White Ignorance and Complicit Responsibility

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White ignorance is a pervasive, insidious form of structural racism that operates in habits, norms, laws and institutional practices. Rather than a lack of information, it is a “substantive” knowledge practice and a “need not to know”. This makes it very difficult to address. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that our prevailing models of responsibility tend not to serve us well when it comes to forms of structural racism like white ignorance, since they emphasize moral absolution and the preservation of innocence for individuals and institutions. The consequences of this include cycles of white disavowal, the inadvertent essentialization of racial identity categories, the racialization of moral concepts like guilt and innocence, and the “re-centering” of “dominant” social positions like whiteness. How can this normative problem be resolved? What normative approach can help address forms of structural racism like white ignorance that does not simply result in its reproduction? In this dissertation I argue that responsibility for structural racism should be understood as “complicit”. I argue against “liability”-centered models of responsibility and complicity, and for a model of responsibility that understands itself to be “complicit” in terms of social positions, complex identities and relationships. I argue further that “resistance” is central to the way complicit responsibility is discharged. I use the work of José Medina, Ernesto Javier Martinez, Linda Alcoff and Mariana Ortega to suggest some practices of “complicit resistance” that, by de-emphasizing guilt and innocence, can open the door to a cross-identitarian, collective movement to deflate, destabilize and de-supremacize whiteness.
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Chapter 1. Introduction: Frameworks and motivations
1. What is white ignorance, and how will it be discussed?

White ignorance has been defined as a “cognitive dysfunction”\(^1\) that makes knowers blind to white normativity. It is “a white refusal to recognize the long history of structural discrimination that has left whites with the differential resources they have today, and all of its consequent advantages in negotiating opportunity structures” (Mills, 2007, 30). Rather than a simple lack of information, white ignorance is substantive, a “need not to know” that is “not contingent, but in which race—white racism and/or racial domination and their ramifications—plays a crucial causal role” (Mills, 20). This kind of ignorance is meant to be expansive enough to include both what we would call the “implicit racial bias” of individuals, as well as the mechanisms of racialization at work in norms, institutions and structures. It’s also meant to capture the ways that our moral and conceptual apparatus is shaped by white supremacy, and the way morality and concepts are used to reproduce and maintain white normativity.\(^2\) White ignorance, then, is a complex social, ethical and political phenomenon, and understanding it and its normative dimensions requires moving beyond traditional epistemological frameworks.

This dissertation uses social epistemology, critical race theory, legal theory, feminist philosophy, political philosophy, and education theory to address white ignorance as a structural problem with both interpersonal and institutional manifestations. It argues for a context-sensitive, collective approach to structural racism on the part of those in positions of social

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\(^1\) Alison Bailey has argued that white ignorance is not merely “cognitive” in nature, and to call it so assumes that it can be resolved through the exercise of rationality, and that it can be corrected by replacing systems governed by white ignorance with a single alternative ideal system – against Mills’ own non-ideal intentions. I briefly discuss that debate in Chapter 1.

\(^2\) Lewis Gordon defines white normativity as “the schema in which whites serve as the exemplification of the human being and the presumption of what it means to be human […]. Normativity is the perversion of normality” (181). While normality stands for the healthy functioning of the subject on accounts like Fanon’s, normativity signifies an “ideal”.
dominance that doesn’t stop at the acknowledgement of complicity, but that acts on it and through it. If that seems like an ambiguous position to take, it is because taking “complicit responsibility” involves the risk of failure. It is a political and philosophical position that is a deliberate alternative to ideals of moral perfection that inadvertently reproduce the vanguardist logic of white supremacy both in theory and political practice. Needless to say, this project will encounter some philosophical issues that it cannot transcend. But I see this as the interest of the project, which confronts the problem of collective, historical, racially-motivated complicity in knowledge-production that is not simply a matter of individuals’ psychological dispositions, or their willingness to engage in “personal transformation”.

2. Motivations

This project is a reflection on collective responsibility for the wrongs that result from structural racism. The difficulty of addressing such wrongs is that they are perpetuated by everyday habits, norms and laws – by the very background conditions of social and political life. This dissertation’s motivation for understanding how to respond to these wrongs is their effects on those who are racialized by them: social death, incarceration, hyper-surveillance, profiling, lack of access to education, housing, meaningful employment, and basic services, micro-aggressions and various forms of interpersonal harassment; but also the fear, apathy, distancing, and poverty of connection experienced by those who may not be racialized in that way, and the collective effects experienced by everyone under conditions of structural racism.

The normative response, however, is rife with strategic, philosophical and ethical dilemmas. Who should take the most responsibility for changing structural conditions? Should it be those who have the most power and who benefit the most from structural injustice, even if
such people tend to have little actual investment in changing a system that operates to their benefit, and are likely to reproduce social inequalities in their very attempts to make change on behalf of others? Are “benefit” and “privilege” appropriate metrics in the discussion of responsibility? What is the role of identity and social position in the kind of responsibility individuals should take for structural racism? Should we work within or against institutions (like the law), and to what degree? Can we rely on moral justification to motivate political change? And what is the role of moral notions like guilt and innocence in political transformation? Is guilt an appropriate motivating force, or has it been misused and abused, both in the law and by those concerned with preserving their moral capital?

Evidently these are not questions that can be definitively answered, here or elsewhere. But they are, to my mind, some of the more important questions of our political moment, and so they are the ones I have chosen to address in this dissertation. While I do put forward arguments that are meant to move the conversation forward, I of course cannot say that this dissertation results in “the” preferred theoretical approach to structural racism. Because of its complicated political nature, I see normative questions about structural racism as demanding a number of different responses and approaches. In addition to this, because of the difficulty of the subject matter, there will be a number of lingering questions with respect to the relationship between politics and morality, the use of guilt, the role of identity, and the role of those in positions of social dominance with respect to structural transformation. I do hope, though, that my argument for complicit responsibility and complicit resistance provokes more much-needed conversation on collective strategies for confronting structural racism that wrestle with Audre Lorde’s “master’s tools” question: if whiteness is associated with the “master’s tools”, what, if any, can
its role be in dismantling the master’s house? And is there a way to ask this question that gets us beyond its terms?

The questions I address in this dissertation are asked in earnest, and I hope that I have handled them with humility, while still making a clear argument for a preliminary approach. As a white scholar who has found myself in racial justice organizing settings for the last decade or so, I have, on many occasions, struggled to find language to justify my involvement in the work. Some argue that I should not be doing it at all; others argue that members of all social groups should be active participants in a movement for racial justice, and that those with skills or resources should mobilize them for social transformation. Some say that my queerness and my Jewishness can and should be used in movement work as a way to break up monolithic whiteness and to forge political affinities and allegiances (not to mention affective ties) that extend across racial identity categories (and in my participation in movement work, this has happened). All of these views are, or can be, the right ones under a given set of circumstances. Debates about the role of identity in racial justice work, however, often seem to take notions of racial identity for granted, or approach the question of racial justice with limited concepts of responsibility. This dissertation explores both of those concepts together, and argues for definitions that can work through the way things are with a view towards transformation.

This project, then, is guided by the questions that arise out of “movement” work – on a broad understanding of the word “movement”. Many organizers use first-person storytelling both to tap into how participants are politically activated by their own experience, and to build trust between the members of a group who will work together and rely on each other to move a project or campaign forward. Empathy and other-regard, however, are also powerful, if complicated, motivators for racial justice thinking and organizing. So should organizers be
looking for articulations of identitarian self-interest to get people on board as participants? Can and should white identity have such a motivating role when appealing to first person experience? This dissertation is interested in that strategic question about motivations: is it strategic to tell white people that racial justice work is in their own interest? Or is the question about motivations un-generalizable and beside the point? Indigenous scholar Lilla Watson’s oft-cited quote asks those in dominant positions not to “help”, but to engage in social justice work only “if you think my liberation is bound up with yours”. It’s difficult to disagree. But it leaves unanswered the question of what “solidarity” looks like in practice, and all of its sub-questions: whether self-interest, self-regard, and one’s own (dominant) identity should be used as a basis for organizing, whether those who have dominant identities should act as “allies” to historically marginalized groups, or should use their own identities and experiences as motivation for becoming actors and activists in their own right. At what point does intended solidarity become appropriative and counter-productive, and when does acting on the interests of a dominant identity for liberation become vanguardist and myopic? I will give an answer in this dissertation that is somewhere in between – that people who are members of dominant groups should not disavow those identities, but should nonetheless organize as “accomplices” beyond the interests of their own identity groups, in order to destabilize systems of disadvantage from within.

This is not to say that this does not already happen. The multiracial, multiethnic political coalitions are there – they exist all around us, as Alcoff writes in The Future of Whiteness: “from Occupy movements to the struggle to end police violence to the fight for the dignity of immigrants to daily labor struggles”. What we lack, she writes,

is a new imaginary or narrative that can make sense of the white participation in these new racially conscious counter-publics. One can sometimes see a groping toward this among the armies of white progressives in antiracist struggles who
cannot quite articulate why they are in the room. The liberal language of transcending race is sometimes the only one they have available. (*Ibid.*)

This project looks for a way beyond the liberal language of “transcending race” that can motivate and justify participation in anti-racist struggle that can shift the circumstances of racialization. This means that this dissertation is directed at academics interested in social and political philosophy and the philosophy of race, non-academics looking for ways to frame political responsibility, various kinds of white-identified people afraid to engage in racial justice work or wrestling with the question of their own political agency as white people, and all those interested in how domination is reproduced through structures and knowledge habits and what we can do about it.

3. A note on the “double bind” of whiteness and eliminativism

Many scholars in the fields of critical whiteness studies and critical race theory have discussed the “double bind” of whiteness, where white scholars’ discussions of their own whiteness serve to signal their enlightenment and race-consciousness, thereby recentering their own white agency and white moral standing. As Karen Teel has put it, “there is something repugnant about a white person, already the recipient of so many unearned advantages, building a career on analyzing white supremacy, even when one intends to move oneself and other white people toward greater awareness and active rejection of whiteness” (Teel, 33). “I shudder,” Teel continues, “when I consider that I live a life of relative luxury while exercising what for me is truly an option to try to redress privilege”.

So why take up the option and write about white supremacy as a white person? Why should it be written about from the philosophical perspective of those, like myself, who, as
Patricia Hill Collins has put it, don’t “feel the iron”? While it is true that there can be something “repugnant” about watching white self-reflection on white supremacist patterns, that reflection is very much needed in virtually every area of US society, and academic philosophy is certainly no exception – and it is are certainly much better than white denial or silence (though as we will see, the alternatives to silence do involve some ethical dilemmas). In spite of – or perhaps because of – the “risks” to self-image involved in facing whiteness, I do think that white people need to confront themselves and one another to recognize their own complicity in the different manifestations of white supremacy/white normativity, and to use various intersecting dimensions of their social positions to work away at the structures and habits that produce whiteness. As Lucius Outlaw writes, “there can and will be no substantial renovative work on notions, instantiations, practices, and institutionalizations of, and ‘investments’ of all kinds in, whiteness without the willing embracing of such ongoing work and of its progress-spurring consequences by those identified and living as white folks” (Outlaw, 2004, 160). The strategic questions attached to that work are the central motivators of this dissertation, including the extent and manner in which “whiteness” as an identity category should be used against white supremacist patterns, and what models of agency, responsibility and identity are the most supportive of transformative political work.

Many scholars in critical race theory and critical whiteness studies, however, do not think that whiteness can be changed. This view has both right-wing and left-wing iterations, both of which essentialize race in their own way (see Alcoff 2015). Some pessimistic “left” views on racial categories take race to be socially constructed but still basically unchangeable. On this view, whiteness is necessarily – though not biologically – tied to exploitation and domination. There is nothing to salvage in whiteness, and so in order to create a world where there can be
racial justice, it must be done away with. Being an anti-racist, on this view, means being against whiteness and committed to its dissolution. This is the “eliminativist” position, or the idea that racial categories are necessarily oppressive and should be abolished. I take this position to be misguided and counterproductive, but there are some advantages to this kind of theorizing, and it is sometimes used as a powerful rhetorical technique. James Baldwin’s 1984 piece “On Being ‘White’… and Other Lies”, for example, makes an eliminativist argument, but in the service of revealing the history of racialization through state formation in the US. Baldwin uses the phrase “people who think they are white” both to point to the ideology of racialization, and to indicate that there is a moral choice to be made with respect to one’s orientation towards racial concepts. He writes,

> Because they think they are white, they do not dare confront the ravage and the lie of their history. Because they think they are white, they cannot allow themselves to be tormented by the suspicion that all men are brothers. Because they think they are white, they are looking for, or bombing into existence, stable populations, cheerful natives and cheap labor. Because they think they are white, they believe, as even no child believes, in the dream of safety (Baldwin 1984, 180).

On Baldwin’s account in this essay, those who think they are white were not white before they came to America; and becoming white was a moral choice to ignore Black exploitation and subjugation, “for there are no white people!” (Ibid.) Baldwin’s argument is for a divestment from whiteness through an acknowledgement of its construction out of the legacy of slavery and

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3 There has been some recent literature on “white genocide” that uses a decolonial framework to argue for the dissolution of whiteness as a structural force – for collective disinvestment in white supremacy. “White genocide” is a polemical term for the undoing of white supremacy, but evidently does not mean the actual genocide of actual white people. There has been some dramatic and controversial debate about the use of this language, which I cannot get into here. I cite the notion of white genocide here as just one iteration of race eliminativism (see Hernandez 2016).
racial exploitation, a legacy with which those who are able to become white – Jews, Eastern and Southern Europeans, the Irish – became complicit. Ta-Nehisi Coates adopts similar language – “those who believe themselves to be white” (Coates 2015). Both authors productively de-essentialize and historicize race, making clear the moral imperative to interrupt its horrific legacy of power and domination.

While I do support the moral imperative to interrupt whiteness’ horrific legacy of power and domination, I do not think that this requires the immediate elimination of whiteness as a racial category; nor do I think that an “ideal” reality without racial categories is politically desirable. Racial categories are, for the foreseeable future, important frameworks for interpreting the world, relating to others, and self-organizing for social change. This last use of racial identity of course works differently for differently positioned groups, and white identity of course has a different valence than other racial identity groupings because of its normative and dominant status. That is why I’m interested to find philosophical ways to support the use of racial identities in political work, while wrestling with how this can be done without reproducing existing patterns of domination that inform racial categorization.4

While there are some weaker iterations of eliminativism that begin to approach my position – like the decolonial view that colonial forms of whiteness tied to the forced expropriation of land, bodies and resources can only be changed by dramatically eliminating colonial systems, structures and material patterns – I argue against the eliminativist position throughout the dissertation. Because the associations, histories and tendencies of whiteness are

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4 I do think that there is a problem with white identity-based organizing that does not put white people in real coalition, relation and contact with members of other groups. In this sense, white identity-based organizing cannot have the same status as other forms of identity-based organizing. This, however, does not mean that white people should not be involved in movement work, or that white identity should not be seriously taken into consideration in political movements!
so problematic, it is easy to understand the appeal of eliminativism. But, to appeal to Outlaw again, the abolition of whiteness is unlikely to happen any time soon, and arguments that seek to eliminate it as a salient feature in group formation and behavior are unlikely to have any success: it is misguided to think that projects of social ordering will stop involving racial identities, and this does not seem to be something we would really want politically in any case (164).

While I do argue against eliminativism, I do not, however, argue for the passive acceptance of racial categories as static and unchangeable. I argue, rather, that identities can and should be used to determine what kind of responsibility we take for structural racism, and how we discharge that responsibility. I claim that the process of taking positional responsibility that accepts structural complicities as an inescapable fact is the only way to transform oppressive structures and institutions. I suggest a kind of responsibility that sees its own complicity in creating and transforming racial categories as a way to reconcile the realness of race, its complex historical process of construction through social and political movements, and the possibility of collective agency that will shift its contours, patterns, and structures. This is similar in some ways to the argument that white political efforts against structural racism should be undertaken as a form of “harm reduction” in order to avoid vanguardism under circumstances where whiteness cannot be abolished or disavowed (see Jacobs, 2009). My argument, however, puts more pressure on active anti-racism that acts from the position of whiteness in order to effect social change – a position that can only continue to be a dilemma, and that demands an alternative framework of responsibility.

4. Whiteness as racial formation
This project understands whiteness as simultaneously one and many. I take it to be both a socio-structural position historically associated with political, material, and social advantage and domination, and an organic, “historically evolving identity-formation that is produced in diverse locations, while constantly undergoing reinterpretation and contestation” (Alcoff 2015, 22).

Many scholars of whiteness have done the important work of showing how whiteness developed historically, through colonization, the law, and the establishment of nation states, but it is not my project to reproduce those accounts here. In this project, I depend on an account of race consistent with Omi and Winant’s theory of “racial formation” whereby racial categories, even if they are not “rehabilitated” per se (as Outlaw argues for them to be), are under the constant transformative influence of social movements, and that the fluid nature of these categories is a place of possibility for transformation. I use a definition of race similar to Omi and Winant’s because their account of racial formation avoids the dual temptations to think of race as either an “essence, as something fixed, concrete, and [merely] objective”, or “a mere illusion, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate”—as if such a world could be arrived at without reference to racial categories (Omi and Winant, 54). For Omi and Winant, race should be understood as “an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (55). It is a concept which “signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies”, without there being any biological basis for that reference, or “precise” application of racial categories (Ibid.). Race, on this account, has a fundamental role in both “structuring and representing the world”. Because so much racial justice activism attempts to create a new set of circumstances out of the present, the fact that Omi and Winant’s account sees the task of a critical theory of race as finding a way “to avoid both the utopian framework which sees race as
an illusion we can somehow ‘get beyond,’ and also the essentialist formulation which sees race as something objective and fixed,” it is particularly apt for this project (Ibid.). Because race is an “element of social structure” and not simply an “irregularity within it”, taking responsibility for white ignorance cannot be a matter of individual absolution or identity-divestment; transformation can only occur from a social position that is “raced”.

I argue throughout this dissertation that that transformation cannot, and should not be, the project of individuals. Social movements are necessarily collective, and this requires a kind of responsibility that can account for, and motivate, individual participation in collective, structural change. The challenge of articulating that responsibility is that the way it is discharged will necessarily be tied to the complexities of identity and social position, which means that it will necessarily be highly contextual. So rather than an overarching descriptive theory of white responsibility, this project aims to describe the problem of white ignorance, to challenge the frameworks that reproduce it, and to suggest an approach that is non-individualistic, and flexible enough to account for the heterogeneity of identity groups, while taking “whiteness” seriously as a force with real social and political consequences.

5. The argument and structure of the dissertation

This dissertation argues for a model of “complicit responsibility” for white ignorance. In Chapter 1, I describe white ignorance. I show that rather than a lack of knowledge or information, white ignorance is a substantive form of group knowledge produced through habits, institutions, and structural patterns. In the first half of the chapter I argue, through the work of Shannon Sullivan, Charles Mills, and social epistemologists Londa Schiebinger and Robert Proctor, that white ignorance has a non-binary relationship to knowledge, and that its normative
import is in its ambiguous status as both “active” and “passive”; that is, it is actively reproduced and motivated by group interests, while individuals also passively participate in historically inherited patterns of domination that they did not cause or intend. The second half of the chapter looks at white ignorance as a “need not to know” that is reproduced through fear of moral wrongdoing and the desire for moral absolution. This is, of course, not necessarily the case with what we might consider “overt” expressions of racism; the chapter is particularly interested in cases of structural racism that are reproduced by individuals in spite of their intentions to the contrary. I deepen the normative problem by using sociological studies about white pre-service teachers, Elizabeth Spelman’s analysis of James Baldwin, Alison Bailey’s notion of disidentificatory “white talk”, and Sara Ahmed’s investigation of institutional “declarations of whiteness”. I conclude the chapter with the dilemma that the desire for moral absolution perpetuates and reproduces white ignorance, against its own explicit intentions.

Chapter 2 deepens the ethical quandary raised in Chapter 1, further problematizing traditional models of “taking responsibility” for white ignorance that focus on moral absolution. To better understand the assumptions behind “moral absolution”, Chapter 2 examines the role that guilt and innocence can and should play in confronting forms of structural racism like white ignorance. I use recent research in experimental psychology, “expressionist” legal theories of punishment, and analyses of race in the law to show that “white guilt”, and its fixation on innocence, cannot be understood independently of a political backdrop that racializes guilt and innocence. I make a preliminary argument that ties affective guilt to the uses of guilt and innocence in the law. I argue that the outcome of this is the need for a model of responsibility that de-centers guilt and innocence as markers of political accountability.
Chapter 3 articulates this alternative model of responsibility. I use Barbara Applebaum’s “white complicity pedagogy” as a starting point for developing a model of responsibility for structural racism that focuses on acknowledging “complicity” and acting “complicitly” – that is, acting on and through one’s social position and racial identity. This is meant to avoid the forms of disavowal and paralysis that often accompany guilt, or “liability”-based models of responsibility. I support Applebaum’s account of “complicit responsibility”, as well as her critique of the liability model, but critique the notion of racial identity assumed by her account, which, I show, inadvertently essentializes and monolithizes whiteness and generates a form of white passivity. I argue for a more robust, realist account of identity as necessary for carrying out Applebaum’s project of “white complicity pedagogy”, using the work of Paula Moya, Michael Hames-García, and Ernesto Javier Martínez to support my critique. I also use Iris Young’s social connection model of responsibility to show that Applebaum’s account conflates two different, but interrelated, forms of responsibility: “interactional” and “institutional” responsibility. I show that this distinction is necessary in order to allow for future-oriented agency in response to forms of structural racism like white ignorance. I conclude with the claim that whiteness can only be “destabilized” or transformed under a robust, realist account of identity that acknowledges the difference in register between the “interactional” and “institutional” perspectives. I argue that because this kind of responsibility and agency are premised on social relations, locations, and connections, that “complicity” is an apt way to frame responsibility for white ignorance.

Chapter 4 puts forward some suggestions for how “complicit responsibility” can be discharged, namely through “complicit resistance”. I use the recent work of José Medina, Mariana Ortega, and Linda Alcoff to argue that resistance should be central to how “complicit” responsibility is discharged. I show that resistance is an ambiguous force that can be used both to
preserve the status quo, and to challenge it, and show that it is, both in spite of and because of this, a necessary ingredient in moving beyond detached “allyship” and towards real coalition building. This will involve “resistance” in the sense of external, coalitional challenges to norms, laws and structural forces; “resistance” that arises from the acknowledged heterogeneity within any identity grouping that can create internal friction as well as political and affective ties across racial identity groupings; and the “internal” resistance whereby one’s assumptions and perceptions are challenged and shifted. I describe all of these forms of resistance as strategically interconnected. I use Maria Lugones’ concept of world-traveling, as it is taken up by Ortega, to argue for white recognition of heterogeneity against the backdrop of whiteness as a dominant social position. Along with Ortega and Alcoff, I argue for a form of uncomfortable, “resistant”, white double consciousness that can have a “deflationary” outcome for white identity without disavowing or abolishing it. I argue that double consciousness and the cross-identitarian coalitions that result from the acknowledgement of white heterogeneity can form complicit “accomplice” relationships that can shift the conditions and investments that produce dominant identities. This view of “complicit resistance” has normative implications for education, racial justice organizing, and interpersonal interaction, and is meant as an argument against forms of white moral fear, purism and vanguardism that inadvertently reproduce white ignorance.
Chapter 2. Substantive White Ignorance and the Problem of Moral Absolution
Individual redemption and genius are no longer an option for us today.
Fadi Quran

The word “ignorance” is usually taken to suggest a deficiency of information. Its colloquial meaning, where would-be knowers are simply “uninformed or have incomplete understandings of a given phenomenon”, is most often understood as “an accidental omission or gap in understanding that can be corrected by […] finding the missing information or running the experiment again” (Bailey, 77). But social epistemology, feminist theory and critical race theory have leveled important challenges to this “deficiency” definition of ignorance, rejecting the idea that we are accidentally ignorant of what we do not yet know. On that critique, ignorance, like knowledge, can no longer be thought of as neutral: it is, rather, a construct and set of practices with political, social and ethical causes and effects. Rather than understanding ignorance as a “natural state” before information is acquired, “agnotology”—the study of ignorance—asks why it is that we don’t know what we don’t know. There are entire taxonomies of ignorance to categorize its many forms, among them those that are passively or actively constructed, “brought about by neglect, forgetfulness, myopia, extinction, secrecy or suppression” (Proctor, in Proctor and Schiebinger, 7). I would add to this list is structures of social domination, which are the

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5 Palestinian political organizer. Quoted directly from a conference presentation at the Jewish Voice for Peace National Member Meeting, Chicago, March, 2017.

6 See the pioneering work of Linda Martin Alcoff, Miranda Fricker, Maria Lugones, José Medina, Charles Mills, Shannon Sullivan and many, many others whose work guides this project.

focus of this dissertation. This chapter aims to understand the forms of ignorance that are reproduced by those structures of domination, and to argue for their normative importance as a substantive phenomenon.

The idea that both knowledge and ignorance are conditioned by their social and political context is not new. Fields of inquiry including sociology, standpoint theory, feminist epistemologies and feminist philosophies of science, critical race theory, decolonial theory, Marxism and structuralism have made strong arguments for the determining role that politics, ideology, social position, group identity and experience play in knowledge production. Many of these fields (not to mention traditional epistemology and psychology) have described the ways that ignorance can be a “species of bad epistemic practice” influenced by implicit bias or by wrongfully or neglectfully applied methodology (Alcoff 39). But what is new – at least in the philosophical literature of the last ten years – is the idea “of explaining ignorance not as a feature of neglectful epistemic practice but as a substantive epistemic practice in itself.” (Ibid.) As Linda Alcoff writes,

The idea of an epistemology of ignorance attempts to explain and account for the fact that such substantive practices of ignorance—willful ignorance, for example, and socially acceptable but faulty justificatory practices—are structural. This is to say that there are identities and social locations and modes of belief formation, all produced by structural social conditions of a variety of sorts, that are in some cases epistemically disadvantaged or defective. (Alcoff 40)

Ignorance, in other words, can no longer be thought of only as a simple lack or deficiency, a “natural void” or “motor of science”, but is a complex social practice tied to social locations and the structures that shape them. Ignorance is substantive in that it also has a role in shaping those structures, in addition to being expressive of them; in some instances, ignorance
isn’t a *mis*application of methodology, but the result of methodologies that are themselves value-driven. And if ignorance is not merely a natural void to be overcome but a practice tied to the structures and relationships of power at work in social life, then its study raises difficult normative questions about when it should be resisted, when it should be tolerated or cultivated, and who is responsible.

This chapter begins by arguing that some kinds of ignorance are substantive rather than a simple deficiency of information. I show this through the work of Shannon Sullivan on ignorance of, and in, Puerto Rico, which I take to be a compelling argument against the idea that knowledge and ignorance exist as a binary. I then show, through Robert Proctor’s taxonomy of ignorance, and through the research of Londa Schiebinger on colonial European knowledge/ignorance of West Indian abortifacients⁸, that the type of “knowledge/ignorance” described by Sullivan lies at the threshold between “active” and “passive” ignorance (though there are good reasons to think of some forms of structural ignorance like white ignorance as simply “active” – but this has been, as we will see, the subject of much debate). This ambiguity is what I take to be the normative crux of structural ignorance, since it is *actively* perpetuated through *passive* inheritance or participation in dominant norms. This makes responsibility for structural ignorance normatively complex and highlights its relationship to the positionality of the knower.

The final sections of Chapter 1 show, through the paradigm case of white ignorance, that structural ignorance is reproduced through a “management” or a “need not to know” that serves to preserve group interests, and especially to preserve moral capital. In the last section, I use the

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⁸ Plants that induce abortion
work of Barbara Applebaum, Sara Ahmed and Alison Jones to look at the mechanics of the “need not to know” in the discourses of “white talk” and “declarations of whiteness”. I show that these are institutionally sanctioned discursive patterns used by dominant knowers to protect moral capital, and are motivated by the desire for moral absolution, on the part of individual knowers, educational institutions, and political bodies.

Throughout this chapter I will return to white ignorance in knowledge practices as a paradigm case of structural ignorance. Though white ignorance cannot serve as an analogue to all forms of structural ignorance, it is a form of ignorance that is clearly tied to historical forces that operate through laws, institutions, and cultural patterns (see Spade, 2011). White ignorance recurs here as a paradigm case because it is both “passive” (the product of circumstances) and “actively” reproduced by group interests, and behaviors for which individuals are responsible; it is a form of ignorance that benefits some knowers and reproduces itself through social dominance, but which can sometimes be used against itself, as a form of resistance.9

Charles Mills, in his seminal essay “White Ignorance”, describes the first kind of ignorance – ignorance that accords structural benefit to those in a position of dominance – as a kind of collective cognitive distortion or dysfunction that preserves group interests. White ignorance, for Mills, is a blindness to dominant white normativity, “a white refusal to recognize the long history of structural discrimination that has left whites with the differential resources

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9 The complexity of contending with dynamics of racial oppression that operate tacitly, where oppressors are ignorant of their complicity, has become mainstreamed in the now established academic discipline of “whiteness studies” and “critical race theory”. Though this chapter relies heavily on scholarship from both of these fields, in addition to social epistemology, I want to draw attention to the precursor to these fields in the many decades of decolonial/postcolonial theory, which I will use in later chapters of this project. As Fiona Probyn writes, “the fact of being an oppressor has not been repressed, it has been explored in some detail throughout (for instance) the last fifty or so years of postcolonial theory” (Probyn 2004). This chapter uses “whiteness studies” selectively, in addition to many other sources, while remaining critical of “whiteness studies” as a discourse with its own political and epistemic consequences. Probyn is critical of the way that current work in whiteness studies frames the revelation of whiteness as liberatory, which she takes to construe whites as oppressed by their own privilege.
they have today, and all of its consequent advantages in negotiating opportunity structures” (Mills, 2007, 30). White ignorance, according to Mills, is a “need not to know” that is “not contingent, but in which race—white racism and/or racial domination and their ramifications—plays a crucial causal role” (Mills, 20). This kind of ignorance is meant to include both what we would call the “implicit racial bias” of individuals, and norms and structures. It’s also meant to capture the ways that our moral and conceptual apparatus is shaped by white supremacy, and the way morality and concepts are used to reproduce and maintain white dominance, or “white normativity” in places like the academy, and other institutional contexts.10

Elizabeth V. Spelman finds this kind of ignorance in James Baldwin’s indictment of white America in *The Fire Next Time*: “This is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and *do not know it and do not want to know it*” (Baldwin, in Spelman, 119, emphasis mine). For Mills, white ignorance is not “merely ignorance of facts with moral implications but moral non-knowings, incorrect judgments about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves” (Mills, 2007, 22). While white ignorance is not indefeasible, it is a “cognitive tendency” supported by laws, norms, and institutions, and the product of “an epistemology of ignorance, a systemically supported, socially induced pattern of (mis)understanding the world that is connected to and works to sustain systemic oppression and privilege” (Appelbaum 37). As Barbara Applebaum writes, white ignorance is what Joe Feagin and Henan Vera describe as “sincere fictions” or “personal

10 Lewis Gordon defines white normativity as “the schema in which whites serve as the exemplification of the human being and the presumption of what it means to be human […]. Normativity is the perversion of normality” (181). While normality stands for the healthy functioning of the subject on accounts like Fanon’s, normativity signifies an “ideal”.


ideological constructions that reproduce social mythologies at the individual level.’ Most significant, these white delusions about racism also function to protect white people from having to recognize their own racism” (Ibid.).

This chapter looks at that white “self-delusion” and describes the ways that ignorance can function as a form of moral self-protection, even when those under its influence mean to critique it. As Sara Ahmed writes, “the language we think of as critical can easily ‘lend itself’ to the very techniques of governance we critique” (Ahmed, 2004). For those in a position to benefit from white ignorance, some well-meaning responses to it may run the risk of reproducing that same cognitive dysfunction, and require careful negotiation. In looking at these uses of ignorance, this project takes seriously Mills’ “epistemic desideratum” that “improvements in our cognitive practice should have a practical payoff in heightened sensitivity to social oppression and the attempt to reduce and ultimately eliminate that oppression” (Mills, 2007, 22).

1. Ignorance/Knowledge: Breaking the Binary

The distinction between ignorance as a “deficiency” and ignorance as “substantive” is not merely analytic. Certainly, ignorance as a substantive practice can be related to a lack of information, and the example I use here – Shannon Sullivan’s discussion of US ignorance of Puerto Rico – shows that this is the case: Sullivan writes that in the United States’ relationship to Puerto Rico, a lack of knowledge has had harmful, racist effects. But the lack of knowledge about Puerto Rico in the United States – both of Puerto Rico’s history of racial colonization by the United States, and of Puerto Rican revolutionary movements that resist US colonization – is inextricably connected to an “active production of particular kinds of knowledges for various social and political purposes” (Sullivan, 2007, 154). In this section, I show that ignorance and
knowledge are best thought of as non-binary, and briefly introduce the idea that “systems” can be non-binary and multiple\textsuperscript{11}.

Sullivan’s account shows that US ignorance of Puerto Rico points to the “crucial role that white ignorance plays in the construction and maintenance of white privilege, including the knowledge that it generates about nonwhite people” (ibid.). Ignorance is intimately related to power, knowledge and the process of racialization through colonization. Because of this, rather than oppose knowledge, ignorance often is formed by it, and vice versa. In such cases, ignorance is better thought of as ignorance/knowledge. The notion of ignorance/knowledge does not collapse ignorance and knowledge into one another. It instead denies, or at least places under suspicion, the purported self-mastery and self-transparency of knowledge, as if nothing properly escaped its grasp. It helps one to peek behind knowledge of Puerto Rico to see what unknowledges help compose it and upon which that knowledge depends (Sullivan 2007, 154).

Sullivan’s rejection of the knowledge vs. ignorance binary is echoed by philosopher of education Barbara Applebaum, who also finds the binary to be misleading in terms of the “epistemological dynamics of whiteness” (Appelbaum 39). As she writes, “white ignorance is a form of white knowledge. It is a type of ignorance that arrogantly parades as knowledge. Rather than an absence of knowledge, white ignorance is a particular way of everyday knowing or thinking that one knows how the social world works that is intimately tied to what it means to be white”. While there may be nothing wrong with forms of knowledge tied to particular cultural or racial identities, the problem with white ignorance is its “arrogance”, and the fact that this knowledge/ignorance is normative and socially sanctioned (Ibid.).

\textsuperscript{11} See the introduction to this dissertation for a note on “systems” and “structures”.
One way that whiteness has come under scrutiny as a set of knowledge habits is through their histories, and Sullivan’s account of the United States’ colonial relationship to Puerto Rico shows how a harmful form of knowledge/ignorance about Puerto Rico became socially sanctioned through material relations of domination and exploitation that developed symbiotically with forms of knowledge/ignorance. She shows that the United States’ intervention in Puerto Rico’s battle with Spain, which resulted in the island’s being ceded to them in 1898, was initially motivated by the United States’ concern over its mercantilist interests in Cuba’s sugar and tobacco industries (Sullivan 156-157). But what accompanied these interests was an ignorant and “benevolent” project to “do good” overseas for a population that the United States deemed inferior but “educable” (especially relative to their Filipino colonial counterparts, who were seen in terms so flagrantly racist that, Sullivan argues, this expedited their independence from the United States in 1947, while Puerto Rico remains in political limbo to this day) (Sullivan 160). Sullivan describes the role of education in the colonial process both as motivated by “benevolent” ignorance, and as generating several different kinds of ignorance, some of which are sites for political resistance. Sullivan’s account stresses the ways that US ignorance of Puerto Rico, and the forms of ignorance generated by its colonial relationship with the United States, are a substantive political practice with normative underpinnings and consequences, and not simply a “lack of information” which, if corrected, would resolve the problem of colonial domination inseparable form it.

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12 For a more detailed account, see Sullivan 2007; Cabán, 1999; and Grosfoguel, 2003.
Educational practices were key in creating the white ignorance that Sullivan describes, and in United States' belief “that [Puerto Ricans’] (alleged) ignorance interfered with their ability to become true Americans” or to legitimately or effectively govern themselves. The project of colonial education was meant to rectify this Puerto Rican ignorance: “Put an American schoolhouse in every valley and upon every hilltop in Puerto Rico, and in these place the well-fitted and accomplished American schoolteachers, and the cloud of ignorance will disappear as the fog flies before the morning sun” (U.S. commissioner, quoted in Navarro 2002, in Sullivan, 161). When one learns that this education system was modeled on the Tuskegee and Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institutes, which “‘trained’ freed blacks in the United States, and the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which ‘trained’ Native Americans,” and that these schools focused more on “proper behavior” and “old fashioned virtues” than on applied science and technology, it is difficult not to see the substantive relationship between colonialism, racialization and the process of ignorance/knowledge production (Ibid.). Of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School model, Lucius Outlaw writes that these schools “became the principal institution through which the terms and agenda of social ordering were mediated to successive generations with determined efforts to preserve the racial hierarchy by educating all who passed through them to the ‘proper’ significance and places of the races” (Outlaw, 201). In Puerto

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13 Sullivan uses this term to refer to citizens of the United States in order to “resist the customary erasure of other (South, Latin, Central, and North) American nations in the Western hemisphere” (Sullivan, notes, 170).

14 Outlaw’s “Social Ordering and the Systematic Production of Ignorance” shows how education is a central tool in the process of racialized social ordering in the United States, and that the motors behind this are the practices of racial apartheid and White Racial Supremacy (Outlaw 204). In this same piece, Outlaw shows that these practices are at work in academic philosophy: “The systematic production of ignorance by privileging the knowledge claims, agendas, strategies and practices, and the social networks of a handful of U.S. American white males and/or the traditions of philosophical thought of European thinkers as the only appropriate instances of philosophizing proper ill prepares graduate students for the work of fulfilling a desire and an aspiration shared by James Baldwin and Richard Rorty, among others, myself included, that we ‘achieve our country’” (Outlaw 209).
Rico, that education system resulted in “the erasure of Puerto Rican’s knowledge of themselves, their history, and their island through combined infantilization and feminization. The United States’ ignorance of Puerto Rico, in the simple form of a gap in knowledge, was being foisted onto Puerto Ricans” (Sullivan 162). As Sullivan writes:

Puerto Ricans were to know themselves as Porto Ricans, which meant knowing that they (allegedly) were a relatively uncivilized, childlike, ignorant, and weak (read: feminine) people with no cultural or political history of any value who were fortunate enough to receive help correcting this problem from a benevolent democracy that had only their best interests at heart. (Ibid., my emphasis)

The benevolent project of turning Puerto Ricans into “true”, “manly” Americans (in the sense of “American” that folds the Americas into a homogenized “America”) hinged on Puerto Ricans becoming ignorant of what Puerto Rican cultural identity was before 1898, and the vehicle of this assimilation was the American public education system in Puerto Rico. Congressional debates and Supreme Court records drawn shortly after annexation, however, show that the United States had no intention of incorporating Puerto Rico as a State; rather, Puerto Rico was a “laboratory for designing and testing effective processes of Americanizing and masculinizing foreign lands that could then be used elsewhere” (Sullivan 163).

While it’s clear how knowledge/ignorance is the cite of colonization, it is also a cite of resistance. Sullivan shows how Puerto Ricans have been “effective in using ignorance/knowledge of them as Porto Ricans against itself for their own benefit” (ibid, emphasis mine), by using their reputation in the eyes of US officials as unassuming and ignorant

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15 When it was ceded to the U.S. with the 1898 Treaty of Paris, Puerto Rico was renamed “Porto Rico” so that non-Spanish speakers would have an easier time pronouncing the name. Sullivan argues that far from being a benign linguistic matter, the name change shows that Puerto Rico was designated as “raw material to be cultivated and developed as the United States saw fit” (Sullivan 158).
to take advantage of the colonial system, for example, by accessing benefits or social security money rather than participating in low-paying US industry jobs. What this example shows is that ignorance is not only substantive; it is also a practice used to affect social structures.

