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ARTICLE

Knowing How to Feel: Racism, Resilience, and Affective Resistance

Taylor Rogers

Department of Philosophy, Loyola Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA
Corresponding author. trogers11@luc.edu

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Abstract

This article explores the affective dimension of resilient epistemological systems. Specifically, I argue that responsible epistemic practice requires affective engagement with nondominant experiences. To begin, I outline Kristie Dotson's account of epistemological resilience whereby an epistemological system remains stable despite counterevidence or attempts to alter it. Then, I develop an account of affective numbness. As I argue, affective numbness can promote epistemological resilience in at least two ways. First, it can reinforce harmful stereotypes even after these stereotypes have been rationally demystified. To illustrate, I examine the stereotype of Black criminality as it relates to false confessions (Lackey 2018). Second, it can encourage "epistemic appropriation" (Davis 2018), which I demonstrate by examining the appropriation of "intersectionality" and #MeToo by white culture. Finally, I conclude that resisting harmful resilience requires affective resistance, or efforts that target numbness via different kinds of affective engagement. I consider Kantian "disinterestedness" as a candidate.

The Question of Resilience

Imagine a white woman who has critically interrogated the construction of Black criminality[1] and its harmful perpetuation in the media and beyond. She understands the way this stereotype has been used to marginalize and oppress Black people. She knows that she is more likely to be attacked by a white man than a Black man, and yet she still reflexively clutches her purse when a Black man passes her on the street.[2] Or consider that this same woman has studied the oversexualization of Black women, learning how it has promoted their rape and forced sterilization, as well as harmful perceptions of Black motherhood (Roberts 1997).[3] She has also encountered evidence showing women of color are more likely than white women to be sexually assaulted. Despite her rational demystification of the racist stereotype of Black promiscuity,[4] she found herself less upset and vocally active when multiple allegations against R. Kelly came into the public spotlight and #MeToo shifted its focus from white women to women of color.[5]

This article explores why harmful epistemic practices and resources remain influential even after they have been critically interrogated or rationally demystified.[6] To begin

formulating an answer to this question, I explore the affective dimension of resilient epistemological systems. Specifically, I argue that responsible epistemic practice requires affective engagement with nondominant experiences.[7] The argument proceeds in three stages. To begin, I outline Kristie Dotson's account of "epistemological resilience," the phenomenon whereby an "epistemological system" remains stable despite counterevidence or attempts to alter it. Then, I show how Dotson's framework can be expanded to illuminate the role of affect in maintaining resilience. To do so, I develop an account of "affective numbness,"[8] a multifaceted mechanism through which epistemological resilience is maintained. As I argue, affective numbness can promote epistemological resilience in at least two ways. First, it can reinforce harmful stereotypes even after these stereotypes have been rationally demystified.[9] To illustrate, I examine the stereotype of Black criminality as it relates to false confessions (Lackey 2018). Second, affective numbness can encourage "epistemic appropriation" (Davis 2018). I demonstrate this claim by examining the appropriation of "intersectionality" and #MeToo by white culture.[10] Finally, I conclude that resisting harmful resilience requires "affective resistance," or efforts that specifically target numbness via different kinds of affective engagement. I consider Kantian "disinterestedness" as a candidate.

I. The Problem of "Noticing"

In "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression," Dotson offers an account of epistemic oppression, or the "persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production" within an epistemological system (Dotson 2014, 1).[11] Drawing on an order-of-change heuristic in organizational literature, Dotson posits three forms of epistemic oppression distinguished by the difficulties encountered when addressing each. According to the picture, first- and second-order epistemic exclusions are exemplified by Miranda Fricker's heavily theorized notions of testimonial and hermeneutical injustices; they are caused by the inefficiency and insufficiency of epistemic resources respectively (Fricker's 2007).[12] Dotson says these exclusions can be addressed while leaving intact systemic values or governing rules, aiming to alter only how these values or rules are achieved or followed.[13] In contrast, addressing third-order epistemic exclusion requires altering the "rules of the game" because it is caused by the *inadequacy* of epistemic resources and the preservation of those same resources.[14] These different orders of exclusion are not mutually exclusive, but they face different kinds of challenges.[15] The central obstacle for the third-order case is "epistemic resilience,"[16] or the phenomenon whereby an epistemological system remains stable despite counterevidence or attempts to alter it.

As Dotson notes, epistemic resilience is not always bad because we need epistemological systems to be relatively stable insofar as we rely on them to make sense of our world. But when such resilience "upholds and preserves" (Dotson 2014, 32) *inadequate* resources that harm some knowers by thwarting their contribution to knowledge-production, we should resist it. In these cases, "one's epistemic resources and the epistemological system within which those resources prevail [are] *wholly* [my emphasis] inadequate" for the task of resistance. Rather, one must proceed from "*outside*" the set of resources since the inadequacy is so thoroughgoing (129).[17]

Characteristic of third-order epistemic exclusion, then, is the skill needed to go outside of one's epistemic resources to contend with resilience. Dotson says this is a distinctively epistemic skill because "going outside" just means being able to put one's resources into question (for the sake of modifying their underlying structure).[18] Now

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the central worry concerning third-order resistance emerges: how can one put into question epistemic norms that provide the very conditions for such an interrogation in the first place? One is epistemically dependent upon what one hopes to change; and, as Audre Lorde famously argued, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 1984/2007). Countering harmful resilience seems impossible, or at least very challenging to conceptualize practically.[19] Given our deep reliance upon the inadequate epistemic resources that preserve governing rules, the central obstacle for resisting third-order harm is "noticing" the inadequacy of these resources in the first place.[20] Insofar as my interest here lies in better understanding and resisting racism and sexism, my own analysis examines an epistemological system of "white supremacy patriarchy," or those epistemic resources and de facto epistemic norms that are inadequate because they assume and preserve white supremacy and patriarchy.[21]

Let's look at an example. Suppose a white woman is purchasing a light peach-colored bra labeled "nude." For our discussion, it is important to point out that it will be difficult for her to notice that "nude" is an inadequate concept because it causes no dissonance with her experience. This is precisely because the epistemological system is structured in favor of white subjectivity; its resilience depends upon a governing rule of white neutrality that is concealed by common usages of concepts like "nude," usages that harmfully reinforce and preserve such problematic assumptions. In what follows, I show it is often *affective* failures that prevent us from noticing the inadequacy of exclusionary dominant resources. Resisting resilience will therefore require contending with affect, and specifically with something I call "affective numbness."

II. Affective Numbness

Although much theorizing has been done regarding epistemic lacunas and how they thwart suitable collective understanding, less has been done regarding the "affective gaps" that do so.[22] In this section, I turn to the affective dimension of our knowing practices. In doing so, I align myself with many feminist epistemologists (Anzaldua 1987/2007; Jaggar 1989; Lorde 1993; Alcoff 1999; Collins 2000; Shotwell 2011; Pohlhaus 2012; Dotson 2012; Medina 2019 and others) who want to theorize knowledge, or the "epistemic" more broadly, as it connects to emotion, skill, social situation, and embodiment.[23] On these pictures, we need to consider more than traditional cognitive epistemic resources[24] to make sense of our knowing practices; "affective," "imaginative," and other resources also have epistemic salience.

Within epistemologies of ignorance, "epistemic resources" will also include those resources that promote knowledge-attribution, even if they fail to promote knowledge-possession because of problematic and inadequate standards for what counts as "knowledge" (see note 11). In particular, my analysis highlights those resources assumed to be knowledge-producing when they are in fact ignorance-(re-)producing due to racism and sexism. Affective numbness is one of these resources. It refers to the phenomenon whereby one fails to emotionally or "affectively" engage with nondominant experiences, rendering one emotionally unavailable to or unreachable by those experiences. Although some might think being impartial or neutral requires a kind of affective numbness, I show how such an approach can fail on epistemic grounds, reproducing ignorance as a result. However, I'm not assuming affective numbness is *always* bad, or that any noncognitive epistemic resource is always good or bad. Sometimes an epistemic resource may be valuable for knowledge-possession in one case, while inhibiting

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for knowledge-possession in another, and affective epistemic resources may be especially vulnerable to playing this dual function.

