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50 Shades of Feminism

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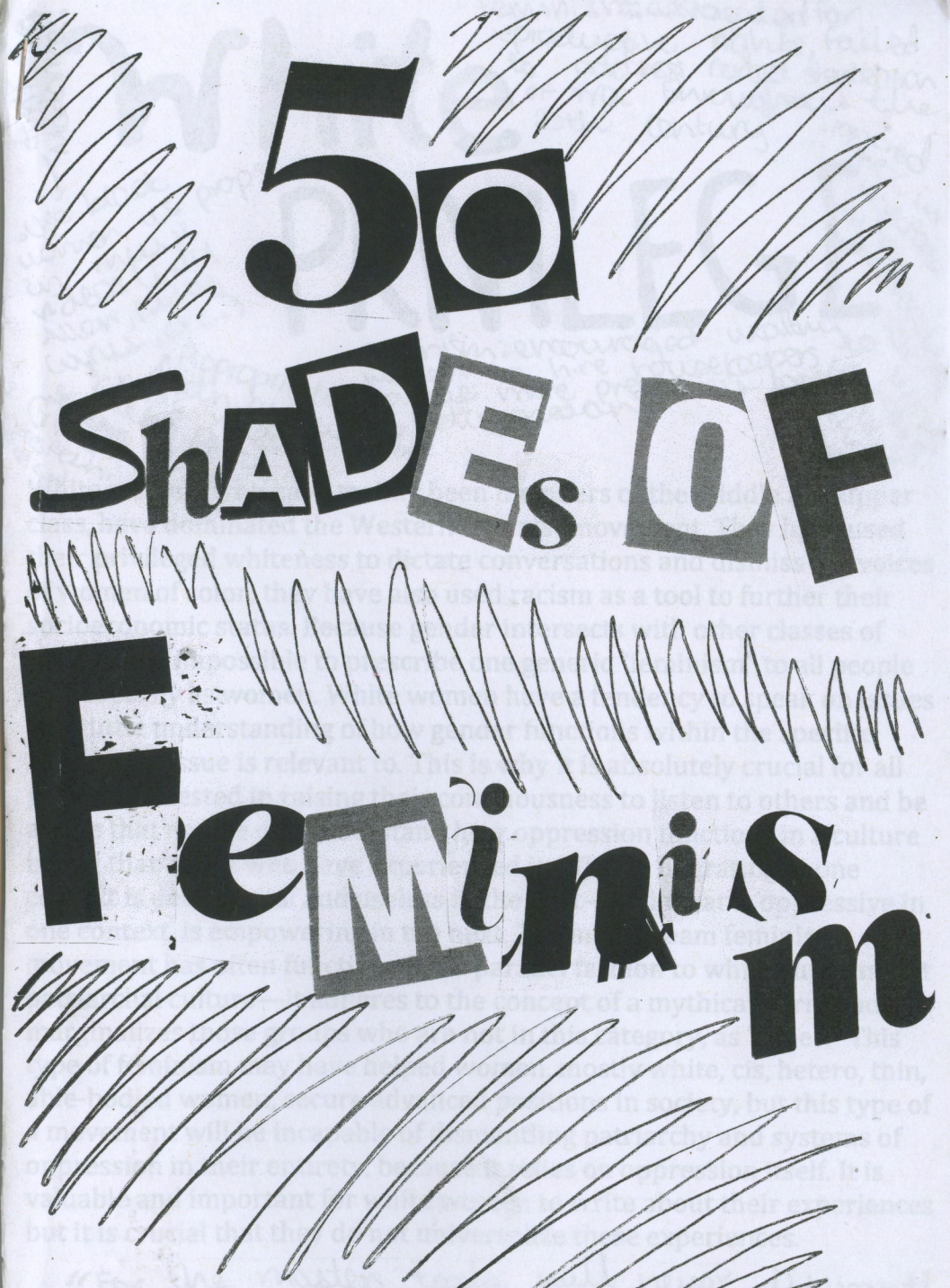
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SHADES OF

FEMINISM

By : Debbie Urinolchai
Chontelle Vargas

reproductive rights, failed to address forced sterilization of WOC throughout the 20th century. ignored WOC in workforce when advocating for them.

Modernism

Use black women as props in music videos (Alicia Keys, Beyoncé, etc.)

Appropriation in Asian culture (Betty Friedan, Amy Poehler)

feminism: encouraged wealthy women to hire housekeepers, pursue more prestigious careers (Betty Friedan)

women's work, etc.