But using knowledge/ignorance to affect social structures is an ethically and politically ambiguous process. The example of Puerto Rico shows that the question of responsibility for structurally motivated group ignorance is challenging, since it refers to group knowledge practices the origins of which cannot necessarily be attributed to individual knowers, even those who are (actively or passively, self-consciously or unwittingly) perpetuating knowledge practices that reinforce social dominance. To be sure, Sullivan shows that the various forms of ignorance at work in the U.S.’s colonial relationship to Puerto Rico were caused by identifiable political bodies, diplomatic treaties, and the work of individual politicians. But Sullivan’s piece is also about why she, a white academic philosopher, knows so little about Puerto Rico, and the broad network of structural reasons for, and political consequences of, her ignorance. As a US citizen, how is she responsible for the colonization of Puerto Rico and its outcomes?

The question of responsibility becomes more difficult when we acknowledge that epistemic practices undertaken both from a position of advantage and disadvantage can be complicit with structures of domination. The questions that guide this project explore how we should think of responsible knowledge practices given the fact that ignorance is a substantive practice of social groups tied to structures of power and domination. By looking at the ways that knowledge practices are complicit with structures of domination, I explore the ways that different positionalities bear on responsibility. Though I do want to avoid a methodology that
focuses so strongly on critiques of “dominant knowers”\textsuperscript{16} that this position becomes re-privileged by default even when it is being critiqued, I do devote a significant amount of discussion to what kind of responsibility “dominant” knowers have for shifting unjust knowledge practices that work to benefit them.

2. Ignorance and “systems”

I’m interested in the moral dimensions of stories like Sullivan’ ignorance of Puerto Rico, and in particular, the way that knowledge/ignorance has a moral dimension that tends to confer moral absolution or protect innocence, since this rationale for epistemic practices tends to reproduce the structures of social domination it aims to effect. By addressing some dilemmas of epistemic responsibility which hinge on the power that rectifying or “fixing” practices have of unintentionally reproducing the structures they seek to dissolve, I argue for positional responsibility for ignorance that takes structural context into account.

The view that knowledge and ignorance are substantive and systemically produced is sometimes accompanied by the notion that ignorance is negative, a void or a moral wrong to be overcome, in the sense that one “system” produces false knowledge, while a utopian alternative would produce “true” knowledge. This project is less concerned with unveiling underlying “true” essences than in understanding the effects of knowledge practices on social life and vice versa.

\textsuperscript{16} I take positionality to be non-essential, situated and relational. “Dominant” or “non-dominant” knowers are not necessarily dominant or oppressed in every context. I do not have room here to make a comprehensive argument for intersectionality, but throughout this project I remain committed to the idea that in different sets of structural circumstances different possible identifications will work to the benefit or disadvantage of a given person, often simultaneously (see Crenshaw, 1995, and Richie, 2012). For instance, while I may be disadvantaged by queerness or female-bodiedness, I am simultaneously advantaged by whiteness and class. In some situations, my structural disadvantage will give me epistemic privilege; in others, my structural advantages will give me epistemic privilege. I’m interested here – taking intersectionality as an established premise – in the ways that privilege/disadvantage and epistemic privilege/disadvantage interact with responsibility.
While I defend social epistemology’s contention that knowledge is always politically and ethically situated, I do not want to reproduce the view that ignorance is a simple “deficiency” or the “frontier of the unknown” by arguing for a single alternative knowledge system to replace the one at fault for “ignoring” an essentialized reality. This is the way that some, like Bailey and Lugones, have interpreted Charles Mills’ *The Racial Contract*, accusing him of calling for a cognitive-epistemic inversion of the Racial Contract that underlies the social contract.

According to Mills, members of political communities built on the Racial Contract learn to “see the world wrongly” (Bailey 80): “The Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have created” (Mills 1997, 18, cited in Bailey). For Mills, this calls for an epistemic reversal or inversion, and thinkers like Alison Bailey and Maria Lugones have argued that “reversals” or inversions only reproduce the logic of moral purity or rightness at work in “systems thinking”. Replacing one system with another assumes the existence of one prevailing logic when there are, and should be, many simultaneous logics.

Debates about the reversal of systems aside, Mills’ account of white ignorance is an important diagnostic tool for understanding structural forms of ignorance that evade those who benefit from it – an ignorance that is a “need not to know”. In this chapter, I look at the “need not to know” or to “see wrongly” described by Mills and others, and show that it is governed, at its core, by a fear of exposing moral wrong. My aim here is to look at the ways in which structural ignorance can evade or resist transformation, precisely because of its structural and substantive
character. The normative dilemma this poses for epistemic responsibility is that it cannot but be complicit.

3. White Ignorance: Active and Passive

This section argues that the normative significance of structural ignorance is to be found in its being simultaneously active and passive, using Robert N. Proctor’s taxonomy of ignorance. The guiding premise behind Proctor’s taxonomy is that ignorance can be made or unmade, and that forms of knowledge-production, like science and social science, can be complicit in either process. Though Proctor’s taxonomy does have some limitations as a descriptive account of the various uses of ignorance, its framework does help to see why it is that responsibility for white ignorance is so difficult to define and discharge. Though Proctor’s focus is on scientific knowledge production and the cultivation and use of various kinds of scientific or social scientific ignorance, I’m most interested to use his “active/passive” categorizations to discuss the “moral non-knowings” of white ignorance (Mills, 2007, 22).

One of the advantages of Proctor’s account is that it does not take inquiry into the workings of ignorance to have the goal of rectification (Proctor, 2). To the extent that ignorance does demand rectification or correction, the specifics of action will be complex and context-dependent, and the corrective will likely be much more challenging than a simple acquisition of missing information. Proctor takes the “rectification” response to be a common trivialization of ignorance, an understanding of it as “something in need of correction, a kind of natural absence or void where knowledge has not yet spread” (Ibid.). Ignorance is “more than a void—and not even always a bad thing” (Ibid.): Some knowledge is dangerous, or can be a form of bias; knowledge and limitations on its access give rise to political contention about privacy, security
and freedom of speech. On this account, ignorance is something that can be made and unmade – it is, in other words, a social construction.

Proctor’s taxonomy locates the normative causes for concern because it shows that not all ignorance has the same causes or normative consequences. Sometimes the boundaries between the different kinds of ignorance described by Proctor are difficult to discern in a particular example. But these ambiguities – especially the tension between active and passive ignorance – raise the most important normative questions about ignorance, since they refer to structures for which agents are responsible without having acted as a direct cause.  

The taxonomy has three categories: 1) ignorance as a “native” or “natural” state (like the “steadily retreating frontier” of scientific knowledge); 2) ignorance as a passive construct, a selective choice with a political geography or result of social fortune; and 3) ignorance as an active construct or strategic ploy (Proctor 3). Though there are, to be sure, other possible taxonomies of ignorance, the distinction between active and passive constructions is particularly apt for a discussion of responsibility for forms of structural ignorance like white ignorance.

Proctor’s first category, ignorance as a natural or native state, is the way that ignorance is most often understood in ordinary language. On this definition, ignorance is something to be fought and overcome, a kind of “foolish superstition” or absence of knowledge that can be rectified when “true” knowledge is acquired to either fill the void or supplant false knowledge previously thought to be true. Though many critical race and feminist theorists take this view of ignorance to be naïve, it is, in fact, quite difficult to discuss structural or political forms of ignorance without some reference to an “ignored” experience or state of affairs that might

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17 An account of responsibility not centered on direct causation is developed in Chapters 4 and 5.
change epistemic norms if it were given exposure: there is something to the idea that information can make a difference in group behavior. But understanding ignorance as a native state takes the lack of information in question to be politically neutral: the realm of the unknown is undifferentiated, a resource or “prompt” used to “keep the wheels of science turning” (Proctor 5). Ignorance is where knowledge has not yet penetrated; on this first view, it is a kind of innocence: we cannot be guilty or morally responsible for what we do not yet know. Of course this is how many describe white ignorance: as a desire for racial innocence. The rest of this chapter, and Chapter 2, aim to unpack that assumption, and to argue that this moral dimension of white ignorance differentiates it from other kinds.

Though this dissertation defends the premise that not all ignorance is innocent, of course some forms of ignorance persist because of a lack of information, and this “ naïve” or “innocent” ignorance as a deficit does have a relationship to structural ignorance. One dimension of the strategy for combatting white ignorance in the humanities, for example, is to introduce more authors of color into course syllabi and to employ affirmative action policies in hiring and admissions. But the point here is that this isn’t merely a “filling in” of information innocently left out. Though prioritizing the representation of marginalized groups in the academy could be seen as supplying “missing information”, epistemologies of ignorance take the exclusion to be symptomatic of substantive knowledge practices built on values that work to the advantage of dominant groups. In this sense, this first kind of ignorance as an innocent deficit to be rectified by filling in missing information is not enough to account for structural ignorance, nor does it do enough work to reveal its normative problems.

Proctor’s second kind of ignorance understands it to be a “passive” construct, selective choice or “lost realm”. Here, ignorance has a political geography, “like knowledge, wealth or
poverty”: it is “encouraged here and discouraged there from ten thousand accidents (and deliberations) of social fortune. It is less like a vacuum than a solid or shifting body—which travels through time and space and often leaves a shadow” (Proctor 6). On this account, knowledge is selective and is always accompanied by the production of ignorance, since we cannot possibly see and take in all things at once, and our bias is what orients and enables any kind of inquiry. This category of Proctor’s taxonomy is the one that best describes the “inherited” or “circumstantial” dimension of structural ignorance.

The example used by Proctor to describe this kind of ignorance is Londa Schiebinger’s research on European knowledge of West Indian abortifacients. Colonial European powers mined the Caribbean for drugs, using and profiting from cinchona (or quinquina, the antimalarial), chocolate and a number of other medicinal plants from the Americas, including jalapa, quassia, ipecacuanha and cacao, which became standard medicines in Europe (Schiebinger 149). Why, then, did knowledge of abortifacients not transfer from the Caribbean to Europe? Schiebinger shows in “West Indian Abortifacients and the Making of Ignorance” that the selection of some medicinal plants over others for transport back to Europe was guided both by European gender relations and by the priorities of the colonial project. This is what Proctor would consider “passively constructed” ignorance, since no active decision was made to suppress information about the well-established use of abortifacients in the Caribbean (where I take his use of “active” to mean something like “intentional” or “deliberate”).

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18 Plants used to induce abortion

19 Though 19th century Europeans observed the use of abortifacients and collected them, knowledge of their use wasn’t brought back to Europe. Schiebinger takes interest in European knowledge of Caribbean abortifacients since it is an example of ignorance as “not merely the absence of knowledge but an outcome of cultural struggles” (Schiebinger 152). In Schiebinger’s research about colonial knowledge cultivation in the 18th and 19th centuries, “both European science and societies were structured to cultivate certain types of knowledge over others. […]
What is interesting about this example for the purposes of this project is that it describes a realm of knowledge neglected by Europeans, but not through any decreed or intentional act of suppression. Schiebinger attributes European ignorance of abortifacient use not to the decisions of individual agents to avoid or cover up information, but to “cultural forces” and “social structures” that generate “a kind of cultured apathy or cultivated disinterest” (156). On this definition, ignorance is understood to be subject to the normative forces – political or economic interests, moral values, etc. – that are at work in all knowledge production. This influence is mostly “passive”, especially when its causes are positionality or “cultural forces”, since it isn’t always employed with the explicit intention of withholding information. Schiebinger cites factors like positionality (“European colonial enterprises were largely male”) and social control (fear that the introduction of new abortifacients would increase “depravity of manners in towns”).

This example, granted, is complex, since some sought to conceal information about abortifacient use for puritan moral reasons. The emphasis, though, should be on the fact that the strongest cause for European ignorance of abortifacient use in the Caribbean was the fact that the colonists’ research interests were guided by the priorities of mercantilist governments, the colonists’ perception of what their own needs were in order for new settlements to take hold, and European assumptions about gender roles. Schiebinger writes that the social landscape of the colonists was largely male: “The majority of Caribbean planters and slaves were men, as were colonial administrators, naturalists and physicians. Colonial governors […] were most interested in medicines to protect traders, planters, and trading company troops, among whom few women were found” (Schiebinger 156).

Funding priorities, global strategies, national policies, structures of scientific institutions, trade patterns, configuration or technologies all pushed investigation toward certain parts of nature and away from others” (Schiebinger 154).
Even more important, though, abortifacients and other substances used to control fertility “worked directly against the interests of mercantilist states which sought to augment the wealth of nations by producing growing and healthy populations”, both in Europe and in the colonies. Significant to European ignorance of Caribbean abortifacients was the practice of using the colonies to “grow negroes”. Especially when European abolitionists threatened to shut down the slave trade in the late 18th century, planters began to use enslaved women (“work units”) as “breeders” (Schiebinger 157). For this reason, cultivating knowledge about the use of abortifacients directly opposed the mercantilism of colonial planters, who, once there was plantation work to be done, were interested in curtailing the decline of indigenous and African populations.

I discuss this example at some length because it shows a great deal about the normative dimensions of ignorance as a substantive practice. What it shows – and what makes it such a strong analogue to other kinds of structural ignorance – is that there are forms of ignorance in which individuals “passively” participate (and thereby perpetuate), for which they nonetheless have responsibility. The story of Caribbean abortifacient use shows the relationship between ignorance, knowledge and geopolitical forces (colonial mercantilism, universalization of European male assumptions about the role of women) that operate both structurally and at the level of individual intentions and interests. The abortifacients example also shows the complex normative dimensions of ignorance. Ignorance can be a substantive practice with negative

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20 “Within Europe, abundant population was to increase the production of crops and goods, fill the ranks of standing armies, and provide productive workers who would pay substantial taxes and rents” (Schiebinger 157).

21 The 19th century Prussian geographer Alexander von Humboldt, rather than citing smallpox as the central cause of depopulation, highlights “guilty mothers’” use of “deleterious herbs” to control their own fertility (Humboldt, quoted in Schiebinger, 158).
political consequences that reproduces the dynamics of social domination. But ignorance as a substantive practice can also be used strategically to positive political effect by those who are disadvantaged by dominant epistemic norms (and others, in some cases). In Schieber's example, “passive” ignorance on the part of planters, botanists and colonists meant that women’s knowledge of abortifacient use could operate as a form of resistance to colonial mercantilism.22

Proctor’s “passively” constructed ignorance verges on his third category, “actively” constructed, or strategic, ignorance. Though this third kind of ignorance is qualitatively different from the second, it stands in close relationship to it and helps highlight what makes something like white ignorance so morally unwieldy. On Proctor’s description, here, “ignorance—or doubt or uncertainty—[is] something that is made, maintained, and manipulated by means of certain arts and sciences” (Proctor 8). This view of ignorance understands it to be an active production, something engineered, a deliberate plan. Proctor’s examples include trade secrets, like the misinformation cultivated by tobacco companies, important scientific information classified by military secrecy, and strategic ignorance or ignorance-making as moral resistance – not necessarily ideologically-motivated forms of collective ignorance. While the second category of ignorance described the “passive” influence of geopolitical interests on knowledge-practices and the ways that those knowledge-practices tacitly reinforce those interests, this third kind of

22 Sullivan also cites the use of jaiba politics in Puerto Rico as a form of strategic ignorance that is seen as reinforcing US stereotypes of Puerto Ricans, but that has resulted in some important political victories. Jaiba politics – much cited in literature on strategic ignorance – use ignorance from within a colonial government, employing colonial rules subversively and strategically to the benefit of Puerto Ricans. “Just as the Puerto Rican jaiba mountain crab moves sideways in order to move forward, Puerto Rican politicians have historically complied with a colonial state of affairs in order to ‘use the tools, rhetoric, and goals of domination, including ignorance/knowledge’ against the United States” (Sullivan 167, in Katsnelson 11). When there is passive or structural ignorance at work, what is the optimal political response both for those who benefit from a “dominant” position and for those disadvantaged by those knowledge practices?
ignorance is intentionally cultivated: information is censored, twisted or misconstrued; ignorance is cultivated for good or ill, but whatever the case may be, this cultivation is deliberate.

One dimension of this kind of ignorance is the intent to deceive or to place limitations on access to information, for others or oneself. One well-intentioned version of this is the idea that “people can work to undo rotten knowledge” or to prevent dangerous knowledge from falling into the wrong hands (Proctor 20). “Research ethics”, in many cases, “presumes that ignorance is preferable to knowledge by improper means” (Proctor 21): Knowledge has a cost, and ignorance should be tolerated or cultivated if this cost is too high. Many archaeology journals, for example, won’t publish artifacts “without an explicit and acceptable provenance”, and sometimes won’t cite the location of excavation sites, to avoid encouraging looting, since “publication is part of the process by which artifacts obtain value” (Proctor 22-23). In this example, researchers must engage in a complex cost-benefit analysis that takes the different registers of ethical consequences into account (both what values are being promoted by a particular research practice and what concrete consequences these research practices have on geographical areas where artifacts are found). In a tactic similar to the reluctance of Caribbean women to share information about abortifacients with Schiebinger, some botanists and ethnographers will only publish knowledge of biopharmaceuticals “in ‘indigenous’ languages to give locals an edge against the multinationals” (Proctor 23).

The most salient dimension of this kind of ignorance for the purposes of discussing responsibility is the use of ignorance itself as a political tool. Ignorance is used to maintain dominance or control (say, in the case of tobacco companies or military classification), as an evasion tactic (in the case of women or botanists keeping knowledge of plants to themselves), or as a deliberate, conscientious divestment of power for moral reasons. This latter use explores the
obverse of the adage that “knowledge is power”. If this is so, “then to dismantle certain kinds of power may require the reintroduction of bodies of ignorance—hence impotence—in that realm” (Proctor 22).

4. **The problem with divestment**

While it is attractive to think that white ignorance can be dealt with through “knowledge divestment”, most scholars of the notion take responses to it to require much more negotiation; perpetrators of white knowledge/ignorance about Puerto Rico that is tied to racialized valuations can’t simply drop historically and culturally mediated conceptions of themselves and those they perceive to be different. While Proctor’s taxonomy does help us to recognize the substantiveness and historical construction of ignorance through its historical relationship to power, this is where his framework is limited. Proctor’s account shows us that ignorance is “passive” – influenced by historical, geographical, and positional bias – and “active” – interested in the preservation of power in a way that is deliberate, intentional, or orchestrated on the part of the knower. But while it aptly describes the ambiguity in the cause of white ignorance, the account doesn’t have the tools to discuss the implicit moral valuations at work in white ignorance as a set of historically-produced knowledge habits. This is because Proctor’s framework does not have room for forms of ignorance that are not only “passive” in the sense of being contextual, the product of bias, or geographically circumscribed, but are invested with an active dimension in their interest (whether conscious or not) in preserving power relations. This is clear in Proctor’s example of “divesting” oneself of the problematic knowledge of “slave owning” in order to deliberately create “active ignorance” around the techniques that made that form of domination possible. Proctor cites this as a conscientious response to patterns of social domination where there is a
“deliberate abandonment of skills to improve some way of life. […] [W]ho now knows all the
techniques slave owners once possessed to control slaves?” (Proctor, 22).

What this does not take into account is the way that domination becomes inherent in
institutional and cultural practices independent of the intention to dominate – a claim now widely
accepted in social theory. Foucault, for example, famously argued that carceral techniques (and
gender norms, and notions of sanity) not only extend beyond prison walls, but that these
institutional techniques become part of the fabric of everyday life, influencing our ideas of
ourselves and our ways of articulating our moral commitments. Proctor’s distinction between
“active” and “passive” cannot fully account for the inheritance and dispersal of techniques of
domination that Foucault so aptly describes in Discipline and Punish, where the mechanisms of
discipline and control at work in prisons are continuous with the disciplinary mechanisms that
function throughout society, transporting “penitentiary technique” from “the penal institution to
the entire social body” (Foucault, 1977, 298). Foucault writes that the techniques of the
penitentiary were diffused “into the most innocent disciplines”, in contexts which appear to be
“free of all excess and violence” (Foucault 297; 302). Significantly, Foucault’s final point in
Discipline and Punish is that the disciplinary techniques at work in the prison are also at work in
epistemic norms23.

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23 “The carceral texture of society assures both the real capture of the body and its perpetual observation; it is, by its
very nature, the apparatus of punishment that conforms most completely to the new economy of power and the
instrument for the formation of knowledge that this very economy needs. […] If, after the age of ‘inquisitorial’
justice, we have entered the age of ‘examinatory’ justice, if, in an even more general way, the method of
examination has been able to spread so widely throughout society, and to give rise in part to the sciences of man,
one of the great instruments for this has been the multiplicity and close overlapping of the various mechanisms of
incarceration. I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison. But, if they have been able to be
formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a
specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the group of men docile
and useful. This policy required the involvement of definite relations of knowledge in relations of power; it called
for a technique of overlapping subjection and objectification […] The carceral network constituted one of the
armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible.” (Foucault, 1977, 305)
I take Foucault’s account of how disciplinary techniques are continuous with epistemic norms to highlight the ways that “passive” ignorance can have an “active” dimension, or a complex relationship to the kind of “active” ignorance described by Proctor. “Passive” interests associated with geopolitics, social location or social conditions that aren’t deliberately or self-transparently pursued can have their roots in active techniques of social domination, that are perpetuated with or without conscious or deliberate intention. Foucault understands the “active” element in structural ignorance to be residual—the circumstances that gave rise to the techniques are in the past, but the techniques persist into the present, like Foucault’s carceral state at work in the very techniques by which knowledge is produced. Others take the social power at work in structural ignorance to be a matter of political choice or belief, at least on some register, holding that structural ignorance is motivated by self-transparent dominant group interests (see Mills and Spelman). Still others, in arguments that I will address in Chapter 2, take the paradigm of choice to be the wrong one in taking responsibility for structural ignorance (see Applebaum, 2010).

Many feminist philosophers would object to the notion that forms of structural ignorance like white ignorance are “passive”, and would say that because of the benefits associated with complicity, it is “willful”. Vivian May, Linda Alcoff, Peggy McIntosh and Barbara Applebaum have echoed Marilyn Frye in calling white ignorance “willful” in the sense that “not knowing requires an active interest in ignoring or a resistance to knowing what is right in front of you. White people […] actively refuse to pay attention to their complicity in racism” (Marilyn Frye, in Applebaum 41). Not only do these authors argue that this form of ignorance is an active exertion of structural advantage; they attribute that exertion of advantage to particular “ways of being” which are also “active” rather than “passive”.

41
In *Revealing Whiteness*, Shannon Sullivan discusses white ignorance as an *active* habit and a way of being. She rejects the “misleading” and “naïve view of ignorance” that “posits it as a simple lack of knowledge, a gap that has not yet been filled but that easily could be” (Sullivan, 2006, 18). On this erroneous view, racism is not “the product of anything that anyone has done. It is the result of lack of activity and the absence of efforts to seek out information about non-white people and worlds” (*Ibid.*). Sullivan is critical of this view both because it obscures the structural causes of racism and the benefits that it confers on white people, and because it displaces political responsibility by taking racism to be a “merely epistemological”\(^2\) problem, resolvable through knowledge-acquisition.\(^3\) This naïve view, according to Sullivan, has the effect of “excusing white people for their racism—and white people in particular, since they, and not people of color, are the beneficiaries of white privilege” (*Ibid.*). Sullivan paints this “naïve”, “passive” view of ignorance in the following way:

Racism is not the product of anything that white people actually do, so the story goes. It is not something that they consciously intend. They might be chided a bit for not rectifying their ignorance of the lives of people of color and the latest scientific advances, but only if they are aware of their ignorance in the first place—for how can people be held responsible for something they did not know about? Blithely wrapped up in a white world, white people often do not see their own ignorance and cannot be faulted for not addressing it, so it seems. Point it out to them, give them accurate information about science and non-white people, and white people will gladly fill in the gaps in their knowledge and eliminate their racism. (*Ibid.*)

Sullivan takes this view to diminish and “soften” the realities of white domination by taking the solution to be rational argumentation and the transparent distribution of information to fill the

\(^{2}\) Where epistemology is understood as a theory of knowledge separate from values or interests

\(^{3}\) I use the term “political” responsibility here to indicate the difference between responsibility attributed to individuals based on individual motivations describable in moral, psychological terms, and responsibility as attributable to groups, and individuals in terms of their membership in groups and social locations.
gaps where important knowledge is missing. Sullivan’s work rethinks ignorance as a collective habitual phenomenon, complicating the way we define ignorance and knowledge-production in a way that requires us to draw the connections between political and historical structures, positionalities and ethical responsibility.

Sullivan raises the question of responsibility for structural forms of ignorance by calling attention to the active verb “to ignore” at the root of the word “ignorance” so that it cannot be thought of as something merely accidental, inadvertent or unintended and easily eliminated (Sullivan, 2006, 44). In observing that ignorance is habitual, Sullivan argues that habits are “simultaneously limiting and enabling. They provide the means by which one is able to act in the world, and in so doing also exclude other possible styles of acting” (24). These habits are “both intimately close because they constitute the self, and elusively distant because of their ability to evade and obstruct conscious attention. They are both the means for change and that which actively interferes with it” (44).

The “limiting” side of structural ignorance is what I will discuss next – a “managed” ignorance that is a “need not to know”, located somewhere in the gray area between “passive” participation in social forces and “active” choice to benefit, dominate or protect oneself through one’s knowledge practices.

5. Managing the need not to know

The “need not to know” – a way that many writers have characterized white ignorance – is a tacit investment in one’s own ignorance by which knowers protect themselves from what they do not want to believe to be true. This is where I take the normative crux of structural, substantive ignorance to be; and its exercise is what raises the political questions I will address in
the final sections of this chapter. Though the “need not to know” can take many forms (classism, ableism, settler ignorance, homophobia and transphobia, etc.), white ignorance is an excellent paradigm case, and one broadly discussed in social epistemology, critical race theory and critical pedagogy. The way I discuss it here is diagnostic, and serves as a step on the way to discussing responses to structural ignorance.

The ignorance practiced by those with dominant positionalities is of great political import because of the depth of its effects, but it alone doesn’t do justice to the complexity of structural ignorance. In some cases, which I do not have room to discuss in detail here, maintaining ignorance of one’s own disadvantage is a survival strategy, as is the case with those who stay closeted (both to others and themselves) since “passing” as straight is a matter of self-preservation. This is a kind of “need not to know”, since it is an elaborate technique not to believe what one knows, on some level, to be true. This complicates the question of responsibility by acknowledging the role that dominant norms (heterosexism, white supremacy, etc.) have in shaping social position, and the different ways that those norms encourage ignorance in ways that can be simultaneously beneficial/protective and harmful to the knower. This is why taking active responsibility for ignorance is a tactical matter that will often run the risk of reproducing the structures it is meant to shift, since those who occupy “dominant” social positions do not necessarily have the epistemic resources to recognize when attempts to shift habits serve to generate moral benefit.

But the heterosexism at work in keeping oneself in the closet and white supremacy operate differently, whatever structural similarities they might have. This project does aim to make some normative recommendations, especially for those in a position of structural
advantage. For methodological reasons, and because of my own positionality\textsuperscript{26}, my writing on the ignorance of those in a position of structural disadvantage will focus on scholarship about the ways that that ignorance has been used to political effect, but \textit{not} on what non-dominant knowers “should” be doing to overcome ignorance. I will, however, discuss normative strategies for decentering white ignorance, the tendency for some of the strategies undertaken by those in positions of structural dominance to accomplish the opposite of what they intend, and will gesture towards a kind of political accountability based on relationality and mutual aid.

These priorities are an attempt to avoid the mistake made by Sartre in \textit{Black Orpheus} described by Robert Bernasconi in “On Needing Not to Know: The Epistemology of Ignorance in Fanon’s Critique of Sartre”. Sartre, in an attempt to honor Fanon and the negritude movement, enfold negritude into an historical dialectic. Sartre tells Fanon that

by embracing his black identity, he will pass beyond negritude and free both blacks and whites for a new humanity. That is, what he chooses under the description of reclaiming his negritude can also be described, as Sartre and Césaire did describe it, as choosing a society without races. The problem is that Fanon did not yet know it under that description. More precisely, he thought that by reclaiming his negritude, he had chosen the absolute, but Sartre tells him that he had chosen only the relative, that is, a stage in the dialectic. Sartre thereby took the meaning of Fanon’s act from him and assigned it to history, except that Sartre himself provided the master narrative and in so doing retained his position as master. (Bernasconi, 235)

Though Sartre may be saying what Aimé Césaire had already said, Bernasconi writes that “it takes on another meaning because it reinscribes the white gaze, undoing precisely what it affirms. Sartre was not altogether wrong, but he was wrong to say it as he said it because he was

\textsuperscript{26} White, upper-middle-class, academic. While there is more to my social position than those qualifiers, I take them to be important to the way I make normative claims about group ignorance, and I don’t want other qualifiers (queer, woman, etc.), to detract from their importance. It should be clear, by now, that I do not take an essentialist view of any of these qualifiers, and that I take race to be socially constructed, while being nonetheless “real”. See Moya and Hames-Garcia in Mohanty, 2006.
white. Epistemologists do not always acknowledge the significance of the social identity of the speaker in assessing knowledge claims, but here is a case in point when they should” (Bernasconi 236).

I take Bernasconi’s point to be about the role of positionality in addressing or perpetuating ignorance – about the intellectualization and simultaneous instrumentalization of black existence on the part of whites, which he calls a “bad form of ignorance”. Sartre cannot truly understand what Fanon sees with “stunning clarity”: that “for action to be possible, it must be rooted not so much in knowledge of the situation but in the experience of it, a being immersed in the situation that occludes seeing all sides” (Bernasconi 234). Bernasconi uses Sartre to show two sides of ignorance: the white ignorance enacted by Sartre by making the mistake of placing Black experience within a narrative without occupying the vantage point to legitimate that claim; and the “sense of ignorance that often accompanies action” (232). Sartre was both ignorant of his own ignorance, and ignorant of the fact that experience, and not knowledge, is the driving force behind action.

There can be some forms of the “need not to know” that serve political action, as Bernasconi describes—a need to take action without “full” knowledge, in such a way that is motivated by one’s structurally-informed experience. But what I want to focus on in this section is a structural need not to know by which groups of knowers “manage” their own ignorance through an elaborate exercise of collective self-protection, an “immunization” to the kind of criticism that might correct their misunderstanding (Spelman 119). This need not to know is similar to self-deception, but this doesn’t quite capture the phenomenon. Elizabeth V. Spelman, in “Managing Ignorance”, likens this kind of ignorance to what James Baldwin describes in The Fire Next Time. Even when faced with a history of atrocities that are perfectly articulable,
“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, in Spelman 119). On top of this, they have “immunized themselves from the kind of criticism that might correct their misunderstandings”, because the white world is threatened whenever “a black man refuses to accept the white man’s definitions” (Spelman, 119, and Baldwin 1993, 85). Baldwin’s formulation of structurally-perpetuated white ignorance, and Spelman’s analysis of it, is a useful framework for discussing the discourse of “white talk” and the “distancing” strategies that many well-meaning white people perform in order to shelter themselves from responsibility when confronted with structural racism.

For Baldwin, white ignorance’s perceived “innocence” is what “constitutes the crime” (Baldwin 5-6). And the preservation of innocence in white self-image, Spelman notes, takes “grotesquely prodigious effort” (Spelman 120); it takes serious management. Spelman takes us through the strategies used to establish and maintain this innocence27. The way she does this is to treat Baldwin’s statement that “whites are unwilling to believe that black [sic] America’s grievances are real” analytically, “letting g be ‘black America’s grievances are real’ and letting W be the rhetorically conceived white American that Baldwin has in mind” (Ibid). Spelman formulates the statement in two different ways. In the first, “W does not believe that g is true and does not want to believe that g is true”. W’s not wanting to believe that g is true shows that W must have some fears that “were g true, this would have unbearable implications for himself and his country. So though W does not believe g is true, W is not quite sure g is false” (Ibid). This

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27 I want to note again that I am writing with a non-essentialist, intersectional account of race. The patterns of “management” that I will describe here are not ascribable to all white people. But there are, nonetheless, ways in which “whiteness” refers to a set of behaviors shaped by context, affinity group, positionality, culture, etc., and that these can be observed in ethnographic or statistical patterns. This is not to say that all white people will behave the same way, but that patterns of domination can have interpersonal and behavioral effects.
gives rise to Spelman’s second formulation that “W does not believe that g is false but wants to
believe that g is false”. Spelman’s description, through her formulations, of this kind of
ignorance is so apt that I will reproduce it here:

We might regard [the two statements] together as an elasticized version of
Baldwin’s claim that whites are unwilling to believe that black America’s
grievances are real. Such unwillingness to believe that g is true means neither
simply that W does not believe g is true nor that W believes g is false (nor, then,
that W has in some sense willed to believe that g is false). If he really did believe g
was false, he wouldn’t have to be so vigilant about immunizing himself, about
trying to ensure that he won’t have to countenance evidence that might point to g’s
being true. (Ibid)

We can see then, that this kind of ignorance is an earnest and fearful – and to some extent
unwitting – attempt to preserve one’s innocence. What this involves is not a simple lack of
knowledge or W’s embracing the false believe that g is false. The trick is to ignore g, “to avoid
as much as he can thinking about g. He wants g to be false, but if he treats g as something that
could be false, then he would also have to regard it as something that could be true. Better to
ignore g altogether, given the fearful consequences of its being true” (Spelman 121). Because
deception involves having false belief, W is not self-deceived. What Baldwin accuses W of is not
self-deception but a particular brand of ignorance, an unwillingness to think about g’s being true
or false. W is actively ignorant, is not simply “ignorant of”, but “ignores g” (Spelman 122 my
emphasis). “W does not think about whether g is true or false. And yet she is hardly indifferent to
its being true or false. Her ignoring g allows her to stand by g’s being false, to be committed to
g’s being false, without believing that g is false” (Ibid).

Asking what will lead W out of ignorance, Spelman cites Baldwin’s allusion to “radical
and far-reaching changes in the American political and social structure”, and suggests that to
undo it we need to understand the labor it takes to sustain it (Spelman 123). This labor, in Spelman’s reading of Baldwin, is motivated by the desire to protect moral capital. Baldwin doesn’t dismiss the harm perpetrated by the white supremacist. But what is of concern to him in the passages taken up by Spelman is the “spineless” ignorance of those who “do not really want to know about the lethal history and presence of white racism”, those who “don’t care to really know” (125). Spelman takes Baldwin to anticipate the tendency his white readers might have to write off this ignorance as characteristic of others but not themselves. Baldwin subverts the attempts white readers might have of “adding to their moral capital” by “not being white supremacists or bullying bigots” (ibid.) by showing that this prioritizes whites’ moral standing relative to other whites over the fact of their dominance.

Spelman likens this tactic to those used at the time of reconstruction and “reconciliation” after the Civil War, where ignorance played a major role in maintaining white domination after it had seemingly taken a blow. Spelman, through the work of Frederic Douglass, tells the story of how “healing” between Union and Confederate whites eclipsed the claims of justice for blacks. Using the work of historian David Blight, Spelman paints a picture of reconciliation that excluded discussions of race and slavery, on the grounds that such “impolitic matters” might undermine the fragile work of bringing together Northerners and Southerners. Healing and reconciliation for groups of whites after the ravages of war “could not be achieved if the question of black [sic] and white equality were kept in the fore” (Spelman 129). It required ignoring the

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28 Spelman is careful to distinguish W’s position from the views of a rhetorically conceived white supremacist, S. “S is not among those who, in Baldwin’s words ‘have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not wish to know it’. […] S not only knows it, but wants to know it; indeed he celebrates it” (Spelman 124).
claims of blacks. Forgetting “America’s bloody racial history” was at the service of mutually maintaining domination between groups of whites.

6. Protecting Innocence: Resistant “White Talk” and the desire for absolution

Barbara Applebaum, Alison Jones, and Sara Ahmed have all shown this kind of discursive “managing” of ignorance at work in different kinds of defensive “talk” that is an expression of the “need not to know”, and that has the same relationship to the preservation of innocence and moral capital. Jones and Applebaum draw on Alice McIntyre’s observation of white students’ distancing strategies in the classroom, which she calls “white talk”, while Ahmed tracks the effects of declarations of whiteness as “non-performative” (that is, they do not do what speakers intend by them). The purpose of this final section is to show white ignorance at work in the discursive patterns at work both at the individual and institutional levels.

White talk, as defined by McIntyre, is a discourse that functions to “insulate White people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism,” a culturally sanctioned evasion discourse that “protects the interests of the privileged and their moral composure” (McIntyre, in Applebaum 43; see also Bartky, 2002). Alison Bailey describes white talk as “fluttering” around the fear of finding oneself complicit in structural racism, an evasiveness “designed, indeed scripted, for the purposes of evading, rejecting, and remaining ignorant about the injustices that flow from whiteness and its attendant privileges” (Bailey 2013, 3). White talk persists, Bailey writes, because “it has powerful moral, ontological and epistemic payoff for white folks” in construing them as “invulnerable” (Ibid.)29. It serves to construct the

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29 “White tears” might seem to present a challenge to this invulnerability; that is the topic of Chapter 2.
speaker as an “imagined non-racist self. That is, it gives us a sense of ourselves as well-meaning white people to whom we can boomerang back when we feel that our perceived sense of ourselves as not racist is being challenged” (Bailey 5). Bailey writes that this kind of discourse acts as a “ritual of moral purification that seeks to evoke people of color’s affirmation” (Ibid.).

Social justice educators have given quite serious attention to this form of denial, and Applebaum cites several studies that explore discursive patterns at work among white pre-service teachers, including Kim Case and Annette Hemmings’ study of distancing strategies. In that study, white pre-service women teachers responded to questions about racism in such a way as to avoid being implicated in systemic oppression or viewed as racist (Applebaum 42). Applebaum also cites Kathy Hytten and John Warren’s ethnography of the rhetorical strategies used by white students in classes on systemic oppression and privilege, cataloguing patterns of “tactics”. Among these were: “remaining silent, evading questions, resorting to the rhetoric of ignoring color, focusing on progress, victim blaming and focusing on culture rather than race” (43).

Hytten and Warren note that these discursive moves are “culturally sanctioned”; they are “already available, already common forms of asserting dominance” (Hytten and Warren, in Applebaum 43). For Applebaum, what this shows is that these strategies protect group interests and shield the white students’ moral composure. Applebaum uses this scholarship to show that “white ignorance is not only sustained by denials of complicity but white ignorance also authorizes such denials” (Ibid.). This discourse of “resistance” – a form of “managed” ignorance that needs not to know – is taken by the students themselves to be a simple “disagreement” with the course material, though Hytten and Warren explain that these denials are socially authorized.

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30 Bailey builds on Alice McIntyre’s account of white talk by extending it beyond simple speech, and looking into bodily performances rather than just the content of utterances.
ways of “protecting the center, the location of privilege” (*Ibid.*). McIntyre calls this “privileged choice”; Peggy McIntosh, author of the much cited “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”, calls it “permission to escape”, because students’ ability to dismiss systemic oppression as an opinion with which they can disagree is a function of the privilege of choice to disengage from discussions of systemic oppression. Applebaum attributes these responses to a deep investment in moral innocence, which the subjects of the study fear will become implicated if they engage critically with questions of racial privilege.