For example, being affectively numbed is sometimes an important strategy for preserving a corrective viewpoint: if an abusive husband is crying and begging his wife not to leave him, becoming affectively numbed toward his pain might be a necessary survival strategy for his wife to keep the reality of his abuse to the forefront. Or, we can imagine a group-based strategy of people of color intentionally numbing themselves to "white guilt" and "white tears" in order to focus on the urgent work of resistance that such guilt and tears might distract from.[25] In contrast to these cases, I am concerned with situations in which nondominant experiences that would pose friction[26] and correctives to dominant epistemic norms are rendered irrelevant to judgment due (at least in part) to affective numbness (which is both itself a dominant epistemic norm, but also embedded in other dominant epistemic norms like stereotyping and exclusionary conceptual framings). Such numbness makes "noticing" corrective alternatives, and also "noticing" the inadequacy of our dominant norms, especially difficult. In other words, I'm interested in those cases of affective numbness that perpetuate the status quo in racist and sexist epistemologies of ignorance. The upshot of my analysis is that countering racism and sexism requires taking seriously the epistemic role of affect (or lack thereof) in promoting knowledge and ignorance.[27]

But what exactly does affective numbness consist in? I will briefly outline six characteristics that are further developed by the subsequent examples. First, the object of affective numbness is some nondominant experience, or any experience that counters the governing norms of white supremacy and patriarchy (norms often structured by white subjectivity, male subjectivity, and especially white-male subjectivity).[28] Although race and gender-identity markers mean some will have their experiences become objects of affective numbness more often than others', even the most privileged can have nondominant experiences become the object of harmful numbness at times. Consider a young, wealthy, cis, white boy, Michael, who is crying. His father exclaims "Dry it up, boys don't cry!" In this case, it is not that his father is affectively numbed toward his son, full stop. He finds himself emotionally engaged in Michael's life more generally, celebrating his successes, and caring deeply about how his son is doing in sports, dating, school, and so on. Yet, when it comes to loss and sadness, his father fails to exhibit affective engagement with his son's experience. If "Boys don't cry" is a governing rule of patriarchal systems, then boys expressing grief will be considered a "nondominant experience" on my view, and it will be important that my account of affective numbness can capture it when thinking about how numbness promotes resilience. If I were to focus on the nondominant identity of subjects, rather than on subjects' nondominant experiences, these kinds of cases would be elided.

Second, affective numbness is self-reflexive, that is, affective numbness can occur toward one's own nondominant experiences, as well as toward those of others. Work in trauma studies has shown that traumatic experience brings with it an onslaught of emotional content that often precludes comprehensibility. Traumatic experiences, in a very real way, cannot be made sense of. Such violence is unconceivable, unbelievable even (see Scarry 1987; Cvetkovich 2003; Van der Kolk 2014; Acosta López 2019). Unable to conceptualize what has happened (or continues to happen), many trauma victims develop numbness toward memories of assault, abuse, experiences of bias, and so on, as well as implement strategies of numbness to avoid the possibility of being destructively emotionally overwhelmed in the future. I want my account of affective numbness to be able to capture these kinds of cases, too. Because traumatic

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experiences hold potential for transforming and combating the resilience of oppressive norms by illuminating their harm, combating the numbness that prevents these stories from coming to the surface is crucial.

Third, affective numbness can occur when one has an experience that is either too distinct from, or too similar to, some nondominant experience. A wealthy white woman's lack of experience with gang violence, or abundance of experience with diet culture, could result in affective numbness toward others' (or her own) salient experiences. Fourth, affective numbness can result from too little or too much exposure to a nondominant experience, such as the underexposure, in mainstream media, of Black women's vulnerability to sexual harassment, or the overexposure of Black men being murdered by the police. Fifth, affective numbness can be indicated by unresponsiveness, or exhibiting a lack of curiosity toward some nondominant experience. For example, when person after person walks by someone on the street outside of the grocery who is requesting financial help, never thinking about this person again, we have an instance of collective affective numbing toward a nondominant experience of poverty.[29] Sixth, numbness is often (and peculiarly) constituted by affective *investment,* namely, an affective investment in *dominant* experience (which occludes and renders unnoticeable nondominant interpretations). When our passerby is numbed to the person outside the store, she is simultaneously affectively invested in her own hurry, judgment, or sense of being bothered. In cases of negative stereotyping, we see this dominant affective investment work to interpret nondominant experiences through affective lenses like white paranoia, fear, or helplessness. I sometimes refer to this phenomenon as the "dominant interpretive affect" of affective numbness, and this will have special importance in the analysis that follows.

The Persistence of Stereotypes

In this section, I consider affective numbness as it relates to false confessions and the harmful stereotype that "Black and brown men are criminals."[30] My claim is that this stereotype, in order to be operative, requires affective numbness toward Black and brown men *as persons*, interpreting them rather as *objects* of fear and paranoia.[31] This numbness hinders the proper consideration of alternative epistemic resources stemming from Black and brown subjectivity, resources that could illuminate the stereotype's inadequacy.[32] Please note the analysis contains triggering content concerning racial violence, sexual violence, and discrimination.

In "False Confessions and Testimonial Injustice," Jennifer Lackey puts forward a view of "agential testimonial injustice" that can occur in two ways, either through obtaining testimony in ways that subvert or deny epistemic agency (by coercion, manipulation, or deception, for example), or through believing someone only when they are stripped of epistemic agency. She specifically looks at men of color who confess to crimes they did not commit. In order to appropriately consider the stakes, let's look at one of the many examples Lackey uses:

> Sarah Appleby and Saul Kassin discuss the case of Juan Rivera, who was convicted of the rape and murder of an eleven-year-old girl in Waukegan, Illinois on the basis of his confession, even after DNA testing of semen at the scene excluded him. "The state's theory of why DNA belonging to someone other than the defendant was found in the victim was that the young girl had prior consensual sex with an unknown male, after which time Rivera raped her, failed to ejaculate, and then

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> killed her" [Appleby and Kassin 2016, 127]. The fact that Rivera was convicted of the child's murder shows that the state's outrageous theory was regarded as more credible than the possibility that he confessed to a crime he didn't commit. In other words, a single confession trumped evidence that would otherwise be taken to be decisively exculpatory. (Lackey 2020, 52–53)

Importantly, the evidence in favor of Rivera's innocence was not only DNA. He was young, a former student in a special-education program, and had been under interrogation by detectives for four days, for the duration of which he denied any knowledge of the crime. But when the detectives became accusatory, he eventually broke down and nodded when asked if he had raped and killed the girl.[33] He continued to recant this testimony in the months that followed. Crucially, then, Rivera is considered a "truth-teller" insofar as his (false) testimony is being taken by jurors as sufficient evidence for conviction. But since this testimony was only obtained coercively under conditions that subverted agency, he's only considered a truth-teller to the extent he has no agency.

