spots at the National Park in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Sheila had come out to stay with her cousin under the guise of some business meetings in Portland. But the truth of the matter was that Sheila had come out to take a break from her life and her failed marriage to Jason Warfield. "The last Black hero," Sheila thought to herself

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rolling her eyes, as much at herself as at Jason. She mused at how she felt like it was only yesterday that she'd seen Jason on her operating table in Arizona at the Sanctus Sanatorium and yet how it felt that they had been married an eternity. He'd been so strong and powerful, idyllic even. But, laying on a gurney that evening after narrowly surviving a bombing of his Black, revolutionary organization, Quad A, he looked so helpless. For Sheila, or Dr. Bainbridge as she'd been known back then, she'd felt helpless in her love for this man, this Black beacon whom she'd admired from afar whose life she then held almost literally in her hands.

Sheila bit her lip to keep her tears from spilling out on to her navy striped t-shirt. Had she just been swept into a white¹ saviority story? Even after years of marriage to Jason, she didn't know. She'd assured herself that Jason and even Neva, his Deputy Director at Quad A, had been the ones to ultimately decide to, respectively, marry her and insert her into Quad A as the Director of anti-racist medical legislation. In this role, she worked on combating racist legal practices in the areas of mental health, patient protection, and affordable health care for communities of color. It fit her and her skills as a doctor and a lawyer, perfectly; she would have been a natural choice for the role if it hadn't been for her white ring finger wearing the wedding ring of the penultimate Black revolutionary leader.

"No," Sheila muttered, "you chose," she thought to herself as a tear made its way down her cheek before she unceremoniously wiped it away with the back of her hand. She tried momentarily distracting herself by studying the trail map for the Willamette Valley forest. She weighed whether to do the two mile loop or the seven. Her competitive side chose for her; despite her coming to relax, she'd do a seven mile hike today. Sniffing back a second tear, she headed off past a large green and disheveled hedge.

The early summer morning was balmy, and the woods smelled like the earth, fresh and gentle. Sheila walked briskly, trying to out-pace her thoughts, but there was no getting away from them. She remembered her and Jason's marriage; they'd eloped on a beach away from everybody. It was beautiful, it was perfect. Then, in a flash, they were back in New York. Sheila, having worked at a hospital in Harlem previously, had thought maybe she would just fit in with Quad A and especially the Black community that she'd thought she was a part of. Jason wasn't the only part of Quad A that Sheila had admired, she'd also followed the work of Neva Brownlee, the Deputy Director of Quad A, who had taken the reigns after the bombing and Jason's injury. Neva was beautiful, brilliant, and unapologetically Black, and Sheila had on more than one occasion wished that she could be Neva. She weirdly envied Neva's way of living life without having to navigate her own whiteness. "Right," Sheila said sarcastically, scolding herself, "like it's so carefree being a Black woman in America." Sheila sighed, defeated. It'd been years of this second guessing herself, trying to decide how she was being racist and then trying to sort it out without anyone knowing, if they didn't already know. What really got to her was when the patriarchy crept in and sexism played a game

of ‘Who done it?’ with racism. Sheila would think that perhaps some of the men were being sexist against her, but then she’d worry that it was just her white entitlement making her think that. Even Jason had assumed early in their marriage, that Sheila would manage the household, get the groceries, do the laundry, etc. When Sheila would get frustrated, Jason would insist that she support him fully as the leader of Quad A and this revolutionary Black movement. Things had gotten even worse when she and Jason had tried to get pregnant, and couldn’t. Sheila had become desperate, spending a large portion of her and Jason’s savings on IVF treatments. Jason hadn’t been happy about them doing IVF, and Sheila felt like she was doing it all alone while Jason tended to his “vitally important work.” She resented Jason leaving her to do the pregnancy stuff all on her own, with zero emotional support, but also resented herself for resenting him when he’d always been clear that his work with Quad A was the priority. Sheila didn’t like to think about it, but she realized that if her love and Quad A had really been a one or the other kind of choice, Jason would not have chosen her. It wasn’t just Sheila who noted Jason’s sexism. Even Neva made comments here and there that hinted at Jason’s Misogynoir, but she always made it clear that she was not on Sheila’s side and kept a chilly distance from her.