White PRIVILEGE

White women, who have mainly been members of the middle and upper class, have dominated the Western feminist movement. They have used their privileged whiteness to dictate conversations and dismiss the voices of women of color; they have also used racism as a tool to further their socioeconomic status. Because gender intersects with other classes of people, it is impossible to prescribe one generic "feminism" to all people who identify as women. White women have a tendency to speak on issues with little understanding of how gender functions within the specific culture the issue is relevant to. This is why it is absolutely crucial for all people interested in raising their consciousness to listen to others and be aware that no one can understand how oppression functions in a culture better than those who have experienced it. What is liberating in one context is detrimental and useless in the next—and what is oppressive in one context, is empowering in the next. The mainstream feminist movement has often functioned in a parallel fashion to white supremacist patriarchal culture—it adheres to the concept of a mythical norm and marginalizes those groups who are not in this category, as "other." This type of feminism may have helped women, mostly white, cis, hetero, thin, able-bodied women, secure advanced positions in society, but this type of a movement will be incapable of dismantling patriarchy and systems of oppression in their entirety, because it relies on oppression itself. It is valuable and important for white women to write about their experiences but it is crucial that they do not universalize these experiences.

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." -Audre

As a feminist who is white, my ideas will be prioritized and my voice will not be silenced in feminist spaces.

I have compiled a list of guidelines that I think are useful to consider if you are a feminist who is white. I would like to preface this list by saying that many of the ideas I have about how to be an inclusive feminist come from what I have learned from listening to WOC, and I hope reflect their criticisms of white feminism.

Looking back on my time as a feminist, I am well aware of having made some of the following mistakes.

1. Listen to WOC
2. If someone calls you out for saying/doing something racist, your immediate reaction should not be defensiveness. Realize they are probably right.
3. Intention doesn't excuse your actions because it doesn't erase their repercussions. Apologize when you mess up, no excuses.
4. If a critique of white people initially bothers you a lot, assume it is true & take that as a sign you need to take it extra seriously.
5. Never think you could know more about another person's oppression than they do.
6. Never think you could know more about another person's culture than they do.
7. Do not speak for/over WOC
8. Confront white people when they're racist - it is your responsibility, not WOC's.
9. Credit ideas about feminism - so many revolutionary feminist ideas come from WOC. Stealing them & returning them as white feminist theory isn't okay.
10. Don't expect WOC to educate you, it isn't their responsibility, do your own research.
1. Do not invade safe spaces for groups you aren't a member of. You can't be a womanist, instead work towards making the feminist movement less problematic.
2. Throwing around the term "intersectional" doesn't make your feminism actually intersectional.
3. Never feel special for "including" or "welcoming" WOC into feminist spaces - it isn't your place to "allow" WOC's voices. Do actively encourage inclusivity within the movement & work to gain resources for WOC to have their own spaces.

Many white women have said to me, 'We wanted black women and non-white women to join the movement,' totally unaware of their perception that they somehow 'own' the movement, that they are the 'hosts' inviting us as 'guests.'" -bell hooks, "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center" -bell hooks

4. Accept that white people theorizing about the intersectionality of race & gender will most likely be less profound than WOC, and potentially problematic. Listen to what WOC say & advocate for it, but accept that they are the people who are most able to philosophize about their experiences. Write about your own experiences with systems of oppression.
5. Use your privilege & power in ways that advance those with less power than you.

"I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.'" -Toni Morrison

Feminism's racist founders?

- Susan B. Anthony: "What words can express her [the white woman's] humiliation when, at the close of this long conflict, the government which she had served so faithfully held her unworthy of a voice in its councils, while it recognized as the political superiors of all the noble women of the nation the negro men who had emerged from slavery, and not only just liberated, but also densely ignorant of every public question."
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton: "American women of wealth, education, virtue and refinement, if you do not wish the lower orders, of Chinese, Africans, Germans and Irish, with their low ideas of womanhood, to make lewises of you and your daughters... awake to the danger of your present position and demand that woman, too, shall be represented in the government."
- Did you know?

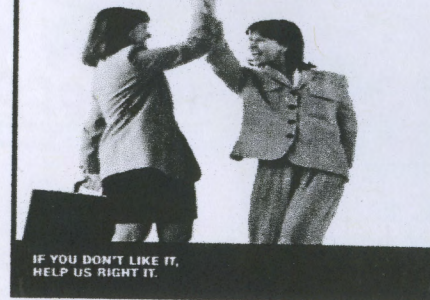
American women coined the term "intersectional" in the 1970s

Thoughts About Gender And Politics

Feminism has emerged due to unrighteous attitude towards women all around the world. Women, who wanted equality and to eliminate all kinds of discrimination have even organized movements in support for their rights. Margaret Mead studied primitive societies and come up with certain notions – tasks assigned by gender varied according to the current situation of the society. The research carried by Mead demonstrates that gender designation according to the activities assigned to males and females varied from culture to culture – “No universal role was either male or female” However, notwithstanding the division of activities, the tasks carried by men were always valued more. This political notion presupposed that women had inferior status than men. Genuinely, women should not be considered as just females. They have the right and belong to different social and economic classes. It has been noticed that even color of skin has racial, class and gender issues. Feminists argue that the word “woman” usually means a white female, and “blacks” is the term referring to men. Thus, a lot of women suffer from this infringement.