Someone might object that Rivera was believed not because he was stripped of agency, but because he was confirming what the jurors had expected or wanted to hear. If he had said of his own free will that he was guilty, then they would have also believed him. But this is precisely the point: namely, Rivera is only believed when he confirms a false stereotype; it is the false stereotype that becomes epistemically salient in the formulation of a judgment, no matter what Rivera says or doesn't say. In other words, when Rivera confirmed the stereotype through his false confession, it was not he who was believed, but the stereotype that was assumed. The fact that he was coerced and manipulated is irrelevant to the jurors' judgment (despite our knowledge about the negative epistemic effects of torture [O'Mara 2015]). Black and brown criminality thus builds into its very operation a lack of epistemic agency attributed to men of color by providing a *default* interpretation of these men as monstrous *objects* of white paranoia and fear, rather than as *persons* with epistemically salient experiences.[34]

This objectification just *is*, crucially, a numbness toward men of color as subjects with their own needs for protection, their own desires, goals, and experiences, and their own needs for charitable (or evidentiary appropriate) interpretation.[35] Such numbness is perpetuated through an excessive representation in dominant culture of men of color as monstrous, which contains its own affective content (or, the "dominant interpretive affect" of affective numbness). It's not that jurors were numb, full stop, when examining the evidence; rather, their interpretive lens carried destructive (and distracting) affective content because the perception that Black and brown men are threats to public safety is embedded with paranoia and fear, and this paranoia and fear prevent affective engagement with *Rivera*'s point of view.[36]

Or, *jurors feel Rivera to be dangerous*.[37] And how can Rivera be both vulnerable and dangerous? To preserve their way of knowing, jurors become unresponsive to Rivera's corrective testimony because being affected by Rivera's vulnerability to a hostile, racist justice system would be to reject the stereotype and its accompanying paranoia and fear (or to notice the inadequacy of the racist interpretive lens). In other words, affective attunement to Rivera would have required a confrontation with (or noticing of) white supremacy. Returning to Dotson's framework, it would have required a third-order change. But enacting such change would have required more than intellectual or "rational" engagement; the jurors were not at a loss for evidence that should have been sufficient to exculpate Rivera. Given that stereotypes often operate under the

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threshold of consciousness, the conclusion that we must also target affect to resist harmful resilience should not be too surprising.

Sadly, Rivera's case is not the exception but the norm for how false testimonies by men of color receive uptake in our legal system.[38] This is especially problematic because the stereotype is preserved and more deeply reinforced (the very mechanism Dotson attributes as the cause of harmful resilience) through greater numbers of false convictions. As with Rivera's case, often the stakes could not be higher, and failing to feel the urgency of this work requires its own form of numbness.

Epistemic Appropriation

In this section, I consider a second way by which affective numbness works to promote harmful resilience, namely by promoting the epistemic appropriation of resistant epistemic resources. Specifically, I consider how intersectionality has been epistemically appropriated by white feminism and white culture more broadly. I do not want to suggest there is a universal experience of discrimination or sexual assault by women of color, but I do want to suggest that such experiences are often caricatured within white supremacy patriarchy such that they fail to be considered as experiences that contain all of the complexities dominant experiences are afforded. Please note the analysis contains triggering content concerning sexual violence and racial discrimination.

According to Emmalon Davis, "epistemic appropriation" occurs when 1. epistemic resources generated in the margins are "are overtly detached from the marginalized knowers responsible for their production" and so the role of marginalized contributors to knowledge-production is obfuscated, that is, "epistemic detachment," and 2. "when epistemic resources developed within, but detached from, the margins are utilized in dominant discourses in ways that disproportionately benefit the powerful. That is to say, the benefits associated with the epistemic contributions of the marginalized are misdirected toward the comparatively privileged," that is, "epistemic misdirection" (Davis 2018, 703). To show that intersectionality has been epistemically appropriated, let's first consider what intersectionality as a concept was intended to illuminate.[39]

In what is sometimes referred to as the founding text of "intersectionality," "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," Kimberlé Crenshaw examines the legal invisibility of Black women (Crenshaw 1989).[40] The erasure of Black women's experience in antidiscrimination law, Crenshaw argues, is perpetuated by a single-axis framework that treats race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. In one case she considers, *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, five Black women charged General Motors (GM) with perpetuating past discrimination against Black women through their seniority system, which, in a seniority-based layoff, fired all Black women hired after 1970. This particularly disadvantaged Black women because GM did not hire Black women prior to 1964. GM argued they *had* hired *women* prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, albeit *white* women. Therefore, sex discrimination was not relevant. The race discrimination claim was also dismissed through the court's recommendation that it be consolidated with another case alleging race-discrimination against GM by Black men (who were hired for very different kinds of jobs than Black women). The court reasoned that the plaintiffs must state a cause of action "for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both" (Crenshaw 1989, 141). Crenshaw summarizes the import of such a ruling: "under

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this view, Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups. Where their experiences are distinct, Black women can expect little protection . . ." (139).

Equipped with analyses of cases like these, Crenshaw puts forward the concept of "intersectionality" to make legible experiences of multiple discrimination, and to thereby illuminate the inadequacy of dominant, single-axis conceptions.[41] Unfortunately, this aim has sometimes been limited and even undermined by how the concept has traveled, or by its "buzzword" status.[42] According to a more recent interview with Crenshaw on the podcast *Another Round*, she says the term is often "used in ways that undermine the point" (Crenshaw 2017, 24:08). As Kathy Davis notes, one reason the concept "buzzes" is because the crossroads metaphor associated with intersectionality[43] is broadly applicable (Davis 2008). One byproduct of intersectional theory has thus resulted in the idea that "everyone is intersectional" (Ehrenreich 2002–2003). But if anyone can lay claim to being intersectional, the queer, poor, white girl from Chicago, or the first-generation, white, disabled man from Poland, and so on, then we have a case of epistemic detachment in which resources generated by marginalized knowers in order to illuminate differential harm are being detached from those knowers. As Nancy Ehrenreich notes, this is "dangerously depoliticizing, for the logical implication of a notion that everyone is oppressed is that no one is" (Ehrenreich 2002–2003, 271).[44]

It might not be the case that generalizing the applicability of intersectionality necessitates the assumption that "everyone is intersectional"; rather, such a generalization might be guided by a desire to look at the multiplicity of ways oppression and privilege intersect and inflect each other. However, the fact that the inadequate legal framework being critiqued[45] by Crenshaw is left unaltered while the article rises to canonical status highlights the depoliticization that can occur from unmooring the term from Black feminism. The intended purpose of showing nondominant subjects as *differentially* subjected to discrimination is elided due in part to the generalizing gesture.[46] Or, epistemic detachment has flattened "intersectionality" in a way that allows for legal and social structures to go largely unchanged.[47] This works generally to benefit dominant subjects who are advantaged by the resilience of racist and sexist structures, and so we also have a case of epistemic misdirection.[48]

We can more directly locate epistemic misdirection through an accompanying intersectional analysis of the #MeToo movement. Tarana Burke, a Black activist from Harlem, created #MeToo in 2006 specifically for women of color who were victims of rape and sexual abuse.[49] Yet it was only when the idea was popularized by Alyssa Milano, an Italian-American actress who prompted women to use "#MeToo" as a hashtag on social media in order to share their stories of sexual assault, that the movement went viral. Where women of color were the victims, the movement had less popular appeal. This asymmetry is apparent when one compares the media coverage of and popular engagement in the case of Harvey Weinstein, on the one hand, and R. Kelly and Bill Cosby on the other. In "#MeToo and Intersectionality: An Examination of the #MeToo Movement through the R. Kelly Scandal," Rebecca Leung and Robert Williams provide such a comparative analysis. They note that the allegations against prominent film producer Harvey Weinstein by white actresses[50] created a "Weinstein Effect" that was unparalleled in the case against R. Kelly. The "Weinstein Effect" was a ripple effect in which, following Weinstein's resignation, numerous other white men had their reputations tarnished because of similar allegations.[51] We did not see a similar "Kelly effect," following the multitude of accusations against

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R. Kelly—which extended back decades—for the kidnapping, grooming, raping, and abusing of underage Black girls.