Despite these difficulties, Sheila thought maybe Jason and her would have made it through, if it hadn’t been for the orange buffoon that now sat in the white house. When Trump had become the Republican nominee, Sheila had laughed. She felt like his nomination was a miraculous stroke of luck that would hand Hillary an easy win. Sheila hadn’t been a Hillary fan, but she was quietly excited to see the first woman President. Jason and Neva had been extremely reserved and concerned during the 2016 presidential election. Neva was quick to point out all of Hillary’s racist contributions, particularly as it related to mass incarceration and super predators. Jason would get annoyed when Sheila would talk about what she saw as Hillary’s inevitable win. “I think you’re overestimating white Americans,” he would say. And he was right. Sheila shuddered remembering the night of the election as she sat alone in her and Jason’s apartment with a glass of scotch. Jason had called an emergency strategy meeting at Quad A and hadn’t protested when Sheila said she wanted to sit this one out. As she watched the doling of electoral votes and the astonishment of the white reporters that mirrored her feelings as they all slowly realized a Trump victory, she felt like she was falling. “Are we that racist? Are we that sexist?” she stopped herself before she could go on. She went to bed alone. Three hours later Jason quietly got into bed, and nothing was ever the same.

Trump’s election made her feel ridiculous; how could she not see it coming? She felt that beautiful anti-racist foundation she’d worked so hard to make was in fact a façade that had cracked. Now Jason, Neva, and all of Quad A saw her for what she really was, a naïve, privileged white girl, a Becky.

Sheila looked up at another blue diamond marker pointing her on her path.

She started off, but then noticed a clearing off of the trail and decided that since she wasn't able to out hike her thoughts, she'd just sit with them for a bit. She spotted a log that would serve as a seat and sat down. She noted a hole blown in the log as she sat. Someone must have been using it for target practice, she thought. "Red necks," she scoffed aloud.

"You called?" came a gruff voice from behind her. Spinning around, Sheila came face-to-face with a stout woman with dirty blonde hair mostly pulled back in a camouflage bandana that more or less matched her t-shirt and fatigues-style pants. "Sorry miss!" said the woman, seeing Sheila's alarm, "I didn't mean to scare you." Sheila let out an incredulous laugh as her eyes came to rest on the large rifle carried by the woman. "I'm fine," Sheila lied.

"Say, you look awfully familiar! Do I know you?" asked the woman. "I don't think so," replied Sheila, trying not to sound as annoyed as she felt. "Hmm," said the woman unconvinced as she searched Sheila's face for a clue as to where she knew her from. "I'm Erika Wechsler," said Erika, extending a dusty hand. Sheila accepted Erika's hand in her own sweaty palm. Erika used the handshake as an excuse to find herself a seat on the tree trunk a few feet from where Sheila sat. Erika propped her gun up on an old branch.

Sheila, realizing she wouldn't lose her unwelcome company quickly resigned, "I'm Sheila Bain..." "Warfield!" Erika exclaimed. Sheila's attempt to use her maiden name in a covert attempt to assert her independence was thwarted by Erika's memory. "Your Jason Warfield's wife!" Erika almost shouted. "Umm, yes," said Sheila plastering a phony publicity smile on her face. I recognize you from the picture in Jason's book, *Still I Rise*. Sheila grimaced; Jason had insisted that she pose in the picture on the back cover of his book. He said it was because he wanted a picture with his wife on his first book, but Sheila always thought it was to increase the market share of his book with white women who were performing a faux anti-racism, while drooling over her husband. These white women did not like Sheila; but they loved Jason because he married a white woman.

"That was a pretty good book, overly optimistic, but good." Erika offered. "You think so, I don't think I've ever heard a white person say that," Sheila said, surprised. "Yeah, well, given who we have as President, I think all race books have been optimistic." "So true," Sheila agreed.