Applebaum’s argument is that this morally motivated epistemic resistance “entrenches ignorance even further”, and that this calls for an alternative model of moral responsibility that takes complicity as its starting point. To support this argument, Applebaum ties white ignorance and complicity to forms of discourse that serve to protect moral and political innocence. This rests on an idea of speech that is performative rather than representational, that goes beyond the speaker’s intention or “good will”. Applebaum is committed to the idea that dialogue is invested with forms of power that go undetected with a representational approach to language (Applebaum 100). Because Applebaum’s research centers on pre-service teachers and dynamics at work in the classroom – spaces where institutional knowledge is produced – the studies she cites discuss structural ignorance at several registers at once: they emphasize the importance of developing strategies for talking about structural racism in the classroom, while connecting those classroom dynamics to larger structures of racial domination.

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31 This dissertation doesn’t make a clear distinction between moral and political innocence, but later chapters will explore moral and political responsibility as two perspectives on forms of structural racism like white ignorance. The project is less interested in whether political innocence can be achieved than it is in strategies that can circumvent an overemphasis on innocence and guilt altogether. Over the course of the dissertation, guilt and innocence will appear to have a role in interpersonal manifestations of structural racism, but it will become clear that even this role operates against a political backdrop that racializes both guilt and innocence.
Applebaum uses Alison Jones’ “The Limits of Cross-Cultural Dialogue: Pedagogy, Desire and Absolution in the Classroom” to show how “white talk” operates in a classroom setting where the politics of racialization are discussed, and what motivations undergird it. In Jones’ account,

the dialogue between her white students and students of color that seemed to the white students to express an empathetic desire to know the Other in effect functioned to maintain the white students’ self-image as “good.” When the students of color snubbed the white students’ well-intended desires for integrated discussion, the white students expressed indignation instead of working to understand their role in the students’ of color preference for separate classes. The white students were unaware but also unwilling to recognize that what they perceived as an empathetic desire functioned as a type of absolution. Jones attributes the white students’ indignation to their interpretation of the students of color as standing in their way of being “good whites” (Appelbaum 91).

Jones characterizes her white students’ resistance as a “refusal to know” that manifests as “empathy”, but which is in fact geared towards preserving moral rectitude32.

Jones’ research on white students’ behavior comes from her observations of a pedagogical experiment which she also describes in “Pedagogy by the Oppressed: The Limits of Classroom Dialogue” (1999). After several years of teaching an undergraduate course on feminist theory with Maori academic Kuni Jenkins at the University of Auckland, Jones and Jenkins decided to separate the class based on ethnicity, a decision was motivated by student

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32 There is much to be written about racial forms of ignorance and empathy – a project I cannot undertake here. Amy Coplan (2011) and Lori Gallegos de Castillo (unpublished work) have both argued that empathy isn’t really empathy if it cannot properly perform clear self-other differentiation, in addition to “other-regarding affective matching”. As Coplan writes, “It is possible to experience affective matching and succeed in other-oriented perspective-taking and still not be empathizing. This happens when there is insufficient self-other differentiation due to a breakdown of the boundaries between the self and others” (15). In cases of “true” empathy, there is awareness “of the fact that the other is a separate person and that the other has his own unique thoughts, feelings, desires, and characteristics. This enables deep engagement with the other […]” (16).
feedback and was undertaken in the interests of participatory and critical pedagogy. The question of integration/segregation in education is politically complex and context-relative, but what I want to focus on in Jones’ work is also her focus: when teachers attempt to facilitate “multi-ethnic dialogue”, what is happening “when 'togetherness' and dialogue-across-difference do not have the same compellingly positive meaning for different ethnic groups”? (Jones, 1999, 1)

Jones’ class was separated into two groups, one exclusively Maori and Pacific Islander, the other mostly Pakeha\(^{33}\)/white. The students kept “journals” meant to chart their “intellectual journey” through the course. Jones writes that

the Journals showed clearly that most of the Pakeha students were hostile towards the course division, and the Maori and Pacific Islands students were uniformly very pleased with it. This was evident too in the course results which showed that the Maori and Pacific students' achievement was on a par with their Pakeha peers. In previous years the course results had not been so equitable.

I’m interested in Jones’ work because of what it shows about the Pakeha/white students’ desire to “do the right thing” through the “right” kind of knowledge acquisition or learning. Journal entries by Pakeha students included:

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ would have thought it would be interesting for all the students to be able to share their unique cultural perspectives with each other. I know I would have found that valuable. I am sometimes quite ignorant and intolerant of other viewpoints, so a wider input would have been educational.} \\
It & \text{ does not seem right. Could we not learn from each other? Wouldn’t it be valuable to share our differences in experience? [...] It is different reading about it}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{33}\) “Pakeha” is the Maori word for foreigner, which has now come to mean white New Zealander or New Zealander of European descent.
in books, or having it taught by teachers. It is better to hear it straight from the women who are having the experience. It is easier to relate to.

Pakeha students were almost uniformly unhappy about the classroom split and felt they had been cheated out of an educational opportunity, while segregation seemed to have the opposite effect for the Maori and Pacific Islander students who wrote:

I cannot begin to describe just how much more I enjoyed coming to classes! I felt our lectures were less formal, encouraging more student-lecturer interaction and inevitably more focused discussion. I also found this to be a less intimidating environment and I felt I was able to learn more as I felt at ease to ask questions!

What was even more pleasing for me was the fact that we were going to be split up for classes. I actually don’t know why but I always feel a lot more confident when I am amongst other Pacific Islanders!

I felt as though I had moved towards the centre and stepped into the centre where white people normally reside. It felt good.

The different streams also allow Maori and Pacific Island women to identify the issues of feminism amongst their own, as too often the discussions are taken over by ... Pakeha women.

I take Jones’ account to reinforce Applebaum’s point that that while the students meant to demonstrate their moral sensitivity through their attempts to avoid their own complicity in patterns of racial domination, “their talk, instead, served to reproduce and maintain the culture of power in the classroom” (Applebaum 92). In Jones’ analysis, the Pakeha students’ anger and disappointment was prompted by their being denied the opportunity to be “good learners” in such a way that would grant them the experience of “absolution”, an absolution which requires access to, and corporeal knowledge of, the ‘other’. Jones’ attributes this to a colonial romance that “underlies the desire for the dialogic classroom”, and which, when thwarted, is expressed “in the annoyed words of the Pakeha students who felt cheated of such ‘coming together’” (Jones 4).
The threat to “coming together” has “particular emotional force […] because it is a threat to the dominant group at the very point of their power in education – their ability to know. A sense of exclusion and outrage marks the refusal of the already-privileged to accept that some knowledges and relationships might not be available to them/us” (ibid, see also Sullivan on white solipsism and white expansiveness). Pakeha students were used to having a sense of “what there is to know”, and confessions of ignorance as a desire to access that knowledge positioned them as “good students”, learning the “right” knowledge. Jones is quick to recognize the colonial, supremacist underpinnings of this desire to know/confession of ignorance, and to point out the ways that even expressions of ignorance with moral intent can preserve a “need not to know”: “their cannibal desire to ‘know the other’ through being taught by her is simultaneously a refusal to know. It is a resistance to the possibility that the other cannot or might not want to be ‘known’ or consumed by them, or to teach them” (Jones, 5).

The most salient feature of Jones’ account is that the motor for the Pakeha students’ desire for access and knowledge through direct contact with the Maori and Pacific Islanders is moral absolution through knowledge-acquisition. As Jones writes,

The angry and thwarted ‘desire to know’ expressed in the words of the Pakeha students seems to be the desire to be told ‘it is alright’ by their Maori friends and acquaintances. The compelling couplet Love me! Teach me! underlies their demands for knowledge. The very act of ‘knowing’, of ‘being taught’ becomes,

[34] Sullivan describes white privilege as tending “to assume that all cultural and social spaces are potentially available for one to inhabit” (Sullivan, 2006, 25). This habit of “ontological expansiveness,” she writes, “enables white people to maximize the extent of the world in which they transact. But as an instance of white solipsism, it also severely limits the ability to treat others in respectful ways. Instead of acknowledging others’ particular interests, needs, and projects, white people who are ontologically expansive tend to recognize only their own, and their expansiveness is at the same time a limitation.” (Ibid.)
most significantly, not an act of logic or an accumulation of information or even a call to action, but an experience: an experience of redemption. The Pakeha students’ powerful and passive need for cleansing and absolution by the other is signaled by a panicked demand for it when it is not apparently forthcoming. (Ibid.)

Jones asks whether the “pleasure of ethnic difference” in Pakeha/white education in general, and in theories of education, might not come down to this desire for redemption that is also a resistance or refusal to know. Apart from a “certain voyeurism”, she asks, is it not so that ‘we’ (the liberal/radical dominant) can be reassured? Isn’t it that at this so-called ‘postcolonial’ juncture when our cultural dominance seems not so smoothly taken-for-granted, that we want (impossibly) to be re/assured by the other-who-now-speaks that we are part of the scene of redemption; that we are not the unfashionable coloniser/oppressor whose despised description fills our textbooks […]? Through being good, loveable partners in the liberal social economy we seek liberation, through your dialogue with us. Touched by your attention, we are included with you, and therefore cleaned from the taint of colonisation and power. (Jones 6)

Many have written on this tendency to attribute racism and colonialism to others but not to oneself, a discursive strategy that recenters the dominant speaker and their moral status. Maria Lugones call this “boomerang perception”, a term coined by Elizabeth Spelman.

“Racist/colonialist perception is narcissistic,” Lugones writes; “it denies independence to the seen, it constructs its object imaginatively as a reflection of the seer. It robs the seen of a separate identity. ‘I look at you and come right back to myself’ […]” (Lugones 157). Though Jones’ example may be different from the forms of white talk that McIntyre and Applebaum describe in their not being the direct result of a verbal confrontation about structural racism, they are, nonetheless, reactions to the ways that racialization impacts the class. Both instances involve some effort to distance oneself from moral fault. “White talk” serves to shield moral standing, often reinscribing and protecting whiteness “even within attempts to disrupt its normative
influence” (Ibid., emphasis in original). The use of studies of white students’ denials of complicity in conversations about structural racism is meant to show that discourse can function in ways that speakers, or social actors “do not consciously intend”, and that “white people cannot rely on their good intentions in order to know how their discourse affects others” (Ibid.).

The evasive discourse of white talk that seeks moral absolution while remaining resistant to knowledge of complicity is also operative at an institutional level, as Sara Ahmed writes in “Declarations of Whiteness”, where she argues that “declarations” of whiteness as “bad” are “non-performative”: that is, they do not do what they say they do. Declarations of white guilt, just as much as McIntyre’s white talk, serve to preserve moral purity or innocence, where saying that one is “bad” is meant to indicate that a white person is “good” in their recognition of their complicity. As Fiona Probyn also notes, white anxiety for moral absolution is the motor for “Critical Whiteness Studies”, where the creation of a “good” disciplinary subject simply takes on another form. Both Ahmed and Probyn demonstrate that the phenomenon isn’t merely psychological, but structural, by demonstrating that institutions, too, use a discourse of “white talk” to demonstrate moral sensitivity while those preservations of moral capital serve, simultaneously, to reproduce the structures of power at work in those institutions.

Ahmed lists “declarations of whiteness” – including “we/I must be seen to be white”, “I/we are racist”, “I am/we are ashamed by my/our racism”, “I/we have studied whiteness (and racist people are ignorant)”, and “I am/we are coloured (too)” (Ahmed 2014), showing how all of these declarations function non-performatively, that is, they do not do what they say35. They are, rather “unhappy performatives,” since whether they avow or disavow racism or white ways of

35 Ahmed means “performative” in the sense of J. L. Austin’s speech acts, later taken up by Judith Butler.
being, they recenter white actions and white subjects, assuming that they can transcend the circumstances of systemic privilege and oppression they inhabit. What ties of Ahmed’s “declarations” together is that they imply an access to transcendence that serves to attribute moral credibility rather than to affect the actual circumstances of white supremacy. Ahmed examines the mechanics of declarations that admit to “bad practice”, which in actuality serve as signs of “good practice” and that are built on a “fantasy of transcendence” (Ahmed 1). These declarations, she writes, are the core constituents of “Whiteness Studies”, which she understands to have taken a self-reflexive turn inward.

Perhaps the most obvious non-performative declarations are those that take the form of “making whiteness visible”. Though Ahmed does not dismiss the work of the entire field of Whiteness Studies, or the importance of making whiteness visible, she is critical of what this kind of discourse does: it serves, as she writes, to equate anti-racist work with making whiteness visible, which only makes sense from a white perspective. If seeing whiteness structures everyday experience in a way that is about living its effects, “that allow white bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape, spaces in which black bodies stand out, stand apart, unless they pass, which means passing through space by passing as white”, then understanding anti-racism as “making whiteness visible only makes sense from the point of view of those for whom it is invisible” (Ahmed 2). This self-reflexivity, while it may be an important dimension of white self-reflection, is an institutionally sanctioned version of “white talk” which “flutters” around institutional racism in a way that prioritizes the project of white moral rectitude without necessarily going further. For Ahmed, if Whiteness Studies is to be more than ‘about’ whiteness, it must begin “with the Black critique of how whiteness works as a form of racial privilege, as well as the effects of that privilege on the bodies of those who are recognized as
black. As [Audre] Lorde shows us, the production of whiteness works precisely by assigning race to others: to study whiteness, as a racialized position, is hence already to contest its dominance, how it functions as a ‘mythical norm’” (Ibid.).

Ahmed tracks the anxiety expressed by white academics in response to whiteness being made an object of study, and in anticipation of what the political consequences of “whiteness studies” are. Scholar Ruth Frankenberg worries about the “reification” and “recentering” of whiteness; Talal Asad and Charles Mills have both shown that the “disciplines” – anthropology, the human sciences, the humanities – have been largely about narcissism built on mythologized “others” – and Ahmed echoes the worry that whiteness studies sustains the direction or orientation of this gaze, whilst removing the ‘detour’ provided by the reflection of the other. Whiteness studies could even become a spectacle of pure self-reflection, augmented by an insistence that whiteness ‘is an identity too’. Does whiteness studies function as a narcissism in which the loved object returns us to the subject as the origin of love? We do after all get attached to our objects of study, which might mean that whiteness studies could ‘get stuck’ on whiteness, as that which ‘gives itself’ to itself. (Ahmed 3)

Ahmed writes that Whiteness Studies is constituted by enunciations of anxiety about its own borders, not that they will be invaded by “others”, but about whether they are appropriate. What do these enunciations do, she asks? “Is a whiteness that is anxious about itself – its

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36 Indeed, there has been a recent proliferation of literature, in philosophy, education theory, and elsewhere, that encourages white educators and thinkers to “get in touch” with their whiteness, such as Gary R. Howard’s We Can’t Teach What we Don’t Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools (2006), which encourages white teachers to come to terms with, and connect meaningfully with, their own “white heritage”. Another example is Shannon Sullivan’s Good White People: The Problem with White Middle Class Anti-Racism (2014). Sullivan’s book is an excellent account of the ways that white anti-racism is motivated by “white guilt” that racializes “other” groups of “bad” whites, reinforcing patterns of white dominance. Her conclusion, however, is that whites should cultivate “white self love” so that their sense of self-worth isn’t tied to the moral recognition they receive from people of color. Her analysis is important, and identifies the same need for absolution identified by Jones earlier in this section. It is only the concluding step, “white self love”, that I find challenging for its running the risk of recentering and “loving” whiteness as a monolithic identity as the conclusion of anti-racist thinking.
narcissism, its egoism, its privilege, its self-centeredness – better? What kind of whiteness is a whiteness that is anxious about itself? What does such an anxious whiteness do?” (Ahmed, 4).

Ahmed’s project in critiquing articulations of anxiety or complicity in Whiteness Studies is not simply to attribute blame. Rather, it is to show how these articulations are related to the institutionalization of racism, and the way it is “declaratively” reproduced, in the declarations of institutions of higher education as well as expressions of nationalism through public expressions of guilt and shame in response to histories of racial injustice that “sully” national history. Ahmed reads Whiteness Studies as “part of a broader shift towards a politics of declaration, in which institutions as well as individuals ‘admit’ to forms of bad practice, and in which the ‘admission’ itself becomes seen as good practice” (Ahmed 5).

This has been echoed by Fiona Probyn, who in “Playing chicken at the intersection: the white critic of whiteness”, looks at how admissions of whiteness, and especially white “badness”, have become “liberatory” in tone, mimicking the language of repression at work in “coming out” discourses. She is critical of the way that current work in Whiteness Studies frames the revelation of whiteness as whites’ liberation from the oppression of their own privilege. For her, this is clearly not enough:

Critical whiteness studies struggles hard to maintain the newness of rediscovering the colonizer who refuses, the revelation of ‘unmasking’ whiteness. This is not a new option for the postcolonizer, it is an old trope that draws attention to the irreducibility of the problem. I’m not saying that postcolonial theory has resolved these questions, far from it. But whiteness studies does seem to neglect the genealogy of its own questions within postcolonial theory (as only one source) and in doing so also neglects to consult the history of identities, subject positions, interstitial spaces, hybridization that that field of inquiry makes available. Not surprisingly then, we find a repetition of repressive hypotheses and libertarian modes of address in the service of a somehow new and pressing political agenda. (Probyn, 24-25)
For Probyn, Whiteness Studies, and people in “dominant” knowledge positions, must, if they are going to engage in critique, acknowledge the colonial dimensions of whiteness, and the ways that discourses of whiteness are retooled versions of older colonial tropes. For this reason, Probyn, Jones and Ahmed all advocate for what Jones calls a “politics of disappointment”, which I also read as a call for white academics and activists to let go of the desire for moral absolution. The implicit argument is for approaches to structural ignorance to remain non-ideal or non-transcendent.

The way Ahmed discusses the “politics of declaration” is consistent with the way that white talk serves to immunize and stabilize structures of power through refusals to know that preserve white moral standing. Though I think Ahmed is right to be critical of the “what can I do?” response she often receives from white academics and students, I do take it to be essential to think through individual and systemic knowledge practices in the interests of navigating complicity with, and subjection to, structures of power with a view to political transformation. Ahmed is suspicious, too, of the use of “critical” as a marker of correct moral orientation, and that differentiates “good” academics from those who are uncritical, and therefore racist and ignorant (where racist and ignorant are synonymous). I am sympathetic to Ahmed’s critique of the fetishization of critique as a marker of white “goodness”, and take the activity of critique to be limited. But I also take the activity of critique – not just “critique” as a negative reference to uncritical “others” – to be essential to navigating systems of domination, so long as that critique doesn’t assume it can, on its own, transcend its circumstances.

This transcendence is what Ahmed takes declarations of whiteness to attempt. For this reason, in the paragraphs that follow, I want to focus on admissions of guilt that serve the same function as the “distancing attempts” we saw in Applebaum and Jones’ work. Both, according to
Ahmed, are non-performative declarations that assume transcendence of their content. Of Ahmed’s six types of declaration, I will look at “I/we are racist” and “I/we are ashamed”, and the way their institutional articulations serve to reinstate white dominance rather than transcend it, out of the very desire to transcend it, or to appear to transcend it.

As an example of “I/we are racist”, Ahmed cites the UK’s MacPherson report on racist policing (1999), which recognized and established “institutional racism” as part of mainstream political language in the UK (though institutional racism was evidently not invented by the report!). The report recognized that racism is perpetuated unwittingly by “collectives” rather than individuals. But according to Ahmed, the report saw evidence of collective responsibility only in what those institutions “failed to do”. The report defined institutional racism “in such a way that racism is not seen as an ongoing series of actions that shape institutions” (Ahmed 8). Ahmed advocates instead for a definition of racism that would make it evident not “in what ‘we’ fail to do, but what ‘we’ have already done, whereby the ‘we’ is an effect of the doing. The recognition of institutional racism within the Macpherson report reproduces the whiteness of institutions by seeing racism simply as the failure ‘to provide’ for non-white others ‘because’ of their difference” (Ibid.). The institutional confession of racism, then, reinscribes a logic of moral immunization built on exclusion.

Ahmed is sensitive, too, to the psychologizing or pathologizing of institutions who take on the characteristics of individuals in such a way that “the institution also takes the place of individuals: it is the institution that is the bad person, rather than this person or that person. In other words, the transformation of the collective into an individual (a collective without individuals) might allow individual actors to refuse responsibility for collective forms of racism” (Ibid.). These declarations are a kind of moral protection in the sense that
If racism is defined as unwitting and collective prejudice, then the claim to be racist by being able to see racism in this or that form of practice is also a claim not to be racist in the same way. The paradoxes of admitting to one’s own racism are clear: saying ‘we are racist’ becomes a claim to have overcome the conditions (unseen racism) that require the speech act in the first place. The logic goes: we say, ‘we are racist’, and insofar as we can admit to being racist (and racists are unwitting), then we are showing that ‘we are not racist’, or at least that we are not racist in the same way. (*Ibid.*)

In order to show how declarations of shame operate as ways to transcend circumstances of structural racism, Ahmed looks at declarations of public shame in Australia’s Sorry Books, an online repository of apologies for the colonial atrocities undergone by Australia’s indigenous population. Ahmed shows here that expressions of white shame operate in such a way as to enshrine a national moral ideal. “National shame,” Ahmed writes, “can be a mechanism for reconciliation as self-reconciliation, in which the ‘wrong’ that is committed provides the very grounds for claiming national identity. It is the declaration of shame that allows us ‘to assert our identity as a nation’” (Ahmed 11). Recognition restores the nation and reconciles it to itself “by ‘coming to terms with’ its own past in the expression of ‘bad feeling’. But in allowing us to feel bad, shame also allows the nation to feel better or even to feel good” (*Ibid.*). The way this works is to link the recognition of brutality to pride: for Australians to be proud of their country, they must acknowledge Australia’s brutality. Declarations of shame, she writes, can work to re-install the very ideals they seek to contest. As with [other declarations of whiteness], they may even assume that the speech act itself can be taken as a sign of transcendence: if we say we are ashamed, if we say we were racist, then ‘this shows’ we are not racist now, we *show that we mean well*. The presumption that saying is doing – that being sorry means that we have overcome the very thing we are sorry about – hence works to support racism in the present. Indeed, what is done in this speech act, if anything is done, is that the white subject is re-posed as the social ideal.
Significantly, Ahmed is also critical of the tendency in Whiteness Studies to equate ignorance with racism, and critique with moral uprightness in the face of racism, where these exist in diametrical opposition to one another. Ahmed looks at the tendency in academia to emphasize the causal link between ignorance and racism, and argues that the performance of “studying” whiteness as an avowed privilege through “Whiteness Studies” reproduces and recenters the white knower. In this account, “ignorance” is the opposite pole to knowledge/critique/seeing whiteness. This chapter has argued that ignorance isn’t the opposite of knowledge, but is of a piece with the epistemic norms Ahmed criticizes. I take Ahmed, too, to be critical of the notion of ignorance as a “lack” that can be filled with the right knowledge, since her account makes it clear that defining structural ignorance as an institutional lack or a lacuna in the knowledge reserves of individuals simply reinforces the structures that produce that ignorance in the first place.

7. Conclusion

In this first chapter, we saw that attempts to resist structural ignorance from a place of dominance often reproduce the structures they resist. Because structural ignorance is substantive, it is intimately tied to social and political forces and patterns of domination, and this means that often, means of “resistance” will be implicated in those patterns. We saw that because structural ignorance is substantive, it is active even when it “passively” participates in structures of social dominance. This makes epistemic agency complex, since it is framed by institutions and forces from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and which structure the way that our knowledge is produced. We saw that dominant knowledge tends to “manage” itself in ways that serve to protect the moral standing of those who benefit from structural ignorance, and the final part of
this chapter demonstrated that structural ignorance continues to reproduce itself even in its own efforts against itself, since its “resistance” is motivated by the desire on the part of dominant knowers for moral absolution.

The implicit argument of this first chapter was that the response structural ignorance should not be this motivation for moral absolution or rectitude, since this re-entrenches white normativity, and creates epistemic resistance to change on a structural level. Another implicit argument was that dominant resistance to structural ignorance can only ever be complicit, at least to some degree; transcendence, as we saw in Sara Ahmed’s account, is impossible, and reinforces a white desire for moral rectitude and absolution through knowledge acquisition and recognition. As Ahmed writes,

Surely the commitment to being against racism has “done things” and continues to “do things”. What we might remember is that to be against something is precisely not to be in a position of transcendence: to be against something is, after all, to be in intimate relations with that which one is against. To be anti “this” or anti “that” only makes sense if “this” or “that” exists. The messy work of ‘againstness’ might even help remind us that the work of critique does not mean the transcendence of the object of our critique; indeed, critique might even be dependent on non-transcendence. (Ahmed 19)

What, then, might positive epistemic resistance look like? What might it look like to take responsibility for white ignorance in a way that does not assume transcendence or take moral absolution or relief as its motivation? The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will argue that if we are to respond to structural ignorance, we need a definition of responsibility that begins with complicity rather than attempting to transcend it. The aim is not to encourage complicity or to advocate for it, nor is it to claim that visions of “things otherwise” are detrimental, to denigrate the imagination or to completely dismiss out of hand the enormous body of work on “ideal theory” and “regulative ideals”. The point of critiquing transcendence is to uncover its link
to a kind of moral capital associated with white supremacy. This isn’t to say, either, that we shouldn’t have a “moral” orientation towards racial and epistemic justice. Quite the opposite: My claim is that a truly moral orientation cannot take moral purity or transcendence as its motivation, especially when that transcendence is to absolve individuals and institutions of responsibility in the here and now. Some activists would advocate a harder line, but there are no easy answers to the question of complicity. The chapter that follows develops the idea that morality, affect and politics have conspired to create a notion of responsibility that, in centering guilt and innocence, limits our possibilities for confronting structural racism.
Chapter 3. The Function of Guilt and Punitiveness in Confronting White Ignorance
Guilt is [...] a primary ally motivating factor. Even if never admitted, guilt and shame generally function as motivators in the consciousness of an oppressor who realizes that they are operating on the wrong side. While guilt and shame are powerful emotions, think about what you’re doing before you make another community’s struggle into your therapy session. Of course, acts of resistance and liberation can be healing, but tackling guilt, shame, and other trauma requires a much different focus, or at least an explicit and consensual focus. What kinds of relationships are built on guilt and shame?

Indigenous Action Media,
“Accomplices Not Allies”

How many years it takes
To tear off the shame
That has become a mask
Shame that instigates the body
Like a war instigates the world
Shame that has caused
The eyes to hate the skin
The ears to hate the music of the tongue
The lips to blame the throat for its accent […]
The heart to reject itself.
But even after you will return to yourself
And tear off the mask
You will find out you still need to tear it
Piece by piece
From the world.

Shlomi Hatuka

1. Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the problem of moral absolution in responses to white ignorance, and the self-reproduction of white ignorance through the desire for innocence. But does this mean that we should abandon guilt? To be sure, guilt and shame can be paralyzing. Shame in particular

Hatuka is a Yemenite Mizrahi poet and activist. From an unpublished translation of his poem “How Many Years” by Shirly Bahar, courtesy of the translator.
has been associated with feelings of powerlessness, smallness, negative self-perception, and anger that disables dialogue (Rodogno 156). While guilt is sometimes thought to have a more positive function for its allowing perpetrators to acknowledge wrongdoing and take responsibility, others find it to be no more effective than shame (170).

This framing of guilt and shame will resonate with those who have followed the internet discussion of “white tears” – displays of guilt, shame, sadness and anger by white people that derail difficult conversations about race, focusing attention on white emotionality in classrooms, meetings, workshops and activist spaces. This kind of behavior has been deemed “deeply inappropriate” (Loubriel, 2016) for the way it thoughtlessly recenters white subjects. Some, like Damon Young (2015) and Mamta Motwani Accapadi (2007) have understood white tears respectively as “obliviousness, defensiveness, hypersensitivity, narcissism, [and] fabricated persecution”, and “resistance” to difficult dialogue about privilege by seeming “helpless” or “innocent”. On this view, guilt and shame – or at the very least, their emotional expression – have negative interpersonal consequences that are tied to, and reproduce, structural racism.

These emotions and their expression may serve important functions in other contexts, but they have no place in activism, organized political work, and other environments where racially diverse groups are working to confront structural racism. As James Baldwin famously put it,

I'm not interested in anybody's guilt. Guilt is a luxury that we can no longer afford. I know you didn't do it, and I didn't do it either, but I am responsible for it because I am a man and a citizen of this country and you are responsible for it, too, for the very same reason. [...] Anyone who is trying to be conscious must begin to dismiss the vocabulary which we've used so long to cover it up, to lie about the way things are. (Baldwin, 2012)

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38 Accapadi associates these characteristics with normalized white femininity.

39 This counter-productive political effect of guilt and shame was the topic of Chapter 1.
Abandoning expressions and affects of guilt and shame, however, doesn’t seem to make sense. Guilt and shame can serve an important interpersonal function, and this can have positive political effects with regard to structural racism. Sandra Bartky has offered a strong defense of guilt as an appropriate, and indeed desirable, response to the knowledge of structural racism (see Bartky 2002), and Dan Haggerty has argued that our society gives shame short shrift: If shame involves tension between who one thinks one ought to be and who one is, then it can be important for motivating the habit and character formation anti-racism may require (2009). Linda Alcoff has argued, however, that the shame that understands white identity as an inevitable form of white supremacy is a politically conservative form of “white exceptionalism” that takes the meaning of race to be unchangeable. She also notes though, that guilt and shame can also be politically galvanizing. As she writes, “the anger that shame and guilt evokes is justified and can be politically productive when directed toward the real causes of our unwitting complicity” (Alcoff 2015, 146).

The latter view is mirrored in some psychology literature that finds “unconscious” guilt and shame to be the problem, rather than guilt and shame in general (Scheff and Retzinger, in Rodogno, 146). Our shame and guilt, in other words, help us act in accordance with our principles, with what we think is right; they become problematic when they are unaddressed and unarticulated, causing anger and avoidance. And there is something intuitive about the view that negative emotions should not be denied or avoided, but engaged and understood in such a way as

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40 Bartky, in “In Defense of Guilt”, critiques the accusation made by political radicals that guilt is a “liberal” emotion, arguing that we should have an affective response when we learn about our complicity with structural racism. She argues, further, that these radical critiques of guilt have problematic gender implications for their masculinist admonishing of emotionality. The radical rejection of “liberal guilt” is, therefore, anti-feminist.
to allow agents to move forward and work with others. I will be making an argument for something like this in this chapter, only from the perspective of structural racism.

This view – that negative emotions like guilt are productive when directly addressed – is supported by psychological research on the effects of those emotions on restorative justice processes in Europe and North America. Much of that research holds that guilt, when acknowledged, can be key to advancing dialogue about how a wrong will be addressed. This view is dominant in the literature, and has it that “the affective roots of guilt lie in human relatedness, that is, in the human capacity to feel the suffering and distress of others and in the basic fear of alienating actual or potential relationship partners” (Baumeister in Rodogno 157). The reason to discuss the psychology of guilt in restorative justice processes in particular is because they shed light on the dynamics at work when a wrong between individuals is being negotiated.

These results concerning the “desirability” of guilt and shame in interpersonal processes, however, are as hotly debated in psychology as they are in philosophy. There is no consensus in experimental psychology, and in philosophy, there is similar disagreement about the role and function that guilt and shame should play in political motivation and action. This chapter grapples with these conflicting accounts of guilt, and reflects specifically on its political function in responding to structural racism. I argue that while the affective expression of guilt, when acknowledged, can serve an important interpersonal function beyond the narcissism of “white tears”, its political function – including in interpersonal situations colored by structural racism – is dangerous if it does not take its context of use into consideration41. I argue that the political

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41 Here I am using “interpersonal” and “political” as perspectives, but not as objectively separable realms. I do not think that states of affairs are necessarily distinguishable as “only” personal or “only” political. Following Iris
use of guilt – that is, its use in contexts meant to respond to structural racism – must take the racialization of guilt and innocence, and their relationship to the politics of punishment, into account. I use social science research to show that we have reason to connect the affect of guilt and the desire for innocence with racist criminal justice policy, and that this has implications for how guilt is employed at different registers of anti-racist reckoning and political action. The outcome of my analysis is a call for agency that goes beyond the guilt expressions of white individuals – a conclusion that might seem obvious, but unfortunately still needs support in the world of moral theory which takes abstract individualism for granted. The goal of this chapter is to critique the overemphasis on guilt and punishment as individualistic, anti-collaborative, white-centric, and as tied to the dominant practices of racialization at work in the criminal justice system – the institutional administrator and conferrer of legal guilt.

Again, it cannot be denied that guilt can serve an important function, as we will see in Rodogno’s research on its role in restorative justice processes. And especially in an era marked by a global phenomenon of white nationalism in the United States and Europe, it is surely a good thing for those who were in denial, or who were naïve, to respond with negative feelings of shame and guilt that will move them to act\(^\text{42}\). While we cannot dismiss the affect of guilt and the constructive uses to which it might be put, I will argue that an overemphasis on guilt\(^\text{43}\) as a static

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Young, however, I do think that these are two different registers or frameworks of analysis that can be employed in discussing structural racism – which, it is important to note, can have interpersonal manifestations.

\(^{42}\) I’m referring to the presidential victory of Donald Trump and the “Alt Right” in the United States, and to white nationalist movements at work in both Eastern and Western Europe that run on racist anti-immigrant sentiment (like France, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, etc.).

\(^{43}\) Haggerty makes a similar argument in “White Shame: Responsibility and Moral Emotions”, where he argues that American society overemphasizes guilt and underemphasizes shame. “Those who overemphasize guilt and underemphasize shame show deficiencies in character and community”. When Americans think about race, they “have overemphasized issues of justice and fairness” over communal life, limiting their shame-induced, “feeling” response to racism. To feel shame, for Haggerty, is to feel that who and how one is in one’s community are under scrutiny (312). Shame is a feeling of personal moral taint that is much needed in order for Americans to respond to
or permanent motivation for political action in response to structural racism is not only counter-productive, but linked in problematic ways to what scholar-activist Mujahid Farid, along with many other theorists, has called “the punishment paradigm” (2015\textsuperscript{44}, see also Barnett, 1977).

Some may think it is a stretch to link white guilt to the racialization of punishment. Indeed, the connection certainly does not apply in all cases: guilt can be an emotional response necessary for those in socially dominant positions to change their habits, commitments, and ways of interacting – what Elise Springer has called a “somatic marker” that signals to us that something is wrong\textsuperscript{45}. However, Rodogno has found that the function and effectiveness of guilt even in such studies is dependent on its socio-cultural significance (Rodogno 170). I understand this to support feminist prison abolitionist activist Mariame Kaba’s contention that, under conditions of structural racism, restorative justice processes that focus on interpersonal guilt are not sufficient; we need reparative justice, too, to address the structural factors at work that mediate the meaning of guilt and innocence\textsuperscript{46}.

In this chapter, I argue in favor of Kaba’s conclusion that the interpersonal significance of guilt is indexed to its political use. I show, not that they are one and the same, but that there are connections between these registers that cannot be denied. After briefly defining guilt and its (controversial) relationship to shame, I review research on the way guilt is thought to function

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\textsuperscript{44} See also Alexes Harris (2016), Elizabeth Hinton (2016), and Naomi Murakawa (2014) for excellent social science accounts of the practice and historical significance of punishment in the United States.
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\textsuperscript{45} Springer borrows this term from Antonio Damasio’s 1996 paper “The Somatic Marker Hypothesis and the Possible Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex”. See Bibliography for full citation.
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\textsuperscript{46} I will not argue in this chapter that individuals are not responsible for their actions. This chapter argues, rather, that guilt and innocence operate in a political context that has racialized them, and that this must be taken into account when evaluating their role in political motivation and action. Chapter 3 of this dissertation argues, along with Iris Marion Young, for a simultaneous commitment to personal and political responsibility for structural racism (including white ignorance).
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when *interpersonal* injustice is confronted. I show that it is consistent with the conclusions of some philosophers that guilt is not enough – it is perhaps necessary, but not sufficient, even when it comes to resolving an issue between individuals. I then show that there is a connection between the affect of guilt and criminal justice policy in the United States through data compiled by the Sentencing Project, and the scholarly work of Naomi Murakawa and Katherine Beckett, Andrew Dilts, and legal theorist Joel Feinberg. I conclude with the claim that because the interpersonal affect of guilt indexes its structural/legal use, there is a need for a shift away from the emphasis on guilt.

2. Defining Guilt and Shame

While there are many ways of defining both guilt and shame, generally speaking, guilt is understood to be a fear of real or imagined punishment for transgressing a rule or law (self or other imposed), while shame is understood to be a fear of exposure. On these definitions, guilt is thought to be “more” other-regarding, while shame is thought to be “more” self-regarding (though both have self- and other- regarding dimensions). This is elaborated in Bernard Williams’ *Shame and Necessity*, where he defines guilt as arising in an agent because of “an act or omission of a sort that typically elicits from other people anger, resentment, or indignation,” where the agent may offer “reparation” in order to “turn this away” (Williams 89). Affective guilt elicits fear of punishment, from oneself or another, and is thought to be “other-regarding” in the sense that it is an affect centered on a victim or a punitive authority. Williams argues in *Shame and Necessity* that modern (as opposed to ancient) morality insists on the “primacy of guilt”, and that the modern ethical and political model takes the internalization of guilt’s punitive authority to focus modern morality on the voluntary, and therefore blame-worthy, actions of
individuals – a focus Williams and Haggerty both critique. Shame, according to these thinkers, is perhaps more apt for thinking through moral problems that arise involuntarily, because it has to do with “what kinds of failing or inadequacy are the source of the harms, and what those failings mean in the context of our own and other people’s lives” (94). Shame embodies “conceptions of what one is” and how one lives in community with others; it is, as Haggerty writes, a personal experience of appraisal where our character is evaluated (Haggerty 306). Where guilt involves a fear of punishment for an offending act, shame involves a fear of abandonment because of one’s failures of character (Ibid.). For this reason, Haggerty argues that shame should be brought back into the picture in efforts to shift white ignorance, since it has the power to shift character and habit formation.

On Williams’ definition, guilt is a juridical notion characteristic of modern morality that holds individuals accountable for wrongs willfully committed for which one owes reparations to a victim or “enforcer”. Many, however, have observed that guilt and shame are in fact quite difficult to distinguish in practice (Block Lewis, 1971; Rodogno, 2008; Harris et al. 2004). Psychoanalytic theorist Helen Block Lewis has noted that, given the difficulty of distinguishing the two, a helpful rudimentary conceptual distinction between guilt and shame could understand the experience of shame as “directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation”, whereas in guilt, the focus is “the things done”. In spite of much disagreement about how to measure guilt and shame as separate occurrences with differing associations, the dominant position in experimental psychology takes a version of Block Lewis’ definitions to hold.

47 The mainstream view in the psychology literature (as we will see) gives a similar definition to shame, but understands it to be debilitating for dialogue, since
Rodogno, in light of his synthesis of a wide selection of contradictory research on guilt and shame, provides the following definitions: In guilt, “one negatively appraises one’s behavior as transgressing a norm to which one adheres” (153). In shame, “one is in a distinctive emotional relation to oneself, which one appraises as globally negative. The self is appraised as degraded or worthless” (Rodogno 153). I am not, however, in a position to intervene in the debate on the delimitations of guilt and shame, and will likewise accept these dominant definitions in order to prioritize an analysis of how they function, with a focus on guilt in particular because of its assumed relationship to punishment and authority.

As we will find in the following sections, there is quite a lot more debate and disagreement on the functions played by guilt and shame, both politically and interpersonally. Though “white tears” may be interpreted as an instance of shame and not guilt, I will still maintain a focus on guilt for its connection to subsequent action and reparation. Shame, while it often occurs at the same time as guilt (see Tangney, 2007), is not “alleviated through behavioral reparations” in the way that guilt is. I am most interested in the role of guilt because shame—at least in psychology literature—is narrowly focused on negative self-concept, whereas guilt does have an action component either built into it (on some accounts), or resulting from it (on others).