> While the #MeToo movement gathered momentum through the mainstream media coverage of the Weinstein effect, the R. Kelly scandal, and its non-famous African American female victims struggled to draw the same mainstream media attention even though their stories came out 3 months earlier than the Weinstein scandal and featured several similar circumstances. Kelly escaped the Weinstein effect, remained on RCA Records' music roster, continued to tour and perform concerts, and enjoyed airplay on radio stations around the nation. (Leung and Williams 2019, 358)[52]

Furthermore, in comparing the case of R. Kelly with that of Bill Cosby, who *was* publicly ostracized for his behavior, Leung and Williams note that the media primarily shared stories of white victims even though nearly a quarter of Cosby's victims were women of color. Especially problematic is that this focus on white women enabled Cosby's defense team to claim racism as a motivating factor of his trial, using the metaphor of lynching.[53] Leung and Williams note how this even further alienated some women of color from #MeToo, as failing to support Cosby could be seen as "dividing the race."[54] We thus have a case in which the epistemic contribution of #MeToo was epistemically detached from the women of color who initially pioneered its revolutionary potential, and then epistemically misdirected to disproportionately benefit white women. Why does this happen?[55]

Tarana Burke, when interviewed for the Lifetime documentary series *Surviving R. Kelly*, says Black women failed to get the media attention white women did with #MeToo because of the problematic and harmful idea that "black girls don't matter. They don't matter enough, and it's proven over and over again." What does she mean Black girls don't matter? Well, if in the case of false stereotypes, one fails to register nondominant experiences outside of one's *own* (very different) dominant interpretation of that experience (of threat, for example), in the case of epistemic appropriation, one registers nondominant experiences only to the extent those experiences confirm, overlap, or resonate with dominant experiences. In both cases resistant experiences fail to be considered *in their own right*, as *different* experiences worthy of consideration in and of themselves. This is just what Crenshaw teaches us with *DeGraffenreid*, and this is just what Burke means when she says "Black girls don't matter." There is an unresponsiveness toward Black women's experiences *as* Black women's experiences.

To think about how affective numbness fits into epistemic appropriation here, let's think about the experience "being sexually assaulted as a woman of color." There are three elements to consider, namely, being a woman, being a woman of color, and being sexually assaulted. Given that all three elements would be considered nondominant experiences under white supremacy patriarchy, it's a good candidate for examining affective numbness. Additionally, I will consider potential numbness in relation to a white woman who has experienced sexual assault herself. She thus may be numb because of dissonance, resonance, or both dissonance and resonance with nonwhite experiences of sexual assault. Let's explore each of these options.

1. She could be numb to only those aspects of the experience she doesn't share, namely, the experience of being assaulted as a *nonwhite* woman. Such numbness might arise because of a false stereotype at play toward women of color. Black promiscuity in which Black women are oversexualized is one candidate (Roberts 1997).[56] Black

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promiscuity is perpetuated by an overrepresentation of women of color in the media as sexualized, and an underrepresentation of women of color's sexual vulnerability. Importantly, like Black criminality, this stereotype necessitates numbness because of the dominant interpretive affect embedded within it. In this case, Black promiscuity contains affective content of white disgust or blame that precludes affective engagement with (and thus appropriate consideration of) Black women's sexual vulnerability. Armed with the stereotype, white women see themselves as purer or more innocent with respect to sexual assault than Black women, who, through the stereotype, are interpreted as "asking for it." In this case, such a white woman might be interested in #MeToo, either self-professedly or below the threshold of consciousness, only insofar as it applies to, and is applied by, white women.

2. This white woman who has experienced sexual assault could also be numb to only those aspects of sexual assault experienced by women of color that she *shares*, such as being assaulted and being a woman. Regarding her being assaulted, she may be numb because of the self-reflexivity of affective numbness. Before undergoing years of therapy, she may have been guilty of not taking women's testimony about their assaults seriously because of her own response to trauma. Because she had not accepted the horror of what had happened to her, she could not accept the horror of what was happening to others. Because she needed to "not make it a big deal" in order to move through daily life without emotional overload (Van der Kolk 2014), numbness toward her own experience precluded proper responsiveness to other women's experiences. Additionally, in regard to her being a woman, she might be numb because of the dominant interpretive affect of skepticism that accompanies stereotypes against women that they are "irrational and uncredible," and thus not to be believed when it comes to experiences of sexual assault. She may dismiss the movement altogether as a result, although she has no special stereotype against women of color (having done a ton of both cognitive and embodied antiracism work, let's say).

3. Finally, this woman could be numb to all three nondominant aspects of the experience under consideration (being a woman, being a woman of color, and being sexually assaulted). Notice this third possibility is likely for any person who has internalized the dominant stereotype against women mentioned above, in which case revisionary testimony will fail to be appropriately considered whether one possesses the racist stereotype or not. In this last case, she might again discredit #MeToo altogether.[57]

But #MeToo wasn't discredited altogether. Rather, the movement was taken seriously insofar as it was applied by and for white women, illuminating the likelihood of a false stereotype at play. #MeToo benefited white women by resisting patriarchal norms that oppressed them but failed to resist white supremacy and the distinct aspects of patriarchy that affect women of color. In so doing, #MeToo was epistemically appropriated, contributing to the resilience of racist patriarchy by obfuscating, through numbness, the very experiences #MeToo was meant to highlight.[58]

Recap

So, in order to appropriately consider nondominant experiences within systems of oppression, it is not enough to know the who, what, when, where, or even the how of these experiences. Oppression, through numbness and especially through its dominant interpretive affect, works to prohibit a clear conceptualization of the harm it enacts (Scarry 1987; Cvetkovich 2003; Van der Kolk 2014; Acosta López 2019). Despite a comprehension of the facts in Rivera's case, or the information made explicit by the lawsuits

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considered by Crenshaw, the resistance potential of the resources generated by Rivera and Crenshaw was severely limited. Failing to affectively engage with Rivera led not only to an immoral judgment of him as guilty (despite sufficient exculpatory evidence in his favor), but to an *irrational* judgment. A more epistemically responsible practice regarding resistant knowledges will thus require something more than descriptive facts; it will require *feeling,* or affective engagement with nondominant experiences. When such crucial affective data is lacking, divergent experiences will be precluded from posing sufficient friction with dominant resources for the sake of illuminating their inadequacy. This prevents the epistemic transformation divergent experiences seek and necessitate if they are to be taken seriously as epistemic contributions.

III. Affective Resistance

In the preceding analysis I hope to have illuminated an epistemic responsibility for our affective engagement with others. The further question then arises: What does affective resistance look like? I do not intend to answer this question satisfactorily here, as it warrants a much richer discussion than I have time and space for. But, inasmuch as the problem is affective numbness, my general suggestion is that cultivating particular kinds of affective engagement with nondominant experiences whose exclusions structure dominant epistemic resources can combat numbness by enabling the inadequacy of those resources to be revealed.[59] This is because some ways of engaging affectively put false stereotypes and other inadequate governing epistemic norms aside[60] (or at least minimize their influence), fostering the kind of "epistemic distancing" (or "putting into question" of our epistemic resources) necessary for third-order change. Affective resistance is thus a mechanism for knowing in new and better, that is, less exclusionary, ways.