"But, sorry, you were saying a different last name, not Warfield. I had thought you and Jason shared the same last name." "Uh, we did...we're separated," said Sheila weakly. "Oh," said Erika, not sounding surprised and not offering any condolences. "Do you live around here?" asked Sheila, hoping to change the subject. "Yeah," said Erika, "my organization has a compound in these woods; I'm doing my morning patrol." "What? I thought this was a National Park." Sheila blinked. "It is," said Erika, "our compound is hidden."

"What organization are you a part of that has a hidden compound in a national park?" asked Sheila. "You've probably heard of us given your work with Quad

A,” Erika said proudly. “I’m a co-founder of White Citizens for Black Survival (WCBS).”

“Oh my God! I have heard of you, but I didn’t really think you were real.” said Sheila. “Of course we’re real!” shot back Erika. “Does Quad A not think we’re for real?” she further demanded. Sheila hesitated, “Well, we weren’t sure. I’ve been privy to the letters back and forth between our organizations and leadership at Quad A was suspicious.” “Suspicious! Of what!?!” Erica demanded. “Well, we had a hard time believing that a bunch of white, independently wealthy folks in the middle of Oregon were creating a modern day underground railroad for Black people for when whites began a race war.” “I’m surprised that Quad A isn’t following suit, given the threat we’re seeing with Trump!”

Sheila was flabbergasted, “Following suit? I’m sorry but it’s presumptuous to suggest that a Black activist organization should be following the lead of an all-white organization!” “Don’t you mean almost all Black?” asked Erika, provocatively. Sheila narrowed her eyes at Erika’s gall. “Not for long,” said Sheila coolly. “So, you’re leaving Jason Warfield,” said Erika in a tone that sounded like she was shaming Sheila. “Well, marriage is a two-way street, but yes, we’re separating,” replied Sheila. “And then you’re out of Quad A, right?” asked Erika. “Yes,” said Sheila quietly. “Well, that’s probably for the best,” concluded Erika, “I just hope you haven’t done too much damage.” Sheila shot daggers with her eyes, “What the hell are you talking about?” asked Sheila hotly. “Quad A is a revolutionary, Black, activist organization; white people have no business being a part of it,” said Erika, as a matter of fact. “Give me a break!” Sheila came back, “White people need to play a role in anti-racism and racial justice, because they’re the problem.” “You mean, we’re the problem, right?” asked Erika “Sure,” said Sheila with a smirk, “we. But, some of *us* more than others. For instance, who are you to critique me? You’ve created an all-white, savior, paternalistic organization. You think that you’re going to save all Black people when whites start a race war, but why would Black people trust you when everything you’ve done has been in white isolation?” It was Erika’s turn to be taken aback. “That’s why we’ve been in close contact with Quad A and other Black organizations, so that our network is ready and working in concert when white people come for Black people.” “But they’re already coming for Black people, and Black people are trying to get away from us!” Sheila shouted. Upon realizing her moment of elucidation in her fight with Erika, Sheila let the flood gates open. “What the fuck are we doing?” she groaned. Erika went silent in the gravity of the moment.

As Sheila’s sobs subsided, she said quietly, “I love Jason. I even love Neva, but I just don’t think I can get past myself to be in true solidarity and not eat them and myself alive, you know?” Erika nodded solemnly. After they’d sat in silence for a few minutes, Erika offered, “Well, you’re welcome to join WCBS.” Sheila, choked on a laugh. “Thanks, she said, but ya’ll are a mess too.” “How so?” asked Erika smiling slightly. “Look, I agree that most of the calls for unity and civility in

our nation right now are more about placating whiteness than about truly bringing the races together, but whites isolating themselves even with the best of intentions toward racial justice will not work, because we know what whites do when left to their own devices. We can't help ourselves. Plus, what is the point of any of it if white people aren't working to find solidarity? We can't do that in isolation. We've so dehumanized ourselves in our work to dehumanize People of Color, we won't be able to come back without solidarity with People of Color."