While Bernard Williams, Daniel Haggerty and Raffaele Rodogno (among others) claim that shame can be productive, in the context of addressing racial bias (even indirect, well-intentioned racial bias like white tears), shame does not seem to show much promise of what psychologists call “approach motivation” to address bias. This is confirmed by both philosopher Linda Alcoff and sociologist Matthew Hughey, who both argue that “global” white shame that

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48 Guilt also allows for “dynamism” – an arc of action or transformation that some have called the “dynamic” account of guilt. While this may not be impossible for shame, accounts of “dynamic shame” are rare.
assumes white identity, whiteness, and white selves to be inherently supremacist, reproduces the very pattern of supremacy in the essentialist ways that it defines both race and identity. Hughey has conducted fascinating sociological research on the sociocultural similarities between white anti-racists and white nationalists in the United States, finding that both operate with similar assumptions about the role and definition of race. The white anti-racists Hughey observes are what Alcoff would call “left white exceptionalists”, who understand white people’s reproduction of structural racism to be incontrovertible, even in their activist work. In Hughey’s study, he found that the similarities between white anti-racists and right-wing white nationalists are their identification with a “disgraced” or beleaguered status as activists organizing around whiteness, a white savior complex, and identities based on “white debt” or loss of “white culture” that can only be redeemed through what Hughey calls “color capital”. I will not explore these in detail here, since Chapter 1 addressed the ways that white guilt and shame manifest through the avoidance behaviors of white ignorance. But Hughey’s work does show us the problem with white shame: that it takes whiteness as a whole to be so inherently problematic that it is unchangeable and impossible to shift through action. Perhaps guilt can circumvent the “globality” or incontrovertibility of white shame, for its relationship to action.

It should be obvious that shame, in addition to something felt by those who understand themselves to have committed a structural wrong, is also a felt response to social rejection, stereotype threat, and other emotional outcomes of those directly affected by structural racism. The analysis in this chapter will relate to some of the ways that that kind of shame arises from negative identity-attributions, but the issues of double-consciousness and bad faith as a result of
racialization processes are not the focus of this chapter\textsuperscript{49} (which is not to say that those feelings are not a constructive area to explore – but this project can only take on so much). I will, however, connect the affect of guilt, and some of its aspects that resemble shame, to social structures, as Shlomi Hatuka does in the poem that is this chapter’s second epigraph\textsuperscript{50}. The difficulty of making a clear distinction between guilt and shame will also be apparent in my analysis of how guilt should be taken up in addressing structural racism.

The next section will look at how some have thought of the role of the guilt – on its own as an emotional experience, and in the context of restorative justice processes – to show that this limited framework for analyzing guilt can only give us an incomplete picture of the way guilt functions in a political context.

3. The interpersonal function of guilt

If guilt focuses on a wrong suffered by another (a victim), or a rule violated in the eyes of a real or imagined enforcer, how should it be taken up interpersonally? “White tears” seem to be an example of when guilt and shame are not appropriate, or at least not in multiracial organizing contexts; they serve a negative function insofar as their expression reproduces the dynamics of

\textsuperscript{49} For an analysis of race, bad faith and double-consciousness see W.E.B Du Bois’ “The Souls of Black Folk”, Fanon’s \textit{Black Skin White Masks}, Lewis Gordon’s \textit{Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism}.

\textsuperscript{50} Both Linda Alcoff and sociologist Matthew Hughey have shown that white shame has negative political effects, and both argue that “global” white shame, that understands white identity or whiteness to be inherently supremacist, reproduces the very pattern of supremacy in the essentialist ways that it defines both race and identity. Hughey has conducted fascinating sociological research on the sociocultural similarities between white anti-racists and white nationalists in the United States, finding that both operate with similar assumptions about the role and definition of race. The white anti-racists Hughey observes are what Alcoff would call “left white exceptionalists”, who understand structural racism to be incontrovertible, even in their activist work to “shift” race relations by understanding whiteness. In Hughey’s study, similarities between white anti-racists and right-wing white nationalists are their being motivated by their “disgraced” or beleaguered status as politically active whites; that both groups seem to have a white savior complex, and that both groups maintain identities based on “white debt” or loss of “white culture” that can only be redeemed through what Hughey calls “color capital”. 
structural racism, making an (often unintentional) demand for emotional support and attention that ignores the other dynamics – and the others – in the room. Though there are different explanations and characterizations of white tears – socially inept insensitivity to structural dynamics, a desire to preserve innocence, a failed performance of solidarity, or simply an unmediated emotional reaction to the horrific manifestations of racism – I will focus on the role guilt plays: the social function of imagined punishment or sanction, or, recalling Rodogno’s definition, a negative appraisal of one’s behavior as “transgressing a norm to which one adheres”. Though available research on the role of guilt in restorative justice processes doesn’t take the dynamics of race or social position into account, I will briefly outline what some of the research shows, and the disagreement about these results, since I think it shows us where guilt is useful, and where it begins to fail without a better understanding of its structural context and the social positions that context creates. We will see, too, that the act that is the object of guilt will be important: while the expression of guilt for an identifiable, circumscribed action may serve a positive function, the expression of “chronic” guilt for a situation that an individual cannot resolve themselves does not.\(^{51}\)

Before we discuss what psychologists say about the function of guilt, though, I want to address an obvious point considered from the standpoint of someone wronged. The tendency, when we feel wronged by someone, is to want an acknowledgment from the person who wronged us, and an apology. I am of course not arguing against such a response. In some cases,

\(^{51}\) There are many examples of the inappropriateness of apologies and admissions of guilt in response to participation in genocidal acts. To cite an example from popular culture, in the 2008 film The Reader, the character Michael Berg, a German teenager in the 1950s, has an affair with an older woman, Hanna, who suddenly disappears. He later discovers that she was guilty of war crimes – and that her illiteracy contributed to her having committed the atrocities she committed. After her death, Berg seeks out a survivor of a massacre in which Hanna was an important participant. When he attempts to give the survivor Hanna’s life savings as a gesture of apology and recognition, Ilana, the survivor, tells him that he should go to the theater if he is seeking catharsis. His gesture of apology is not only inadequate; Ilana indicates that it is self-serving, and that she cannot absolve him of his feeling of guilt.
however – and especially cases of structural wrong, or cases where interpersonal interactions are strongly influenced by structural factors – this response can be problematic. This chapter takes its cue from those cases where expressions of guilt like apology are embedded in structural dynamics that prevent them from serving the straightforward function we might want them to have.

Why, then, take what might seem like a detour through research in experimental psychology? Because I take research in how guilt actually functions for individuals to be important to understanding how it should – or shouldn’t – be taken up or cultivated. This is not to say that the results of this research are definitive. Far from it: there has been much disagreement in experimental psychology about the definitions of guilt and shame, their degree of distinctness, and their respective associations, which means that there has been similar disagreement about the functions they should play in responding to a wrong.

Now, let’s have a look at what some of that research says about guilt. Some researchers emphasize the self-punishment function of guilt, while others emphasize its pro-social, reparatory function. Of the latter, some find that reparation only serves to “assuage doubts of one’s egalitarianism” (Dutton and Lennox, in Amodio, Devine, and Harmon-Jones, 524). Research on the interpersonal role of guilt seems to be divided between results that find guilt to have an inhibiting role, and results that find it to be “motivating” – results that are mirrored in the debate in philosophy over whether guilt is a paralyzing or politically motivating emotion that we saw above.

The traditional view, at least in studies of restorative justice processes, has been to understand guilt as more strongly related to “taking responsibility”. Those who are “guilt-prone” – and even those who feel guilt against their general tendencies – tend to focus on the “offending
behavior” and seem, according to this view, to be more motivated to “confess, apologize, or repair” (Rodogno, 156). Fisher and Exline’s study on remorse and forgiveness (2006) examined the role of guilt in “pro-social responses to transgressions” for those who have a general disposition to feel guilty, and for those who are guilty of a situation-specific transgression. Their results showed several interesting connections. The first is that taking responsibility for an offense “was clearly associated with self-directed negative emotion” involving both “remorse and self-condemnation” – an association that challenges the supposed distinction between guilt and shame as those terms were defined above (Ibid.). Only remorse, however, “predicted repentant behavior toward the offended party and humbling change” (Ibid.). Guilt, on this account, functions to produce repentance and humbling, which will in turn motivate apology and reparation. This is supported by Baumeister’s research that guilt functions to strengthen social bonds by “redistributing emotional distress” within a victim-transgressor dyad (Rodogno 157).

Rodogno, however, argues that we shouldn’t be so quick to rely on guilt to address interpersonal wrongs. Several researchers have shown that guilt in the context of a restorative justice process can elicit “counterproductive resentment” and “chronic guilt” – that is, guilt that becomes a disposition (Rodogno 167). In this respect guilt becomes difficult to dissociate from the paralyzing effects of shame. Additionally, Rodogno observes that research on the role of guilt in restorative justice processes tends to ignore some important factors: specificities of cultural context that may shift the role of guilt, and the particular relationship between the parties involved, which may determine whether guilt is “adaptive” or “maladaptive” (170).

52 Dean Spade, in Normal Life, gives an excellent and controversial critique of the “victim-perpetrator” model at work in discrimination law and rights discourses, which he takes to give support and credence to the punitive and racially motivated operations of the criminal justice system.
The context-dependence of the function of guilt seems to me to be an obvious point, as does the role of social position and the particularities of a given relationship. I will argue in the upcoming sections of this chapter that for the feeling of guilt to have a positive political function, it must take the particular dynamics of this context into account – dynamics which reference structural factors operative beyond the context of that particular interaction. While this point may seem simplistic, I will show that guilt is indexed to its political context in very particular ways that have implications for how it should be taken up in response to structural racism, both interpersonally and politically. The point of broadening the analysis to look at how guilt operates in politics and the law is to understand its limitations as a tool for political organizing. This analysis also aims to broaden the perspective so that white actors can understand expressions of guilt as a produced in part through social position, which persists both through the actions of individuals and through institutional policies, laws and social norms.

Before connecting guilt to its political context, however, I want to look at one last approach to guilt in experimental psychology. Recall that in this section, I have so far addressed two different approaches to guilt. One takes guilt to have a positive function insofar as it seems to lead people to take responsibility for their actions, apologize, and make reparations. Another view is less convinced that guilt has such predictable positive effects, taking it to share some of the inhibitions, paralysis, and avoidance associated with shame. Even more important to note is that Rodogno and several other researchers have found guilt to be effective only in cases where the “offending act” can be repaired by specific actions; but when there is no clear way to act differently in the future, guilt may manifest in ways that are no less paralyzing than shame. Guilt that has no place to be discharged does not, according to this research, have a positive interpersonal effect.
Does this mean, then, that guilt is an emotion to be abandoned? Another account of guilt – and of social emotions like it – can help mediate between these contradictory accounts of the interpersonal function of guilt, though I will contend that it is still not enough to address the kinds of circumstances that prompt white tears, and that even this function of guilt cannot be fully effective without reference to political structures. This third account holds that social emotions like guilt are “dynamic” rather than static. On this account, guilt functions in an “arc”, whereby “the experience of guilt is initially associated with the interruption of ongoing behavior and a reduction in approach tendencies in order to halt a transgression, survey the damage, and learn from mistakes” (Amodio, Devine, and Harmon-Jones, 525). Guilt, then, begins as an inhibiting emotion that paralyzes “offenders”; this is perhaps one way of characterizing the avoidance techniques at work in the reproduction of white ignorance described in Chapter 1. But on the dynamic account of guilt, guilt does not stay that way; it is a transitional affect.

In their experimental work on the role of guilt in motivating research subjects to change their behavior, Amodio, Devine and Harmon-Jones find that after this initial stage of inhibition, “the function of guilt then transforms to promote approach responses toward reparatory behaviors, aimed at making up for past transgressions and behaving more appropriately in future situations” (Amodio, Devine, Harmon-Jones, 525). In their study, white research subjects with “egalitarian views” were presented with faces, and then given “bogus results” of their own brain scans, some of which falsely indicated racial bias. The researchers were able to then test motivational responses by asking the research subjects which pieces of writing they would recommend be included in future studies. They found that research subjects who presented brain scan signs of guilt tended, after a period of downtime, to chose pieces of writing on topics like “unlearning racial bias”.

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The “active” response in the “second phase” of guilt proposed by Amodio, Devine, and Harmon-Jones’ study, however, is only “other-regarding” in the sense that subjects were motivated to educate themselves on how to shift their racial bias. But it is unclear whether their study implies that these same research subjects would shift their interpersonal behavior beyond knowledge acquisition. And we have already seen Rodogno’s skepticism about the role of guilt in face-to-face restorative justice processes – not to mention the critique of knowledge acquisition as a remedy for structural forms of ignorance in the first chapter of this dissertation. Self-education is not to be dismissed. But we did see in Chapter 1 that instances of structural ignorance like “white tears” require more than the acquisition of missing information. Guilt may be an important moment in the way actors become motivated to respond to structural ignorance, but it is, of course, not enough, and especially when an interpersonal interaction is indexed to structural dynamics (a connection that this chapter will explore in its subsequent sections).

Because of these different moments in the dynamic “arc” of guilt, Elise Springer has written that guilt “is not really a state at all, but an active path. Or rather, it is half of a path that is more or less jointly navigated by participants in a critical encounter” (Springer, 118). Springer comments directly on the particular “flavor” of guilt that tends to be experienced along with “persistent social justices”, and that is characterized by “paralysis and self-absorption” (120). Springer cites Marilyn Frye’s unnerving self-distrust when she is confronted with the claim that “her well-intentioned actions were racist”:

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 […]. If you want to be good, and you don’t know good from bad, you can’t move” (Frye, in Springer, 120-121).
Springer observes that while this, static, “freeze-frame” description of guilt is easy to fall into, especially in response to complicity with structural racism, “dynamic” understandings of guilt are those most likely to result in “a greater commitment or motivation to act once a suitable direction becomes clear” (121). The dynamic process is “stalled”, and actors paralyzed, when there seem to be no “viable paths of repair”. Guilt, according to Springer, can only “catalyze” a process when the disruption it produces leads to something more than introspection on the part of an individual. Springer observes that guilt itself is not the problem or the “counterproductive factor”. The problem is when guilt becomes consolidated into an “enduring state” where no “path of uptake” with others seems possible (122). The problem is an *overemphasis* on guilt, where guilt cannot be seen as part of a larger arc of *active* response.53

Springer’s account is consistent with psychological studies that take guilt to be simultaneously inhibiting and motivating. But in all of these accounts, the “uptake” stage may not belong to guilt at all. Guilt, on Springer’s account, is a kind of “somatic marker” that signals a dysfunction or marks a disruption in thinking: it calls attention to something wrong through embodied emotion. But when it lingers too long, it inhibits the “follow through” that the feeling calls for. Even its recognition as a “feeling” may “signal some stagnation of attention” that may be *too* inhibiting (123). Though guilt as a “somatic marker” may motivate action, “then what is called for in our receptivity to apt criticism is not the feeling of guilt itself, but a kind of further social participation that is potentially *facilitated* by the urgency of guilt” (123). The problem, for Springer, is that our “ordinary language concept of guilt does not distinguish between effective

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53 I argue in the following chapter that this responsiveness is active and qualitatively different from guilt on its own.
attention and stagnant discouragement”. Because of this, we should “be wary of assigning an essential role directly to guilt within exchanges of moral criticism” (123-124).

Most significant to my argument is Springer’s contention that a “fixation on producing guilt is particularly troublesome when background conditions make a concern seem especially opaque or intractable to whom it is addressed, or when the hearer of criticism faces a practically overwhelming set of concerns” (124). In the case of white tears, both of these seem to be true: background conditions have an important role in limiting the ways that guilt can help white people “carry forward” or follow through with what Springer calls “concern”, because their role, faced with a seemingly “intractable” situation, is unclear. Background conditions, too, produce an “overwhelming” set of concerns that well-meaning white actors may not know how to take up; they may feel paralyzed by the sheer totality of structural racism and unable to see any way to affect their circumstances or alleviate their discomfort with their own social position.

In light of the fact that guilt seems to be inadequate as a response to background conditions that seem to be beyond an individual’s control, Rodogno’s critique of the role of guilt, and of the “dynamic” account of guilt seen above, we can see that even the use of guilt as a mechanism in interpersonal interactions (like the interpersonal dynamics produced by white tears) leaves something to be desired. The feeling of guilt may “mark” where agents (and some institutions) have work to do, where they have made a mistake, or where they need to stop for a moment to reflect on how to move forward. While guilt cannot be avoided, I have shown that guilt may not be as “desirable” as the dominant view in restorative justice practice would have us think. This is because most studies about how guilt operates do not account for cultural and contextual differences in the role of guilt and shame (Wagatsuma and Rosett’s 1986 study of shame and guilt in the US and Japan is a notable exception). These studies likewise do not
account for social position and the particular relationship between both parties. Most importantly, the research on guilt – both research on dynamic guilt, and on the role of guilt in restorative justice processes – takes it for granted that one party committed an act that warrants a remorseful response and an apology. While this approach may be appropriate for some racially motivated micro-aggressions and interpersonal behaviors (and perhaps even some instances of white tears), accountability for such actions requires moving through and beyond both affective expression and apology and towards group action.

The function of guilt may, in some situations, be positive, in the sense of its being a “somatic marker”, as Springer has argued. But in cases where actors are responding to the “overwhelming concerns” of structural racism, any positive function of guilt depends on “some additional efforts at translating and contextualizing a concern so that it becomes an occasion for the hearer’s agency, rather than for its suppression” (Springer 124). And once agency is deployed as a response to guilt, it seems that we are talking about something else: responsibility. Springer’s “additional efforts” of contextualization, I will show in the next section, are an understanding of how the affect of guilt is tied to social position, and how it is informed by the uses and attributions of guilt and innocence in the context of structural racism. While guilt, apology and remorse may be appropriate in some discrete wrongs between individuals, responding to widespread racist norms like white ignorance demands more than guilt. This is because guilt itself – both its affective and attributive/legal dimensions – is indexed to those norms.

4. Indexing the affect of guilt to criminal justice policy
What reason do we have to relate guilt as an affect or feeling to the employment of guilt and punishment in the criminal justice system? I have argued so far that the function of guilt in responses to both instances of interpersonal racism (like micro-aggressions, unwittingly racist comments and behaviors, etc.) and institutionalized racism (white tears, which express shock and vulnerability in response to knowledge of structural racism) largely depends on the social position of the person feeling or cultivating the affect, and on the political circumstances that give a context for that affect. While that may seem obvious, there is little psychological research that directly explores the interpersonal dimensions of guilt while also taking race and social position into account. To undertake that research is obviously beyond the scope of this project, and my own scholarly expertise. But what I will do is connect the psychology literature reviewed in the last section to the literature on how guilt and innocence operate politically. Even if I will use an analytic distinction between the affective and the political registers, I will claim that there is a connection to be made between them – indeed, that they inform one another. Both perspectives – the affective and the political – must be taken into account in understanding the function guilt might play in confronting structural racism.

The central piece of evidence I will use in this section is data on punitiveness collected by The Sentencing Project. In its 2014 report on race and punitiveness, “Race and Punishment: Racial Perceptions of Crime and Support for Punitive Policies”, The Sentencing Project analyzed and explored the implications of research that shows that “white Americans who more strongly associate crime with people of color are more likely to support punitive criminal justice policies” (18). While this research does not focus on “guilty” white people, or the affective guilt experienced by white people themselves, it does demonstrate that there is in fact a connection between the desire to distance oneself from criminal guilt (or to preserve innocence) and the
paralysis associated with affective white guilt. This is the case insofar as the report shows a statistical tendency among US white people to adopt individualistic views of crime, poverty and life conditions, higher overt and non-overt racial prejudice, where both of these factors are strong predictors of punitiveness in general, and not just for behavior deemed “criminal” (see Ghandnoosh, 27). The report also serves to show that manifestations of guilt, like, but not limited to, white tears, happen against a political backdrop where legal guilt has been put to a particular racialized use. While political guilt and affective guilt are not the same, I will show in this and the following sections of this chapter that they cannot be dissociated.54 The inability to move beyond white tears – the paralysis that panics to regain innocence – is an affective phenomenon that is even better understood in its legal, political context. While I cannot make a claim as to which causes which, I will treat both registers – the affective and the political – as partners in the reproduction of white supremacist practices. I will add a new and important dimension here: that of punishment. I bring this into the analysis because it is an ingredient in the fear and panic associated with “white tears” – being a “bad” white person at risk of punishment.

Before I go on, I want to give a couple of disclaimers that respond to some anticipated (and real) issues the reader may have with my approach. The first is the risk of a problematic comparison of the affect of white guilt to the outcomes of a guilty verdict for those accused of

54 I am using the word “affect” here in the colloquial sense, though with the awareness that affect theory has given the word a much broader meaning than simply “emotion” or “feeling”. Affect, in the sense given to it by affect theorists Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg is “the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement and extension”. Affect is more than feeling – it can account for style and performativity, and theorists like Sara Ahmed have understood affect and affects to be “orientations” or dispositions that have political, social, and emotional valences, influences and effects. In this chapter, I am using affect to mean an emotional state, or the experience of an emotion – though I welcome more expansive interpretations of the word and the implications these interpretations may have for my analysis.
crimes. I want to dispel this: Those who feel guilty perhaps have the threat of punishment in mind, consciously or unconsciously. But I do not want to say that white guilt should be critiqued in the same way that we critique legal conceptions of guilt that are excessively punitive towards people of color. Rather, the case I am making is for an analysis that sees both of these as sites for the distortion of guilt that occurs under white supremacy. While they may not be the same, they are related: stagnant white guilt that cannot move forward, and the racist mobilization of legal guilt against communities of color, are part of a racialized economy of guilt and innocence that the remainder of this chapter will outline.

A second major challenge to my approach is that the research cited in the Sentencing Project report describes the views of those who associate crime with people of color, while my dissertation focuses more broadly on behaviors performed by white people who may have anti-racist commitments, but for whom the fear of guilt, or the affect of guilt, hinders the possibility of collaboration and collective action. So it needs to be said that these statistics may or may not address the same demographic. I am using the Sentencing Project data because I see it as an important contribution to the project of problematizing guilt, and because I do think it’s helpful in describing the political constellation of which guilt is a part. Studying how some white people think about guilt, innocence, and punishment can help us make normative claims about how those concepts should (or shouldn’t) be used. I want to reiterate, too, that I am not arguing that when white people feel guilty they are contributing directly to mass incarceration. But I do want to demonstrate some points of connection to show that fear of losing innocence is a symptom, or a part of the pattern, that deserves recognition.

So let’s turn now to the data gathered by the Sentencing Project. The studies most heavily cited by the 2014 report are those undertaken by Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz (2004), which
demonstrate the links between “racial perceptions of crime and punitive policy preferences” (Ghandnoosh, 18). In these studies, they found that “whites – though not blacks and Hispanics – who attributed higher proportions of violent crime, burglary, or robbery to blacks were significantly more likely” to have a preference for policies including “‘making sentencing more severe for all crimes,’ ‘executing more murderers,’ ‘making prisoners work on chain gangs,’ ‘taking away television and recreation privileges from prisoners’, and ‘locking up more juvenile offenders.’” (Ibid.) Strikingly, this relationship remained statistically significant even when the researchers controlled for other factors related to punitiveness including “racial prejudice, conservatism, crime salience, and residence in the South.” (Ibid.) A study undertaken in 2011 by Welch, Payne, Chiricos and Gertz found that whites who agreed that “African Americans pose a greater threat to public order and safety than other groups” were significantly more likely to hold punitive views than those who did not, and that this pattern did not hold for other groups. The same holds true for juvenile justice: when these researchers analyzed a 2010 survey, they found that racialized views of youth crime and victimization “led whites, but not blacks, to support punitive juvenile justice policies” (Ibid.). Significant to my project in this chapter, these researchers concluded after the latter study, and data on “Whites’ support for child saving” that “public support for punitive juvenile justice policies to some extent represents a desire to control other people’s children” (Ibid.) According to Ghandnoosh, the author of the Sentencing Project report, the “weight” of the evidence suggests that “people with racial associations of crime are more punitive regardless of whether they are overtly racially prejudiced”; which is to say that whiteness and racial associations with criminality were enough to predict punitiveness.\footnote{It should be noted that “alternative measures of racial perceptions of crime, or of punitiveness, suggest that overt prejudice plays a stronger role”. See Unnever and Cullen (2012), cited in Ghandnoosh (19).}
This is of course not to say that this association exists for all white people, or to say that whiteness is inherently associated with punitiveness. Whites are not a homogenous group, and, as Alcoff has argued in *The Future of Whiteness*, whiteness and its associations have changed, and are changeable (as is the case with other identities). We see this through the ways that associations with whiteness have become increasingly negative, in ways that may not have applied in the past. The current shape of whiteness is “uncool”: “It is not on the right side of history, and it is associated with many troubling dispositions, most importantly racism. If one doesn’t want to take the chauvinist route of defending whiteness against these charges, then why would anyone in their right mind want to be associated with whiteness?” (Alcoff, 2015, 8) Alcoff does not, however, support the view that all white people fit this stereotype – even if whiteness, like many other identity categories, has its roots in histories of domination, colonialism and slavery. There may seem to be good reasons to adopt the fatalistic view that “the main response of white people to a loss of majority status will be racism, fear, anger and violence” – as we have seen with the election of Donald Trump. “If white identity cannot be separated from this foundation in white racial dominance – if to avow one’s whiteness is to buy into the ideology – then whites who convert to an antiracist social view have no other option than to disavow their white identity” (Ibid.). This view is, of course, problematic on Alcoff’s account, and I agree with her: whiteness should not be “disavowed” as an anti-racist gesture.

Alcoff argues that statistical representations aside, identity categories, while real and often visible, are historically and contextually fluid, and that there are normative reasons to think of identities this way: in the case of white supremacy, the historical changeability of identity gives normative impetus to act through and on the circumstances that shape identity, rather than simply taking their fixity for granted, or as an excuse for passivity. Returning to the Sentencing
Project data, these studies do not show that all white people are punitive on account of their whiteness. They do, however, identify some statistical patterns, among which are some numbers that indicate that those who adopt punitive views are disproportionately white. While statistical representations do not give an accurate representation of every white person, they do tell us something. And I take their message to have normative significance.

The reasons given by the Sentencing Project report for why “white Americans are more punitive than blacks and Latinos” are that (1) “whites have fewer and more positive encounters with police and courts relative to racial minorities”\(^{57}\); (2) the harboring and expression of overt and less overt racial prejudice; and (3) white American’s greater likelihood to “attribute criminal behavior to individual failure, rather than to contextual causes” (Ghandnoosh 27). In the case of the second reason, while overt racial prejudice based on supposed biological characteristics has declined, “culturally”-based racial prejudice continues to influence the way whites think about economic disparities, for example. “The prevalence of lingering prejudices and the reluctance to acknowledge structural racism creates a schism for many whites between widely-held egalitarian principles and support for policies to address racial gaps” (30). A 2001 report, for example, showed that “the majority of whites attributed the black-white economic inequality during the late 1990s to individualistic factors such as the need for blacks to try harder or to have more motivation” (see Bobo, Charles, Krysan and Simmons, 2012). In a more recent 2008 study, when

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\(^{56}\) In fact, the Sentencing Project also cites data to show that there are wide discrepancies between what the public wants, and what policymakers think the public wants. There is a particularly stark divide in Pennsylvania, for example, where the policy options do not reflect the fact that over 80% of the public support investment in early intervention rather than prison construction (Ghandnoosh, 25).

\(^{57}\) In the case of racial disparities in experiences of the criminal justice system, the studies cited in the report indicate that police relied more on their own “discretion” to stop people of color. Among whites who were pulled over, “84% believed that the police had a legitimate reason for doing so, in contrast to 74% of Hispanics and 64% of blacks”. See Langton and Durose (2013) in Ghandnoosh.
white Americans were asked “whether the government has a special obligation to help improve
the living standards of African Americans because of longstanding discrimination, the majority
said no, with fewer than one in four saying yes” (Ghandnoosh, 31, see also Bobo et al., 2012).
These statements were strong predictors of punitiveness, which was found to be most prevalent
among white people.

Punitiveness was found to be strongly linked to an emphasis on the individualistic causes
of criminal behavior – agreeing, for example, that “people commit crime because they don’t care
about the rights of others or their responsibilities to society” or because they are lazy – over
structuralist explanations – agreeing that “people turn to crime because our society does not
guarantee that everyone has regular employment” or that “poverty and low income are
responsible for much of crime” (Ghandnoosh 31). We can see then, that frameworks of
responsibility that emphasize individualistic causes for social phenomena, are statistically tied to
whiteness and punitiveness, where both whiteness and individualistic explanations for crime
were predictors of punitiveness (both for punitive criminal justice policy, and for punitive
attitudes towards people of color).

But what do these statistics tell us about the function of white guilt, and the phenomenon
of white tears? Recall that the claim of this section is that the affect of guilt is indexed to the
political operation of guilt. While we haven’t yet made a comprehensive connection between the
guilt and shame white people may feel and express, and the statistical tendency for white
Americans to adopt punitive policies, there are some initial important connections to make. The
first is that both emphasize individual responsibility tied to moral status over structural factors;
the second is that both involve a form of othering that establishes innocence relative to a
racialized “other” (we saw with Accapadi’s description of white tears as a performance of white
While there is still more work to do to make the connection between white tears and femininity. While there is still more work to do to make the connection between white tears and a punitive society in which guilt and innocence are racialized, what the Sentencing Project report shows us is that there is an economy of guilt and innocence at work that operates on its racialized associations. The reason to take this seriously is that it gives us some information on the political backdrop against which guilt and innocence are used – a backdrop missing from much of the psychological research, which could only take us so far in understanding the normative role of guilt. When we take this backdrop into consideration – that is, the dominant force of punitiveness at work under circumstances of structural racism – then this will necessarily color the way we employ expressions of guilt in racial justice work, including conflict resolution in a racial justice context.

5. The political function of guilt and innocence

The last section showed that there is reason to link affective expressions of white guilt in response to structural racism to a system that racializes criminality, and therefore guilt and innocence, where overly punitive policies are made in connection with the punitive “preferences” of white constituents. While it would be nonsensical to claim that expressions of affective guilt and applications of criminal guilt cause one another directly, it cannot be denied that they are part of a moral economy of guilt and innocence that is operative in the US (and beyond). In the above section, we saw that white people were statistically more likely to attribute criminality to individual moral failings rather than structural factors, and to extend this moral framework beyond criminality – to educational and employment opportunities, for example. Again, this of course does not show that expressions of white guilt cause structural racism or the hyper criminalization and incarceration of people of color. But it does show that there is a
political backdrop against which expressions of affective guilt and innocence should be understood.

We saw that on the dynamic account of guilt, it can, at an initial stage, act as a “somatic marker” that signals that something is not right. This kind of guilt serves an important awareness function, since it indicates that a response is needed. But the role of guilt becomes significantly more complicated when it comes to structural wrongs that cannot be “righted” through the isolated actions of one individual. This is the kind of “chronic” guilt that is debilitating and that can act as an obstacle in racial justice work, and which, I have shown in Chapter 2, can be associated with a desire for moral purity or absolution and the preservation of innocence. This section looks at how guilt and innocence operate politically. It seeks to make clearer the background conditions against which guilt and innocence operate, and to look specifically at how punishment figures into the equation. I will do that in this section by looking at some literature in the philosophy of law on guilt and punishment – like Joel Feinberg’s now classic work, and Naomi Murakawa’s scholarship on innocence – in addition to some critical theoretical commentary on the relationship between “white innocence” and the racialization of guilt in the criminal punishment system.

In terms of this section’s relevance to the rest of this project, it serves to further support the notion that racial justice work can be undertaken from a position of “complicit responsibility” instead of innocence, and that this requires continual vigilance and negotiation, but that is more productive, more future-oriented, and more socially motivated than normative positions that require agents to imagine themselves individualistically and as morally “pure”. This dissertation rejects that position as further reproducing white supremacist knowledge practices and political structures. This chapter and this section serve to support ways of approaching activism and
interpersonal accountability that circumvent mechanisms of denial and disavowal, while also circumventing frameworks of responsibility that are centered on blame and guilt. The goal of this chapter is to outline the function of guilt in racial justice reckoning and activism – to look at what role guilt serves from both an interpersonal and political perspective. I claim that while these are different registers, a connection does obtain between them.

Because this section discusses philosophically rich and contested concepts like criminal guilt and punishment, I cannot continue without delimiting the scope of an admittedly ambitious project. First, this chapter cannot engage the psychoanalytic literature on punishment and guilt, or the Nietzschean or Hegelian accounts of guilt and punishment (among the many others). For an excellent critique of the latter three through a reading of Frederick Douglass, see Cynthia Willett’s “A Slave Narrative of Freedom” in her *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities* (1995). The substance of Willett’s critique is that Nietzsche, Hegel and psychoanalysis, each in their own way, disavow the social nature of oppression – the way that selfhood is constructed through the “othering” relationships at work in American slavery, for example. This is relevant to my work here, since I have also been arguing that dominant moral frameworks in philosophy and law reinforce white subjectivity as “innocent”, and that this cannot but happen relative to a guilty “other”\(^\text{58}\). While negative emotion in response to structural racism is warranted – white people *should* feel bad about structural racism – the paralysis of “chronic” guilt ignores the social, relational aspect of oppression, and misapplies an individualistic framework of responsibility to what is a structural phenomenon that demands a collective response.

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\(^{58}\) This othering is clear in the Sentencing Project report, which understands the statistics to show that empathy or identification with those who have contact with the criminal justice system is a predictor of less punitive attitudes.
This section uses some literature in the philosophy of law, and I want to address a natural question to ask at this point in the chapter: the relationship between morality and the law. There are several literatures on the relationship between philosophy, morality, and law, and it should be very obvious that I cannot accommodate those debates here. The reader is right to assume, however, that I am making an implicit claim about the relationship between morality and the law: that there is one, is I think, hard to contest. But justifications for what that relationship should be on a given issue is a question for future research, and cannot be addressed in depth here given the scope of this chapter. I do, however, assume that the role of moral norms is important for understanding the function of the law, as should be clear enough by now. I am, after all, linking the moral affect of guilt and its expression to the uses of legal guilt to trace a pattern of racialization that points us toward an alternative framework of responsibility.

So what, then, does the legal/political use of guilt tell us about how we should take guilt up in confronting structural racism? The next step in the analysis I am undertaking in this chapter is to look how guilt, innocence and punishment operate politically. The way I will do this is to first take a brief look at how the philosophy of law has understood the role of punishment and its relationship to guilt, as I think that this does quite a bit to show that conventional morality and the law do have a relationship of normative significance that warrants critique. I’ll then use Dilts’ and Murakawa’s respective work on innocence, criminalization and changes in the legal system to support the view that guilt has a political context that should be taken into account when seeking normative responses to structural racism.

5.1. Punishment and guilt

The racialization of legal guilt is well documented. In the wake of Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, there are now many best-selling books on the ways that punishment in the
United States is historically tied to slavery, the convict leasing system (which abolished slavery except for those “duly convicted of a crime”, as stated in the Thirteenth Amendment), and Jim Crow – not to mention how the drug wars and the punitive social assistance policies of the Clinton era are related to historical economic exploitation. While there has always been resistance to structural racism in the United States and its institutional manifestations, the last eight or so years have seen the increased visibility of critiques of the criminal justice system, and increased public expressions of moral outrage at the disproportionate punishment of people of color through incarceration and detention, police and parole practices, immigration law, etc.

What is less often discussed in the context of critiques of criminal punishment – because it is a slippery analysis to undertake – is its connection to social mores and collective affect. In this section, I want to look at some analyses of how guilt operates in the law in order to determine how guilt might be used in responding to structural racism. The reader should, by now, understand that I am arguing that affective guilt, while perhaps a desirable initial response, is both insufficient and perspectivally limited, and that a structural analysis of its political backdrop shows us why. This part of the chapter outlines some uses of the law that make white ignorance more permissible, while simultaneously racializing guilt.

Let’s return to the relationship between morality and the law. It is of course not the case that these are the same, and there are many strong arguments in political theory for why they should not be. However, there are reasons for such great debate among legal philosophers about

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59 This is to name only a few.

60 I am referring to the mainstream reception and visibility of such critiques in major news publications, television features, etc., and the increased visibility of prison reform and abolition movement work – work that existed before, but now has more airtime. There are, currently, several bipartisan prison reform initiatives that have had a good deal of visibility in the political media.
the relationship between moral and legal guilt, and one of those is that legal guilt has a moral dimension that cannot be avoided. Legal debates on punishment cannot but address that debate, even when they cannot make a definitive claim as to what relationship pertains between the two.

While there are many different approaches to punishment and its justification in the philosophy of law, one that is particularly useful for my purposes here is the view that punishment has what legal philosopher Joel Feinberg calls an “expressive” function. Feinberg defines punishment in opposition to what many have thought to be the “standard” definition of punishment: “the infliction of hard treatment by an authority on a person for his prior failing in some respect (usually an infraction of a rule or a command)” (Hart, 39). For Feinberg, this definition does not do justice to the “moral disquiet” punishment provokes, since it does not give us a way to distinguish between punishment and other kinds of penalties that are non-punitive, like fees for parking infractions, for example. What Feinberg takes to be particular about punishment is that it is an expression of “the community’s condemnation” (Feinberg, 593). While it may be widely acknowledged that punishment is an expression of “condemnation”, it is not normally thought that this is the substance, meaning and justification for of punishment. Many theorists, for instance, discuss punishment as having utilitarian value (“deterrence”), retributive or “reformative” value, which are often taken for granted in justifying current criminal justice policies. Feinberg, however, rejects these as constituting the nature and justification of punishment to show that what is most distinctive about criminal punishment is its symbolic, morally expressive value.

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61 This is only one strain of legal expressivism among several.
For Feinberg, punishment (as opposed to penalty) is a conventional device for the “expression of attitudes of resentment and indignation, and of judgments of disapproval and reprobation, either on the part of the punishing authority himself or of those ‘in whose name’ the punishment is inflicted” (Ibid.). As legal writer Henry M. Hart writes, the “physical hardship” often entailed by punishment is different from other kinds of physical hardship precisely because it is the “expression of the community’s hatred, fear, or contempt for the convict which alone characterizes physical hardship as punishment” (Hart 23). Feinberg argues that the other roles we might think definitional of punishment – like “disavowal”, “vindication of the law”, and “absolution of others” – are only made possible by the social disapproval or moral condemnation that is at the heart of punishment.

Feinberg’s definition of what constitutes punishment is important to my account because though he is not critical of the condemnatory function of punishment, he does go to some lengths to demonstrate that criminal punishment is primarily motivated by societal resentment – a theory that is supportive of my contention that there is a relationship between moral feeling and morality as expressed in the law. According to the expressionist position that Feinberg espouses, we are entitled to feelings of hate and vindictiveness towards criminals on moral grounds, and that the function of criminal justice policies is to guarantee that that expression happens in a “regular, public legal way”62 (Stephen, in Primoratz, 603).

Even more significant to my project here is that Feinberg shows that the distinction between civil penalties and punitive sanctions has been the subject of much constitutional debate, and that this is precisely because of the moral symbolism of punishment. In US law, the courts

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62 This is Primoratz’ characterization of James Fitzjames Stephen’s view of punishment. Stephen’s position has been described as “normative expressionism”.

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take it to be true that all criminal statutes are punitive – that is, punishment is what makes something a crime, not simply its label or categorization as “criminal” or subject to criminal laws. Though I cannot get into it here, there is a good deal of debate about “whether all statutes specifying sanctions are criminal statutes” (Feinberg 596). Because of this lack of clarity, in some cases there is room for ambiguity in deciding whether a case is “punitive” or merely “regulative”, and whether sanctions that would otherwise be deemed “criminal” can be applied to cases where hard treatment would “regulate an activity”. The consequence of this, as Feinberg has put it, is that legislators can, in these cases, “go outside the criminal law to do the criminal law’s job”, concealing punitive intent behind claims of “regulativeness”.