Affective resistance can take many forms, which will vary depending on one's social positioning, and on whether one is combating numbness toward one's own nondominant experiences, or toward those of others. Regarding the former, therapy and art-making that work to renew victims' capacity for ways of feeling that have been cut off as self-defense responses to trauma might be two ways to resist affectively (see Van der Kolk 2014). Regarding numbness toward both self and others, growing affective capacities like grief, empathy, rage, hope, and pleasure will be important avenues for affective resistance (and there is already much literature on the importance of some of these affects for social justice).[61] However, I have aimed to move beyond the mere idea that the emotions we feel are epistemically valuable, to an understanding that the emotions *we do not feel* are also epistemically valuable. In order to confront affective numbness and get to these other emotions, I hope to show in what follows that developing "disinterestedness" as an affective tool of engagement might be a good first candidate for affective resistance, especially for combating the dominant interpretive affect aspect of numbness that accompanies false stereotypes.[62]

Disinterestedness, drawing loosely on the Kantian concept, refers to a form of affective engagement that is free of (self-)interest, or, on my less optimistic view, is a form of affective engagement that contains at least *less* (self-)interest than usual. My own use of the term approximates George Dickie's revisiting of the theme in aesthetics literature (Dickie 1964). According to Dickie, disinterestedness is really about *attention*, or about the ability to attend to an aesthetic object outside of distractions that often derive from one's own interests.[63] For example, my ability to attend to a piece of music disinterestedly requires that I am not just attending to it because I want to impress my

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girlfriend or put myself in a particular kind of mood. In these latter cases, I might miss something important for appropriate engagement because I am distracted from the music itself.

For our purposes, I extend this idea of disinterestedness to interpersonal engagements, the idea being that stereotypes and their underlying interests often *distract* us from properly considering people and their experiences for their own sake. This seems right. More specifically, dominant interpretive affects like paranoia or blame that accompany stereotypes of Black criminality and Black promiscuity *distract* us from revisionary resources (constitutively numbing us to such resources), even and especially when those these resources possess a host of epistemic and affective content that poses friction with the stereotype. If stereotypes are harmful epistemic resources that promote the resilience of epistemologies of ignorance, and specifically of "white supremacy patriarchy," then they operate as something like "epistemic guards" that protect white male dominance, or the default (epistemic) interests of the group of white cis men. And they do so partially through their required numbness.[64]

But if this is right, then disinterestedness might be just the kind of affective tool needed for combating the kind of numbness that accompanies false stereotypes. In the aesthetic case, one learns to puts aside distracting interests in order to engage with (according to Kant) the aesthetic experience of *pleasure* an artwork might provide (importantly, lacking or minimizing the role of *interest* in one's experience of events does not mean lacking or minimizing the role of *affect* such an experience affords). In the case of interpersonal engagement with nondominant experiences, one learns to reorient from distracting interests—interests that harmfully preserve systemic ignorance and motivate the operation of inadequate epistemic resources like false stereotypes—in order to engage with the affective and epistemic content nondominant experiences afford. Equipped with disinterestedness, then, all kinds of new epistemically salient information can make itself noticeable that otherwise is eclipsed.

One might think there is a danger of a tautology here: How does one suspend false stereotypes? One does so by suspending stereotypes, that is, being disinterested. However, this concern makes sense only if one conceives of disinterestedness as a state one is either in or not in, full stop. I am suggesting, on the other hand, that disinterestedness is or can be cultivated. One can thus be disinterested to a more or less degree. Disinterestedness is more like a practice of attention than a state, allaying the concern of circularity.

In the case of Rivera, disinterested engagement could have made it possible for the jurors to engage with Rivera's vulnerability toward the aim of falsifying the dominant narrative of brown criminality. By not permitting the motivating interests of the stereotype to totalize the juror's interpretation (thereby permitting the stereotype to be put aside or at least minimized), the hope is that jurors would have been able to suspend interpretation until they had appropriately considered the content of Rivera's testimony. After such consideration of evidence, the stereotype could have been critically interrogated in light of testimony that confirmed or falsified it. Without disinterested engagement, such critical engagement was unlikely to occur. In fact, this is what happened: the stereotype totalized the jurors' interpretation, thereby confirming itself and rendering any counterevidence epistemically irrelevant (after all, stereotypes often are just *predetermined* interpretations of Black and brown men's actions as criminal). Armed with affective skills of disinterestedness, then, epistemically obstructive distractions can be put aside or minimized, enabling a more appropriate, all-things-considered assessment or judgment of what's at hand.

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Of course, it's not easy to engage disinterestedly even when conceived as a practice of attention. Rivera's jury undoubtedly made a pledge to judge, to the best of their abilities, without self-interest, yet stereotypes determined the irrational outcome. White feminists often intend to listen to women of color without appropriating their insights, yet fail. Yet there might be contexts particularly fruitful for cultivating disinterested (or *less* interested) engagement. Given that Kant cashes out disinterestedness in terms of how we respond to beauty, this might suggest the art world could be a productive space for developing these capacities.[65] Insofar as practices of mindfulness and breathing have proven to reduce feelings of threat and blame (dominant interpretive affects that can promote numbness), these practices might also be fertile ground for developing affective resistance through disinterestedness.

Central to all these practices is that they are primarily *affective* in nature. They may engage rational capacities (putting aside that interests are partially cognitive), but they de-emphasize such capacities in order to make way for deeper and novel noticings. Participants are overtly asked to refocus, transitioning from a starting point of "what they think they know," or their governing epistemic norms, to sensory experiences that are occluded when such epistemic norms are in the driver's seat of experiencing self and others. In this space, emotional and affective life becomes richer. We might notice tones of voice, gestures of hands and body comportment, facial expressions that betray inner feelings, and other sensory data that provide an entryway into others' emotional experiences more deeply. Insofar as these emotional experiences are epistemically salient, such access will be necessary for appropriate judgment. Although there is more work to do in order to show that skills of disinterestedness developed in less threatening contexts, such as the art world or a meditation class, can find application in more interest-heavy political realms like the courtroom and academia,[66] I hope to have at least convinced readers that disinterestedness might provide a candidate for affective resistance when it comes to our engagements with nondominant experiences (both of self and others), and to have gestured toward what this might look like.[67]

Affects like grief, empathy, hope, and pleasure will absolutely be other forms affective resistance can take, as mentioned. My argument thus importantly builds upon Alison Jaggar's claim that certain "outlaw emotions," like, for example, white people feeling outrage and grief at the mistreatment of Blacks (making them "race traitors"), are epistemically vital (Jaggar 1989). But insofar as affective numbness sometimes blocks the possibility of privileged subjects perceiving nondominant others *as agents* at all, disinterestedness might be an important first skill to cultivate, especially when it comes to negative stereotyping. Only once we are able to engage with revisionary knowledges on their own terms can we then learn to appropriately deal with what is in front of us, or noticed. As a juror, I first need to notice or consider the content of Rivera's testimony on its own terms before being able to grieve or empathize as a result of this testimony, although these may be further affective capacities necessary for combating numbness altogether. This seems likely, illustrating that affective numbness is multifaceted and demands many strategies of affective resistance in order to contend with it. For now, I do not claim that affective resistance efforts will be sufficient for resisting numbness and harmful epistemic resilience, but they can certainly help.

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Notes

1 According to this stereotype, Black men in particular are assumed to be dangerous criminals.

2 To consider the phenomenological experience of some Black men who experience fear and paranoia by white women, see Yancy 2016.

3 In putting forward these stereotypes, I am aware that even in my attempts to counter them, there is a risk of causing harm through their very positing. My hope is that the benefits of consciousness-raising might outweigh this risk.

4 According to this stereotype, Black women are assumed to be promiscuous, immoral, and sexually available.

5 Although the movement was popularized by Alyssa Milano, it was a Black activist from Harlem, Tarana Burke, who started #MeToo a decade earlier (specifically for women of color who were victims of abuse). More on the importance of this in the second part of section II.

6 See Morton and Paul 2019 for why "epistemic grit," which involves resilient reasoning, can sometimes be epistemically rational.