"But, can we really have solidarity with People of Color, when we and our whiteness are always a thorn in their side?" "I don't know," said Sheila rubbing her head, "I think we can, but we need to get ourselves out of the way." "Hmm, I just don't know," said Erika. Erika and Sheila sat on the log in silence, listening to birds chirping and the breeze rustling the leaves. The sun had finally peeked through the clouds to illuminate the many hues of green. Sheila took a deep breath and closed her eyes. When she finally opened them again, she sighed, "Well, I guess I should get go..." as she turned to look at Erika, there was nothing but an empty log with an old bullet hole in it. Sheila, mystified and weary, stood up and went back to the path, headed toward the trailhead where she'd started.

Neva's Review

Neva set down the manuscript and took a deep breath. "Of course, they'd pick me to review this," she thought to herself. Sheila Bainbridge had gone into academia after her divorce from Jason Warfield and leaving Quad A. This was her first submitted article after securing her tenure-line position. Given the autobiographical nature of the piece, it couldn't be sent anonymously, and Neva's friend and fellow classmate at Howard, who was the current Editor of the journal Sheila had submitted to, asked Neva to review it, particularly since Neva was named in the article.

Neva reflected on how white women need space to work out their whiteness, but so often that comes at the expense of emotionally overburdening Women of Color. White women also tended to turn to Women of Color to solicit their opinion on race related topics but were often unwilling to compensate Women of Color for their time nor were prepared to hear what Women of Color really thought. In short, what white women really want is for Women of Color to cosign their whiteness and coddle them through their flagrant mistakes. Black women are particularly prone to this expectation given the history of slavery in the United States and being forced into the role of mammy to comfort white women through enslavement and domestic servitude post de-facto slavery. Yet, how can two white women honestly critique their whiteness alone? Neva sighed, "They can't, their whiteness pushes them to evade certain areas of racism, and this forces Black women into having to point it out."

Neva pushed up her sleeves and got comfortable in the plush sitting chair in the corner of her home office. She glanced at Jasmine, her husky sleeping in the

corner, and pulled her hair back. Speaking to herself, she said, “Time to rain some reality on their white women’s parade.” While Neva appreciated that two white women sought a conversation about their whiteness, she found it incredible that they didn’t seem to see how they were centering themselves in their narrative.

Jump In, Jump Out

White people often belittle the work People of Color do around anti-racism because of a belief that the interest is self-serving. Neva recalled the many times she’d discussed her work in Quad A, and a white person quickly dismissed it because, “Of course Neva would do anti-racist work...she’s Black,” as if it were selfish for her to fight for the humanity of herself and Black people.

Yet, while she was dismissed, white people were canonized for doing anti-racist work. Reflecting on the two anti-racist roles Sheila and Erika discussed in the woods that day, Neva again felt their dialogue was disingenuous. They can jump in and jump out of anti-racist work as they please, because their lives do not depend on eradication of a white supremacist society. Whites treat their social justice endeavors as outward facing actions versus rooted in an authentic creed that they live by. “It’s like a PR campaign,” Neva vented. She recalled how she had witnessed particularly whites treat anti-racist work like a 9-5 job. At the end of the day, they’d hang up their racial justice work along with their coat and get back to their real life and leisure, unhampered by the People of Color forced to continue on to the night shift. Even when People of Color do not work in professions specifically rooted in anti-racist work, they do not have the luxury of ignoring the ways racism impacts their daily lives.

Neva noted Sheila’s description on the night that the 45th president was elected, how devastated she felt. Neva had remembered her own devastation that night, and how even before the votes started rolling in for the inevitable victory (or defeat), Neva and Jason had called an emergency meeting of Quad A. When Sheila, as the only white leader within Quad A didn’t turn up for the meeting, Neva felt the cold and familiar stab of a white woman, one that Neva respected, sitting out the racial justice battle of their lives and letting the Black folks hold the line alone. In the emergency Quad A meeting itself, Jason ran the show. At one point, Neva jumped in to give an update on the women’s health policy development work she thought they needed to speed up with the impending presidential administration, and Jason interrupted and dismissed her, saying “That can wait!” She as one of three women in Quad A leadership’s group of eight, interrupted Jason right back. “No, I disagree.” He, looking annoyed, shot back, “Neva, let’s discuss this offline.” Neva had noted how, even though she kept a distance from Sheila, that, had she been there, Sheila would have sided with Neva and argued to forefront the women’s health discussion. “But, she wasn’t there,” Neva thought, feeling resigned.