WOMEN
Like men,
only cheaper.



These women, “women of color”, have always had a hard destiny. They worked outside homes, had lower wages, were constantly discriminated and had another views on marriage and work, and the relation these had. This was mainly due to class and race issues. Bell Hooks, who is a feminist herself, explains that this way “women of color” were dehumanized. Differences in class lead to the differences in politics. Since times immemorial white women were deprived of political rights, in addition, “woman of color” could not even speak of having such. Thus, it became the task of feminist movement to gain particular right and establish them among men. Racial, ethnic, gender, class and work differences should be less looked at, for general term of both woman and man is - human. “Women of color” are the same as white ones, and they should not be judged according to their historical background.

To conclude, feminism is a widespread term as well as the movement is determines. Feminists all around the world search equality with men. Moreover, the ones that need it the most are “women of color”. For ages they have been discriminated and enslaved. Even now societies have certain negative connotations when they speak about these women.



The cartoon shows a woman holding a child's hand, in a fairly dismal looking city area standing on a sidewalk at the entrance to a building. The entrance has a sign that says "Really Good Careers." To the right of the entrance, a smaller sign says "An equal opportunity employer." The entrance looks like it can be fit by only male; it seems that the woman and her child could not fit through the entrance

Western Feminism Is Not a Cure

Many Western feminists with good intentions see Muslim women covered from head to toe and think, "Those poor women, being forced to cover up like that!" The idea of women in places like Iraq being separated from men fills them with shock and horror at such injustice. Such uncivilized, barbaric Middle Eastern societies are obviously oppressive and old-fashioned. Western feminist ideals tell them that women should wear whatever they want and be able to roam around town free of judgment and fear. They are right, of course - to an extent.

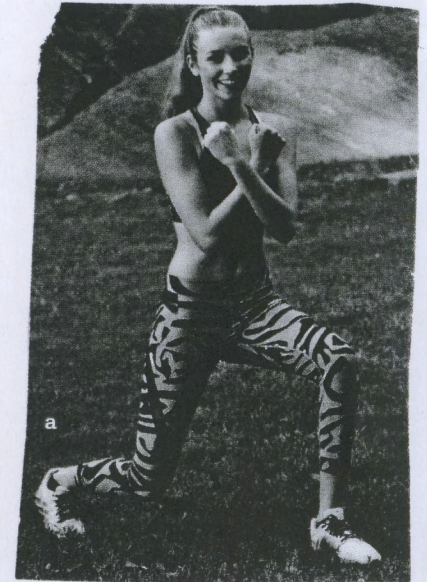
Certain cultural practices and rules may seem oppressive to the outsider looking in, but sometimes are actually quite empowering for those who live with the rules every day. For example, purdah, the seclusion of women, seems like oppression but actually gives women freedom in certain aspects of their lives. In her ethnography, *Guests of the Sheik*, Elizabeth Warnock Fernea explains that the women she encountered enjoyed an incredibly tight-knit community of females who look after and support each other because of purdah. The practice also allows

women to go about their day without feeling as though they are committing a sin against their religion by allowing men to see them. Without such boundaries, these women would feel uncomfortable and violated. A seemingly oppressive system, in reality, makes these women feel more at ease.

o.v.o.v.o.v.o.v.

In "Oppression," Marilyn Frye claims that "the word 'oppression' is being stretched to meaninglessness; it is treated as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation or suffering." Yes, purdah is a system that limits women's involvement in the public and political spheres, but it also provides privacy a powerfully encouraging community. No one custom or practice is exclusively oppressive or exclusively empowering. A lot of things are both, and it depends on the person. Some women view posing nude for a magazine as taking control of their sexuality while others find it demeaning. The real key to all of this is choice. Empowerment comes from freely choosing whatever is best for you without the pressure of fear, patriarchal ideals, or societal expectations. You want to wear a bikini to the grocery store? Go for it! You believe in covering up your body? Awesome!

o.v.o.v.o.v.o.v.



To look down on certain cultures because they do not match Western ideas of feminism or justice makes no sense. We are talking about different values, beliefs, and ideologies. One person's idea of feminism cannot serve as a universal cure to women's problems around the world. Forcing one culture upon another will not fix anyone's problems. Maybe it's some leftover colonialist thought, but white or Western women cannot determine what is wrong with the rest of the world and decide how to fix it all on their own. We need to respect different beliefs while fighting for every woman's right to make her own decisions for herself. We are all women, we are all different, and we need to appreciate and work with those differences.

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When, as happened recently in France, an attempt is made to coerce women out of the burqa rather than creating a situation in which a woman can choose what she wishes to do, it's not about liberating her, but unclothing her. It becomes an act of humiliation and cultural imperialism. It's not about the burqa. It's about the coercion. Coercing a woman out of a burqa is as bad as coercing her into one. Viewing gender this way, shorn of social, political and economic context, makes it an issue of identity, a battle of props and costumes."

- Arundhati Roy