7 One might ask, how is "epistemically responsible" distinct from "morally responsible" or "socially responsible'? My answer follows Davis 2018, 725–27, in claiming that although I am only interested in the epistemic to the extent it is salient for justice, focusing on this dimension makes clearer some relevant harms and skills that might otherwise elude us. For example, understanding how systems exclude insightful knowers from contributing to social meaning is important for any moral/political agenda, but it comes into focus best through epistemic terms. For more on epistemic responsibility and the relationship between epistemic justification and ethical justification, see Code 1987.

8 I first encountered the term from José Medina, who uses the phrase "affectively numbed" to describe being ignorant of the racial aspects of social experience (Medina 2013, 210). My use is more general but includes and builds upon this idea.

9 My view is sympathetic and consistent with Rima Basu's and Sarah Moss's thesis on moral encroachment in which the epistemic status of a judgment or opinion can depend on its moral features (Basu 2018; Moss 2018). My view focuses on the emotional or affective dimension of judgments, but these features undoubtedly overlap with moral features at times.

10 Intersectionality is the idea that single-axis frameworks for understanding oppression are inadequate for addressing individuals or groups who simultaneously experience multiple forms of oppression; this is because those forms of oppression overlap and are interdependent. "The 'me too' movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing. … In less than six months, because of the viral #metoo hashtag, a vital conversation about sexual violence was thrust into the national dialogue" (Me Too 2019).

11 Importantly, Dotson defines an epistemological system as "all of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production and possession" (Dotson 2014, 121). This notion of "possibility" is crucial because Dotson in her later work emphasizes the importance of remaining "neutral" with respect to whether an epistemic resource contributes to knowledge or ignorance when considering it for purposes of resistance. She distinguishes between "knowledge attribution" on the one hand and "knowledge possession" on the other: One can be attributed with knowledge without really possessing it and vice versa. The "epistemic" in "epistemic conditions" is therefore not (or at least not only) normative but concerns at least in part de facto practices of knowledge-attribution in a given society. For Dotson, inquiries into knowledge-attribution concern whether one would attribute some knower with knowledge capacities where knowledge capacity refers to "someone's real, imagined or potential capacity to . . . be epistemically competent with respect to some domain of inquiry. . ." (Dotson 2018, 476). Importantly, within epistemologies of

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ignorance, such as those informed by patriarchy or white supremacy, nondominant subjects are often wrongly assumed to lack such capacities whereas dominant subjects are often wrongly assumed to possess such capacities. As this is already well-trod ground, I assume rather than argue for this, instead exploring how processes of differential knowledge-attribution *work* within epistemologies of ignorance.

12 Testimonial injustice occurs when a listener makes a judgment of a speaker's credibility that is deflated. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when an aspect of one's experience is obscured from collective understanding because of social marginalization (Fricker 2007).

13 On Dotson's picture, testimonial injustice can be addressed through redistributing credibility, a resource already in use for knowledge-production, and hermeneutical injustice can be addressed through the introduction of new concepts.

14 In earlier work, Dotson says third-order harm results in "contributory injustice" (Dotson 2012), which is caused by willful ignorance.

15 Although addressing first- and second-order exclusion can be "reduced" to a redistribution of social and political power, on Dotson's view, resistance toward third-order exclusion is "irreducible" to these factors. This distinction does not mean, as Dotson assures us toward the end of the 2014 article, that these efforts can or should be sought in isolation from one another. Rather, it illuminates that there are different kinds of strategies and skills needed for resisting epistemic oppression (even if these efforts are often complementary).

16 I prefer my use of "epistemic" to "epistemological," though the terms are often used interchangeably in the literature, insofar as the latter word technically refers to a "theory of knowledge." "Epistemic" is thus more apt for referring to those epistemic practices, resources, and modes of resistance that constitute factors of resilience.

17 This does not mean, however, that alternative resources lie "outside" of the system in any ontological way. Given Dotson's definition of an epistemological system as "all of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production and possession" (Dotson 2014, 121), it would be fetishizing at best, and dehumanizing at worst, to assume the resources generated by marginalized knowers exist outside of these conditions. I thus align myself with others who argue that many of the concepts and resources needed for epistemic resistance *already* exist within marginalized communities (Mason 2011; Medina 2011a; Pohlhaus 2012; Dotson 2014). This makes sense, insofar as it is *active* exclusion of marginalized resources in contemporary society (rather than, say, isolation) that often constitutes the inadequacy of governing epistemic resources. This also illuminates why Dotson's epistemological system includes *both* conditions for knowledge-attribution *and* conditions for knowledge-possession (see note 11). This distinction was made after her 2014 article upon which my own analysis is based. It's therefore helpful to reread the earlier article in light of these later insights.

18 When Dotson says we have to go "outside" the set of resources, it's important to keep in mind that this "going outside" is an *epistemic* exercise, not an ontological one (see note 17). Dotson's use of Lorraine Code's distinction (drawing from Castoriadis) between the "instituted social imaginary" and the "instituting social imaginary" is helpful here (Code 2008). The institut*ed* social imaginary "carries normative social meanings, customs, expectations, assumptions, values, prohibitions, and permissions—the habitus and ethos—into which people are nurtured from childhood" (Dotson 2014, 119). The institut*ing* social imaginary, on the other hand, is the creative-critical activity of a society in which it exercises its ability to put itself into question.

19 It is helpful to see that a distinction between *systems* and *resources* is importantly at play in Dotson's account yet is not always obvious. The inadequacy of epistemic *resources* causes an epistemological *system* to be harmfully resilient. Furthermore, those resources primarily responsible are those that have a disproportionately greater influence on a system's workings, namely, "dominant epistemic resources," or "governing epistemic resources." The inadequacy of *these* resources, then, must be noticed for the sake of resisting resilience. Because of both the undue influence dominant resources enjoy throughout multiple areas of the social landscape (media, politics, education, and so on), and also because of the deep structural assumptions that accompany these resources, widespread uptake of alternative resources would require *radically* different practices (which follow different rules), or the kind of deep structural change third-order resistance requires.

20 This is related both to Medina's notion of "meta-blindness" in which one is unable to detect "one's inability to understand certain things" (Medina 2011, 28), and to Mills's work in which he thinks about the obstacle to combating white ignorance (Mills 2007) for the sake of a new Black radical liberalism in the following way: "How can you critique what you don't even see?" (Mills 2019).

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21 Both Dotson and I are indebted to Mills's account of "white ignorance" in which he considers socially based mis-cognition caused by racialized patterns of domination and subordination (Mills 2007). In much of Mills's work, drawing from Marxism, he emphasizes the shortcomings of ideal theory, prescribing that we rather begin our theorizing from the nonideal, material conditions that we inhabit. Dotson suggests that inquiries into knowledge-attribution, rather than knowledge-possession (see footnote 11), heed this call for nonideal theory. "Real world dynamics and possibilities serve as the engine of Knowledge Attribution accounts" (Dotson 2018, 478).

22 I build here upon Medina's (2019) work on the desensitization of publics to the struggles of marginalized groups and upon Judith Butler's work on "ungrievability" (Butler 2004; 2016). According to Butler, within dominant epistemic frameworks some lives do not "count" as lives worthy of consideration because dominant subjects are rendered "senseless" or desensitized before them. This results in affective distortions that further violence against these lives.

23 Black, Latina, and (other) decolonial feminisms have developed robust literature on the importance of including embodied experiences for purposes of knowledge-production. See Ortega, Medina, and Pitts 2020 for recent work in Latina feminism on the issue, and Rogers 2018 for a list of texts on the topic of "embodied epistemology."

24 These resources include "resources of the mind, such as language to formulate propositions, concepts to make sense of experience, procedures to approach the world, and standards to judge particular accounts of experiences" (Pohlhaus 2011, 718).