Neva brought her attention back to her review of this point, saying, “White people will always benefit from a white supremacist institution and no amount of work can erase the white privilege they continuously receive. White people need to reconcile themselves with the truth that the work of racial justice will never be done and, for many, this truth will not suffice. White people refuse to accept this answer because they always seek an end to doing the work. But, if they’re looking for the end of the work or even just a break from the work, I question whether they are *really* doing anti-racist work to begin with?” Realizing, that this critique might feel like a personal indictment of Sheila, Neva added, “The author should contrast their experience with that of BIPOC, and reconcile these differences in her manuscript.”

Neva, who had become transfixed on her napping husky, turned her attention back to her laptop and added another bullet point to her review, “Sheila and Erika need to reflect more on why they are doing what they are doing instead of how Black people will perceive them.” Neva laughed, “Like, we know you’re white but what are you going to do about it?”

Neva’s clock struck on her end table with the warm resound of chimes. “Oh my goodness, it’s 4:00 already?” Neva grimaced at having spent most of her Saturday on this review, and looked back at her laptop to finish things up. As she read through her comments, she realized that she hadn’t addressed the points around patriarchy that Sheila had brought up, but Neva didn’t have any more in her for this. Reading and reflecting on Sheila’s narrative had been emotionally exhausting and painful for Neva. It brought back all the memories from when Jason had announced he was marrying Sheila and inserting her into Quad A to when Neva had to carry the cause and the organization, largely on her own as Sheila and Jason’s marriage fell apart. In no part of Sheila’s recounting did she mention that the consequences for *everything* that happened fell mostly on Neva. “I was again rendered invisible, and left to do the work alone,” she said as a tear rolled down her cheek. She brushed it away, and turned to look at Jasmine, who had gotten up and was now nudging Neva with her nose. “You want dinner already?” asked Neva incredulous.

Neva glanced back at her laptop. She hoped that when Sheila received this feedback, she would better recognize that anti-racism comes at a cost and understand that sliding back into comfort or taking a break from the work voided the work she had previously done. Neva took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and tried to imagine what her world would be like if neoliberal white women got out of their own heads, gave caution to the wind, and risked it all for liberation. What a wonderful world it would be.

Analysis

Theory as Method

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed by Derek Bell and other legal scholars as a response to Critical Legal Theory’s ignoring race and racism. Schol-

ars in education have long since taken up CRT within their field (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lynn, 1999), making CRT truly transdisciplinary.

The tenets of CRT include the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992), a critique of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988) intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2009), and counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstorytelling are narratives shared by People of Color that resist the master narrative (Matsuda, 1995), which is held by whites and white supremacy. CRT holds firmly that white people, although they can resist racism and whiteness, cannot offer a counterstory, because their voices, even when defiant, have always been centered and served as the majoritarian or dominant narrative.

Yet, white CRT scholars have drawn on the tools of counternarrative, not to discuss their own experiences as counter, but as a sort of *fan* fiction (Preston, 2013) that engages Derek Bell's conversation-style counternarratives (1992), where fictional characters meet and discuss CRT and its application.

Recognizing that our initial fan fiction counternarrative centers white women and our/their voices, we then incite Bell's (1992) character of Neva, revived with the voice of our third author, a Black woman, to offer a critique and review of the white women's discussion. In giving Neva the last word, we work to re-center, Black people, as Bell does, but specifically a Black woman whose role in Bell's original counternarrative was peripheral. We draw out Neva's voice and the perspective of a Black woman to stay true to the spirit and intent of CRT and particularly intersectionality as we discuss more below.