These transparent efforts to mask punitive intent on the part of judges, juries, lawyers, and other enforcers, are of real constitutional import. The reason I take them to be important, however, is because they show that the racialization of criminality through “borderline” cases that can be made more punitive through “broken windows policing”, to give only one example, does have broader social symbolism that should be analyzed and critiqued. While Feinberg and other legal expressionists do not necessarily condone physical hardship, they take punishment as an expression of condemnation to be necessary to the “healthy” functioning of society. I, however, am using normative expressionism in the law to show that the over-condemnation exercised by the criminal justice system on communities of color – if punishment is moral

63 An example of this cited by Feinberg is the 1961 New York State Legislature’s “Subversive Drivers Act”, requiring “suspension and revocation of the driver’s license of anyone who has been convicted, under the Smith Act, of advocating for the overthrow of the Federal government” – a bill “aimed primarily at Communist Benjamin Davis, who had only recently won a court fight to regain his driver’s license after his five year term in prison”. The bill’s sponsor claimed that this wasn’t punishment but that the legislature was simply “exercising its right to regulate automobile traffic in the interest of public safety” (Feinberg 597).
condemnation more than anything else – says something alarming about the moral function of guilt in society.

5.2. Guilt, innocence and political participation

I am not alone in making an argument that critiques the exclusionary, condemnatory function of punishment in the law, and in linking moral guilt and innocence to the legal and political practices that create both criminality and citizenship (see Manos, in Adelsberg, Guenther and Zeman, 2015; and Haney-Lopez, 2006). Andrew Dilts’ *Punishment and Inclusion* explains felon disenfranchisement by linking the hyper-punishment of people of color in the US to the creation of innocent citizens in contradistinction to them, where felon disenfranchisement is a “necessary failure” built into liberal theories of the state. I will use some of his work below in order to support the idea that legal guilt and innocence serve to manage the distribution of moral guilt and innocence, and that this political configuration should be taken into account in any reflection on the function of guilt and innocence in responding to structural racism – since such moral notions are also a product of structural racism, as we will see. To be innocent is to be a legitimate political agent, in contradistinction to those who are guilty, and therefore symbolically excluded from political participation.

Let’s begin this section on the innocence of political participation by looking at the way normative theory has framed punishment. Normative theory has traditionally approached punishment as a “necessary harm requiring specific justification” and subject to the limitation

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64 This chapter unfortunately cannot accommodate a deeper definition or analysis of the liberal tradition, republicanism, or social contract theory, or the philosophical controversies about their delimitations. Dilts’ work, however, gives an excellent account of the roots of excessive punishment in classical social contract theories (Locke, Rousseau, Kant, etc.), which he understands to have had constitutive influence on the development of political liberalism, alongside “civic republicanism” in the United States context.
that it “must not inflict more harm than is right, good, necessary, or prudent” (Dilts 11). Most theories of punishment – including retributivism, utilitarianism, liberalism, and most legal theory – hold that punishment must “fit the crime” rather than “the criminal” (even though some have shown that proportionality is difficult to establish, and therefore should not be the basis or foundation for punishment. For more on this, see Feinberg, 1995). And on most of these frameworks, felon disenfranchisement is in excess of their own justificatory requirements, not to mention the fact that it is difficult to justify as “fitting the crime”. Dilts shows that the “excess” of felon disenfranchisement – its disproportionality as a statutorily applied addition to a punitive sentence – is a symptom of larger patterns of racialized inclusion and exclusion at work in liberal states.

Most current legal theoretical literature on the problem of felon disenfranchisement – mostly restricted to legal analysis – draws primarily on social contract liberalism and civic republicanism, reducing the question of disenfranchisement to its unjustifiability “under some set of ideal conditions” (14). The focus in the former literature is whether felons should lose their rights for having violated the social contract. Dilts shows that this approach operates in concert with that of civic republicanism, which is primarily concerned with “whether criminal actions indicate that an offender is unworthy of the rights and responsibilities incumbent on citizens”: whether the offender poses a “danger” to the purity of the ballot box. What Dilts shows – and what makes his research so important to my argument – is that what unites social contract liberalism and civic republicanism is “a theory of the criminal subject as irredeemable and therefore unfit for political membership” (14). This is the perspective of what Dilts calls

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[65] See, for example, the ruling of Green v. Board of Election (1967), cited in Dilts: “A man who breaks the laws he has authorized his agent to make for his own governance could fairly have been thought to have abandoned the right
“liberal republicanism”, which has its basis in “the importance of individual virtue and moral character as the basis of a strong moral economy and stable polity” (Ibid., emphasis in the original).

Disenfranchisement is a particular kind of excessive punishment. But on Dilts’ account, disenfranchisement is not simply an anomaly, but a “productive failure”: liberalism “succeeds by failing the felon” (Dilts 16). What the history of disenfranchisement shows is that there is a relationship between punishment, innocence, and citizenship, where criminalization operates not only through legal penalties that ostensibly “fit the crime”, but through assessments of moral character that create productive exclusions both contrary, and fundamental to, liberal principles. For Dilts, the history of disenfranchisement in the United States shifts our perspective on the role of legal guilt. Instead of focusing on how excessive forms of criminal punishment in the United States are applied to particular racial groups “in violation of liberal norms of equality”, what we should be asking is, how does excessive punishment “help produce and manage the unstable and changing conception of this particular group?” (17). According to Dilts, the emergence of the felon in the history of US criminality “captures the intersection of theoretical discourses of punishment, law, identity, and race, ultimately revealing that the modern liberal state is formed and maintained through joint punishment and exclusion of some of its own members and is not simply an aberrant departure from liberal principles” (18). The excess of felon disenfranchisement –which is difficult to justify on most theories of punishment –is, for Dilts, “simultaneously integral to and violation of the logic of punishment. The project of the state is subsequently to manage this excessive character” (ibid.). And the state does this by “producing”

to participate in further administrating the compact” (14); see also Washington vs. State, 75 Alabama (1884): “The presumption is, that one rendered infamous by conviction of felony, or other base offense indicative of great moral turpitude, is unfit to exercise the privilege of suffrage” (Ibid.).
the felon *through* its exclusion from the polity while maintaining it within its “territorial and conceptual boundaries” (194). Dilts is clear that this “directly serves the interests of maintaining white supremacist notions of citizenship and does so through the application of a civic disability to some persons, deemed to be [morally] impaired, in order to mark those political members whose standing is beyond question, beyond reproach, and ultimately stable in their whiteness, their innocence, and their normality” (Ibid.).

What Dilts shows is that excessive punishments like felon disenfranchisement cease to be contrary to, or in violation of, liberal principles when we take into account that racial ascription is at the core of liberalism’s exclusionary nature, and is observable in its use of punishment to manage the boundaries of political membership. Important to my thesis is that this is done not only through overt exclusion (like the death penalty, deportation, etc.), “but also through punishment’s *production* or *fabrication* of the liberal subject” (20). In the US context, racialized exclusions that draw on assessments of moral character are constitutive of the very meaning of membership in the political body.

Let’s return now to the idea of guilt and innocence in the context of a larger moral economy, and the linkages that exist between affective guilt and criminal guilt. Given Dilts’ account of the creation of criminality through racialized exclusions that are built into the very operation of liberal states, what white guilt or white tears have in common with the application of criminal guilt is the view that wrongs – both criminal and moral – are irredeemable and render actors unfit for political action. When white guilt cannot move past its phase of inhibition, actors take their racial identities and social positions to be irredeemable, and to therefore delegitimize
their own political agency in response to structural racism.\textsuperscript{66} While the mechanism of disempowerment is evidently not the same, the model of criminal guilt enforced under the punishment paradigm is likewise expressive of the view that those who are guilty are deemed by the state to be unfit for political participation at all. What this describes is a moral economy of guilt and innocence that preserves a racialized status quo rooted in slavery and the convict leasing system. While \textit{criminal} guilt and the \textit{moral affect} of guilt are \textit{not} the same, an analysis of the political effects of punishment shows us that both have a role in the preservation of a punishment paradigm. Forms of guilt-centered white paralysis could be thought of as a desire to preserve one’s status as innocent by avoiding mistakes, the outcome of which is non-action. In tandem with this, excessive punishment through the criminal justice system serves to preserve that white innocence as the status quo requirement for political action, excluding those who do not meet it.

5.3. \textbf{The legal precedent for racial innocence}

In the previous section, we saw that white moral innocence and racialized criminal guilt in the US are rooted in the same moral economy, and that the consequences are limitations on political participation. This is especially the case for those who have had contact with the criminal punishment system through disenfranchisement, removal from their communities through confinement and incarceration, and limitations on access to housing, education and services. But it has consequences, too, for well-meaning [white] people who believe their racial

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{66} I will maintain some ambivalence with regard to the question of whether white racial identity in particular can serve a useful political purpose in the way that other identities have. I will make a claim similar to the one in this chapter on guilt that white identity should be acknowledged, taken up for both acceptance and critique, contextualized and historicized, always with a view to its structural destabilization. It should be said that this will involve some contradictions.}
identity to be incontrovertibly tied to the status quo, and who experience paralysis when faced with structural racism. I do not intend for these two kinds of political non-participation to be compared, or to be considered equivalent: they absolutely are not, since those who are paralyzed by guilt make a choice not to follow through, while those who are criminally punished are deprived externally from flourishing and participation. The point is obvious, but I want to be very careful not to be misunderstood by the reader on this point. I am arguing that moral guilt and criminal guilt are connected within a larger moral economy that informs how we might use guilt in responding to structural racism. I am obviously not arguing, however, that moral and affective guilt, and criminal guilt, are all equivalent.

Before I conclude with a discussion of the broader normative implications of the political and moral economy of guilt and innocence, and return to the analysis of guilt in restorative justice practices undertaken earlier in this chapter, I want to briefly discuss some legal-institutional mechanisms that reinforce the status-quo uses of guilt and innocence I have described through the work of legal scholar Naomi Murakawa. The reason I will do this is to give some legal evidence for the configuration I have described. But it is also meant to motivate the analysis in Chapter 4, which attempts to find normative ways around the misuses of guilt and innocence in the law and beyond.

Murakawa and Beckett, in “The Penology of Racial Innocence”, aim to show how a shift in legal institutions and legal practice has resulted in a racialized differential in the application of guilt and innocence. Their work addresses a paradox: “In antidiscrimination law and the conventional wisdom of many whites, racism is waning, aberrant, and located in the bad intentions of individual actors. Yet in the lives of many people of color, criminal justice is expanding, commonplace, and located in systemwide penal policies and practices that are
irreducible to bad individuals with evil intent” (Murakawa and Beckett, 696). They explain this paradox through what they call “the penology of racial innocence”, which they define as “a framework for assessing the role of race in penal policies and institutions, one that begins with the presumption that criminal justice is innocent of racial power until proven otherwise” (695). Their goal is to reveal the ways that the law has, increasingly, erased the role of race in the study and practice of punishment, and that the outcome is increased guilt for those who have contact with the criminal punishment system, and decreased guilt for those accused of racial discrimination.

The purpose of including Murakawa and Beckett here is to give an example of the way that guilt and innocence are racially constructed through legal policy and practice. On their account, guilt and innocence have been shaped by two divergent tendencies: the contraction of the definition of guilt in anti-discrimination law, and the simultaneous expansion of the definition of crime. The focus of Murakawa and Beckett’s piece are the two hypocritical divergences at work in “racial intent” and “racial causation”. In the case of the first, “as anti-discrimination law has developed to demand proof of intent to discriminate on the part of specific and identifiable persons, criminal justice has expanded in ways that further obscure individual intentions” (696). Anti-discrimination law, they show, is built in such as way as to preserve the innocence of the party accused of discrimination by enforcing a stringent definition of “racial intent” whereby only “intentional” discrimination is prohibited by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (see Washington v. Davis, 1976), and “discriminatory

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67 See also Jackie Wang’s “Against Innocence” in L.I.E.S. Feminist Journal, which uses the case of Trayvon Martin to discuss the requirement for racial justice causes to represent innocence and to avoid representations of guilt. Her piece looks at the way that this amounts to a kind of respectability politics that preserves white innocence. See also Gloria Wekker’s White Innocence, which looks at the avoidance of white accountability, and state accountability, for institutionalized anti-black racism in the Netherlands.
“purpose” implies “more than awareness of consequences; it implies decisionmaking for the purpose of discrimination” (*McClesky v. Kemp* (1987), in Murakawa and Beckett, 702). A legal emphasis on “intention to act according to racial bias” has, according to the authors, been a “significant barrier to changing criminal justice practices and policies that produce racially disparate outcomes” (Ibid.). This obscures the role of both systemic, structural factors that may motivate racial discrimination, and of implicit racial bias, which does not operate entirely purposefully. Simultaneous to this, an expansion of “discretionary power” for those who work in the criminal justice system, and for the system itself, render officer intent “largely unassailable; the proliferation of mandatory minimum statutes and sentencing guidelines displaces discretion from judges to prosecutor’ offices […]; and expanded administrative control means that decisions to revoke parole and incarcerate violators are increasingly common and largely inscrutable” (696). The criminal justice system, in its administrative expansion, also allows for increased unaccountability.

The second hypocritical divergence discussed by Murakawa and Beckett is the role of causality. As they write: “As antidiscrimination law has developed to demand the disaggregation of decision-making points in order to identify ‘biased’ actions occurring in a single moment, definitions of crime, criminal justice institutions, and discretionary authority have expanded, producing complex causal webs of racial inequality that compound over longer time horizons” (697). According to them, this search for racial causation according to a model whereby racial discrimination occurs in a single moment “sustains racial innocence” – both of the criminal justice system itself, and of those who may reproduce discriminatory or racist patterns.
Both of these “divergences” limit our understanding of the racialized operation of punishment, both in policy and in social science. The implication for Murakawa and Beckett is a need to show how it is that processes and policies thought to be race-neutral are in fact racialized. But Murakawa and Beckett’s demonstration of how guilt and innocence operate against a structural backdrop also supports the connection between affective, moral guilt and criminal guilt. This is because they describe a tendency in antidiscrimination law that cannot but have an effect on social behavior: the tendency to restrict legal responsibility for racist behavior to purposeful, intentional, strictly causal acts of racial discrimination. Murakawa and Beckett argue that this contraction of responsibility for racial discrimination obscures the racial motivations behind punitive policies and practices. I am arguing that along with that, the focus on intent and causality in antidiscrimination law shows us that white innocence is embedded in the law, and that this creates a precedent for social behavior that serves to preserve that innocence. Murakawa and Beckett show that a strong emphasis on restrictive notions of “racial intent” and “racial causality” contribute not only to a “penology of racial innocence” where individuals and members of groups can remain unaccountable, but to a moral economy of guilt and innocence where expressions of “guilt” can be employed, paradoxically, to preserve white innocence. Though the relationship between social norms and the law is much too complex to account for here, the thinkers we have seen in the last sections show that the connection between moral, affective guilt and innocence and criminal guilt and innocence cannot be denied.

6. Conclusion: Normative Implications

Murakawa and Beckett also show how social science research on crime and punishment tends to reproduce these “divergences” in intention and causality.
This chapter argued that affective expressions of guilt play an important role in situations where guilt can be discharged through a specific action associated with the harmful act. But even in such cases, guilt should be understood as part of a “dynamic” arc or process, where it spurs other-regarding action beyond self-reflection or knowledge-acquisition. I showed that not only is an over-emphasis on guilt counterproductive in interpersonal interaction, it tends to have a distorted role in wrongs motivated by structural racism or racial bias, and must be understood against the backdrop of structural racism. It was for that reason that I made some connections between the racialization of punitiveness, attributions of criminal guilt, racialized delimitations on political participation, and the preservation of white innocence through anti-discrimination law. My goal was to show that there is a legal precedent for the anxiety to preserve innocence that is, arguably, related to displays of “white tears”. Rather than adopt the absurd conclusion that guilt should be abandoned, however, I argued against an overemphasis on guilt that paralyses action, takes white supremacy for granted, and serves to preserve white innocence that, in its legal manifestations, has dire consequences for communities of color who are disproportionately punished relative to the innocence of those accused of racial discrimination (see Murakawa).

We saw in the analysis of the Sentencing Project results that this configuration has its roots in individualistic understandings of poverty, underemployment, lack of education and crime – a conclusion supported by Murakawa and Beckett’s contention that responsibility for racial discrimination and bias have become increasingly tied to specific, isolated, causal acts on the part of individuals whose deliberate “racial intent” must be shown in order for the act to qualify as racially discriminatory. In both cases, responsibility for racially biased acts or policies rests on those who can be said to have both caused and intended the consequences of a racially
biased act. At work in this legalistic description of racially motivated harm is an individualistic definition of responsibility that is inadequate for responding to wrongs of a structural nature. This does not mean that individuals should not be held accountable as individuals. The phenomenon of white tears shows us, however, that individuals should cultivate an understanding of how their affective and political responses operate against a backdrop where legal policies and practices favor white innocence – as we saw through the description of mechanisms like felon disenfranchisment and antidiscrimination law.

The implications of the complicated relationship between affective guilt and criminal guilt that we saw in this chapter are legal, political and moral. The social science data we saw that found whiteness to predict punitiveness, along with Murakawa and Beckett’s descriptions of narrow antidiscrimination laws paired with “penal innocence”, show that questions of racial justice necessarily imply widespread legal reform. We saw with Feinberg’s work on the expressive function of punishment, and Dilts’ critique of the limiting of political participation through criminality, that there is a need not just for some laws to be modified, but for a major paradigm shift that de-emphasizes guilt and punishment in favor of political repair.

Though I can only gesture towards it here, this chapter suggests that guilt can help us only where it is part of a broader transformative process. While some may say that this is what restorative justice processes are meant to do, I have argued in this chapter, by using psychology research on restorative justice processes, that these processes must, if they are dealing with questions related to structural racism, move beyond attributions of individual guilt to collective accountability. What this chapter also shows is that in addition to a widespread overhaul in criminal justice law and in antidiscrimination law, there is a need for organized responses to harm outside the current criminal justice system – outside of initiatives like recent projects to
develop “community policing” by the police force that perpetuate racialized punishment. As activist scholar Mariame Kaba has reported on such an initiative in Chicago,

It turns out that a big part of what people are talking about is how to push people out of the community. It’s basically to figure out ways to ostracize and evict people from the neighborhood. Not to bring them in and to ask them, “If you are doing x, y, and z that we find undesirable, why are you doing that, and what can we do to mitigate that? What can we do to support you in a different way so that you don’t go down this road?” No, it’s basically that CAPS becomes the community-based counterinsurgency arm of the police in our communities. 69

Restorative justice processes, according to Kaba, are valuable in moving beyond the punitiveness of victim-perpetrator dyads. But they are not synonymous to transformative justice processes. Restorative justice, for Kaba, is appropriate for grievances between individuals where community involvement is helpful, and where the preexisting relationships between the parties involved allow for repair. Restorative justice takes place at the level of individuals, in a community context, but does not address the forces that structure that context, or that may have created the dynamics at work in a particular community. For Kaba, “individual relationships occur within larger constructs, and there are larger forces that impact our lives, which structure our relationships and our institutions. And so, you have to also fight in a collective way against those forces of oppression”. That collective work is that of transformative justice – justice that goes beyond attributions of individual guilt and innocence and their accompanying punishments or rewards.

According to Kaba, transformative justice says that, yes, we’ve got to have these individual-level projects and individual-level attempts to address interpersonal harm, but that we’ll never be able to solve those personal harms without also doing the macro work, because these things are

69 From an interview with the publication Lumpen. Kaba goes on to say that those most in favor of community policing initiatives of this kind are homeowners and new arrivals who want the police to “basically do the work they don’t want to do”.

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reinforcing of each other. Because you can’t think about gun violence in a city like Chicago— which is a form of interpersonal violence— you can’t separate that from the structural reasons this is happening in particular communities and why it happens less in other communities. So transformative justice asks you to marry macro level organizing and analysis of oppression, to doing the work that you need to be doing on the ground on an individual level.

I’m arguing along with Kaba that our approach to structural racism should operate at these two registers. And in both of them, we should be vigilant with respect to the role played by expressions of affective guilt, understanding the way they operate against the backdrop of a legal, political and moral economy of guilt and innocence shaped by white supremacy. The moral implication of my account is that responses to structural racism demand a form of accountability that moves beyond guilt and into collective action. That responsibility must understand and build relationships between community members, and between communities, rather than focusing on strict definitions of individual intent. For this to happen, we need a notion of responsibility that must move beyond the individualism of the punishment paradigm, without leaving individuals off the hook for structural racism.

The arguments in this chapter support that alternative model of responsibility. They motivate the notion that racial justice work can be undertaken from a position of “complicit responsibility” instead of innocence – a position the next chapter will justify. While this model of responsibility requires continual vigilance and negotiation, it is more productive, more future-oriented, and more socially motivated than normative positions that require agents to imagine themselves individualistically and as morally “pure”. I’m rejecting that position as further reproducing white supremacist knowledge practices and political structures. This chapter serves to support ways of approaching activism and interpersonal accountability that circumvent mechanisms of denial and disavowal, moving beyond frameworks of responsibility that are centered on blame and guilt.
This chapter motivates a move beyond affective guilt so that it can be integrated into a process of active accountability no longer characterized as guilt per se. The next chapter will explore a notion of responsibility that de-emphasizes guilt in order to bolster the kind of agency required to change the status quo moral economy, where paralyzing guilty affect is linked to larger legal and structural dynamics that reinforce non-action and paralysis on the part white actors, and limitations for the political participation of communities of color. The next chapter will continue to develop a critique of a problematic conception of racial identity, which I take to contribute to white paralysis and racialized criminal guilt alike. In my critique, I follow Alcoff’s critique of the incontrovertibility of racial identity categories to argue that identities – white and otherwise – must be thought of as both real and changeable. Through that notion of identity, I argue for a concept of “complicit” responsibility rather than responsibility based on guilt, innocence and liability.
Chapter 4: Complicit Responsibility
This chapter argues that responsibility for structural forms of ignorance like white ignorance should be understood as complicit with socio-political structures, rather than disavowing its connection to them. This is to avoid reproducing punitive, guilt-based models that can be instrumentalized by dominant knowers\(^70\) to engage in avoidant or distancing behavior – to avoid taking responsibility, in other words, as we saw in the first two chapters of this dissertation. Arguing for complicity and against guilt\(^71\) is also a way to avoid the systemic use of punitive models for political responsibility that re-center the epistemic agency of dominant knowers, focusing the inquiry on ideal ways of being a dominant knower – which, in the case of white ignorance, amounts to a problematic focus on ideal ways of being white. We saw, too, in Chapter 3, that this also has tragic effects in its establishment of a moral economy of guilt and innocence that disproportionatelypunishes people of color.

While it seems evident that dominant knowers should have responsibility for structural ignorance – white knowers, for instance, should be responsible for recognizing and responding to white ignorance – that responsibility should take on the structures that valorize whiteness as epistemically and politically dominant. The basis for that responsibility is what is at issue in this chapter. I show that the way we justify complicit responsibility for white ignorance has an effect on the way political responsibility is practiced.

Dominant moral and legal approaches to responsibility understand it to be attributable to individuals who themselves commit wrongs. Wrongs like structural ignorance, however, are the

\(^{70}\) I am using the term “dominant knowers” as shorthand for those whose locations put them in a position of social dominance and power relative to others. I will, later in this chapter, problematize the idea that “dominant” or “non-dominant” or “oppressed” groups are monolithic, that identities themselves are monolithic. This chapter, too, will problematize the simplistic “privilege” account of racial identity.

\(^{71}\) Against some forms of guilt, or against guilt as the central criterion in determining responsibility. See Chapter 3.
result of the cumulative actions of institutions, social norms, and habits that have become normalized, and that play out through social position. We saw in Chapters 2 and 3 that guilt-motivated responses to less straightforward instances of white ignorance can reproduce a guilt/innocence binary that privileges white moral absolution and reproduces epistemic narcissism. In some cases, as we saw in Chapter 3, guilt and shame can be important in motivating the political education of dominant knowers. Additionally, there is no necessary connection between guilt and white solipsism or the “need not to know” described in Chapter 2. Some, like Gaile Pohlhaus and Miranda Fricker, have argued that a phenomenon like white ignorance is indeed “culpable” and both epistemically and ethically blameworthy, and there is an argument to be made for such blameworthiness. It is clear, however, as we saw in Chapter 3, that the racialization of the guilt/innocence distinction emerges from historical patterns of structural racism that distort the way we use those concepts, both in morality and the law. While guilt may not in itself be the problem, it cannot be denied that guilt and blame are taken up in epistemically damaging ways under circumstances of structural racism – for both dominant and marginalized knowers. For these reasons, we should find alternative justifications for political responsibility.

Structural wrongs occur not necessarily because individuals caused or intended them, but because their actions and ways of knowing are undertaken under oppressive conditions that effect their ability to understand their role within structures of oppression, and to respond to that understanding. Miranda Fricker has called the phenomenon whereby structural conditions limit the capacity to know and be known – that limit us in our capacity as knowers – hermeneutical

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72 See Fricker’s 2013 reply to Jose Medina on the subject of white ignorance as an instance of hermeneutical injustice.
and testimonial injustice, where hermeneutical injustice results in “gaps” in collective meanings and interpretations of the world (including what knowers can know about themselves), and testimonial injustice denies credibility to certain knowers by virtue of their social position. Because dominant knowers operate under oppressive conditions, many hold that they are not technically “to blame” for the epistemological injustices associated with white ignorance, habits adopted in part because of homogenous social groups, institutional norms, racialized uses of the law, etc. This has led thinkers like Barbara Applebaum to replace the model that attributes blame to individuals – which I will call the “liability model” – with an alternative model that understands individuals to be complicit without being liable or “to blame”. This chapter takes up that hypothesis: that knowers can be *complicitly responsible* without being guilty.

To de-emphasize guilt and call attention to the racialization of moral concepts is certainly not to say that there can be no normative frame of reference for epistemological injustices, or that such injustices are not wrong. On the contrary, I will argue throughout this project that there are concrete moral imperatives for shifting racist knowledge patterns and the self-conceptions tied to them, though the way they are carried out is contentious and fallibilistic. That is why this chapter will show that knowers must acknowledge their own complicity in social structures with

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73 Fricker herself does not think that white ignorance is a case of hermeneutical injustice, since white people do not suffer from it, and because cases of hermeneutical injustice are “epistemically non-culpable”, whereas for Fricker, white ignorance is epistemically culpable as “a certain kind of individual or collective motivated cognitive bias in what evidence and/or social interpretations relatively privileged groups attend to and/or integrate into the rest of their beliefs and deliberations—specifically applied to the context of the USA it names the motivated bias on the part of white citizens taken as a group that leaves them ‘ignorant’ (in this special sense) of the situation of black citizens taken as a group” (Fricker 2013). In the disagreement between Fricker and Medina, I agree with Medina’s assessment that white ignorance is ideologically motivated, and that while it is always epistemically wrong, it is not always blameworthy or isolatable to the actions of an identifiable individual. Medina’s account leaves more room to understand the systemic dimension of white ignorance.

74 I am not here using “liability model” to refer to the notion of “strict liability” in the law. I simply mean “liability” to refer to individual responsibility with guilt for the committed acts as its basis.
a view to acquiring *better* understandings of their own social positions with respect to those structures, so that they can *better* carry out their epistemic responsibilities.\(^7^5\)

I do think, then, that when it comes to taking responsibility for structural ignorance, an acknowledgement of complicity is the only place to start. There is, however, a problem with Applebaum’s account of complicit responsibility, which I will discuss in this chapter. That problem is that Applebaum misunderstands the basis for complicity because of her adoption of an “anti-realist” notion of agency. For Applebaum, complicity derives from membership in whiteness to which white knowers are subject in the Butlerian sense: selves are unstable and discursively formed, and are therefore not strictly liable for some behaviors that are more performative than they are intentional or “causal”. This instability applies both to our status as agents, and to the ways we choose to discharge our agency – a distinction that, I show, Applebaum does not adequately account for.

While her position is problematic in some respects, Applebaum does have good reasons to elaborate a theoretical account of epistemic responsibility that questions the role of direct causal contribution to structural wrong. She claims, first of all, that an account that emphasizes complicity is much more pedagogically effective than “white privilege pedagogy”, which on her view is not relational enough. It is clear, too, that Applebaum is interested to hold white people accountable for structural racism as a matter of political expediency. I will show, however, that without an account of complex social position and realist agency, Applebaum’s complicit responsibility is paralyzing, and the notion of “complicity” merely negative, or negative-
connoting. Grounding complicit responsibility on Butlerian agency does not give actors enough incentive to act both on and through their complicity.

The goal of this chapter is to make the case for a kind of complicit responsibility that takes identities to be frameworks for interpreting the world and understanding one’s place within oppressive structures, and for acting on those interpretations and understandings. Following Iris Young, Jose Medina and Ernesto Javier Martinez, I will argue for a notion of complicit responsibility that moves beyond Applebaum’s by taking relationality, complex social position, and realist identity as its basis, rather than a single group membership. The consequence of a politically functional notion of complicity will be a notion of agency that is “impure”, and a kind of responsibility that may – depending on one’s social position – result in an unsettling of (white) identity rather than a search for the “right way to be white” (a result Applebaum also aims for, but has difficulty justifying for reasons I will elaborate in what follows).

Martínez’ work in On Making Sense: Queer Race Narratives of Intelligibility, shows that taking responsibility for oneself under oppression can involve significant risk to one’s self-conception and self-identification. I take this to be entirely consistent with the idea of abandoning the moral capital that accompanies the identity of “white ally”, for instance – a view Applebaum shares but cannot adequately support with a Butlerian notion of agency. Responding to Applebaum’s notion of complicit responsibility in this chapter will prepare the ground for the following chapter, where I will outline a form of “complicit resistance” to oppressive structures. This chapter, however, will focus on identifying what is wrong with notions of complicity based on group membership in whiteness that take anti-realist notions of agency for granted. I follow Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Moya and Martinez’ critique of anti-realist notions of identity on the grounds that group membership can reference and illuminate aspects of the social world, but that
we need certain forms of awareness about the place of a particular identity within oppressive systems, and that this awareness may require the selective unraveling of dominant identities like “white”. It is not “denial”, but the impurity and indeterminacy that result from this awareness that create “cognitive affective” registers that have “liberatory potential” (Martinez 71).  

This chapter argues that responsibility for structural ignorance must be “complicit”, but that that complicity must motivate knowers to risk those very identities in action. For these stakes to apply, group membership cannot be understood through a Butlerian model. I show this by first describing Applebaum’s white complicity pedagogy and outlining its advantages. I then support her critique by following her redefinition of “complicity” as non-liability-based. I show that what her account gets right is its commitment to a definition of complicity that has a structural and non-individualistic orientation, and that is critical of a single or central focus on causal contribution, intention and attitude. I will then review some literature on complicity to support the idea that we should think of responsibility as “complicit” rather than “liable”, and to show why complicit responsibility can help us address structural wrongs like white ignorance. I show, through this review of concepts of complicity, that individualistic, legalistic models are limited when it comes to addressing structural racism. I then identify some problems in Applebaum’s argument and in the consequences her account has for moral and epistemic agency. I show (1) that her account needs a more robust notion of social connection and relationality with others; (2) that it conflates two different kinds of responsibility in a way that creates barriers to future-oriented action; and (3) that it simplifies whiteness as a social position in a way that inadvertently reproduces a version of ally politics that is more passive than Applebaum’s stated

76 Impure agency and complicit resistance will be the subject of Chapter 4
intentions want it to be. I show that these problems arise from an anti-realist notion of agency that turns out to be inadequate for actively responding to structural wrongs. The chapter then uses the work of Iris Young, Ernesto Javier Martinez and others to formulate a kind of complicit responsibility that takes complex, substantive social positions and relations into account.

1. Applebaum’s argument for “white complicity pedagogy”

Applebaum’s *Being Good, Being White* argues for a model that takes agents to responsible without being “liable” – a framework that holds agents accountable without relying on attributions of guilt and innocence. Applebaum asks: “What understanding of moral responsibility can be attributed to white individuals who may have no clear causal connection to a wrong and who might not even recognize the wrong because it is so normalized that its moral relevance is obscured?” (Applebaum 120) The context for Applebaum’s question is her project to ground the claim that

*all* white people are complicit in sustaining systematic injustice not because they have a direct causal link to the harms of racial injustice, not because they have particular bad intentions or bad attitudes against those who are not white, but by virtue of being a member of a social group that benefits from such systemic injustices” (Ibid.).

There are, evidently, dimensions of white ignorance that *do* involve “bad attitudes” (even if un-self-aware) that are expressed in the form of micro-aggressions and racial bias, and that do have a direct causal effect on who gets hired, listened to, educated, incarcerated or murdered by law enforcement. In this light, it may seem to be in bad faith, or too “soft”, to claim that white

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77 Several studies conducted in 2015 (including one undertaken at Harvard) showed that the overall number of white people killed by police was higher than the number of black people killed by police. In 2015, The Washington Post launched a real-time database to track fatal police shootings, and as of mid-July 2016, “1,502 people have been shot
complicity is “indirect”, “non-causal” or unintentional. What Applebaum is attempting to address here, however, are forms of cognitive bias that are, in large part, “caused” or greatly influenced by structurally racist background conditions that have been normalized by social practices and the law, and that create the circumstances for knowledge and action. Applebaum, who is a philosopher and professor of education, is concerned to find techniques to get her (mostly white) students – who will soon teach in classrooms of mostly non-white students – to understand themselves as accountable and politically responsible for those background conditions from which many of them benefit. She is, in other words, trying to connect students’ cognitive bias to larger historical and de-personalized forms of racism that individuals are not themselves responsible for having caused, but that influence their behavior in important ways not transparent to themselves. I will show in my exposition of Applebaum’s account that, despite some philosophical problems, the argument for complicity is an important one to pursue.

Let’s begin with Applebaum’s argument. Applebaum’s book focuses on racialized dynamics in the classroom, and its goal is to support a form of “white complicity pedagogy” that is meant to get past white teachers’ and students’ unwitting denials and distancing techniques. She makes her argument first by connecting the fear of moral taint she observes among teachers and white students to a liberal, individualistic moral framework premised on moral rectitude and...
superiority rather than on listening, receptivity and honest exchange (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Applebaum’s concern is to develop a pedagogy that helps “white students understand that white moral standing is one of the ways that whites benefit from the system” (Applebaum 4). Preserving white moral innocence is not possible because it wrongly assumes that one can transcend the structures that create whiteness as a social position. Applebaum’s goal, given the impossibility for individuals to transcend structures of racial domination, is to “support the possibility for white people in the context of white complicity to act in ethically responsible ways” that mitigate or reduce the harm of white normativity (5).

Applebaum begins by arguing for “complicity pedagogy” to replace “white privilege pedagogy”. She takes classroom discussions of privilege – often, in the United States, prompted by a narrow reading of Peggy McIntosh’s essay on the “invisible knapsack” – to encourage a focus on “white confessionals” and to lead to an “individualistic psychologizing of privilege” (31). Such a strong emphasis on personal awareness, Applebaum argues, “overshadows the need for understanding and challenging the system of power that supports white privilege”, and allows students to assume that responsibility “begins and ends with awareness” (Ibid.). When read simplistically, as it often is, the knapsack metaphor – that one carries an invisible knapsack of structural privileges that one is not immediately aware of – de-emphasizes the relational nature of privilege, and encourages the notion that individuals can divest themselves of that privilege by simply making themselves aware of their “knapsack” or baggage.

Applebaum is not alone in this view. Critical race and education theorist Zeus Leonardo has also critiqued white privilege pedagogy as too “passive”, ignoring the active ways that white people appropriate the resources of people of color around the world (33, see also Zeus Leonardo, “The Color of Supremacy”). An understanding of privilege as passive, then,
“ironically works to protect white innocence rather than challenge white supremacy”. Applebaum argues instead for a pedagogy that links whiteness to benefit rather than privilege, because the notion of “benefit” stresses the structural relationships of domination that benefit some at the expense of others. As Leonardo writes, focusing on one’s “position” within white supremacy rather than one’s individual privilege “involves being less concerned about ‘the issue of unearned advantages, of the state of being dominant, and more around the direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it’” (Leonardo, in Applebaum 33).

The benefit to which Applebaum refers is twofold: in the first instance, it is the material, psychological and epistemological benefit that white people derive from their position in white supremacy. But it is also the benefit of being protected from critique and moral taint that is the result of white ignorance and denial. For Applebaum, this is to say that to “benefit from” the protection from moral taint results in a contribution to white supremacist practices. Though Applebaum does write that she has found it just as challenging to get her students to accept “benefitting from” as she has found it to get them to accept “privilege”, she argues that this is a direction that has the potential to help white students understand systems of unfair advantage as something in which they are actively implicated. Benefit is a relational concept that is meant to show students that their complicity is derived from systems and not their individual attributes. Applebaum uses the notion of benefit to show students that “benefitting from” is the result of “contributing to”: the fact of benefitting, regardless of intention, is morally and politically implicating.

After establishing “benefit” as a more relational and structural concept than “privilege”, Applebaum supports her argument for white complicity pedagogy by advocating for a shift from language as representation to language as discourse. She does this by relying on Judith Butler’s
notion of performativity, whereby subjects are created by their non-self-transparent responses to their structural subjection – an account of subjectivity I will outline later in this chapter.

Applebaum’s work on Butler is valuable both in its use of performativity to argue for a notion of responsibility based on the instability of the subject and the vulnerability and uncertainty at work in moral life. It falls prey, however, to what Mariana Ortega has called “loving, knowing ignorance” – a propensity to undermine the insights of writers of color even as they proclaim a desire to “think complexly alongside their work” – and what Ernesto Javier Martinez describes as a “larger cultural economy of race” that is “embedded in the claims of leftist scholars” who take “unmarked categories of white existence as an unacknowledged starting point” (Martinez 27). Ortega and Martinez take this to be especially endemic among scholars who use post-modernist, anti-realist theory in ways that inadvertently discredit the identity positions, scholarship and experiences of writers of color by reproducing patterns of “erasure and misappropriation” that reflect a racial logic grounded in the supposition that writers of color are less theoretically astute” (Martinez 26). The problem I will focus on in this chapter, however, is that basing responsibility on a Butlerian notion of agency creates some difficulty in motivating active political responses from dominant knowers.

Applebaum’s position is a crucial argument in shifting the focus away from a guilt/innocence framework, and toward action that responds to the needs of a situation rather than the felt moral needs of an individual. This chapter takes seriously Applebaum’s claim that because all white people are complicit in perpetuating racist patterns (since they benefit simply

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78 Martinez writes that “Tacit presuppositions that reflect a larger cultural economy of race are embedded in the claims of leftist scholars... Knowledge claims, including the anti-realist claims of queer theory, are based in traditions and categories of white existence as an unacknowledged starting point” (Martinez 27). While Applebaum does cite authors of color, the foundation of her account does not address this implicit logic in Butler’s anti-realist position.
by being white), all white people are responsible. The intention of the chapter is to flesh out this idea philosophically, contend with the philosophical questions it generates, and to use other resources from feminist philosophy and critical race theory to support the idea of complicit responsibility for structural ignorance. In order to do this, I will first give an overview of the literature on complicity in order to motivate an alternative relational understanding of the concept.