25 See DiAngelo 2018 on "white fragility.'

26 See Medina 2011b; 2013 on "epistemic friction.'

27 See note 7.

28 Keeping these two analytics separate is important for intersectional considerations regarding white women's racial privilege, and Black men's gender privilege, or taking seriously their "sub-contractor" status (Pateman, Mills, and Mills 2007).

29 This example is building in assumptions about class that often, but not always, accompany white supremacy patriarchy.

30 Stereotypes often function as implicit biases (Brownstein and Saul 2016) or "controlling images" (Collins 2000), operating under the threshold of consciousness or explicit cognition. We should therefore pay attention to the way in which they function affectively despite the implicit bias paradigm being notoriously cognitivist. Insofar as stereotypes have both affective and cognitive content, then, we might consider them to be "cognitive-affective epistemic resources." When false, they will be inadequate resources for producing epistemically responsible beliefs and judgments.

31 This will hardly be a new insight for critical race theorists like Charles Mills, who have argued that personhood cannot be taken for granted within a racist social world, or for many working within the tradition of Afro-pessimism (Mills 2015; and see especially Wilderson 2020) which theorizes blackness using Saidiya Hartman's term of "ontological death," as opposed to human subjectivity (Hartman 1997).

32 This claim builds upon Moss's thesis that "Opinions formed by profiling can be epistemically deficient in virtue of failing to constitute knowledge, or more generally, in virtue of lacking any number of positive epistemic features" (Moss 2018, 180).

33 "It wasn't until the Center on Wrongful Convictions became involved that the Illinois Appellate Court ruled in 2012 that Rivera's conviction was 'unjustified and cannot stand,' and thus that the state would dismiss all charges. Rivera had served 20 years in prison" (Lackey 2018, 12).

34 Importantly, as Dotson points out, the different varieties of epistemic exclusions are not mutually exclusive. Although this is clearly a case of first-order epistemic exclusion, or testimonial injustice, it can also be a case of third-order epistemic exclusion, or of epistemic resilience (especially because the case is exemplary and not merely a one-off case, representing systematic governing assumptions about Black and brown men).

35 Relevant to the inability of whites to view Black subjects *as subjects* is Robin Bernstein's "racial innocence" (and the way nineteenth-century white girls, through "doll play," learned to see black dolls [and black bodies] as incapable of experiencing pain) (Bernstein 2011).

36 In his discussion of stereotyping, Lawrence Blum argues that "respect for other persons, an appreciation of others' humanity and their full individuality is inconsistent with certain kinds of beliefs about them" (Blum 2004, 262)

37 Or, Rivera is "framed" epistemically and juridically by this *affective* lens.

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38 This is consistent with Mills's suggestion that white ignorance is the norm rather than the exception in systems of white supremacy. My analysis is also sympathetic with Mills's suggestion that affect is part of white ignorance (Mills 2007). In later work, he expands upon this idea by highlighting the fact that racialized interactions are bodily and corporeal, phenomenologically experienced, as much as they are political, economic, or cultural (Mills 2019).

39 For a rich discussion of different ways the term *intersectionality* has received uptake in Black feminist theory, see Nash 2019a.

40 Heeding the caution of Patricia Hill Collins (Collins 2017), I resist claiming that Kimberlé Crenshaw "coined" "intersectionality" as it gives value to intersectionality only insofar as it has been recognized by the academy (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Giving Crenshaw this kind of authorship erases the long history of Black feminist scholar-activists who have been theorizing about these phenomena for decades. Although Crenshaw uniquely and very helpfully packaged these ideas into a form that was more readily theorized and digestible in academic philosophy, theorizing on these themes remains indebted to a long history of thinking about multiple and interlocking oppressions. See, for example, Truth 1851/1972; Combahee River Collective 1974/1997; King 1988; Collins 2000; 2003; Harding 2004. For more on how easy it is to perpetuate epistemic oppression when theorizing about it, even in our attempts to counter it, see Dotson 2012.

41 See Hammonds 2004 for an analysis on how one can avoid reinstantiating hierarchical power dynamics when making legible experiences that have occluded dominant consciousness.

42 By "buzzword," Kathy Davis means the term easily captures interests, and therefore enables one "to express familiarity with the latest developments in feminist theory, without necessarily exploring all the ramifications of the theoretical debates" (Davis 2008, 75).

43 "Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic in an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination … but it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: sometimes the skid marks and injury simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm" (Crenshaw 1989, 149).

However, Crenshaw gives two different metaphors for depicting "intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1991). The "intersection" metaphor is more popularly taken up, but the "basement" metaphor offers a hierarchical way of looking at marginalization that might be harder to subsume into white individualism:

"Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex class, sexual preference, age, and/or physical ability. These people are stacked—feet standing on shoulders—with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors up to the very top, where the heads of those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are not disadvantaged in any way reside. . . . Those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that 'but for' the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who—due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below—are in the position to crawl through. Those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch. As this analogy translates for Black women, the problem is that they can receive protection only to the extent that their experiences are recognizably similar to those whose experiences tend to be reflected in antidiscrimination doctrine" (Crenshaw 1989, 151–52).

See Carastathis 2013 for more on how leaving the basement metaphor behind has resulted in an uprooting of the term from its origins in Black feminism and in an obscuring of the *hierarchical* power relations of Crenshaw's analysis.

44 Ehrenreich goes on to attribute this universalizing move to a "myth of equivalent oppressions," which arises because of a "North American liberal culture on abstraction, formal comparisons, and myths of equivalence. Like color-blind, formal-equality-based definitions of discrimination . . . the notion that oppression is universal is an equalizing myth that threatens to obscure important structural inequalities in our society. Thus, some have criticized the 'myth of equivalent oppressions' as a harmful—although probably unintended—byproduct of intersectionality theory" (Ehrenreich 2002–2003, 271). Collins notes the importance of retaining intersectional analysis on groups in order to avoid these "assumptions of

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Individualism [which] *obscure* hierarchical power relations of all sorts [my emphasis]" (Collins 2003, 205–30). For more on the relationship between Western individualism and color-blind racism, see Mills 2007.

45 According to the Fourteenth Amendment, gender-discrimination cases demand "intermediate scrutiny," whereas race-discrimination cases demand "strict scrutiny," requiring different burdens of proof for each (Wex Legal Dictionary 2017a; 2017b). The fact of these different levels of scrutiny (and thus different legal procedures) construct the law such that Black women and other women of color have to *choose* which variety of discrimination, race or gender, "relegates the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (Crenshaw 1991, 2).

46 This is not to deny that intersectionality's "buzz" hasn't also had many important positive byproducts, even if it illuminates some of the underexamined negative consequences of its popular uptake.

47 Collins notes that intersectionality's entrance into the academy was largely responsible for its epistemic appropriation: "intersectionality seemed to travel more smoothly through the academy when Black women and other subordinated social actors minimized forms of knowing that empowered them in social movement settings.… What remained was pressure to produce a depoliticized version of intersectionality that was individualized and fragmenting" (Collins 2017, 118). For an interpretation of some of the racial temporal logics, both problematic and promising, that have accompanied intersectionality's institutionalization, see Nash 2014.

48 For example, some subjects will appear as resistant actors in their use of the depoliticized term, increasing their credibility and social power in some contexts even when they are unknowingly (or knowingly) undermining the concept's intended aim. See Ahmed 2012 for how the concept of "diversity" functions similarly as it travels in the university setting to increase a university's social power at the expense of marginalized staff and students.

49 See Burke 2017. This does not mean that the originators of the term meant for "Me Too" to serve *only* Black women (even if they were initially concerned with women of their own race), but it would certainly be against their aims to exclude or only marginally include women of color in a movement using the term.

50 This list includes, among others, actresses Ashley Judd, Angelina Jolie, Rosanna Arquette, Kate Beckinsale, Rose McGowan, Gwyneth Paltrow, Mira Sorvino, Uma Thurman, Heather Graham, Annabella Sciorra, and Daryl Hannah.