Two Woke Beckys? And Being Ambushed by Whiteness

The white women, Sheila Bainbridge and Erika Weschler in Bell's (1992) foundational CRT book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, are noted for their critical consciousness. Yet, in Bell's discussion, we don't learn or truly understand how either of these white women negotiate or tarry (Yancy, 2015) with their own whiteness and their ongoing work to resist it and push toward racial justice (Applebaum, 2010).

In resurrecting these two characters and adding onto their story, we watch them wrestle or tarry with whiteness in their own mind (like when Sheila mentally rehashes her failed marriage to "the last Black hero") and then with each other as they argue ultimately about white people's appropriate role in anti-racism and racial justice. It is also through Sheila and Erika's dialogue that we witness how we/they, as white women, are "ambushed by whiteness" (Yancy, 2008, p. 229). This occurs through the "reinscription of distances" (Yancy, 2008, p. 229) Sheila uses, including when she refers to Quad A as an all-Black organization (even though she is in it) while critiquing Erika's all-white organization and her reference to white people needing to be involved in racial justice work because *they* are the problem. While Sheila and Erika are attempting to work through their white complicity, as

white women, our subjective positions continue to produce a form of white ignorance. Another example of Sheila being ambushed by whiteness includes when she witnesses the past presidential election. As the narratives indicate, Jason and the rest of Quad A were not surprised by this outcome. However, Sheila, even with her work and efforts towards anti-racism in Quad A and her relationship with the Black community, still continues to be ambushed by whiteness.

Neva, of course recognizes that both Sheila and Erika are ambushed by whiteness. The irony in Sheila and Erika's conversation is that as the two white women are critiquing each other for trying to be white saviors, they are simultaneously trying to demonstrate that they are one of the 'good whites.' They're embodying white savior aspirations as they critique the very same in the other.

Race Relations Between White Women and Women of Color

hooks (2014) argues that feminism cannot move forward if white women refuse to listen to Black women or deny the reality of white racial domination. Beginning with a historical analysis of white and Black women's relationships (or lack thereof), hooks writes "white women writing about their impressions in scholarly and confessional work often ignore the depth of enmity between the two groups, or see it as solely a Black female problem" (pp. 101-102). We must understand how contemporary interactions between Women of Color and white women are implicated in historical relations, where the "point of contact between Black women and white women was one of servant-served" (p. 94). As presaged by hooks, in this fan-fiction, Sheila does not explore her relationship with Neva Brownlee through the historical reality of white women's history of participating in white supremacy (Cooper, 2018) and the ways in which white women have on numerous occasions turned their backs on Black women's pain (hooks, 1994). The little we gather from Sheila about how she feels towards Neva includes that she wishes she could be her, envies her independence, and later admits "I even love Neva." It is important to acknowledge that white supremacy and heterosexism, and white women's participation in both, have worked towards creating profound mistrust and hostility between these two groups (hooks, 1994), and this mistrust is certainly merited by Women of Color. In addition to the larger historical reality of white women and Women of Color's relationships, none of Sheila's reflections about Neva took into consideration the amount of labor Neva took on to support Quad A's mission while Jason was gone, and while Jason and Sheila's marriage was falling apart. Sheila also failed to recognize how Neva was oppressed by patriarchy at the same time she was battling white supremacism.

White women's oppression of Women of Color traces back to white women's role as 'Miss Anne' or even as slaveholder (Jones Rodgers, 2012) and then into white women's suffrage when they refused to include Women of Color in their movement for the vote (Pauley, 2000). Bell also highlights these relationships

fraught by white domination in the original version of both counternarratives. We see this during his dialogue with Geneva Crenshaw, a reoccurring character in Bell's counternarratives. Geneva is a Black woman and lawyer who forces Bell to confront the truth regarding racial realism. At the end of Bell's "Divining a racial realism theory" chapter, he questions Geneva's intentions for putting him in the forest in Oregon with Erika. Geneva responds by saying she wanted to see if Bell, unlike Jason, "could maintain a proper relationship with a white woman" (Bell, 1992, p. 108). This invites further reflection and question regarding the role of white women in racial justice struggles and their relationship to women of color and Black women specifically.