2. Redefining complicity: The problem with applying liability-based models to structural wrongs

This section gives an overview of some definitions of complicity in moral and legal theory, and discusses their aptness for responding to structural forms of ignorance. I critique the strict binary between “principals” and “accomplices”, and question the application of such a binary to instances of structural wrongs. I then show why thinkers like Applebaum criticize notions of complicity that rest on causal contribution, self-transparent knowledge, intention, and attitude, and briefly outline Applebaum’s alternative (which will turn out to have its own challenges). While doing without these mainstream legal and moral theories of complicity may seem to leave us with no normative ground to stand on, I show that on their own, these frameworks fail to make agents accountable for structural wrongs since they rely on the liability or “guilt” of individuals.

a) Complicity as causal contribution

Much of the legal literature on complicity takes it for granted that when a wrong has been committed, there will be a clear difference between “principals”, whose actions have a direct causal effect in producing the wrong, and “accomplices”, whose actions may have an indirect
effect or make a less direct contribution. Currently, in the United States, the legal basis for conferring these roles – a way of attributing liability for involvement in, or “facilitation” of, a crime or wrong – is the degree of causal contribution. Though this was not always the case in the US law, it is now, as Lepora and Goodin have shown, both the codified legal norm and central to the way complicity and responsibility are thought about in the current moral and philosophical zeitgeist. This section looks at the limitations of these kinds of “liability” models of responsibility for complicity that rely on causal contribution and intention for assessing cases of structural wrongs. This may seem counterintuitive for a project that seeks to make normative, moral arguments about the actions of individuals. I show here, however, that if individuals are to be held accountable for structural wrongs, responsibility cannot be attributed on the basis of guilt or liability, since it puts the normative focus on self-exoneration rather than on collective actions, relationships, and institutions. I will then show in the following section that a focus on collective actions, relationships and institutionalized patterns is entirely consistent with “personal” responsibility, and that this requires thinking of complicity as broader than liability or causal contribution. To understand why this is, I will begin with some standard definitions of complicity to show that they are inadequate for responding to structural wrongs.

The legal philosopher John Gardner argues that complicity arises when someone who is not a “principal” wrongdoer “makes a difference to the difference that the principal makes” (Gardner, in Applebaum, 121). A complicit person, according to Gardner, should be thought of

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Young, as mentioned above, takes the notion of “complicity” to reinforce individualistic notions of responsibility. In responding to Kutz’s definition of group responsibility as “participation”, she writes, “responsibility in relation to structural injustice should not be thought of as an attenuated form of responsibility as complicity, which is itself an attenuated form of individualized criminal or tort liability. At the point when we consider issues of responsibility in relation to structural injustice, quantitative difference becomes qualitative difference. What we should seek is not a variation on a weaker form of liability, but rather a different conception of responsibility altogether” (103-104). I am sympathetic to this view, but will argue here for a redefinition of both complicity and responsibility.
as an accomplice to the wrong, who can be shown to be part of the chain of events that led to the wrong. The difference between principals and accomplices, or complicit agents, is where one is situated on the causal chain leading up to the wrong or harm. Gardner’s goal – though it isn’t clear what the delimitations are between moral and legal responsibility – is to reject the notion that one can be a complicit participant in moral wrongs caused by others without any causal effect. We must think of complicity in terms of causal contribution, or else there is no moral basis for avoiding its “moral taint” (Gardner, in Applebaum 120) – a view strongly rejected by Applebaum and Young on the grounds that it cannot grasp the specificity of structural moral wrongs where individuals should be considered responsible in spite of their not having made a clear, identifiable causal contribution to moral wrong. This is why Applebaum and Young make an argument for “complicit” rather than “causal”, “liable” or guilt-based responsibility to address cases of structural wrong in response to some of the standard ways that complicity has been defined.

Though some of the literature I will review does make room for complicit actions that are collectively undertaken, the accounts either rely heavily on intention transparent to the agent, or on causal contribution, both of which are inadequate for responding to cases of collective, structural wrongdoing that is unwitting on the part of actors, who may not, as individuals, make much of a causal contribution at all.

80 I do think that there are some cases where guilt and causal contribution should be used as a basis for attributing responsibility. I grant, also, that it can be difficult to establish clear boundaries between what is “structural” and what is “individual” or “personal”. I will address this distinction later in this chapter by using Young’s Responsiblity for Justice, where she shows that US policy discourse on “personal responsibility” wrongly assumes a relationship of mutual exclusivity between “personal” and “structural” responsibility. With a “social connection” model of responsibility, she argues, we can hold both of these simultaneously, holding individuals responsible for structural background conditions in such a way that does not rely on guilt for causing or producing them.
b) Complicity as “knowledge without purpose”

In On Complicity and Compromise, Lepora and Goodin note that most literature on complicity has thus far been undertaken by lawyers, and that philosophers (including action philosophers and moral philosophers in general) rely heavily on legalistic notions of complicity, and on platitudes about the role of “intention” that ultimately do little to clarify a moral standard for complicity. They show how the focus on intention to do wrong excludes a number of acts that are unintentional, or do not “share in the purpose” of the principal, but nonetheless contribute to the wrong of the principal. The focus, for Lepora and Goodin, is the etymological root of complicity: “acting with” – whether or not that acting has the same intent as the principal harm.81 They show that the mainstream intuition about the role of intention is far from universal, even though it is the current formulation of complicity in the US Code and the Model Penal Code. In both of these, complicity is defined, essentially, by intent, or actions undertaken “with the purpose of facilitating an offense” (Lepora and Goodin, 86). Lepora and Goodin take this to be too restrictive, and prefer a more minimalist definition closer to the UK’s legal definition of complicity, which takes “knowledge without purpose” to suffice as a standard. Intention, or purpose to commit a wrong, isn’t necessary for actors to be “complicit”; all that is morally relevant, according to Lepora and Goodin,

is to acknowledge that you are engaging with and indeed contributing to wrongdoing, even if you do so only in order to do more good on balance. We think that is a better way of explicating the morality of the situation than to deny that you are doing anything wrong at all by contributing to wrongdoing, on the grounds that your intentions are pure. (Lepora and Goodin, 96)

81 Lepora and Goodin address a number of action-types that bear a “family resemblance” to complicity, some of which involve agents’ participation versus their contribution – the latter being the minimal requirement to fit the definition of complicity.
Lepora and Goodin’s account defines complicity as “concerning (potentially) causal contributions to the wrongdoing of another agent” (Lepora and Goodin, 31), denying that complicit acts are “independent” or “freestanding”. For them, complicit acts are necessarily “tainted” by the actions of the “principal”. What their account has in common with Applebaum’s account of white people trying to achieve moral rectitude in ways that end up reproducing structures of domination is the attitude of mistrust toward “good intentions”. And it is true, as we saw in Chapter 2, that good intentions can be unwittingly self-serving, or may be operating with a misguided view of the moral needs and political priorities on the ground, or with a moral framework that reproduces structural dynamics. In this regard, Lepora and Goodin’s account could make an interesting contribution to an analysis of structural ignorance, since agents need not intend to do wrong to be considered complicit.

But the most flagrant problem with their account of complicity is that it is centered on cases involving grievances between individuals who are abetted by other individuals. Complicity for Lepora and Goodin is framed only in terms of individuals’ causal contributions, which is less helpful when discussing the perpetuation of structural wrongs to which individuals may not have made any clear causal contribution, or wrongs in which individuals participate by virtue of their group membership and not necessarily by choice or “knowledge without purpose”. Structural ignorance, as we saw, is a managed ignorance that self-perpetuates, where agents can be argued to have some form of awareness that manifests as a fear of losing the benefits of group membership. Most of the time, however, structural ignorance is unwittingly reproduced, and this is part of the normative dilemma it generates. I take this to be so even when actors should know better.
I have used Lepora and Goodin – even though their account does not address structural wrongs – to represent the view that the most minimal requirement for complicity is “(potential) causal contribution”, though this may be unintentional, and may not necessarily share in the purpose of the principal actor. Though this does little to help with addressing collective wrongs, that, in addition to being unintentional or unwitting, involve responsibility without causal contribution\textsuperscript{82}, an account like Lepora and Goodin’s is useful for understanding the lay of the land and the general direction of both moral and legal thinking in the United States, and understanding the need for models of responsibility that can shift the motivation for action away from guilt for having \textit{individually caused} harm\textsuperscript{83}. Though Lepora and Goodin are critical of defining complicity on the basis of intention, their work gives an account of the way that showing “purpose” to do wrong has become the assumed standard in both US philosophy and law, and shows that there is a need for definitions of complicity that take the “mitigating” force of institutions, social patterns, and relationships into account\textsuperscript{84}.

c) Complicity as participatory intention

\textsuperscript{82} There is an argument to be made for understanding participation in dominant groups as causally contributing to a cumulative effect of domination. I am rejecting this view for now because it is places the focus on evaluating causal chains of individual action rather than on structures and the kinds of relationships that can shift them. I am open to the idea that “white ways of being” are causal contributions to white ignorance, but that position generates a moral standard of blameworthiness that may be too draconian: that all white people should be blamed for white supremacy. This is perhaps worth exploring, but I cannot entertain that possibility here for reasons given in the first three chapters.

\textsuperscript{83} There is a case to be made for understanding “white ways of being” as having a cumulative causal effect, but I still find that an overemphasis on causality has a tendency to confer guilt on particular individuals in the causal chain rather than addressing structural causes and institutions.

\textsuperscript{84} It is impossible to raise these questions without invoking Arendt and the concept of the banality of evil. I will address this at other moments of this chapter through Young’s work on Arendt’s distinction between guilt and responsibility in \textit{Responsibility for Justice}. 
Christopher Kutz’s account of complicity takes a step in the direction of accounting for structural factors. He holds an account of collective action centered on intention precisely so that he can avoid the “disparity between collective harm and individual effect” that arises when complicity is defined by causal contribution. Rather than define complicity as “knowledge without purpose”, as Lepora and Goodin do, or as causal contribution, as Gardner does, Kutz understands complicity as “participatory” intention (Kutz, 74). For Kutz, complicity requires collective, joint participation, where the actors have the intention to participate. This account addresses structural ignorance more directly than Lepora and Goodin’s account, since it problematizes the individualist focus of most “traditional” notions of complicity and moral responsibility, and accepts that the causality standard fails to capture the moral responsibility of participants whose individual contributions may not make a significant difference to the wrong. For Kutz, individuals’ accountability must take collective actions “mediated by social and institutional structures” into account. As Kutz writes,

The most important and far-reaching harms and wrongs of contemporary life are the products of collective actions, mediated by social and institutional structures. These harms and wrongs are essentially collective products, and individual agents rarely make a difference to their occurrence. So long as individuals are only responsible for the effects they produce, then the result of this disparity between collective harm and individual effect is the disappearance of individual accountability. (Kutz, 113; and Applebaum, 123)

In this way, Kutz’ work attempts to capture the moral responsibility we have when “we find ourselves connected to harms and wrongs, albeit by relations that fall outside the paradigm of individual, intentional wrongdoing” (Kutz, in Applebaum 122).

Kutz refers to two principles at work in traditional notions of complicity in order to critique them: the “Individual Difference Principle” and the “Control Principle”. The first
assumes that one is accountable only when what one has done has made a difference in the occurrence of the harm; the second assumes that one is accountable “only if one can control the occurrence of harm by producing or preventing it” (Applebaum, 123). Kutz rightly observes that the assumptions at the root of the Individual Difference Principle and the Control Principle cement the tight connection between “traditional conceptions of moral responsibility” and praise and blame, in ways that focus solipsistically on the agent’s attributes and what they say about what the agent deserves, instead of the agent’s relationships with others. The guiding principle Kutz suggests we use instead is the “Complicity Principle”, which is meant to capture “participatory intention”: the “intention to act as part of a group in the collective action of agents who orient themselves around a group project” (Applebaum 124). Kutz uses the Complicity Principle to account for examples like the bombing of Dresden, where not all pilots caused civilian devastation: they may have been trained along with others who flew but were themselves unable to fly when others were dropping bombs, or may have missed their targets when they did. Kutz observes that even those who made no causal contribution nonetheless felt responsible, and that this feeling of shared responsibility is what the Complicity Principle is meant to capture.

Kutz’s account is promising for thinking through structural wrongs because its focus is participation rather than causal contribution or “control”, and because his focus is on linking individual responsibility to participation in group-based wrongs85. Applebaum takes issue with his view, however, since the groups he refers to are not structurally defined, but are what Iris Marion Young would call “associations” – groups that form through the individuals’ willed

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85 Kutz also has an account of structural wrongs, or cases of collectively caused harm in which “those who participate are not coordinating and in which they do not intend the results” (Young 102). He refers to these cases as “unstructured collective harms”. But these lack the participatory intent that he deems necessary for finding people responsible for a collectively produced outcome.
choice, or choice to engage in a common activity. For Applebaum – and I think that she is right here, even though Kutz does successfully shift the focus away from causal contribution – Kutz’s Complicity Principle “cannot capture [something like] white complicity that is distinctly characterized by its unintentional participation in the perpetuation of injustice”, which Applebaum takes to be connected to group-based “ways of being” which one may not choose or have control over (Applebaum 125). Kutz’s account is limited in that it cannot account for unintentional, un-chosen participation, which is arguably what makes membership in structural groups structural. Kutz’s account doesn’t address the most difficult normative question: responsibility for background conditions which one cannot be said to have caused, and in which one may unintentionally, and unwittingly participate.

Applebaum also stresses that Kutz’s account doesn’t address “the type of complicity that involves participation in wrongs that are normalized as morally good” (Ibid.). It does not help with the kind of wrong committed when agents are attempting to protect their moral rectitude in ways that reproduce structural ignorance. Applebaum notes that Kutz’ theory is guided by the responsibility “felt” by those who participate in a group that does wrong without necessarily making any causal contribution to that wrong (like the Dresden pilots), but that “it is specifically a lack of such a feeling of responsibility (such complicity is denied) that is characteristic of white complicity” (Ibid.). Applebaum’s point is that structural injustice is indeed a kind of collective harm. But, she writes, “such harms are reproduced through cultural, economic and political

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86 This is not the strict definition of “structural” held in this project, but un-chosen participation is a characteristic of structural phenomena, even though those phenomena may also involve the cumulative, deliberate actions of individuals that all together may contribute to a structural wrong (Young’s example is the cumulative, legal, non-blameworthy actions of many individuals that contribute to a single mother’s inability to secure housing).

87 It could also be argued that the “feeling” of group responsibility generated by affinity is informative, and can be politically productive.
institutions that people participate in without any participatory intentions that can be pointed to” (125).\(^8\)

Though Applebaum has good reason to mistrust white people’s good intentions, since they may be motivated by an underlying desire for moral superiority that reproduces white supremacist patterns, there is also good reason to take intention into account in what must be a complex, contextual ethical evaluation of acknowledgement and resistance to structural racism. A helpful distinction – one which I will take up again in my critique of Applebaum – may be a temporal one between intentions for ongoing structural wrongs, and the intentions behind acts of resistance to structural wrongs. As I will discuss later in this chapter, if there is to be some motivation for premeditated, organized group actions, any notion of responsibility that takes complicity into account must also leave room for the intention to change a set of circumstances, even if one did not intend to cause them. Beyond showing that individuals bear responsibility on account of their group membership, an account attempting to address responsibility for structural wrongs must also give some account of what motivates action, or the “discharging” of that responsibility. That will be the work of the last half of this chapter.

d) Attitude complicity

After critiquing intention as a measurement of responsibility, Applebaum also shows that attitude-cultivation runs into a similar problem in a reading of Larry May’s theory of collective moral responsibility in his *Sharing Responsibility*. May’s account resonates with the common sense notion that shifting attitudes is a central component to taking responsibility for structural

\(^8\) There are some interesting connections to make between the analysis of white tears in Chapter 3 and Kutz’ account of “felt” participatory intention – complicity as “affect”. This is a direction for future research.
wrongs, and that responsibility for shared wrongs should be distributed among the members of a group. May distinguishes between “collective responsibility” and “shared responsibility”. He uses collective responsibility to describe situations where responsibility is attributed to a collective entity, but where the members of that collective cannot be said to be responsible as individuals. Examples of this include corporations with unjust policies or institutional cultures that are not attributable to any particular individuals in the corporation. On the other hand, in cases of shared responsibility, responsibility can be distributed among the individual members of a group. May’s description of shared responsibility is both intuitive and problematic, since his focus is on the cultivation of personal attitudes. His position draws on Karl Jaspers’ notion of “metaphysical guilt”, which links responsibility to “who one chooses to be” (Applebaum 128-129). The notion of distributive responsibility for structural wrongs is helpful in supporting Applebaum’s claim for white complicity pedagogy, since in cases of shared responsibility (and benefitting from whiteness could be an example of shared responsibility) all participants are understood to be implicated in the moral wrong.

What is problematic with May’s account, however, is his focus on attitude-cultivation. Though habit formation cannot happen without a shift in attitude, the latter cannot be considered sufficient as an account of political responsibility. As Applebaum writes, May “does explicitly claim that one can relieve oneself of responsibility for the crimes that other people commit if one opposes the wrong or if one dissents”. While dissent seems crucial to responding to structural wrongs in which one is complicit, it does not seem to be enough to equate structural responsibility with vocal opposition, especially where one’s social position may make this approach counter-productive, or where showing that one has the “right” attitude discharges one of responsibility. When this approach is applied to white complicity, Applebaum is firmly
opposed to the idea that “only those ‘white’ people who respond with disapproval do not share responsibility” (129).

While many agree that any definition of responsibility for structural wrongs must find a link between structures and the individual participants in those structures, thinkers like Cassie Stribleen and Young maintain that it is counterproductive to focus on individual choice for attitudes. For Young, May concentrates too heavily on past wrongs or acts that have reached a terminus”, assuming that one can “relieve oneself of responsibility if only one can purge oneself from negative attitudes or make an attempt to show others one’s discontent” (Young, in Applebaum, 130). Young claims that May’s approach does not account for structural injustice that is ongoing, rather than in the past, and that is maintained in much more complicated ways than discrete acts or policies.  

Even more problematic than the focus on “attitude” in May’s account is the way that it reverts to a “fault-blame” model, where “guilty” individuals can absolve themselves of their responsibility for structural wrongs through their vocal opposition to the attitudes and actions of other group members. While I will reiterate that vocal opposition is often a good thing, the argument of this chapter is that it should not be thought of as “absolving” members of structural groups for the wrongs from which they benefit. So long as the benefit derived by structural groups persists, the responsibility cannot be “discharged” by undertaking a temporally finite act.

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89 May’s account, though flawed, does contain an intuition that is much more aptly explored by feminist ethicists like Lisa Tessman, who argues that any account of responsibility under structures of domination and oppression must take character formation into account. Her account is more apt since it takes agents to be “complicit” insofar as they cannot will away the moral damage with which structural factors have affected their desires, goals and inclinations, which may conflict in ways that affect their ability to flourish. Though this shares an intuition with May’s position – that “attitudes” and “attributes” are important factors in the way one takes responsibility for group-based wrongs – it is much more successful in accounting for the structural double-bind whereby individuals’ attitudes and desires are affected (or “damaged”) by structures of oppression, creating barriers to addressing those structures.
Furthermore, as Alison Bailey has written, May’s account is more concerned with the complicit person’s moral standing than the harmed person. The agency of the person harmed by structural injustice is “completely written out of the story” (Bailey, in Applebaum, 131).

e) Applebaum’s “complicity” as benefit

An overview of these accounts of group responsibility shows that most maintain responsibility as attributable to individuals based on their causal contributions, intentions or attitudinal responses. Though these accounts may be helpful in some instances, I find, with Applebaum and Young, that these accounts fall short in their lack of attention to the ways that social position impacts responsibility for structural wrongs, applying universal moral notions of responsibility to collective actions committed out of structural ignorance, naïve self-interest, or collectively accepted norms. A notion of responsibility that can respond to structural ignorance must, then, refer to social position within structures of domination and to the flawed, but fundamental role of relationships under unjust norms.

The definition of complicity that Applebaum offers rests, as we saw earlier in this chapter, on a Butlerian notion of agency as subjection. She uses Butler’s theory of performativity, and the notion of language as “discourse”, as a response to white complicity. Applebaum defines her sense of complicity against one which I will call “attitude complicity”—the definition espoused by Larry May. On this definition, complicity is a kind of cognitive bias, the product of “unconscious negative attitudes and beliefs about non-white people that infect all white people and has an effect on their practices” (Applebaum 10). Applebaum describes this
kind of complicity as “silent racism”, which is a “cultural phenomenon” that “inhabits the minds of all white people”. This is the lens through which current implicit bias research is undertaken, in that it assumes that racism manifests itself in unconscious negative attitudes and beliefs. For Applebaum, it this complicity operates in the way that “power circulates through all white bodies” in such as way as to make them “directly complicit for contributing to a system that they did not, as individuals, create” (14).

Applebaum does not discount the effects of this kind of complicity. She does not privilege it, however, since as we saw above, the focus on cultivating the right attitude can have counter-productive effects. Applebaum is concerned to focus on another kind of complicity that has less to do with “right attitude”, or the “psychology” of racism, and more to do with the “practices and habits of whiteness” and “the consequences of those practices and habits” (Ibid) – though she does not want to focus on causality. This notion of complicity has its basis in the view that “one cannot transcend the social system that frames how one makes meaning of oneself and the social world within which one is embedded” (Ibid.). On this view, social groups under systems of racial oppression and privilege can only be constituted relationally in terms of “others” on whom one’s identity reciprocally depends, where one “dominant” group is “always established as the norm form which other groups become ‘deviant’” (Ibid.).

Applebaum argues for this kind of complicity by drawing on the work of feminist thinkers like Marilyn Frye and Sandra Bartky, who understand white complicity to be an “orientation” or “way of being” involving an assumption of good moral standing, authority, or expansiveness. Applebaum draws on these thinkers to emphasize the ways that “whiteness

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involves the ways in which whiteness is performatively enacted” characterized by “a conviction in regard to one’s moral innocence or goodness” (17). Applebaum is, for this reason, concerned with the dilemma this creates, namely that “when the moral agency that one would call upon to raise awareness of such complicity conspires to camouflage the very complicity that needs to be exposed, white complicity becomes extremely problematic. In effect, whiteness becomes reinscribed and recentered in the very practices that attempt to work against social injustice” (Ibid.). This, of course, is precisely the problem this dissertation seeks to address.

What Applebaum proposes is a complicity that understands itself to be a “performative” reproduction of whiteness. While there is much to agree with in Applebaum’s account, the model of agency that underlies her definition of complicity cannot meet the normative demands that that complicity requires. This is because the Butlerian notion of agency on which her account rests is inadequate for following through politically on the complicity it rightly identifies. Applebaum’s account becomes stuck in the mere recognition of white complicity that cannot go further than its declaration – an outcome Applebaum herself seeks to avoid.

3. Realist complicit agency

It should be granted that Applebaum’s project is a difficult and pressing one, and that there is no single correct response to white complicity. It is in the interests of moving the conversation forward that, in this section, I will outline the challenges created by Applebaum’s reliance on what I will call an “anti-realist” notion of agency.

In calling Applebaum’s adoption of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity “anti-realist”, I am following the tradition of post-positivist realism – an approach adopted by Linda
Alcoff, Michael Hames-Garcia, Paula Moya and others. In his description of the political differences between realism and anti-realism, Ernesto Javier Martinez writes that antirealist standpoints are rarely named “antirealist”. “Still, they are recognizable by the lingering afterlife of their iconic claims: identities are fictions, normative claims are violent, linguistic reference is indeterminate, subjecthood is only and always a form of subjection” (Martinez 9). Additionally, “antirealism” is suspicious of the possibility of accurately referencing an objective reality, a position that is in some respects applicable to white ignorance, but which (I will show) divests agents of active, future oriented political agency through complicity. Against the antirealist view of agency, realists see identities “not as essences or fictions, but as bits of social theory” that are “socially significant and context specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world” (Moya, in Martinez 12). Because it is so central to Applebaum’s account of complicity, I will briefly outline Butler’s notion of agency to show that it is inadequate for addressing structural ignorance.

For Butler, identity is unstable from the outset, and an insistence on unified identities is an effect of oppressive structures that assume some essential, “original” characteristic (“being” a woman, a lesbian, etc.) to be their guiding principle (Butler, IGI, 710). A Butlerian subject is “deeply intertwined with regimes of power to the core of its very existence” (Applebaum 64). As Butler herself writes, “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (IGI 709).

Identities and the norms that shape them, then, are not straightforwardly liberatory, but are first and foremost “instruments for regulatory regimes”. On Butler’s account, agency is a
“performative” or repetitious reproduction of norms that is structurally and psychoanalytically driven rather than being fully “intentional”: Butlerian selves are always “other” to themselves. Butler does not mean for this to preclude all political agency. Because our identities are constituted by the way gender and sexuality (for example) are practiced relative to norms, these constitutive practices are also a means for those norms to be modified. Central to this account of subjectivity – for both Applebaum and Butler – is the instability of language as discourse. Norms are “discursive formations” that are “prone to ‘misfire’” and are thus unstable (Applebaum 64), and political possibility is to be found precisely in that instability. For Butler, “all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat”, which locates agency “in the possible variation on the repetition” (Butler, GT, 145).

Applebaum relies on performativity in her account because it does, to Applebaum’s credit, describe agents who turn out not to have mastery over their self-conception, and whose words and actions do not originate in them as individual speakers but “from the history of norms behind the words” (Applebaum 68, in reference to Butler’s Excitable Speech). Agency, for both Butler and Applebaum, cannot be understood outside of “power regimes”: it is always necessarily complicit.

While I agree that agents cannot remove themselves from their structural circumstances, and am on board with Applebaum’s commitment to complicity, I find a Butlerian account of complicity to weaken agents’ relational responsibility and accountability to others by abstracting from the actual relationships at work in subject formation and political action. By rejecting a coherent account of the subject in favor of an “incoherent” subjecthood because it is an unintentional repetition of normative patterns, Butler and Applebaum take it that we are “able to
reconceive the conditions that make responsibility possible and a new sense of ethics can be articulated” (Applebaum 83).

“Reconceiving the conditions that make responsibility possible”, and rethinking our frameworks for responsibility, are crucial for addressing structural ignorance. Taking post-modernist accounts of the self to be a helpful “safety check” against “false universals” (Cynthia Kaufman in Applebaum 83), however, cannot get us as far as Applebaum intends. Focusing the activity of critique self-reflexively on how the practice of that critique is complicit with power structures limits its application, and restricts the ways that actors can, and should, employ their social position in different ways, depending on their structural location. It is not enough to acknowledge the fallibility, lack of self-coherence and complicity of the subject; that acknowledgement must be able to articulate the stakes for actors to act, or agency and group identity become passive and de-politicized.

Butler does not think that identities can be political unities, and takes this position to free up new political possibilities. Post-positivist realists, however, take issue with the political implications of this view on the grounds that it is politically deflationary: it makes all identities equally “subject” to power structures in the same way, it abstracts from the complex, substantive and politically promising relationality that exists between individuals, and it focuses political activity on “critique” without entertaining other political options that may be more transformative of the structures identified by that critique. I will briefly entertain two objections to the anti-realism in Applebaum’s account to show that if complicity is going to adequately address structural ignorance, it must think complexly about the variety of different relationships.

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91 In Chapter 5, I argue for a form of “white double consciousness” that can and should have a deflationary effect on white supremacist patterns, but do not think that this account should be applied universally to “identity” or “race”. Rather than a metaphysical approach, I argue for “deflating” white identity on strategic and normative grounds.
individuals can have to their group behavior, and it must have a more robust notion of
relationality. The first objection, made by Michael Hames-García, takes performativity to reduce
identity to behavior, and to ill effect; the second, made by Paula Moya, takes performative
identities to be empty “idealistic” abstractions, unable to do the socially relational political work
that “realist” identities can. While both critics focus on Butler’s account of gender identity, I do
think that both objections also pertain to other kinds of identities.

Hames-García takes accounts like Butler’s and Applebaum’s to have conservative
implications in treating the causes of all identities to be a universal problem. Butler claims that
the structures that impel the practices that in turn constitute our identities are governed by the
same mechanism at the root of all subjectivity. Hames-García raises a compelling objection by
claiming that an account of identity that focuses on behaviors to the exclusion of other causal,
structural, external factors cannot but see all identity as a problem under current social
conditions, and that this encourages homophobia in Butler’s analysis of gender. This critique is
similar to the one taken up by Martinez, that takes Butler’s critique of identity to discredit racial
identities as the basis for political action and social knowledge. My point here is that a Butlerian

92 Where Butler and Applebaum argue that identities are always constituted by regulatory practices governed by a
psychoanalytically motivated repetition, Hames-García takes it to be politically problematic to think of identity only
in terms of repetitive and constitutive regulatory practices. In his essay “What’s at Stake in ‘Gay’ Identities?” he
argues that to elide identity with behavior is to “slide into a discussion of the origins of homosexuality;” (Hames-
García 78) and Hames-García holds that “any inquiry into the origins of homosexuality (asking why people exist
who have homosexual relationships or desires or what causes such relationships or desires to exist) in a homophobic
society is ethically suspect” (79). Attempts to trace causal histories of homosexual desire are either “seeking to keep
homosexuals from existing, or […] attempting to show that homosexuals are not at fault for their homosexual
relationships or desires. Both of these motivations proceed from the homophobic premise (dominant in most
societies and eras) that same-sex relationships are something humanity would probably be better off without.” A
better, and politically anti-homophobic perspective, according to Hames-García, “assumes that human society is
better off because (at least some) people have significant sexual/emotional relationships with other people
understood to be of the same sex.” An account focused on the causes of homosexuality should be abandoned in
favor of a position that sees homosexuality as worthy of choice, something desirable (Ibid.).
account does not give agents enough possibility to resist through their differently situated and constructed identities. Where Butlerian accounts downplay the specificity of particular identities beyond assemblages of behaviors, Hames-Garcia and others understand identity to be a direct, partially transparent reference to actual political structures and tendencies in the world.

Crucially for responding to white ignorance, Hames-García’s point is that “one’s sense of oneself as gay or lesbian (or queer or marimacha or same-gender-loving) can be critical for making the work of political coalition or collective resistance against oppression possible.” (Ibid.) Identities aren’t performances or imitations for Hames-García; they are, rather, like theories, able to offer “theoretical explanations about how the world is structured in relation to oppression,” and not just how individual, subjective desire or feeling is structured in relation to oppression (Hames-García 78). Theorists like Hames-García and Paula Moya contend that “only by treating identities as epistemic resources and mobilizing them […] can we draw out their knowledge-generating potential and allow them to contribute positively to the production and transmission of knowledge” (Moya, 97). Identities, according to Moya, are “the non-essential and evolving products that emerge from the dialectic between how subjects of consciousness identify themselves and how they are identified by others” (Moya 97). They aren’t constituted by invisible mechanisms that produce subjectivity through practice, as Butler describes them, but rather are “socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world” (Ibid.). Rather than referring “inward” to the ways in which unwitting, repeated behaviors reveal the contingency of normatively gendered [or raced] practices, identities are “indexical”, referring “outward to social structures and [embodying] social relations” (Ibid.). In this way, identities can be reliable “ways
of making sense of our experiences” (Mohanty, in Moya, 97) – and, I will argue, ways of resisting the structures that shape them.

The problem with the notion of agency at work in Applebaum’s account of white complicity is that it elides political identity with subjective identity. Avoidant or distancing behaviors exhibited by individuals are, to be sure, counterproductive. But there must be another register for action that observes such behaviors, and can act both because of, and in spite of them. The post-positivist realist line of thinking has the resources to make such a distinction, and this, in turn, allows for a kind of agency that better responds to structural forms of ignorance. Moya, for example, makes an analytic distinction between “ascriptive” and “subjective” identities in order to account for their partially transparent, and inescapable, political relationality. Moya understands herself to be elaborating a “dialectical” position that takes these two dimensions of identity into account – its social-group dimension as well as the role played by the subjective interpretation of that group dimension. This is Moya’s way of claiming that we can be both free and partially determined by identity categories, and her way of circumventing the zero-sum choice between “essentialism” and what she calls “idealism.”

Moya directly addresses Butler’s theory of performativity in “What’s Identity Got to Do with It?” characterizing her views as “idealist”. Where “essentialists”, on Moya’s view, take ascriptive and subjective identity to be identical with one another, “idealists” like Butler claim

93 Ascriptive identities are social categories, inescapably historical and collective, operating through a “logic of visibility”. Moya includes gender in this category. She can be understood to think, along with Linda Alcoff, that the visibility of identity pertains to what we expect to see but do not, as when our expectation that someone’s gender will reveal its truth to us is left unsatisfied. Alcoff writes in Visible Identities that “the truth of one’s gender and race […] are widely thought to be visibly manifest, and if there is no visible manifestation of one’s declared racial or gendered identity, one encounters an insistent skepticism and anxiety. […] The visible has the property of being endless, of never providing complete satisfaction.” (Alcoff, 7) Subjective identities refer to our “individual sense of self” and our “various acts of self-identification.” (Moya, 99)
that “there is no stable or discoverable relationship between the ascriptive and subjective aspects of identity” (Moya 98). Moya understands Butler to be claiming that “we can disrupt historically sedimented and socially constituted identity categories through individual acts of parody or refusal”. This, according to Moya, attributes too little significance to the social categories and standpoints through which we receive societal recognition, underestimating the “referential and social nature of identity” (99). Identities, for Moya, refer “to relatively stable and often economically entrenched social arrangements”. Where Hames-Garcia takes performativity-type theories to preclude some forms of political activism, Moya takes Butler to overestimate the political power of individual refusal, with unintentional conservative effects, since the Butlerian account neglects the possibility of collective action.94

The post-positivist realist critique of Applebaum’s notion of complicity show us that a notion of complicity with stakes for action on the part of dominant knowers needs to understand group membership as putting one in a substantive relationship of accountability with others that creates the possibility for consciousness, coalition and active resistance through complicity. Responsibility should be complicit, but that complicity must have a realist notion of social position and identity as its basis.

94 This overestimation is interesting, given Butler’s contention that Gender Trouble is not meant to offer a program for political action. “It would be a mistake,” Butler writes in its 1999 preface, to take the discussion of imitation and drag “as the paradigm of subversive action or, indeed, as a model for political agency.” (xxiii) Butler’s point is, rather, to ask, “what are the categories through which one sees?” and when these categories come into question, how can our difficulty in distinguishing the real from the unreal be generative? (xxiv) This unmooring of identity categories shows us that “what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. Call it subversive or call it something else. Although this insight does not in itself constitute a political revolution, no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one’s notion of the possible and the real. And sometimes this shift comes as a result of certain kinds of practices that precede their explicit theorization, and which prompt a rethinking of our basic categories: what is gender, how is it produced and reproduced, what are its possibilities?” (Ibid.) The political significance of performativity is in its taking the “sedimented and reified field of gender ‘reality’” to be one “that might be made differently and, indeed, less violently”; to understand the prevailing norms of what can be “intelligibly” human to be changeable. (xxiv)
4. Motivating future-oriented action: Interactional and institutional responsibility

We have seen that because Applebaum is concerned to make a political argument whereby all white people are responsible for structural racism and its accompanying ignorance by virtue of their whiteness, she does not address some of the complications in the application of “white complicity pedagogy”. One of the building blocks in Applebaum’s account is a post-modern notion of the self, understood in Butlerian terms as unstable and perpetually re-generated through its performative acts. For this reason, the emphasis, for Applebaum, is an individual agent’s lack of control over their own behaviors and socialized habits, with a focus on “white ways of being”. I do think that Applebaum is right to elaborate a strong critique of the liberal individual who takes responsibility only for what they themselves have caused, and who is self-transparent in undertaking moral actions as acts of will that are worthy of moral praise or blame. Her critique, however, does not leave room for a discussion of what Lisa Tessman has called a “particular mixture of control and lack of control” (Tessman, 2000): the kind of moral agency that is possible to undertake under conditions of oppression. Applebaum would say that this agent can only be “complicitly responsible”; but she is more concerned to critique the whiteness of moral capital (a worthwhile project!) than she is to discuss the ways that her complicity analysis might be used in strategies for resistance or opposition. Her account is, after all, a critique of white morality’s re-centering white agential action in questions of racial justice. But her account requires one to ask precisely what non-liability-based, “complicit responsibility” might look like, given the way that structural forms of oppression affect the ways we make sense

95 Or the ways that this might make white people take up this responsibility in a form of “allyship” that reinforces colonial or hierarchical dynamics. I will address this in the conclusion to this chapter and in Chapter 5.
of ourselves and the responsibility we have for what we know and do. This section shows that Applebaum’s account conflates two different kinds of responsibility in a way that creates barriers to future-oriented political action, and that it simplifies whiteness as a social position in a way that inadvertently reproduces a “passive” version of ally politics.

In focusing primarily on the structures that have come to make members of groups complicit (by virtue of the benefit they derive from that membership), Applebaum neglects an important distinction. Her account is an important justification for tying benefit to ignorance and responsibility in the case of whiteness, and an important description of the reproduction of white denial motivated by the desire for moral purity. But Applebaum seems to conflate the subjective responsibility of individuals – as it plays out through social habits—with organized political responsibility. This results in an implicit argument for the passivity of white people who are meant to defer to “others” in order to be good political allies, since the account is critical of deliberate choice on the part of dominant knowers, whose complicity is understood as a set of structurally determined behaviors for which they can have no intentional choice. Though Applebaum is interested in elaborating pedagogical strategies, these center on the activity of critique undertaken by individual knowers, rather than knowers who choose to act together as a political group.

As much as Applebaum’s account is meant to ground white responsibility, the consequence of using an anti-realist notion of agency traps dominant knowers in an endless reflection on behaviors and habits in a way that creates barriers to active, deliberate, collective intervention. For this intervention to take place, individuals need to see their habits, behaviors and actions as connected to institutions and structural forces that can be addressed alongside, the process of self-critique or reflection. Applebaum’s account discounts the kind of active
responsibility that could emerge from “white complicity pedagogy” – a complicit responsibility undertaken both from an “interactional” and from a “political” or “institutional” perspective. The distinction between these two perspectives helps to avoid a monolithic understanding of responsibility that conflates past behaviours that could elicit feelings of guilt or shame with ongoing structural wrongs that should be met with collective action across identity categories.

By focusing on the structures that have come to make white people responsible, Applebaum’s account assumes that political responsibility can only play itself out in the realm of our interpersonal habits. The unintended result is an idea of political action that limits the responsibility of dominant knowers to mere reflection on their person-to-person behaviors, rather than tying it to collective efforts to change the structural circumstances that inform those behaviors. Applebaum’s account leaves us asking what positive model of responsibility can move individuals to action based on their group membership, while also mitigating the ways that their complicity in systems of oppression reproduces those systems. By de-emphasizing choice, and framing agency in post-structural terms, Applebaum risks making agents less accountable.