51 This list includes, among others, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Spacey, Louis C. K., Ben Affleck, Brett Ratner, James Toback, Matt Lauer, and Charlie Rose.

52 As of January 2020, charges have finally been brought against R. Kelly, decades after allegations started surfacing publicly. The mini-series *Surviving R. Kelly* has played a large role in increased public outcry and demand for justice (see Leung and Williams 2019).

53 The lynching of Black men during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was often justified through false rumors that they had raped white women.

54 Note the same metaphor was also used in 1991 by Clarence Thomas, when he called hearings before the Supreme Court that concerned allegations against him of sexual harassment, as a "modern-day lynching." This worked to further discredit and alienate Black victim Anita Hill from her Black community. See Stansell 1992. Crenshaw also considers this issue of "dividing the race" when considering the potential allyship between Black men and women in the 2 Live Crew scandal (Crenshaw 1993).

55 If in the case of "nude," the inadequacy lay with the concept itself being structured in favor of white subjectivity, then in the case of intersectionality and #MeToo, it is dominant *usage* of the concept that begins to take on inadequate racist assumptions. This occurs through a universalizing gesture that obfuscates the *differences* these epistemic resources were meant to highlight. Crucially, I want to flag that many folks do not notice the inadequate ways "intersectionality" and #MeToo are employed to flatten difference in popular discourse. This is precisely because resilient systems operate in sneaky ways, absorbing resistant resources in order to avoid deep transformation. Inadequate usages of resistant concepts are thus *hard to notice*, especially when operating under the guise of resistance, such as when a straight white woman says "Yas Queen." She may think she is expressing solidarity and inclusion toward queer POC culture by sharing and enjoying the sentiment, but all the while she obfuscates the expression's origin (in drag culture) and its resistant purpose to celebrate *difference,* in order to include herself. I do not want to claim every use of a resistant expression in dominant discourse is problematic, but rather that we may be able to more appropriately assess the harms of seemingly innocuous utterances through more appropriately considering the intentions and experiential origin by which these resistant resources are generated. Combating numbness is important for such a consideration. Some helpful questions might be: Am I helping to increase

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knowledge about marginalized experiences when using this concept? Have I made myself aware of the origin of this term, and about the differences between my experiences and the experience such a term was intended to highlight or uplift? How am I accounting for these differences and contributing to the original cause the term was meant to serve?

56 Another candidate for the dominant affective investment of numbness in this case is a distinct form of "white paranoia" in which failing to protect women of color, whether in antidiscrimination law or in the case of #MeToo, is justified by the need to avoid "opening the floodgates" on our legal system. In this case, those who are vulnerable are cast as parasites who could bring about the downfall of the state if their rights were protected, or their injuries were recognized. Such an affective state goes against the idea put forward by the Combahee River Collective who suggest that liberating the most vulnerable would liberate everyone (this is also implied by Crenshaw's basement metaphor [Crenshaw 1989; see note 43]). Rather, vulnerable populations fail to register as subjects with their own interests and perspectives to be protected, and rather register *affectively* as threats that need to be managed.

57 Note, a fourth option would be to not be numb toward any aspect of the experience under consideration, in which case she might be able to consider and respond to the testimony of sexual assault by Black women with both appropriate interest and horror. In this case, she would have countered any numbness created by her own trauma, and also by false stereotypes. In the final section, we will think about how measures of affective resistance might help make this fourth option more prevalent and feasible.

58 This is not to downplay the positive effects of #MeToo. In fact, the concept of epistemic misdirection builds into itself the idea of there being positive byproducts from appropriating an epistemic resource. It's just that these positive byproducts, such as the creation of a culture of more accountability, disproportionately benefit white women.

59 The argument that we need greater consideration of affect for resisting systems of oppression and epistemologies of ignorance is by no means a new argument or insight. Significantly, one reason many feminist scholars argue for embodied experience and emotions to play a more central role in our investigation into knowledge is because of a frustration with the norms of a "pre-social epistemology" in which there has been "a more rigorously individualist activity/practice than moral-political practices could be" (Code 2017, 91). Collins points out that it was when intersectionality entered the academy that it became depoliticized. This is because a seeking of objectivity leads many scholars to downplay or even reject the epistemic value of personal experience, emotions, and affect, making academic investigations themselves "affectively numbed." Or, as Patricia Williams articulates the point, governing academic norms have created "bad affective investments" through a guise of "neutrality" (Williams 1991). Affective resistance thus might find a particularly good starting point in the institutions we inhabit as scholars (see especially Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981/2015 and Anzaldúa 1987/2007 for influential examples of how affect can be incorporated and epistemically valued within "academic" texts.)

60 Affective resistance is thus an important part of developing Code's institu*ting* social imaginary (see note 18).

61 For example, see Gould 2009 and Brown 2019 for discussions of pleasure; Cheng 2000 and Nash 2019b for discussions of loss and melancholy; Lorde 1981 and Cooper 2018 for discussions of anger and rage; and others. Many of these texts focus primarily on affects experienced by marginalized subjects who are under conditions of oppression or resisting conditions of oppression, but my own view of affective resistance, and especially when thinking about disinterestedness, considers (also, and at times centrally) the affective dispositions of those who are dominantly positioned.

62 See Code 2015 for a discussion of the relationship between care and epistemic practices in which she argues reclaiming care is epistemically vital. Such a reclamation might itself be another form of affective resistance (a form that can be supported by the form of disinterested engagement I am advocating for in this section).

63 Also relevant is Hume's argument that aesthetic judgment requires the removal of biases and prejudices. See Hume 1874.

64 Of course, this is not to say that only white cis men have interests in maintaining white supremacy, or that all white cis men share this interest. If, as many argue, white supremacy harms *everybody*, including white people and men (even as it privileges them as a group), some white people and men could develop more sociable and resistant interests through, perhaps, something akin to standpoint achievement for privileged subjects (see Collins 1977/1995). Furthermore, it is well-trod theoretical ground that marginalized subjects can share interests with more privileged subjects in maintaining white supremacy patriarchy

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insofar as doing so maintains or advances their own individual social power (see Du Bois 1903/1995; Collins 1977/1995; Mills 2007). These interests to protect the system, then, (or to protect one's own privilege within a system) are paramount for the flourishing of harmful stereotypes and their constitutive affective numbness, and also for the flourishing of harmful resilience. See also Bheegly forthcoming for a discussion of the conditions under which judging someone by group membership is wrong.

65 Though his form of disinterestedness is much narrower in scope than my own account, precluding emotions and "charms" from entering into judgment. See Kant 1790/2000.

66 Literature in political and reparative aesthetics provides much food for thought on this matter. See Ranciére 2015; Best 2016; and Chanter 2017. Insofar as politics are inherently "interested," on Kant's picture, a strict interpretation of disinterestedness could appeal only to aesthetic judgments, not political ones. However, insofar as aesthetic contemplation provides a kind of "preparation" for contemplating the moral law, on Kant's view, he might very well be sympathetic to the social and moral import of cultivating disinterestedness, even if he denies any strict application (see Kant 1790/2000).

67 Disinterestedness seems like just the kind of capacity needed for Code's "instituting social imaginary" (see note 18).

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Taylor Rogers received her PhD in Philosophy from Northwestern University in August 2021, with a certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies. She is currently an Instructor of Philosophy at Loyola University in Chicago. Taylor's scholarship lies at the intersection of social epistemology, political aesthetics, and critical race and gender theory. Her dissertation, Knowing How to Feel, argues that combating emotional numbness through art and storytelling is central for resisting gendered and racialized ignorance. Email trogers11@luc.edu

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