Intersectionality

As Sheila makes her way into the woods, she is emotionally mulling over how, as a white woman, she has felt in the throes of negotiating white supremacy and patriarchy, recognizing herself as the oppressor in the former and as the oppressed in the latter. In this way, she gets at the intersectionality of race and gender not as hyper-privileged as Cabrera (2018) shows white men are, nor as multiply marginalized as Collins (2009) shows Black women are. Sheila is negotiating systems of oppression that for her are working in opposing ways. For her, these systems are intertwined in such a way that she finds herself confused as to whether her interpretations of sexist acts by Black men are legitimate or are simply her engaging in and with white innocence (Gutierrez, 2006), where she as a white woman is once again castigating Black men as villains. Of course, even as Sheila tries to disentangle these systems in herself, she is denying that when it comes to how these systems work, it is never either/or, but it is both/and (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 2009; hooks, 1996).

The intersectionality of white supremacy and patriarchy, when it comes to where white women fall, put into perspective the moniker, *Becky*. The term Becky (and now, Karen), has grown in popularity, not only in pop culture, but in scholarship (Matias, 2020; Matias & Nishi, 2017). While Becky is used to critique the unique whiteness expressions of white women, its use is also simultaneously sexist. The connotations of Becky include not only the necessary critique of whiteness, racism, and entitlement, but also the inherently sexist judgement of white women's naiveté and not smartness. Becky is a racist, but she's not smart enough to understand how she is a racist. She's not smart enough because she is a white *woman*. This becomes particularly clear when white men start using the term, *Becky* to describe white women. It is not an accident that there is no masculine equivalent to Becky that is denigrating to white men, while calling them out for their racism and sexism. It's important to further note that, similarly, the moniker, *Becky*, renders trans* and gender non-conforming people, invisible. White trans* women and femmes do not get labeled Becky, and it is not because they

are never exhibiting racism. Why then are only white cisgender women Becky if there is not a heteropatriarchal ideology enmeshed in the practice?

Returning to Sheila, she has recognized sexism being wielded against her, but has trouble identifying it as such. Certainly, if she were to name it in a Black activist organization, she would likely become Becky. Her calling out sexism would be seen as a semantic move to refocus the priority and centering of People of Color within Quad A with herself, a white woman. What Sheila should choose to do—call out sexism or put her head down and ignore it, in navigating her place in these oppressive systems—is not obvious.

Sheila's negotiation of her complex position is overshadowed by Neva's reflection and review. Neva admits that she doesn't respond to the patriarchy that Sheila describes, but shows how, she as a Black woman has been the one to fall through the cracks of both white supremacy and patriarchy in the way that Neva and her juxtapositioned roles are rendered invisible. For Neva, the pain and isolation she has experienced is largely due to, yet not acknowledged by, Sheila or Jason. Sheila has forgotten that, when it comes to intersectionality, Black women were and are the intended focus (Harris & Patton, 2019; Crenshaw, 2009), and her neglecting to consider Neva is an affront to intersectionality, even whilst she is considering race and gender implications for herself. Even though how Sheila should handle the sexism she experiences in Quad A is not obvious, the way she should handle the racism and sexism she sees Neva experiencing is clear (although not to Sheila). Sheila should be unwaveringly supporting Neva. Even when dealing with personal pain, Sheila should have stood by Neva. But, alas, the clear path for social justice passes Sheila by as she is navel gazing with Erika. Not just the forest, but the veil (DuBois, 1999) surrounds the two white women that day.

The Possibility of Solidarity

Sheila and Erika's conversation closes as they discuss their own activism and how it relates to solidarity. This path to solidarity consists of whites interrogating their own whiteness and complicity with white supremacy so that they can then resist whiteness in themselves, but more importantly, in systems and structures.

Sheila and Erika both seem to acknowledge the importance of solidarity at some level, but disagree on how it can be realized. For Sheila, it comes in working side-by-side with People of Color and, for her, connecting with People of Color, and even intimately with Jason. Erika critiques Sheila for this, suggesting that she is prioritizing herself over the cause of racial justice. Conversely, Erika believes that solidarity might be realized without personal connection to People of Color. She believes that, actually, it is better for her to stay out of the way of People of Color and simply work with other whites to create support for People of Color. For her, she is problematizing herself and white people and just trying to do the work of racial justice without placing further emotional burden on People of Color.