As the group Indigenous Action Media has written in their argument for “accomplices” over “allies”, “resignation of agency is a by-product of the allyship establishment. At first the dynamic may not seem problematic. After all, why would it be an issue with those who benefit from systems and behaviors (like entitlement, etc.) that accompany them?” (Milstein 94) A consequence of taking oneself to be a “privileged ally” is that “in the worst cases, ‘allies’ themselves act paralyzed, believing it’s their duty as a ‘good ally’. […] You wouldn’t find an accomplice resigning their agency or capabilities as an act of ‘support’” (Ibid.). Making some
distinctions between the dimensions of responsibility is key in maintaining non-guilt-based justifications for action in response to structural wrongs.96

A strong justification for this distinction can be found in Young’s Responsibility for Justice, where she argues that responsibility can be simultaneously “personal” (or “interactional”) and structural (or “institutional”), and that a non-liability theory of responsibility must hold both of these perspectives at the same time. To exclude personal responsibility deprives individuals of the agency to make changes in their lives within a set of structural circumstances, and to choose, as individuals, to engage in collective political resistance. I do not believe that Young is advocating for a liberal “empowerment” model for those in oppressive positions, but rather for a model that gives individuals of a range of social positions the possibility of navigating (and mitigating) their structural circumstances ways that are politically appropriate to their social position. What Young wants to avoid is an account of responsibility that makes poor people, or people with other forms of structural disadvantage, “personally” responsible for the structural factors at work in their own position, and that excludes those in a

96 The following example, given by Zeus Leonardo in “The Myth of White Ignorance” in his book Race, Whiteness and Education, shows us why. Leonardo and his students worked together to make visible the knowledge that “racial lessons” are “learned” from family and social context (Leonardo 115). While many white students were open to discussing moments when a “non-racial” home discourse became racial” because a person of color was introduced into students’ white social environments, one white student “played the race card” (Ibid.). The student confessed to Leonardo that she had been feeling “unaffirmed because of her peers’ negative reactions to her ideas about race”, concluding that this was because she was a “non-minority”—white. In Leonardo’s analysis, he takes the student to be right in her claim for a white participation in a conversation about race, though her “racial assumptions are symptomatic of […] white racial knowledge” (116). “Dialogues about race are never easy,” Leonardo writes, “and entrance to them is most awkward for whites”. But in this particular case, though the student’s behavior was symptomatic of white racial knowledge, the student received criticisms from peers of all races. The student interpreted her “victimization” as resulting from her peers’ racialization of her as a white woman”, overlooking the reason for her peers disagreement: “that they found her views problematic”. To address this sort of situation, Leonardo suggests that it is “important to remember that when personally confronted with a negative situation, whites [can] interpret it as racial against the group” (Ibid.). For Leonardo, “When situations are positive and preserve group power, whites claim that their advantages stem from individual merit, that is, non-racial, deserving, and neutral. This suggests that whites know when to invoke race in a manner that maintains their “innocence”. In fact, it is as this point when white racial knowledge mysteriously transforms into racial ignorance.” (Ibid.)
position of structural dominance from taking *personal* responsibility for the effects of their actions and decisions on the lives of others. We will see that an effect of Young’s distinction is that it gives agents the possibility of acting complicitly with others, rather than limiting political action to individual self-reflection on habits and behaviors.

The motivation for Young’s distinction is to reveal and critique the ideological roots of a shift in US social policy that she traces back to some “determined conservative academics and policy analysts in the early 1980s”—Young’s focus is on Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead—who sought to show that “the causes of being poor are largely traceable to attributes and behavior of the poor people themselves” (Ibid.). According to this trend, poverty and its accompanying hardships are not a function of complex historical and institutional factors, but are caused by the fact that poor people “engage in deviant or self-destructive behavior” and “do not take as much responsibility for their lives as other members of other groups do” (Ibid).

While some critics might respond to Mead and Murray by opposing themselves to the discourse of “personal responsibility” altogether and placing the “responsibility” solely on structural factors, Young takes this to be the wrong approach. For Young, taking structural causation and personal responsibility to be mutually exclusive presupposes a liability conception of responsibility. Young takes structures “describe a set of socially caused *conditions* that *position* a large number of people in similar ways”. Nevertheless, “each person so positioned is

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97 Murray and Mead’s policy suggestions were the inspiration for President Clinton’s Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act, signed into law in 1996. As Young describes it, “for the first time since the expansion of social legislation in the New Deal Era, this law removed entitlement to public assistance for those who meet eligibility criteria” (6). Mead and Murray blame the social programs of the 1960s and 70s, which, by granting benefit and services in the form of “cash income”, “created a culture of dependency” among poor people who were entitled to benefits for which they needed to do nothing in return. Clinton’s Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act was a response to the normative agenda of these theorists insofar as it was meant to hold individual recipients “accountable for their lives” (Ibid.).
responsible for how she or he takes up these conditions” (Young 18-19). Though this account might seem to risk the atomism that Applebaum finds at fault in the liability model, Young is in fact advocating for two coexistent kinds of responsibility precisely in order to avoid the individualist assumption. This is because, on her view,

This discourse of personal responsibility fails to acknowledge the many ways that some middle class and rich people behave irresponsibly. It assumes a misleading ideal that each person can be independent of others and internalize the costs of their own actions. It ignores how the institutional relations in which we act render us deeply interdependent. The discourse fails to ask what personal responsibility individuals have for the conditions of the lives of others in these independent relationships, as well as for their own lives. (Young, 4)

For Young, neglecting how each person responds to, or takes up, their structural conditions amounts to absolving individuals – and especially those who are in dominant social positions – from their responsibility for themselves and for those who are in relationship with them. To identify some one factor or agent as the cause of a form of oppression is the wrong approach, because it has the effect of absolving everyone else, according to Young. The discourse of personal responsibility “attempts to isolate the deviant poor and render them particularly blameworthy for their condition, which then justifies the application of paternalistic or punitive policies to them” (24)\. The liability model at work in the discourse of personal responsibility turns out to be driven by absolution, much like the distancing techniques and declarations of

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*Young debunks the notion that there are character traits associated with poverty by finding, in the social science research about poverty in the US, that rather than affecting a minority of people in the United States, the majority of people in the US have “experienced at least one ‘spell’ of poverty in their lives”. She uses Mark R. Rank’s research to claim that “if a majority of Americans live below the poverty line for some time in their lives, then we cannot separate poor people from other people according to some character traits, dispositions or failings they have” (Young, 24).*
whiteness we saw in Chapter 2. Given the racialization of poverty in the United States and the emphasis on individualistic moral standing in Murray and Mead’s position, Young’s critique gives even stronger reason to abandon the liability model for its reproduction of racist patterns in political and institutional responses to structural problems.

Young’s contention that we should view responsibility as both structural and individual, and that we should be able to distinguish them as two different “points of view”, doesn’t commit her to the idea that structures are something separate from the rest of society. She follows Gidden’s theory of structuration, whereby “structures exist only as enacted by individuals in relation to one another” but where “a distinction between structural and individual levels of social analysis is nevertheless important to make” (Young, 60). This means that the question of individuals’ relationship to structures consists in “understanding power differentials and power relations” (63). Young’s *Responsibility for Justice* is an attempt to articulate the responsibility that individuals have for the habitual, status quo actions of masses of individuals acting on their own projects that can have widespread unintended consequences. Social position is a necessary place to start on this account, allowing us to be “less concerned with their individualized

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99 Census information shows that those who identified as Black, American Indian and Hispanic had the highest rates of poverty in the US (see Macartney, Bishaw and Fontenot). See also Jackie Wang’s extensive account of about the racialized, morally-laden discourse on poor urban Black Americans in the aftermath of the Clinton era: “The dis-identification [of middle and upper class Americans] with poor, urban Black Americans is not limited to Black men, but also Black women who are vilified via the figure of the Welfare Queen: a lazy, sexually irresponsible burden on society (particularly hard-working white Americans). The Welfare State and the Penal State complement one another, as Clinton’s 1998 statements denouncing prisoners and ex-prisoners who receive welfare or social security reveal: he condemns former prisoners receiving welfare assistance for deviously committing ‘fraud and abuse’ against ‘working families’ who ‘play by the rules.’ [...] The re-configuration of the Welfare State under the Clinton Administration (which imposed stricter regulations on welfare recipients) further intensified the backlash against poor Black women. On this view, the Welfare State is the apparatus used to regulate poor Black women who are not subjected to regulation, directed chiefly at Black men, by the Penal State — though it is important to note that the feminization of poverty and the punitive turn in non-violent crime policy led to an 400% increase in the female prison population between 1980 and the late 1990s.”
preferences, abilities and attributes, and more concerned with the *relations* in which they stand to other persons” (57).

Young’s account is in many respects consistent with Applebaum’s, since it takes individuals to have a non-negotiable relationship to social structures, insofar as those structures are constituted by individuals’ goals, preferences and moral orientations. Individuals are, in other words, “complicit” with the structural environments that generate their social positions. But Young’s account differs, and is a necessary response to Applebaum’s, insofar as it makes an argument for *two* different perspectives on complicit responsibility, precisely in order to avoid moral absolution as the central motivation for political action.  

Young draws on Arendt’s distinction between guilt and responsibility, which, as Arendt presented it in her essay “Collective Responsibility”, understood the application of “moral and legal concepts” like guilt and blame to be inappropriate for evaluating group-based wrongs. The concept of guilt, for Arendt, is applicable only to “individual deeds”, and loses its meaning if applied to a whole group: “Where all are guilty, nobody is” (Arendt, in Young 76).  

According to Young, Arendt, much like Ahmed in “Declarations of Whiteness” (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation), takes it that “expressing a feeling of guilt on behalf of an entire collective, not by  

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100 Young herself does not describe responsibility as “complicit”, taking the notion of complicity to frame responsibility in terms that are too liability-based. I take this to be a semantic issue. While I see how complicity’s negative connotations allow one to think this, I have argued earlier in this chapter for a non-liability based definition of complicity that in essence means roughly the same thing as “positional” – responsibility is complicit because one cannot take responsibility outside of one’s social position. My focus on “complicity” is to showcase the tendency for idealizations of agency to focus on acts that absolve individuals of their responsibility for unjust structural circumstances.

101 Where Young undertakes an in-depth analysis of the notions of guilt and responsibility across Arendt’s work, I will focus on Young’s interpretation of Arendt, and her development of an original theory of responsibility that is not predicated on guilt, but where individuals are nonetheless accountable by virtue of their relationality and social position.
virtue of deeds done but by virtue of one’s membership in an association, is a sentimental gesture that obscures real political issues” (Young 77). A collective is responsible only in “political terms”, but not in “moral or legal terms”, the two conditions of this responsibility being “(1) I am responsible for what I have not done, and (2) the reason for my responsibility is my membership in a group which no voluntary action can dissolve” (78). This is very close to Applebaum’s account, where responsibility is radically distinguished from guilt and the moral standing of individuals, and where group membership associated with benefit is a sufficient condition for this kind of responsibility. The first condition applies in Applebaum’s account, since she is concerned to make individuals responsible on account on their group membership irrespective of causality for the wrong in question.

While Young bases her account on Arendt’s distinction between guilt and responsibility, she is unsatisfied with the meaning of Arendt’s “political responsibility”. As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, Young finds it to be a “mystification to say that people bear responsibility simply because they are members of a political community, and not because of anything at all that they have done or not done” (ibid.). Needless to say, this is quite different from Applebaum’s view that membership in a dominant social group is the basis for responsibility (a notion clearly inspired by Arendt). Young finds that this definition of responsibility, which “exists quite apart from what the individual member of the group has done and therefore can neither be judged in moral terms nor be brought before a criminal court” is too vague, since its community of reference is, at times, the nation state, and at other times “the historical continuum” (Arendt, in Young 80). For Young, there must be more to political responsibility than a vague or simplified notion of group membership.
Young interprets Arendt’s essay “Organized Guilt and Collective Responsibility” to give more nuance to responsibility in that it entails “doing things (and perhaps not doing things), but doing things that indirectly contribute to the enactment of crimes and wrongs” (80). Those who are responsible would include “those on whom it falls […] who dwell within the social system that enables the crimes and supply that system with at least passive support” (86). This definition of responsibility has broad scope. And though it may not meet Applebaum’s criterion of avoiding causality altogether, it does make clear that political responsibility is attributed to those who “support” or “enable”, with no requirement that they be fully knowledgeable or that they have a transparent intent to do wrong. While Applebaum is skeptical of moral motivations for responses to structural racism, Young holds that there is room for both political and moral responsibility, and that the two are tied to one another as two different “perspectives” one can have on harm.

Though Young works from Arendt’s intuition that we should make a conceptual distinction between what is “personal” or “moral” and what is “collective” or “political”, these two frames of analysis are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Young is interested in supporting these categories as “perspectives”, since they are part of a “social connection model” of responsibility that takes both interactional and structural relationships to be the basis for responsibility. Though Arendt’s description of responsibility is backward looking, directed towards actions committed in the past, Young reinterprets her account as forward looking, and proscriptive, rather than simply descriptive. Political responsibility, she writes, falls on members of a society by virtue of the fact that they are aware moral agents who ought not to be indifferent to the fate of others and the danger that states and other organized institutions often pose to some people. This responsibility is largely unavoidable in the modern world, because we participate
in and usually benefit from the operation of these institutions. The meaning of political responsibility is forward-looking. *One has the responsibility always now,* in relation to current events and in relation to their future consequences. We are in a condition of having such political responsibility, and the fact of having it implies an imperative to *take* political responsibility. If we see injustices or crimes being committed by the institutions of which we are a part, or believe that such crimes are being committed, then we have the responsibility to try to speak out against them with the intention of mobilizing others to oppose them, and to act together to transform the institutions to promote better ends. (92)

For Young, the basis for political responsibility – or responsibility for structural wrongs – is not causality or individual intention, though these may turn out to be necessary. It is, rather, “they very judgment that there is injustice” that implies some kind of responsibility” (95).

Young’s social connection model of responsibility is an excellent alternative to the models Applebaum critiques, since it rejects “standard frameworks of moral and legal responsibility” which “connect a person’s deeds linearly to the harm for which we seek to assign responsibility” by focusing on the relationship that the isolated actions of individuals have to harm (96). According to the social connection model, “all those who contribute by their actions to structural processes with some unjust outcomes share responsibility for the injustice. Being responsible in relation to structural injustice means that one has an obligation to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less just” (ibid.). Key to Young’s conception of responsibility according to the social connection model is that it is a “special kind of responsibility” rather than a variation on “guilt, blame, fault or liability” (ibid).

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102 Young’s example for illustrating the implausibility of the liability model is that of single mothers with children being denied housing by landlords in a competitive housing market where patterns of housing demand (including young professionals moving into inner city neighborhoods) “rebound” on lower income renters. No single party, according to Young, should be blamed for that outcome, because “the specific actions of each cannot be causally disentangled from structural processes to trace a specific aspect of the outcome. Presumably none intended the
Because Young’s social connection model “does not isolate perpetrators” but rather brings “background conditions under evaluation”, it takes responsibility to be shared, and dischargeable “only through collective action” (105). Because of this focus on collective action rather than blame, the model is “forward looking”. It seeks to assign responsibility for “structural social injustice that has existed recently, is ongoing, and is likely to persist unless social processes change. […] The injustices produced through structures have not reached a terminus, but rather are ongoing. The point is not to compensate for the past, but for all who contribute to processes producing unjust outcomes to work to transform these processes” (109). This intuition at work in Young’s social connection model is crucial for responding to structural ignorance, since it allows for collective responses that emerge out of substantive relationality.

Because Young’s account of social position is complex and relational in a substantive way, I will use it to show how those occupying dominant social positions should be “complicitly” responsible. Young’s account does not take social position on its own, but stresses that social position derives from, and is enacted by, individuals in relation to one another. This accounts for the ways that white supremacy directly benefits some at the expense of others. The advantage of Young’s account in this regard is that these complex, inter-group relationships are not abstract, but are the very means by which structures of domination are resisted and reproduced. Young’s social connection model seeks to articulate individuals’ responsibility to resist the structures of domination at work in their social context from where they are situated within that context, and from the kinds of relationships in which they participate.

outcome [perhaps with the exception of real estate developers?], moreover, and many regret it. […] This means not that they should not be found responsible, but that they ought to be held responsible in a different sense” (100).

103 Young does note that her model is backward looking insofar as it takes historical injustices into account, and takes it to be necessary for participants in structural injustice to understand their role in it and how their social position came about (109).
Though there are several interesting accounts of the way that social position influences responsibility for group-based wrong, many of them rely on notions of duty (see Hay’s “The Obligation to Resist Oppression”, which uses the Kantian notion of duty to justify the obligation that oppressed people have to “protect and preserve their rational nature”), or put an emphasis on evaluating what counts as “resistance”, as if it were a context-independent ideal-type (see Cudd’s Resistance and Responsibility, 2006), giving short shrift to the relationality and complex social position at work in situations of structural wrong. Without being able to fully address them, I want to flag some of the challenges that arise with accounts of responsibility based on group membership, namely, the fact that many individuals are members of multiple groups with simultaneous, multiple structural positions. This challenge is certainly not new – the Black feminist tradition has been giving intersectional analyses of oppression for many decades – but the ethics literature on complex, intersectional responsibility is limited, often taking “oppressed” and “oppressor” to be fixed concepts without necessarily stressing that political responsibility is directed at the structural conditions that create those social positions.104

According to Young’s social connection model of responsibility, “all agents who contribute to the structural processes that produce injustice share responsibility for remedying that injustice” (Young 142). The scope of this notion of responsibility is broad, and some may

104 Bernard Boxill’s paper “The Responsibility of the Oppressed to Resist their Own Oppression” is one of these, claiming that oppressors can choose to “stop” their oppressive activities – a claim I find suspect. In Boxill’s papers, slavery is the paradigm case, where plantation owners are the “oppressors” and slaves are “the oppressed”. This kind of example is helpful in some respects, but not for cases of structural ignorance where the perpetuators are reproducing structural wrong simply by acting out of banal self-interest in conformity with social norms. Slavery is meant to be understood as an historical example of an accepted social norm. But Boxill’s account isolates individual choice in such a way as to obscure the structural circumstances that would likely have a strong affect on an oppressors choice to simply stop oppressing at will.
find it too demanding or impossible\textsuperscript{105}. Young emphasizes, however, the “openness” of responsibility in comparison with “duty”. The latter “specifies what it is we are supposed to do”, while in the case of the former “it is up to the agents who have a responsibility to decide what to do to discharge it within the limits of other moral considerations” (143). For Young, “we who share responsibility ought to take action, but it is up to us to decide what is reasonable for us to do, given our abilities and our particular circumstances. […] We should not be blamed or found at fault for the injustice we contribute to, and we should not be blamed or found at fault for what we do to try to rectify injustice, even if we do not succeed” (Ibid.). We should, however, be “criticized for not taking action, not taking enough action, taking ineffective action, or taking action that is counterproductive” (144).

Because of the open nature of responsibility, Young stresses that no theory can provide a set of rules or a standard method for determining how to act or what to do. She does think, however, that it is possible to articulate “parameters of reasoning” about political responsibility that can guide individual and group action. For Young, these parameters “ought to respond to the intuition that different agents properly have different kinds and degrees of forward-looking responsibility for justice” (ibid.). These differences derive from “the social positions agents occupy in relation to one another within the structural processes they are trying to change in order to make them less unjust”. For Young, these parameters are \textit{power, privilege, interest, and collective ability}. Forward-looking responsibility for structural wrongs will look different for

\textsuperscript{105}Lisa Tessman has written extensively on the impossibility of moral demands as a feature of morality that must be taken into account when discussing moral obligation. Action theory does not properly account for the experience of moral failure, which she takes to be an essential dimension of morality. She argues for a virtue ethics account that prioritizes character-formation over right action. This, she says, can support moral action under conditions of oppression that cause us “moral damage”, inhibiting our capacity, integrity, and motivation to engage in resistance to those conditions.
differently positioned people, depending on where they fall according to these parameters, though these parameters are only loose guidelines and evidently cannot give us a way to calculate collective responsibility.

On Young’s account, in addition to acknowledging the “complicity” of one’s social position through reflection and by educating oneself on the significance of one’s social position, one must also engage in organized contestation that exerts public pressure on actors who can make changes. In contrast to Applebaum’s account, Young’s account provides a guide not just for responsibility at the “interactional” level, but at the “institutional” or “structural” level, and makes an argument for the ways that the two are connected. On Young’s account, individuals are “implicated” by their social position, and are responsible because of it, but the way that responsibility is “discharged” depends on the specific parameters of one’s social position, and on ones particular set of circumstances. Young’s account goes further than Applebaum’s in its providing tools for assessing how one might act on that responsibility. The advantage of Young’s account is that it sees the messy work of coalition-building and collective action as the future-oriented form of the “complicit” responsibility advocated by Applebaum, which, because of its conflation of two different kinds of responsibility, and because its anti-realist notion of agency, cannot motivate dominant knowers to shift the structures that benefit them.

5. Conclusion: Risking identity

This chapter argued that responsibility for structural wrongs should be complicit, but that the agency behind that responsibility cannot be anti-realist; moreover, complicit responsibility must be committed to two different registers of responsibility – an “interactional” and “institutional” perspective that, together, allow for active, future-oriented, collective work
against unjust structural configurations. This depends on a post-positivist realist notion of agency, which I defended along with Hames-Garcia, Moya and Martinez. On that account, identities are both subjective and ascriptive: they are, at the same time, conferred on us as perceived members of groups, and can be actively assumed by us. Taken together, these dimensions of identity can serve as theories that are indexed to realities at work in the world, and are a means of resisting those realities. On this account, group membership isn’t an abstraction, or an essence; it isn’t a fiction, but neither is it merely a set of behaviors or attributes. It is, rather, a means of understanding oneself and one’s relationship to socio-structural forces. This post-positivist realist account is an essential ingredient in conceiving of all kinds of subject positions as having the capacity to resist the structures that shape those identities. I have shown here that we really cannot do without a realist account of social position if agents are going to take complicit responsibility for white ignorance.

We have seen in this chapter, then, that any account of complicit responsibility needs an active, future-oriented dimension so that dominant subjects are motivated to change not only their behavior, but also the structures that inform their interational habits. An anti-realalist account of subjectivity like Applebaum’s risks simplifying group membership in a way that has unintentional conservative consequences. To conclude, I will briefly discuss how basing complicit responsibility on group membership alone, without an analysis of substantive relationality and future oriented action, is more likely to result in the reproduction of structures of domination that Applebaum describes – which I describe as a kind of “passive” ally politics.
The author “M.” demonstrates, in “A Critique of Ally Politics”, published in the collection of essays Taking Sides\textsuperscript{106}, that the liberal concept of allyship is predicated on the idea that there are “fixed” groups of people, and that this has conservative political consequences – a critique I will develop further in Chapter 5. Though Applebaum’s account is based on an important political intuition (that guilt and blame cannot be the approach to addressing structural wrongs), its philosophical implications need further development, since it relies to heavily on a homogenized notion of group membership. On the realist account, however, identity and group membership can be used strategically when appropriate. M. is right to claim that those with dominant social positions must consider the political implications of their “ally” status. On an account that takes substantive relationality into account like Young’s, dominant knowers cannot stop at the recognition that they are complicit. They must develop tools for adjudicating what kinds of engagement they can have in current movements as political actors themselves.

What this may require is an active commitment to destabilizing the dominance of certain identities, including whiteness as a social position. This is certainly not to say that white people should disavow their group membership, or distance themselves from the recognition of their own benefit. But they must be willing to do political work that is indexed to real racialized inequalities, and that may result in a destabilization of identity.

Jose Medina has written that “no one gets to have cognitive innocence under conditions of oppression”; epistemic obstacles affect all subjects, though these obstacles tend to have different effects for knowers in different subject positions (Medina 45). Because of the material and psychological benefit that dominant knowers derive from white ignorance, the stakes in

\textsuperscript{106} Edited by Cindy Milstein
undertaking acts of resistance may be high. As Martinez writes in his analysis of James Baldwin’s novels, taking responsibility for oneself and one’s social position can amount to risking an integrated sense of self. Martinez is interested in Baldwin’s characters, attempting to take responsibility for themselves under structural racism involves “monumental difficulty” in terms of “what they see themselves capable of knowing and how they conceptualize their possibilities for action” (Martinez 50). Taking responsibility for oneself and one’s identity consists, for Martinez, “of a commitment not only to exploring the correlations between what one knows and where and who one is but also to distinguishing between ‘better’ and ‘worse’ frameworks for understanding the self” (Moya, in Martinez 50). This kind of responsibility is undertaken at great risk to one’s self-conception because it involves “reconceptualizing one’s relation not only to one’s self but also to one’s community and belief systems” (51). Taking responsibility in this way means that “to know the world and one’s relation to it – to know them better – one might have to adopt new senses of one’s self, new identities that, in any given circumstance, might contradict former self-conceptions and community values” (Ibid.).

In Martinez’ account of Baldwin, whiteness is not just something to which one belongs: it is an epistemic system that acts as a perceptual barrier to agents of different social positions. Risking it as a source of a knower’s “integrity”, Martinez writes, “may be the “price” for gaining an understanding of our “social predicament” (Martinez 69). This price, however, shouldn’t be an end in itself: it should be understood as a necessary step in responding to a long-term, widespread epistemic and communicative crisis. That response will require active forms of deliberate, complicit resistance undertaken by conflicted agents acting in ways that destabilize structural racism from within. The following chapters describe what that complicit resistance
could look like – a complicit resistance that turns dominant knowers into “accomplices” rather than “allies”.
Chapter 5: Complicit Resistance
We're all complicit in exploiting workers, in gentrifying – let's just get over that. We're also dealing with race and gender and patriarchy. But knowing that allows for responsibility and agency, without resorting to a correct line.

Amin Husain\textsuperscript{107}

If we recognize liminality in others and in ourselves and if we recognize a need for company and for coalition then we can decide to enter a conversation with other liminals that is not a liberal conversation. Liberal conversation thrives on transparency and because of that it is monologized. Complex communication thrives on recognition of opacity and on reading opacity, not through assimilating the text of others to our own. Rather, it is enacted through a change in one’s own vocabulary, one’s sense of self, one’s way of living, in the extension of one’s collective memory, through developing forms of communication that signal disruption of the reduction attempted by the oppressor.

María Lugones\textsuperscript{108}

The project of this dissertation has been to formulate a model of responsibility for confronting structural forms of ignorance. My focus and paradigm case has been white ignorance – a term coined by philosopher Charles Mills – and my analysis has treated the issue contextually, looking for theoretical tools that are the most apt for addressing this particular form of structural racism. My goal has been to use these tools to develop strategies for resisting white ignorance that are not themselves wholesale reproductions of white supremacist patterns, though of course there is no stepping outside the structures in which we participate and which create the conditions for agency and identity. We saw in previous chapters that models of responsibility for structural racism with a strong emphasis on guilt and innocence have a tendency to reinforce white supremacist patterns. After looking at the political backdrop for expressions of white guilt

\textsuperscript{107} From a March 2017 interview with Susie Day. Husain is an artist and political organizer.

in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 put forward an alternative model of responsibility that begins with the acknowledgement and acceptance of complicity, rather than its denial. The chapter culminated in two dimensions of “complicit” responsibility drawn from Iris Young: interactional and institutional responsibility. This final chapter gives an account of what “complicit responsibility” could look like in practice. It argues that “resistance” must be a central component of that practice, and that it must be cultivated both across, and internal to, identities. I use Mariana Ortega’s recent work to argue for resistance through “multiplicitous identity” and “white double consciousness” – strategies which can open the door to the destabilization, deflation, and desupremicization of whiteness without disavowal.

This chapter proposes that complicity be *used* to cultivate resistance – though this cannot be done without having to contend with its dangerous ambiguity. If we are talking about white responsibility for the structures and behaviors that produce white ignorance, that responsibility must accept the fact that the current movement to disrupt white supremacist practices and institutions is not “about” white people. Let’s take the current racial justice movement as an example. Black Lives Matter encompasses several black-led and centered organizations like Dream Defenders, Operation Zero, Black Lives Matter Network, and BYP100. While these groups have spearheaded protests and organized communities across the country, and have now put together a very comprehensive policy platform\(^\text{109}\), many of them “haven’t built up national coalitions with hierarchies and official roles” (see Meyerson, 2016). Because of this diffuse nature, some have claimed that “there’s no explicit place or structure for white people, a clear and intentional departure from civil rights groups of the 1960s” (Ibid.). While the author claims

\(^{109}\text{For the complete Movement for Black Lives Platform, see https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/}
that “this is a good thing for the most part”, it has made white participation complicated and has
“bred a type of well-meaning but sometimes problematic white ally” (Ibid.). The earlier chapters
of this dissertation have looked at the ways that good intentions to “be” an ally can go wrong.
This chapter looks at the ways that “complicit resistance” – both internal and external – can act
as a framework for approaching the conundrum of white participation in the movement for racial
justice.

Both Iris Young and Jose Medina – two thinkers whose work has strongly informed this
dissertation – take resistance to be necessary for acknowledging and discharging political
responsibility, and understand the responsibility to resist forms of structural oppression to apply
more stringently to those in dominant social positions. This is because, as Medina writes, “we
should not expect the most oppressed to carry the biggest burdens” (310). In liberation and
resistance movements, he writes, “we should expect more from those who are closer to the
center, the more mainstream subjects, the ones who—even if oppressed—enjoy certain
privileges and certain comfort, and are therefore comparatively less vulnerable” (Ibid.).
Following Sandra Harding and Naomi Scheman, Medina takes there to be an imperative for
privileged subjects to cultivate “traitorous” attitudes and orientations that “disrupt unquestioned
assumptions and orientations”. Medina is referring to Scheman’s 1997 paper “Queering the
Center by Centering the Queer: Reflections on Transsexuals and Secular Jews”, where she
argues that the “subversive practice of resisting and contesting established presumptions of
normalcy” should not be taken up only by those who are “queer”; “all of us” should be engaged
in this practice, and especially privileged subjects (Medina, 310; Scheman 2011). Medina uses
Scheman’s work to show that those in positions of social privilege or dominance “owe it to
themselves and the subordinated others with whom their lives and social positions are entangled”
to challenge and resist “what has been deemed normal and paradigmatic by the social imagination” (Ibid.).

Medina’s position here is in tension with the idea that those directly affected by structures of oppression should be at the forefront of movement work. This chapter engages that tension by focusing specifically on the challenges of the political imperative for those in dominant social positions to take “more risks” in their contestation of oppressive norms. One such challenge is that those in dominant social positions can lack precisely the experiences that would allow them to understand how to engage in productive resistance – though this is not universally the case, or an essential characteristic of people with “privilege”, but rather a tendency of that social position.

What I am suggesting in this chapter is that there can be white responsibility for white ignorance without disavowing white identity; that this is not only possible, but necessary; and that it will require engaging with various forms of resistance (political, epistemic, social, emotional) and creating new ones. At this point in the development of “whiteness studies” and white anti-racist leftist politics, it has fortunately become unacceptable to use disavowal at the level of identity as a viable anti-racist strategy. Talk of being a “race traitor”—a heroic exception to whiteness – is however, not uncommon, and it is very easy to understand its appeal. Many white anti-racist affinity groups aim to “undo” racism by “unlearning” whiteness, and there is something both right and not quite right about this aim. As Linda Alcoff put it in 1998, “how can whites be disloyal to whiteness while acknowledging the significance of their own racial identity?” (Alcoff 1998) Can those who occupy dominant social positions organize both from within and against their location? And can there be political strategies for doing this that aren’t mere psychologizations of the problem of structural racism?
Alcoff’s question speaks to the central challenge that has been outlined in this dissertation: the way that dominant knowers’ lack of epistemic privilege with respect to their own dominance can derail or distort their efforts to shift their individual and collective behavior, creating negative resistance in movement work. In this final chapter, I suggest that rather than disavowal or becoming a wholesale “traitor” to one’s “race” (a position I find implausible and politically irresponsible, but with understandable appeal), taking responsibility for structural racism through forms of “complicit” resistance might help to mitigate the inadvertent reproduction of white supremacist practices inherent in the misguided attempts of individuals to “shed” their whiteness or “abandon” the privileges associated with it. I understand “complicity” to have connotations that are less hubristic – though evidently also more ambiguous – than the character of being a “traitor”, and that allow for agents in positions of social dominance to have a “double” or “multiple” engagement with identity and social position that uses what simply cannot be disavowed.

There is no denying that this runs some risks – not least because many think that the most responsible thing white people can do is to step aside, and in many cases this is true. But knowing how and when to do so, I would argue, requires a form of active engagement with the question of social position and identity. What I am suggesting in this chapter is meant to give support to real-life, imperfect movement-building practices that target the structural manifestations of white supremacy by motivating some of that resistant risk-taking, in ways that are “complicit” with those whose social locations are similar and different to one’s own – that is, that use complex, cross-identitarian relationships to build coalitions that are both internally and externally resistant.
To this end, the first step in this chapter will be to outline what I mean by complicit resistance, and to describe the ambiguous role of resistance, which can be disruptive of the status quo of structural racism on the one hand, but can also act as a conservative barrier to both personal and systemic transformation on the other. One of the most comprehensive descriptions of the complex character of resistance is Jose Medina’s *The Epistemology of Resistance*, which will prove to be an important resource for the work of this chapter. As Medina writes,

resistances can be a good and a bad thing, epistemically speaking. The resistances of your cognitive life keep you grounded. As Wittgenstein would put it, in order to have a real (and not simply delusional) cognitive life, ‘we need friction,’ we need to go ‘back to the rough ground.’ But there are also resistances that function as obstacles, as weights that slow us down or preclude us from following (or even having access to) certain paths or pursuing further certain questions, problems, curiosities. (Medina 48)

Following Medina, the first section of this chapter will define positive epistemic resistance as part of a reflective attitude directed toward the interpersonal and political manifestations of white ignorance. I’ll then build on Medina’s account by explaining why this attitude should be understood as “complicit”, and as directed at structural phenomena. Beyond simply articulating an alternative framework for responsibility, which was the goal of Chapter 4, the second section of this chapter will describe, and argue for, *complicit* strategies of resistance. I will show that in addition to a framework of responsibility that begins from complicity and adopts a realist notion of identity (which were the arguments of Chapter 4), complicit resistance requires a multiplicitous notion of agency. I will argue, relying on the recent scholarship of Mariana Ortega, that “complicit resistance” can help negotiate a simultaneous commitment to identity realism (the idea that identities are both constructed and real and are sources of information about the world), and to complex, multiplicitous, heterogeneous group identity. This
multiplicity and heterogeneity are key elements in creating opportunities for positive complicit-resistant engagements.

The argument for complicit resistance, though, seems to require seemingly contradictory commitments with regard to identity, and raises a host of philosophical and political problems. Some of these problems include the political risks of adopting such a framework for “white” identity, including the risk of appropriating or exploiting “outsider” strategies developed by those who experience multiple oppressions; the dangers of moving “beyond” allyship; and “failed” complicity that amounts to mere “reformism”. These will be addressed throughout the chapter, where I will highlight how simultaneously compelling and deeply problematic it is to apply or ascribe such techniques of resistance to dominant identities like whiteness.

While the focus of this dissertation has been white ignorance, my hope is that the tactics and strategies\(^{110}\) discussed in this chapter will invite the reader to apply the shape of my analysis to other forms of epistemic and political domination. The problem of white ignorance, however, cannot be said to operate the same way as male ignorance, settler ignorance, ableist ignorance, straight ignorance, ignorance based on class privilege, or any other form of structural ignorance. The analogies between different structural phenomena are not direct, and there is no guarantee that political responses and strategies can apply cross-contextually, as motivating as such analogies may be. The intention, however, is for “complicity” to create opportunities for

\[^{110}\text{Mariana Ortega distinguishes between “strategies” and “tactics”: strategies, according to Ortega, are reformist, and operate within status quo structures by employing their methods, while tactics subvert those methodologies. These tactics include those needed to survive under oppressive conditions. They are methods that subvert the very logics of oppressive systems, operating under or beyond their radar. In this chapter, though I do use Ortega’s work, I do not use her distinction, and see that both “strategies” and “tactics” on Ortega’s definition could be employed complicitly.}\]
“accomplices” to participate in intersectional, multiplicitous resistance within and across identity formations that can destabilize structural circumstances.111

1. Epistemic resistance and complex identity

Because much of this dissertation has treated structural ignorance as a phenomenon that is both political and epistemic, where these are coextensive, I have been reluctant to discuss ignorance as a merely epistemic phenomenon, and in this final chapter, I will continue to argue for responses that are not only aimed at addressing “gaps” in meaning or collective knowledge, but at shifting the structural circumstances that are tied to what Medina and Fricker have called “hermeneutic deficiencies”. In keeping with those goals, this section will use Medina’s notions of “epistemic friction” and “epistemic resistance” to show how it can be a way of discharging the complicit responsibility outlined in Chapter 4. Showing this will involve applying Medina’s work beyond its own stated intentions.

Medina’s account of epistemic resistance is an apt resource to take up in describing how to discharge complicit responsibility, since it follows Foucault’s contention that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power” and that resistance can only be understood through “the strictly relational character of power relations” (Foucault, cited in Medina, 15). Medina’s account of responsibility takes resistance to be both an “epistemic strategy” and a “political strategy”, that is a contextual, intersectional, complicated, and “heterogeneous phenomenon that

111 The question of using analogy to motivate political action is a topic for future research. To what degree does our own structural position – ethnic identity, or sexual identity, for example – allow for an analogical or empathic sense for someone else’s structural position, and to what degree should this be put to political use? This question makes an appearance in this chapter under the guise of multiplicitous identity formations that create complex coalitions, but deserves to be developed further.
defies unification and explication according to abstract and rigid principles of subversion”. Our cognitive, affective, and political lives are “permeated by different forms of conformity and resistance that shape our lives in various (and not always fully coherent) ways” (Medina, 14).

For Medina, resistance, and responsibility for that resistance, are understood as inseparable from structures of oppression. “Our communities of resistance,” Medina writes,

cannot leave the mainstream critically untouched. It is a mistake to think that the forms of exclusion, subordination, and marginalization that we can find in mainstream culture can be resisted only from the outside, and not also from within. […] The multifaceted activity of resisting is conceptualized as contending with, and not exclusively or fundamentally as contending against” (16).

Medina’s epistemic resistance can be read as “complicit”, since it acknowledges and engages with the structural circumstances in which it is embedded, without presuming to extricate itself from them.

In this chapter, I will apply and expand Medina’s notion of epistemic friction to the problem of white ignorance. This is because his suggestion for carrying out epistemic activism is discussed mostly in terms of cultivating “resistant social imaginations” that are pluralistic and heterogeneous, and where epistemic norms are continually challenged by the tensions in meaning-making between and within identity group formations. Epistemic responsibility is a hermeneutic practice where shared meanings are shaped through beneficial friction that challenges the status quo, but never from a single perspective. “In order to become hermeneutically responsible interlocutors in our communicative interactions,” Medina writes, “we are obligated to interrogate the limits of our interpretative horizons and to expose ourselves to interpretative challenges that may require extending or transforming the interpretative resources available to us” (Medina 110).
Medina’s *Epistemologies of Resistance* is an important resource for the project of confronting white ignorance (and other forms of structural ignorance) because it discusses the “forces” at work in our cognitive lives, in our beliefs and belief systems, that move us, through our dispositions and tendencies, to “believe or not believe” (49). Medina’s work lends itself to an account of complicit responsibility because it recognizes agents as caught up in a plurality of opposing forces that structure their internal and external cognitive lives. Insensitivity to beneficial epistemic resistance, on Medina’s account, is what produces something like white ignorance, since it refuses both “acknowledgement” of its limitations, and “engagement” with those forces of resistance – two “regulative principles” Medina suggests for beneficial epistemic resistance (50).

Medina’s account is centered on epistemic virtues and vices, where vices maintain and contribute to epistemic oppression, and virtues “fight against it” (29). Epistemic vices typical of otherwise privileged subjects, like epistemic arrogance and other “corrupted attitudes and dispositions that get in the way of knowledge” are understood by Medina to be disadvantages, while virtues like “humility”, “curiosity”, “critical openness”, and “diligence” are advantages. Epistemic vices are “flaws that are not incidental or transitory, but structural and systematic: they involve attitudes deeply rooted in one’s personality and cognitive functioning” (30). Because they permeate one’s entire cognitive life”, they affect one’s capacity to learn from others and the facts; they inhibit the capacity of self-correction and of being open to corrections from others […]. In short, these vices are deep and serious flaws in epistemic character that limit the subject’s learning capacities and contributions to the pursuit of knowledge, and therefore they also damage the social knowledge available and harm the chances for epistemic improvement of the subject’s community. (Ibid.)
These kinds of epistemic vices are more likely to be found in the knowledge practices of those who are privileged or who occupy dominant social positions, though they are not universal or exclusive to, or automatic features of, that group (43).

