

# What's Up with White Women? Unpacking Sexism and White Privilege in Pursuit of Racial Justice

Collective Praxis Book Club

12:00pm-1:30pm PST

Tuesdays November 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and December 7<sup>th</sup>

Tickets: While each session is stand alone you can purchase the whole series together for a discounted price.

- Each session is \$100 each.
- All five sessions purchased together is \$400.

*"The right acknowledgment of Black justice, humanity, freedom and happiness won't be found in your book clubs, protest signs, chalk talks or organizational statements. It will be found in your earnest willingness to dismantle systems that stand in our way — be they at your job, in your social network, your neighborhood associations, your family or your home. It's not just about amplifying our voices, it's about investing in them and in our businesses, education, political representation, power, housing and art. It starts, also, with reflection on the harm you've probably caused in a Black person's life."*

Tre Johnson

Authors Ilsa Govan and Tilman Smith are excited to offer a five-week series exploring how ideas in our book apply beyond the pages. Our hope is that participants will leave with a deeper understanding of the intersection of sexism and white privilege in their experiences and new ideas for living into anti-racist values.

Each session will stand alone and be accompanied by recommended pre-reading. Participants who commit to growing our community by attending all five sessions will receive a discount and be paired with another participant, an accountabilitybuddy, for added connection and reflection.

We are two cisgender white women who offer a model that examines the harmful impact of white supremacy and patriarchy within a society that promotes a false gender binary. The content will center on cis and trans women and non-binary folx who have internalized white feminine gender norms, as well as multiracial women who present as or are perceived as white and want to interrogate internalized white superiority. People of all races and genders who want to engage in conversations about what's up with white women are welcome to attend.

## Session One: Navigating the Buffer Zone

**Tuesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Accompanying Reading:** Chapter 1, Introduction & Chapter 2, A Power Analysis: White Women and Institutional Access

*“People in the ruling class — those who are the top of the economic pyramid — have never wanted to deal directly with people on the bottom of the pyramid but have wanted to prevent them from organizing for power. Therefore, they have created a space that protects them from the rest of the population. I call this space the buffer zone.”* Paul Kivel

White women’s position in the hierarchy of institutional access lies between white men and People of Color. We tend to have leadership roles in service and support industries such as nursing, teaching, managing offices, leading nonprofit staff and directing social service nonprofits. . This creates a dynamic that encourages and rewards white women to act as enforcers of policies and practices that benefit white men and institutions, often at the expense of women and People of Color. In other words, white men make the rules and white women enforce them. The “Karen” phenomenon offers a great example of this.

### Session Objectives

- Better understand how white women access privilege through relationships with white men.
- Explore patterns of behavior typical of white women in the buffer zone.
- Develop strategies for better navigating racial and gender power dynamics.

## Session Two: White Women’s Tears

Tuesday, November 16<sup>th</sup>

**Accompanying Reading:** Chapter 10, White Women’s Tears

*“The legitimate grievances of brown and black women are no match for the accusations of a white damsel in distress... white women are equally aware their race privileges them as surely as ours condemns us. In this context, their tearful displays are a form of emotional and psychological violence that reinforce the very system of white dominance that many white women claim to oppose.”* — Ruby Hamad

The act of white women crying and the response to our tears offers a clear example of the intersection of sexism and white privilege and provides a case study of what the same behavior can look like in different stages of our model of anti-racist identity development.

We propose there is a connection between a learned behavior that helps us navigate sexism and an assertion of our racial superiority. Join us for a conversation with the authors, two self-identified criers, as we share stories unpacking the impact of white women’s tears.

### Session Objectives

- Unpack the ways sexism and white privilege lead to white women’s tears and the resulting impact on People of Color.
- Explore ways to stay engaged and not derail the conversation as white women when we do cry.

## Session Three: Unpacking Sexism and White Privilege--Storytelling as a Tool for Racial Justice

Tuesday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Accompanying Reading:** Appendix A

During this session, participants will learn a process called Serial Testimony and practice sharing and listening to short personal stories of experiences with sexism and white privilege. Serial Testimony, described by Peggy McIntosh as “the autocratic administration of time in service to the democratic distribution of time,” is a time management tool that encourages each participant to voice their experiences without commenting on the input of other members. Who gets to speak, gets listened to, gets seen as an expert, and other dynamics of power frequently show up in conversations based on our race, class, gender, other social identities, as well as our position in an organization’s hierarchy? This tool counters these dynamics by giving equal time and value to each person’s reflections. Because each person only has one or two minutes to share, this process provides an efficient way for all voices to be heard in a limited amount of time.

### Session Objectives

- Learn a tool for sharing stories that helps in countering hierarchy in conversation.
- Reflect deeply on your own experiences of sexism and white privilege.
- Gain new insights into the many ways sexism and white privilege show up in our lives.

## Session Four: Watch Out! I’m an Anti-Racist!

Tuesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

**Accompanying Reading:** Chapter 3, A Model of White Women’s Development & Chapter 7, Projection

In our book we explore six stages of white women’s development that illuminate the ways we understand and navigate sexism and white privilege. After a brief overview of the entire model, we’ll take a closer look at the fourth stage, Projection. In Projection, white women have heightened awareness of racism and white privilege, while now downplaying the role of internalized sexism in our lives. For the first time, we have a multicultural understanding of racial experiences, rather than the monocultural worldview found in the first three phases.

The characteristic assumptions and behaviors of white women in this stage stem primarily from how we want to appear, the identity we want to project to the world, as we progress in our understanding of whiteness. We love the fact that we get recognized for showing up to do anti-racism work, even though People of Color rarely receive the same kind of accolades. We are quick to point out the failings of other white people and frequently feel deep shame or even self-hatred about our own mistakes. We may look to People of Color to affirm for us how we project our identity as allies and work harder to be seen as racial justice advocates than we work in advocating for racial justice.

### Session Objectives

- Understand one stage of white women’s development commonly found among white anti-racist activists.
- Unpack assumptions about sexism and racism in order to better show up as allies for justice.

## Session Five: If What, Now What?

Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>

**Accompanying Reading:** Chapter 11, If What, Now What? & Appendix A

*“When we view living in the european mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.*

*But as we come more in touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes.” --Audre Lorde*

If, when considering sexism and white privilege, you’ve been wondering, “But what do I do about this?” you’re in good company. Many of us recognize the problem, and we want an answer. We tell ourselves we would have changed institutional racism a long time ago if we just had the formula that worked, the data on successful programs that have closed the opportunity gap in other schools, the recruiting strategy to bring more People of Color into our organizations, the checklist of anti-racist behaviors.

Much of this information has been available to us for many years. So, why haven’t we changed?

This final session will utilize the Serial Testimony process introduced in session three to explore what keeps us from changing and how we can overcome obstacles both internally and externally to promote social justice.

### Session Objectives

- Name what keeps us from advocating for justice.
- Leave with new ideas for breaking solidarity with patriarchy and white supremacy.