This contrast pulls into question some of the technical aspects of solidarity. Is personal connection necessary or helpful in building solidarity? Is the connection of personal relationships worth the emotional burden that often is placed on People of Color in their relationships with white people? We do know that personal connection, and even marriage and intimate relationships between particularly white women and men of color do not yield ‘woke’ white women in and of themselves (Thompson & Collier, 2006).

What we realize, ultimately, is that both Sheila and Erika are centering themselves in their discussion of solidarity. Yes, they both offend the other in their suggestions of white savoricity and naiveté in the other. But beyond this, their conversation ends with them *only* talking about themselves. The real tragedy is that Sheila leaves the woods not sure of what decision to make, and not realizing that she has not even considered the best choice: to stand in solidarity with Neva. It’s notable how in the story of Sheila and Jason, a white woman and a Black man, Neva falls right through the cracks in the systems and narratives that are at the heart of Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality (2009). Neva falls through and is rendered invisible by both Sheila and Jason as she labors alone for social justice. The delivery then of this fan-fiction piece helps all three authors arrive at a complex questioning of the way we tackle and think through issues of white supremacy, patriarchy, and intersectionality in scholarship and traditional academic journals.

In his landmark book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992), Derek Bell offered two counternarratives, back to back that each featured one white woman who he portrayed as being critically conscious. He even went as far as to show how Sheila had been raised in a poor community of color, while Neva, the Black woman activist, had a wealthy upbringing. In this, Bell created a class difference that could help justify Jason, ‘the last Black hero’ falling in love with a white woman.

Yet, Bell seems to critique his choices during his discussion with Geneva Crenshaw, his Black woman muse and inadvertently suggests that Jason and Sheila’s relationship was inappropriate. We began this piece, intrigued by this connection and the very start of Bell’s relational critique in his own work. We wanted to add depth to both Sheila and Erika’s characters and to see what they would do when they tried to work out their whiteness with each other. Yet, it wasn’t until a Black woman and scholar, embodied as Neva, highlighted the holes, myths, and white centering in Sheila and Erika’s story that we were really able to find the depth of critique necessary to transform this work to be liberatory.

Derek Bell’s counternarratives were a form of radical contextualization (Taboo, 2020). He took the tenets of CRT and embedded them in our world to demonstrate the lessons of racial realism. Although fictive, these counternarratives were prophetic. This fan-fiction narrative furthers radical contextualization by using critical theoretical approaches to race, class, and gender studies, while also taking up a methodological (fan-fiction) perspective that contests current taken-for-granted approaches in education and in the academy. The controversy

of zeroing in on the underdeveloped white women in Bell's counternarratives does not escape us. We understand that with the nonstop barrage of white women calling the cops on Black people for doing the most mundane of activities, most are not interested in hearing more about white women's plights, and certainly not when white women's tears are involved, understanding their violent history and current threat. Yet, we engage in these white women's experiences, however unsavory to a critical race audience, as a case of radical contextuality to better engage white women and push them from reveling in their own whiteness to moving toward solidarity with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) women. This is particularly true, given that we know white women can be more effective in 'coming for other white women' (Nishi & Parker, 2017) who are straying back toward their role in upholding the "white matriarchy" (Parker, 2020, p. iii).

In closing, we think it is important to consider white women's role in dismantling white supremacy and patriarchy, along with their/our hang-ups and complicity with whiteness. It's also essential for white women to heed Black women instead of staying in a state where we (white women) revel in our shame and self-centering. As Black women show us, all the systems of oppression, including white supremacy and patriarchy are always at work, and so must we all, always be at work to resist, in ourselves and in the world, in solidarity.

Note

¹ As a symbolic gesture, we intentionally use the lower-case in references to hegemonic systems such as white and patriarchy. In contrast, we choose to capitalize references to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. (Nishi, 2020)

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