The cognitive experiences of non-dominant knowers could be thought by some to be forms of epistemic disadvantage (in terms of access to education, internalized self-doubt and questioning, etc.), but Medina shows that they are advantageous in cultivating the epistemic virtues of openness, curiosity and humility. This is because those navigating inhospitable systems must become familiar with norms, values and beliefs different from their own, and this is often a matter of survival (43). In this sense, attentiveness to one’s own cognitive limitations is not only “virtuous”, but can, under some conditions, produce a kind of “subversive lucidity that can have an enormous critical and transformative impact on the epistemic community and its environments” (51).

On this account, both those who are structurally advantaged and those who are disadvantaged can cultivate epistemic virtues by engaging the resistance they experience – though this depends on a particular relationship between individual agency and structural circumstances. The question this chapter engages is: what kinds of resistance should be cultivated *collectively* to challenge white ignorance, and what tactics can generate “subversive lucidity”, without reproducing what Shannon Sullivan has called “white ontological expansiveness”? It seems clear that this project requires an ambiguous, dialectical process of simultaneously acknowledging identity and “risking it”, and a commitment to the realness of identity and its multiplicitous heterogeneity. That ambiguous process of resistance is what I hope to begin to describe in this chapter.
While Medina’s account of resistance is a good place to start, it also has some limitations for dealing with the *structural* nature of white ignorance. Because Medina’s focus is on the cultivation of epistemic virtues, it has an implicit emphasis on character formation. While this is an important dimension of white ignorance, which is a collection of habits and ways of being that include affective expression (as we saw in Chapter 3), I am specifically interested to apply Medina’s notion of epistemic resistance to collective political processes, individuals’ motivation to participation in them, and optimal strategies and tactics of deliberately produced resistance. Some advantages of Medina’s account are that it is plurivocal, complex, fallibilistic, meliorist, and non-essentializing, while still taking very seriously the role of social position and identity. It also rejects the false dichotomy between individual and collective – a position I have argued for in this dissertation – as well as rejecting the “false trichotomy” between the epistemic, the ethical and political (82). I am using Medina here because he takes epistemic interaction to involve “more than the mere pooling of information”; for him, “it also involves negotiating processes of mutual interrogation and the collaborative generation of meanings and interpretative possibilities” (95). But Medina’s account of epistemic responsibility is, “first and foremost, the responsibility to *confront* internal and external resistance” (my emphasis), while in this chapter I am interested in active strategies for *creating* and *cultivating* collective resistance that are not merely negative.

While I do think that Medina’s project of expanding and pluralizing the social imagination is crucial for shifting white supremacist practices, I am interested in forms of resistance that go beyond imaginaries – forms of resistance that take concrete action motivated by “beneficial” epistemic friction. Though many of Medina’s examples do in fact point to the material conditions tied to social imaginaries (Rosa Parks’ direct action that was tied to her
social position and was also made possible by being part of a movement to shift material conditions, his project is to create pluralistic networks of solidarity that can shift collective meaning-making. His account of epistemic resistances is cognitive, emotive, social and political, but Medina is reluctant to “instrumentalize” resistance beyond the cultivation of resistant “imaginations”. For this reason, I will build on Medina’s account here in order to expand it beyond “epistemic” activism – though of course I accept that epistemic activism is itself political. I have argued here, however, that our beliefs and knowledge practices are inseparable from structural circumstances and institutional practices, and that we need a framework of responsibility that can address the conditions that have a mutually constitutive relationship to knowledge production. Though Medina would not deny that these registers are inseparable, his emphasis is on what we would traditionally think of as the realm of knowledge production, and the epistemic character that individuals must cultivate, while I am attempting to generate direct practices of political resistance for confronting structural racism, of which white ignorance is an instance and a barrier.

So what, then, does Medina’s account of resistance add to the idea of “complicit” responsibility? In the first place, it acknowledges that one’s social position can have complex effects on one’s willingness to resist, and the effectiveness on one’s resistance, and that these effects are not universalizable. This means that identities, locations, and positions contain internal frictions that can motivate both individual transformation, and the collective transformation of an identity in its multiplicitous relationships to others. Some social positions,

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112 Medina calls this kind of agency that is both generated by a political movement and by individual responsibility, “chained agency”. Chained agency understands individual responsibility to be tied and motivated by social position and structural circumstances, while still retaining individual agency to navigate those circumstances. Chained agency does not separate individual and collective or structural agency. See Medina, 234.
like those that involve certain kinds of privilege, are more likely to put up negative resistance to shifting the epistemic status quo. We saw above, and in Chapter 2, how this happens in the case of white ignorance. Because Medina’s account does not essentialize the connection between social positionality and epistemic virtue, it gives us some important resources for challenging white ignorance from the social position of whiteness, where whiteness is already heterogeneous and engaged with internal and external differences that create epistemic friction. It is not impossible for those in positions of social and material privilege to develop the kind of subversive lucidity that Medina describes. But it takes an acknowledgement of and engagement with the paradoxical nature of whiteness as a real identity that creates the conditions for political and epistemic agency, and as something that must be destabilized through its own political agency. Medina’s account offers subversive, positive resistance through a “meta-attitude” that remains in the political fray, while developing a lucid understanding one’s own position, and of the kinds of epistemic and political forces that might be affecting one’s beliefs and interpersonal behaviors. Medina intends his notion of “meta-lucidity” to not to be “meta” in the sense of removing oneself from one’s epistemic circumstances, but to be a reflective, critical engagement with the internal and external forms of resistance – both positive and negative – at work in the cognitive, emotional and social processes that come to inform individual and group behavior.

Medina’s picture of cognitive agency as the navigation of various forms of resistance positions subjects as moving through, and actively contributing to, an “experiential space” rife with heterogeneities, discontinuities and tensions. Understanding this position is necessary for actively deciding which forms of resistance to bolster and which forms of resistance to diminish. While Medina’s focus is resistance in the process of cultivating epistemic virtue, his account,
when pushed further, sets us up to ask which forms of resistance will “up the ante” by strategically applying political pressure, and which forms of resistance are counter-productive.

Because those forms of resistance cut through and across identity categories, Medina’s “epistemic resistance” is a tool for confronting white ignorance insofar as it can help agents become more attuned to structural difference inside their own group. Though forms of oppression do not all operate in the same way, tensions that are the product of cognitive limitation internal to white identity have the potential to politicize and sensitize white actors. Though there is of course no guarantee, structural disparities within whiteness can create a form of analogical awareness that can move people to act on behalf of others, like (white) queers who are moved to engage in racial justice work by participating in groups like Queers Against Israeli Apartheid. There are certainly problematic ways that this analogy is used, like the subsumption of race under class by some Marxist groups, or what should now be (at least from an academic, gender studies perspective) a dated debate in the “women’s movement” about the primacy and universality of gender-based oppression. But experiencing epistemic friction within oneself and one’s own identity group – without simplifying the experience through distancing techniques like “white talk” (see Bailey 2013) – can open the door to “coalitions”, “allegiances” and forms of “solidarity” that operate across those groups, and ultimately destabilize a monolithic whiteness just enough to motivate well-meaning actors to act in collaboration with others against the forces that gave one’s identity its power. Medina’s account of epistemic friction is an honest engagement with the complexity of forces at work in our cognitive, affective and political lives, and does not require agents to be fully “lucid” or fully “blind”; political action is, rather, “a mixed and hybrid kind of agency in which intentional and non-intentional acts of individuals and groups become interwoven, enabling and constraining each other in complex ways” (244).
Medina’s critique of one-dimensional group membership is crucial for the possibility of resistant coalitions, and has interesting implications for the complex project of “allyship” – a notion I began to critique in Chapter 4. The suggestion that epistemic and political transformation require coalitions that involve a form of “solidarity” and agency deeper than “ally politics” has been echoed in some recent activist literature written in response to the difficult political dynamics that arose in the aftermath of Ferguson in 2014.\(^\text{113}\)

The author “M.”, in “A Critique of Ally Politics”, published in the collection of essays *Taking Sides*\(^\text{114}\), is emphatic in their critique of ally politics as generating an impoverished form of political responsibility precisely because of its assumption of homogeneity. According to this essay, the liberal concept of allyship is predicated on the idea that there are “fixed” groups of people

that have been wronged by the structural oppressions of our society, that we must work across these differences to achieve equality for all, and that this responsibility falls especially on those who most benefit from structural oppressions. [...] According to ally politics, in order to undermine whatever social privileges you benefit from, you must give up your role as a primary actor and become an ally to the oppressed. A good ally learns that [...] the only way to act with integrity is to follow the leadership of those who are oppressed in that way, support their projects and goals, and always seek out their suggestions and listen to their ideas when you are not sure what to do next. (66-67, in Milstein)\(^\text{113}\)

Now, this position does not immediately seem undesirable: in many contexts, those with privilege should exercise vigilance with respect to the space they take up, and should prioritize the voices, organizing, and decision-making power of those who have been historically marginalized. M. writes, however, that

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\(^\text{113}\) The uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 after the shooting of Michael Brown by the police, was the catalyst for the current Black Lives Matter movement.

\(^\text{114}\) Edited by Cindy Milstein
[It] starts to get real complicated, real fast, however, as you discover that there is no singular mass of people of color—or any other identity-based group—to take guidance from, and that people within a single identity will not only disagree about important things but will often have directly conflicting desires. (Ibid.)

What M. is objecting to is the false homogenization of identity groups, and the political tokenization of “others” that is unintentionally produced by “white ally identity”, specifically of those “others” who are chosen by those allies as “representing” people who are oppressed (M., in Milstein, 69). M. writes that often these representatives are the most visible “leaders”, and that this “structurally reinforces the hierarchical power that we’re fighting against by asking a small group to represent the view of many people with a variety of lived experiences” (Ibid.). M. stresses that this kind of allyship based on one’s identity “as an ally” is a way of

...taking power while simultaneously diminishing your accountability, because not only are you hiding behind others but you’re also obscuring the fact that you’re in control of making the choices about who you’re listening to—all the while pretending, or convincing yourself, that you’re following the leadership of a nonexistent community of people of color or that of the most appropriate black voices. And who are you to decide who the most appropriate anything is? (70-71).

The problem, according to M., is a distortion of reality motivated by the guilt at the heart of ally politics (and “charity” responses to oppression): these models are “so strongly rooted in ideas of I and the other that they force people to fit into distinct groups with preordained relationships to one another” (75). Instead of acting out of “divestment” or “resignation”, or mere recognition of complicity, M. suggests focusing on affinity and mutual aid: working with people who share goals, and developing relationships based on trust, friendship and love, where we all have a stake in one another’s liberation (74).
M.’s polemical position is a response to the idea that whiteness and privilege are reifiable, stable group identities that have enough fixity to determine what kind of agency one can allow oneself to have. I do think that whiteness is an identifiable, historically-generated, socially constructed collection of habits, cultural behaviors and tendencies that have become associated with domination, and I think that it would be politically irresponsible to give it up any time soon as a category of analysis. I do think, however, that M. is on to something, and that is the fact that if whiteness is going to be engaged in a transformational, coalitional politics from its own standpoint, it must (1) accept its internal and external affinities and frictions, within and across identity groupings, that have the potential to build coalitions, and (2) it cannot supplant individual responsibility to take political action with what is assumed to be passive receptivity to the demands of a falsely homogenized “other”.

But what qualifies as an ally, from white and non-white perspectives, “isn’t universal,” as Collier Meyerson writes in her 2016 opinion piece published in Fusion in response to the arrest of white activists demonstrating after the death of Alton Sterling at the hands of the police. She cites Katrina L. Rogers, the communications manager of the New Orleans chapter of BYP100: “I think a white person can only be a true ally if she works from the desire to dismantle white supremacy instead of merely being fueled by white guilt […]. If you’re not working with us and taking our direction, you’re not an ally” (cited in Meyerson, 2016).

M.’s polemical position, then, while it does give us the helpful role of “accomplice” to replace “ally”, does not quite give us the tools to distinguish between white hubris and white accountability, or to act collectively against white supremacist institutions and practices while still acknowledging the reality and power of white identity. And, while this is not necessarily a strategy that will work on its own without deep structural change, it also does not necessarily
develop an analysis that supports leadership of color to displace an overwhelmingly white professional organizing and non-profit world, and an overwhelmingly white academy. M’s account is helpful, though, in that it invests individuals with an accountability to put themselves on the line in a way that cultivates affinities, goals, friendship and love for those whose identities are different from one’s own – an accountability that resonates with both Young’s and Medina’s.

Against M.’s critique of orienting one’s activism around the claims of “communities of color” (who M. rightly says we should not understand as a fixed or homogenous entity), Medina is right to say that those who are less advantaged by their circumstances tend to be better at what philosopher Lori Gallegos has called “skillful coping”: forms of skilled knowledge that allow for the navigation of environments hostile to one’s social position (Gallegos de Castillo, 2016). Those who are members of historically marginalized groups tend to be more experienced in code-switching, and tend to have the skills and epistemic privileges that come with having to navigate multiple worlds (Ortega 2016; Lugones 2003, 1987). This means that those who have lacked material and social privileges do tend to be more knowledgeable about what needs to be done to address the forms of historical disadvantage active in their own lives, and should be setting the priorities in organizing and movement work.

So what can “accomplices” learn from M. and Medina, if they can no longer be “white allies” by trying to “give up their primary role”? To what extent should privilege be used if one cannot simply give it up?\footnote{Activist groups like Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ – a group of white anti-racists with a mandate of educating and organizing other white people in anti-racist activism) and Resource Generation (a group of mostly young white people with economic privilege whose work finds ways to invest and divest resources to support racial and economic justice) have the explicit goal of using privilege to mobilize for political transformation. Some scholars like Matthew Hughey, however, have critiqued the inflexible understanding of racial identity assumed by groups like SURJ (Hughey 2012). Hughey’s work concludes, disturbingly, that groups that predicate their organizing on racial privilege tend to preserve racially privileged behaviors and assumptions about race that, upon}
must involve coalitions that acknowledge the resources and limitations of whiteness, and can consider them strategically in an organizing context. In this next section, I will use Mariana Ortega’s work on coalition-building and multiplicitous identities to describe a “complicit resistance” that acknowledges and addresses whiteness as a political problem, while maintaining enough heterogeneity to generate transformational friction and affinities within and across identity groups.

So what does it take, philosophically, to have resistant coalitions that operate “complicitly”, both within and across identity categories? I showed in the last section, through Medina’s work, that complicit resistance requires a “meta-attitude” for recognizing which forms of internal and external resistance are positive and negative with regard to structural racism – and “meta” only in the sense of an activity of reflection, and not in terms of a “neutral” register of normativity removed from social position. Though Medina’s account mainly focuses on character formation, it does give us an approach that can be applied to collective, political forms of resistance – both those internal to groups, and those organized across identity group formations.

What complicit resistance requires, in addition to a meta-attitude that can judge which forms of resistance to cultivate and which to temper, is to take social position as constitutive of how responsibility should be carried out, while simultaneously maintaining a multiplicitous, non-monolithic notion of identity. While this might seem paradoxical, I’ll use Mariana Ortega’s recent work to support the notion of multiplicitous, non-monolithic identities and social positions as a way through the dilemma described by M.’s critique of “ally politics”. I will be careful, in making this argument, to maintain the “realness” of identities and social positions like whiteness, analysis, are hard to distinguish from the behaviors and assumptions of white nationalist groups (Hughey, 2012): namely, an essentialism that takes race to be unchanging and unchangeable.
while understanding them to be porous and transformable through forms of collective action that target their constitutive structures – though of course I do not take racial identities, or racial categories, to be changeable or “chosen” by individuals themselves, no matter how “meta-reflective” we are about them, or how much we shift the way we relate to them\textsuperscript{116}. As Linda Martin Alcoff writes in *The Future of Whiteness*, “whiteness is an organically produced identity formation. As an organic identity, the meanings of race identities are subject to change, not fixed forever in a vat of unchanging racial sentiment or animus” (Alcoff 2015, 188). In order to change group identities, however, they must be engaged openly and directly, in such a way that can “avoid the sort of group-centrism and group-think that excludes connections to others” while still engaging whiteness as an identity (Ibid.). I find Mariana Ortega’s work on multiplicity to very helpful in the project of this chapter, which looks for collective ways “deflating” white identity through “rearticulating cross-racial identities” (Ibid.).

2) Multiplicity and world-traveling

In *In-Between*, Ortega develops a Latina feminist phenomenology of the multiplicitous self through an analysis of the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugones. She concludes with the need for a politics of “deep coalition”, a notion also drawn from Lugones’ work, and

\textsuperscript{116}There has been some new literature on “transracialism” in the wake of the controversy over Rachel Dolezal’s racial identity that misunderstands the term to mean individuals’ choices to relate to multiple racial identities, or individuals’ having multiple racial identities. By erroneously understanding “transracialism” to be analogous to “transgenderism” (a pathologizing and dated word for trans*ness or trans* experience), some of this literature argues that it is possible for individuals to “choose” their racial identities in the way that individuals can also “choose” their gender identities. There isn’t room in this chapter to engage that literature, or the conversation about Rachel Dolezal (which I cannot help but take to be about “passing” and cultural appropriation more than it is about “transracialism”). This footnote is meant to signal that I do not think that racial identity and gender identity categories are analogous to one another (structurally or historically), and that for this reason, I am not claiming what I say in this chapter to apply in any way to gender, transness, or trans* experience.
developed by Ortega alongside the “decentered tactics” of a multiplicitous experience of selfhood that inhabits multiple worlds. Ortega’s beautiful book presents a theory of border-crossing and border-crossers. It isn’t just a phenomenology of the “being-between-worlds, being-in-worlds, and becoming-with” (Ortega, 3) experienced by los atravesados: “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; [...] those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’” (Anzaldúa, 3). It is also an argument for how in-betweenness and multiplicity of identity and experience – elaborated through Anzaldúa’s notions of nepantla and the new mestiza, and Lugones’ notions of world-traveling, curdled logics, complex communication, and deep coalition – can serve us politically. I cannot, here, give an adequate account of all of these notions, so I will focus on Ortega’s argument for multiplicity as a basis for political coalition. I’m interested in Ortega’s account, because for her, the experience of multiplicity – of in-between selfhood that inhabits multiple worlds with no guarantee that these experiences will result in an “integrated” self – is both characterized by resistance (in terms of the friction or incommensurability in the experience of multiple worlds), and creates the possibility of collective political resistance. I’ll focus here on Ortega’s use of the notions of “world-traveling” and “deep coalition”, and relate them, as she does, to a notion of double consciousness drawn from Du Bois.

Lugones’ oft-cited notion of “world-traveling” is meant to capture the epistemic shifts experienced by those who have been “subordinated, exploited, and enslaved” (Lugones 2003, 17) when they move between different spatial worlds of sense. It is meant as a practice of “cross-cultural and cross-racial loving” (Lugones, 1987) that emphasizes the importance of plurality rather than unity, and that is resistant to a “‘logic of purity’ and oppression that calls for univocity, homogeneity, and an abstract understanding of space” (Ortega, 90). Lugones describes
world-traveling as the experience of having different cultural or social worlds activate different aspects of the self\textsuperscript{117}, the paradigm case in her own account being the tension she experiences as an immigrant to the United States navigating the “Anglo” cultural world, and as a lesbian in the Latino cultural world. In world-traveling, some attributes or aspects of oneself that are central to one’s behavior and identity – for example, “playfulness” in Lugones’ Latino world – are unrecognizable or incommensurable with ones attributes in another world, as is the case with Lugones’ “seriousness” in the Anglo world.

World-traveling, for Lugones, is a “resistant practice” that “moves against the grain of oppression” because it allows for the “play” of multiple visions of the world and oneself, where one can move between structural positions, or experience the incommensurability of multiple simultaneous structural positions, which Lugones calls the position of “being-oppressed/oppressing ⇔ resisting”. What Lugones’ account is meant to capture is the way that different positions relative to power can be operative at the same time, for the same person, disrupting monolithic notions of identity, and creating complex affinities across identity groups usually thought to be homogenous or atomistic. One can be both an oppressor and resisting, both oppressed and resisting, and world-traveling allows us to experience these shifting visions of ourselves and our place within power relations. Because of the complexity it discloses, this multiplicity of vision requires “resistant, oppositional thoughts, movements, gestures among

\textsuperscript{117}Ortega is critical of the ambiguity in Lugones’ work around whether there are indeed multiple selves and multiple realities. I cannot get involved in this ontological debate here, and will follow Ortega in putting aside Lugones’ notion of “multiple realities” in favor of selves that traverse multiple intersecting or overlapping worlds. Ortega rejects the notion that world-traveling necessarily entails “self-traveling”, or the exploration of multiple selves, favoring an account of selfhood that can be fragmented, multiplicitous, but nonetheless “one” in its co-becoming with other selves. In contrast to Lugones’ view, Ortega writes, “my view captures the importance of the multiplicity that Latina phenomenologists like Anzaldua and Lugones so powerfully theorize, but it does not posit ontological pluralism. My position is better described as an existential pluralism that recognizes both the individual and multiplicitous character of the self in terms of the way in which the self fares or \textit{is} in different worlds” (89).
variegated heterogeneous aggregates of subjects negotiating a life in the tensions of various being-oppressed/oppressing ⇔ resisting relations” (Lugones, quoted in Ortega, 90). The practice of world-traveling emerges out of experiences of one’s own multiplicity and the “heterogeneity of the social” (Ortega 91), and is a resistant practice because it effectively refutes the notion that cultural worlds are homogenous or univocal. “ Outsider” selves, who find themselves traveling from world to world, or inhabiting simultaneous sets of social norms that are in tension with one another, challenge the idea of “atomistic” social or cultural worlds as isolated units (92). The liberatory potential of world-traveling lies in the possibility that “the self that is constructed as alien, as unwanted, as disposable in one world can travel to another world and find herself as resistant and as a constructor of new visions” (Ibid.), while in another world yet, she might find herself as oppressor.

World-traveling that engages the multiplicity of identity is a resistant, transformative practice, because it “takes up the nonscripted possibilities in the cracks in domination” (Lugones, 2003, 30). Ortega takes a “mestiza or differential consciousness” characterized by ambiguity and contradiction to be at the basis of the political possibility in the practice of world-traveling, since it moves beyond “being at ease”, and “reactive” forms of resistance, to challenge the very logics at work in one’s various worlds. On Ortega’s account, this means that for Lugones,

the solution to dealing with contradiction is thus not a matter of becoming at-ease. Resistance involves having access to other worlds in which the self is constructed differently and thus can see resistant possibilities that lead to resistant practices. This happens at the limen in specific, concrete spaces in which the self can attain resistant and resisting visions. The limen is a social state in which one is fully aware of one’s multiplicity; it is an “anti-structure” in which selves encounter possibilities of “standing aside from one’s social position” (Ortega 97, quoting Lugones).
World-traveling allows for the “resistant” meta-attitude described by Medina earlier in this chapter, since it generates an experience that is reflective of one’s multiplicitous non-neutrality. It’s important to note that this “liminal” experience of resistant ambiguity is only possible on an account where selves are impure, or “curdled”, where logics of purity are “logics of domination” (Ortega 102, Lugones 2003 “purity, impurity, separation”)[^118], and where “curdled” identities can resist logics of domination by refuting the static identities created by structures of domination.

Ortega’s interpretation and use of Lugones’ concept of world-traveling is consistent with the argument I have been making about forms of responsibility for structural racism that take white identity into account while simultaneously working to deflate or destabilize it. World-traveling, like the “complicity” account of responsibility, rejects the logic of moral purity; it also employs an epistemic strategy similar to that of the scholarship on “white ignorance”, since it challenges a set of ideologically dominant knowledge-norms and practices. It is a resistant practice characterized by ambiguity, like the “complicit resistance” I suggest in this chapter.

But because the practice of world-traveling and the multiplicitous consciousness it develops involve such ambiguity, they do not, on Ortega’s view, guarantee resistance or liberation (124). This is why Ortega argues not just for world-traveling, but for critical world-traveling – since of course world-traveling is not a “neutral” activity (137). Ortega’s amendment to Lugones’ concept is particularly important for when those in positions of social dominance employ the practice of world-traveling. Because the practice is meant for *los atravesados*, it is not obvious that it should be employed by those who are not outsiders in some important respect, who do not, in some way, already have the experience of code-switching, boundary- or border-[^118]

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[^118]: For Lugones, logics of purity and domination understand separation as “splitting”, a complete separation yielding two fragmented or distinct parts. Impure logics understand separation as a “curdling” that produces the “yolky oil and oily yolk” of curdled mayonnaise.
crossing, migrating, gender-bending, being otherwise deviant from the dominant norm, or “between” normative systems.

Is critical world-traveling by members of dominant groups necessarily appropriative and presumptuous, or can the practice be engaged in to generate resistance, both for individuals, and for identity-based groups, and particularly resistance to white ignorance? Ortega writes that the practice of world-traveling can be “a way to combat arrogant perception or a failure to identify with and to love others whom we deem inferior to us”, since it “allows for openings so that we can understand different worlds and understand ourselves and others differently” and can “provide insights into how someone lives in another world” (136). In this sense, it can be a “powerful tool” used by members of dominant groups “for the purposes of undermining oppression and injustice”. But of course, to use the practice primarily as a member of a dominant group – even when that dominant identity is not heterogeneous – runs the risk of romanticizing or misusing it. Ortega, however, still thinks that members of dominant groups should use the practice as a tool against domination, emphasizing that one must be engaged in “critical world-traveling or the type of travel in which one is aware of the baggage that one is bringing along, of one’s presuppositions about the world to which one is traveling, and of the ways in which what is learned in world-traveling can be used to change worlds” (137).

To be critical in one’s world-traveling means that sometimes white people, or members of dominant groups, must “decline world-traveling, since it will do more harm than good”. Ortega cites Sullivan’s notion of “ontological expansiveness”, a conscious or unconscious view held by many white people that “they have the right to occupy geographical, linguistic, moral, and other spaces, even if these spaces are for people of color or for groups other than privileged whites” (Ortega, 138). Ortega observes that both world traveling and “opting out of world
traveling” give rise to various problems; there is, therefore, no “general recipe as to what members of dominant groups must do”. Some form of critical world traveling, however, is necessary, according to Ortega. But it requires “attunement to the spatiality, sociality, and historicity of each circumstance,” as well as “special awareness of how the knowledge acquired in world-traveling is used” (139). Dominant world-travelers must have explicit, conscious awareness of the “norms and rules” of their own context, and must be cognizant of the danger of “political tourism”, limiting one’s “traveling” to the intellectual realm, and being “playful” in a way that becomes detached from political consciousness and has no real consequences for the practitioner.

The way I take Ortega’s expansion of Lugones’ notion of world-traveling to give substance to “complicit resistance” is that the practice both issues from, and creates, resistance to the systemic forces at work in one’s respective “worlds” – without relying on pure notions of identity and agency, and without employing a univocal moral orientation. The practice is decidedly against the cultivation of “mastery” over a particular world or over oneself, since world-traveling discloses multiple, often incommensurable views or perspectives on the self. These perspectives are relational, as is the practice of world-traveling itself.

In the case of white identity, world-traveling, when undertaken “critically”, has the potential to generate not just “resistant” multiple consciousness for individuals, but can create the possibility of group-based coalitions that cut across identity-divisions, without disavowing the structural advantages that some positions have relative to others. In practice, this means the complicated process of affinity and cross-identity based organizing – not for the “mastery” of

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119 Ortega adopts a notion of “intersectional” identity which she interprets following Michael Hames-Garcia’s contention that identities are “intermeshed” rather than simply “intersecting”.

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those in dominant positions, but in order to target patterns of domination and the structures shaped by them.

3. Double-consciousness and political coalition

The transformative multiplicity at work when those in dominant positions engage in the practice of world-traveling is, as we saw, characterized by a great deal of ambiguity. There is a fine line between relational experiences that destabilize one’s view of one’s situation and motivate one to act in political coalition with others, and mere political tourism. Because world-traveling takes place in the “limen” – in a border state between normative systems or worlds – it can be difficult to gauge which side of the line one is on. This is why Ortega and Alcoff have both theorized the multiple consciousness of world-traveling as a form of Du Boisian “double consciousness”. Alcoff in particular argues that the doubleness or incoherence of a white consciousness “alienated” by its “connection to a disquieting past, troubling present, and correlate responsibilities” (2015, 168) should be taken seriously as “a phenomenological datum from which to understand the transformation of whiteness” (169). Like world-traveling, “white double consciousness” has the potential to motivate coalition and transformation by destabilizing the rigidity of identity categories while still recognizing their real histories and effects.

As Alcoff notes, there are some important distinctions between Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness and the white double consciousness I am invoking here. In Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, double consciousness is an affect, affliction, epistemic position, and “epistemic privilege” associated with being on the receiving end of racial oppression. In a famous and oft-cited passage, Du Bois describes double consciousness as

this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One
ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-
reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength
alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the
history of this strife — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his
double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the
older selves to be lost. [...] He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be
both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows,
without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face” (2-3).

Alcoff sees this as resonant with the “inner turmoil whites feel who have seen through the myths
of vanguardism” (168) — the anxiety produced by the recognition of one’s own participation in
whiteness, and the white subjective experience that “does not correspond to the dominant
narrative of whiteness that holds itself ahead of and better than every other culture” (171). This is
not to compare or equate the historical domination and exploitation experienced by communities
of color with white discomfort. Importantly, “whites who experience a split consciousness
between the way they see themselves and the way they are seen by non-white others are not
thereby oppressed by a racist gaze from racial others” (170). They are, rather, living out the
failure of “white vanguardist ideologies”. I am following Alcoff here in her suggestion that we
put pressure on the white incoherence of seeing oneself through “conflicting meaning systems,
inside and outside one’s community” (170), and use that incoherence as “a potential source for a
new and more accurate understanding of social conditions” (Ibid.). While this understanding
does not guarantee coalitions of resistance, it can be an important collective motivation, since it
involves “becoming aware of the obstacles in the way of creating a morally livable white
identity” (171), and assuming the structural dimensions of those obstacles as political targets,
rather than looking to assuage white guilt or discomfort.

Alcoff notes that some of the double consciousness experienced by white people is the
result of a shift in the status of whiteness: the weakening of white normativity, the increased
impossibility of avoiding nonwhite perspectives, the waning of whiteness alone as conferring unmediated privilege without the influence of other variables like class, gender, region, age, able-bodiedness, sexuality, etc. Alcoff writes that what David Roediger has called the “wages of whiteness” are decreasing, and that the “promulgation of new racial categories may confuse the meaning of the concept of race and lessen its power” (Alcoff, 173; Roediger 1991).

These slow demographic changes, however, certainly do not decrease the collective, “psychic attachment” to white vanguardism (Alcoff 175), and the mainstreaming of American white nationalism with the election of Donald J. Trump in November, 2016, along with the statistical rise in the number of hate groups for a second year in a row\(^\text{120}\). While it may be true that whiteness is becoming less unified and less credible (Alcoff 176), this year has confirmed that white supremacy hasn’t gone away, and will not do that on its own. Alcoff’s argument is not that we should sit back and watch this occur, but that the recent collective “turmoil” among white people is an opportunity to move beyond eliminativism, and to put pressure on whites’ collective split consciousness to “explore the basis upon which whites might join a coalition for social change for their own reasons” (Alcoff 175).

What, though, is the relationship between the internal “resistance” in white double consciousness, and the formation of resistant coalitions? Let’s return now to Ortega’s account of double consciousness in its relationship to Lugones’ concepts of world-traveling and deep coalition. Ortega writes that for Du Bois, the exact meaning of double-consciousness and the status of the experience double-consciousness are not clear, citing Derrick Bell’s interpretation of the notion as a “mythic blessing and social burden”, Tommy Lott’s understanding of it as a

\(^{120}\) According to a 2017 Southern Poverty Law Center report, the number of anti-Muslim hate groups alone has grown from 34 to 101 in the last year (see Potok, 2017).
“lack of racial identity” and Robert Gooding-Williams’ reading of it as a “false consciousness” (Ortega 122). This means that double consciousness, on its own, is not enough to create coalitions. One response to double consciousness – as Alcoff writes – is escape: the desire to escape the anxiety associated with the acknowledgement that whiteness is problematic. For double consciousness to contribute to coalition work, it must be accompanied by the critical meta-reflection we saw in Medina’s work, that observes the experience of resistance in its relational context rather than seeking to quell it or escape it. This makes white double consciousness different from Du Bois’ initial iteration of the concept in an important way. For Du Bois, double consciousness is ambiguous – as it is on Alcoff’s account. But for Du Bois it is a manifestation of the experience of racial oppression and otherness, while for white people, it is the recognition of one’s problematic participation in an undesirable whiteness with which one does not want to identify, but cannot disavow. To say this is to grant that there are incontrovertible problems in applying the notion of double consciousness to whiteness – namely, the white appropriation of a racialized experience, which is nothing new. But, as Alcoff has argued in The Future of Whiteness, much depends on the willingness of white people do maintain forms of discomfort like double consciousness. Against Medina’s reluctance to “instrumentalize” resistance, I will do just that with double consciousness as a strategy for motivating coalition building.

For both Lugones and Du Bois, double consciousness involves “the recognition of the self’s confusing and contradictory experiences” because one “sees oneself as different in different worlds”. Confusion, contradiction, and discomfort are key for the resistance they produce, where resistance is transformational. For Ortega, the resistance involved in world-traveling and double consciousness can lead to a coalitional politics “that is not based on
essentialist or categorical identity and that is mindful of both social location and relations with others” (155). Coalitional politics, she writes, “relies on the understanding that we are both being and becoming, that we occupy certain social and material locations, and that we are relational. It is also informed by recognition of the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nationality, and other categories intersect or are intermeshed” (155). Ortega is interested in a coalitional politics in which those who do not share identities are nonetheless “becoming-with”: a process that involves “not just understanding others but being transformed by them and with them” (Ibid.).

Ortega’s process of coalition that arises out of our becoming-with one another does not necessarily answer the motivational question for how and why those who experience the anxiety of white double consciousness will be moved to work in coalition with others, instead of opting for disavowal or escape. What Ortega’s work offers for an account of complicit resistance, though, is the potential for the experience of doubleness and multiplicity to lead to something other than escape and disavowal. For Ortega, double consciousness isn’t just a symptom or a “datum”, as Alcoff has it; it is something to be expanded, cultivated and used to acknowledge and deepen one’s becoming-with others through coalition. This cannot really be thought of as a series of discrete how-to steps, however, since coalitions are both the outcome of double-consciousness, and also themselves produce double consciousness by requiring white people to navigate worlds where they must encounter dimensions of themselves not transparent to them in their most comfortable worlds. Ortega’s account makes it clear that on an account of identity that takes its internal multiplicity and complex, cross-identity relationality seriously, we must understand the work of countering white ignorance to be coalitional. An account of multiplicitous identity groupings that share a describable, historical material and discursive
location, but are nonetheless heterogeneous, makes it possible “to conceive the many ways in which individuals can align themselves or have solidarity with members or other groups with whom they do not share social identities or locations and also those with whom they share relations that open up possibilities of meaningful engagement” (Ortega 165).

In order to avoid the historical pattern of white vanguardism characteristic of both positive and negative white exceptionalism, we need a coalitional politics that acknowledges “the need for us to work with the heterogeneity of members within our groups as well as with other resistant groups” (Ibid.). While having a “multiplicitous consciousness” and acknowledgement of heterogeneity “does not guarantee success when resisting”, it is, according to Ortega, “necessary for understanding and resisting dominant paradigms”, and “the possibility of deep coalition remains tied to this consciousness” (166).

What Ortega and Alcoff’s accounts show in their analysis of double or multiplicitous consciousness is that there is an important epistemological dimension to coalitional movement work, both for motivating it and carrying it forward, and that in turn, that coalitional work has important epistemological consequences. Both authors stress the resistant qualities of discomfort and non-mastery as key characteristics of collective, cross-identitarian work that aims to generate resistance to oppressive paradigms through collective becoming-with. As Ortega writes, understanding ourselves as becoming-with amounts to becoming open to the interests of groups with whom I may not share identity markers; it means understanding these interests as being as important as my own interests. […] Identity politics must be ultimately about transformation, not about sameness […]. I become-with you, and we remake each other. Despite our differences, we can struggle against oppression, not necessarily because I identify with your values or your identity markers but because our standpoints intersect in ways that lead us to recognize how we stand within relations of power and how working together with a good sense of our differences (or understanding the zones where contact is uncomfortable, challenging, and even hurtful) might provide avenues to undermine oppression (169).
Central to this account of undermining oppressive structures is a notion of identity that is transformable through the recognition of both its internal heterogeneity, and its structural force. Resistance is central to the deep coalition that can result from this recognition, and it is “complicit” in the sense that it does not seek “transparency” or “assimilation” (Lugones, 2006), and does not limit itself to working within homogenous identity categories, or with identity categories that are unchangeable.

4. Complicit resistance as non-exceptional

To argue for “complicit resistance” is also to suggest an approach that isn’t limited only to those who are “exemplary” – this project has consistently argued against the idea of white exceptionalism as its own form of racial essentialism (see Alcoff, 2015). Alcoff has argued that we need to make whiteness ordinary, both as an epistemic position, and in our organizing, since it is the “unglorious majority” who will decide the order of the day” (Alcoff 2015, 189). She writes that “essentialist views of whiteness that link it indelibly to racisms” leave the limited, and politically untenable, options of either “standing in for the whole” as the dominant paradigm, or “standing forever apart”. Instead, “what is needed is to make whiteness ordinary as one among others, neither more nor less, without state-enforced advantage or border-control,” and what this requires is “a retreat from the vanguard mentality” that nonetheless “inhabits whiteness” in a process of negotiating and organizing with those who do not share in white identity from a position of epistemic and political disadvantage.

Alcoff uses the story of white SNCC activist Bob Zellner as one of her examples of a non-essentialist, non-vanguardist way of inhabiting whiteness, where Zellner’s remains
committed to “being a part of it [non-violent direct action]” while understanding that “it’s really their [Black people’s] thing” (Zellner, quoted in Alcoff 193). Key to Zellner’s account, as Alcoff presents it, is Zellner’s belief in his own reasons for putting their lives on the line. Though Zellner is, by many accounts, a heroic example of someone who made significant sacrifices to his everyday life in order to participate in civil rights activism, and not someone looking for ways of enacting “deep coalition” through their regular, everyday activities of work and family, Zellner’s story is still motivated by a non-essentialized notion of whiteness, and an understanding of the resistance generated by whiteness’ internal ideological and identitarian heterogeneity, and the political affinities created by it. Zellner “never had a missionary mentality”, Alcoff writes, “nor did he imagine himself to be assimilating his identity to the African Americans he worked with: he knew who he was, and he knew why he was there” (196). And one of his reasons was his conviction that a racist society “circumscribed his own rights”.

As we saw with Ortega’s account of deep coalitions, shared identities are not necessary for coalitional movement work, and the multiplicity of our own consciousness, as well as our own identity groupings, show us how we can take on the political interests of those whose identity markers we do not share as our own.

While the problem of “appropriation” does not go away, in this chapter I have attempted to show that white people can take on resistance to structural racism as in their own interest when they are open to experiencing themselves, and their groupings, as having internal multiplicity. That multiplicity can create affinities and affective ties across indentitarian groupings, while still maintaining them as locations generated by structural forces. On this account, whiteness is not abandoned or disavowed; it is acknowledged as a heterogeneous identity in complex, contextual relations with others. Having a “double” or multiplicitous group
consciousness can have the outcome of deflating the vanguardist claims of whiteness by taking the focus away from white redemption narratives, and shifting it towards the complex coalitions we can build for the work of fighting white supremacy together. Complicit resistance is not reformism; nor does it aim for “more” compliance with racist norms or institutions, or for deliberate collusion with structural racism. Rather, it is a way of arguing against the moral purism, vanguardism, and claims to mastery that only serve to reproduce white ignorance.
Bibliography


