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## White Women and White Supremacy: How and Why White Women Contribute to White Supremacy

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# White Women and White Supremacy: How and Why White Women Contribute to White Supremacy

## Abstract

This paper identifies the ways in which and the reasons why white women contribute to white supremacy through an analysis of a blog called "Wife With a Purpose" written by #TradWife Ayla Stewart. I found that the primary methods white women use to uphold white supremacy are reproducing it through the family, subscribing to hegemonic white femininity, and repeatedly choosing to identify with their privileged identity of being white as opposed to their oppressed identity of being a woman. White women contribute to those factors in covertly racist ways, often making it more difficult to call them out for it. I conclude by discussing how these covertly racist actions are the base of the white supremacy pyramid and without them, could not reach the overtly racist acts at the top, like genocide.

## Keywords

White supremacy, white women, racism, white privilege, covert racism

## Disciplines

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

## Comments

Written as a Senior Capstone in Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies.

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**White Women and White Supremacy:  
How and why white women contribute to white supremacy**

**Abstract**

This paper identifies the ways in which and the reasons why white women contribute to white supremacy. Through an analysis of a blog called “Wife With a Purpose” written by #TradWife Ayla Stewart, I found that the primary methods white women use to uphold white supremacy are reproducing it through the family, subscribing to hegemonic white femininity, and repeatedly choosing to identify with their privileged identity of being white as opposed to their oppressed identity of being a woman. White women contribute to those factors in covertly racist ways, often making it more difficult to call them out for it. We conclude by discussing how these covertly racist actions are the base of the white supremacy pyramid and without them, could not reach the overtly racist acts at the top, like genocide.

## Introduction

While writing this introductory paragraph, I googled “examples of overt racism”. As a white woman, racism does not affect my daily life in any noticeable way except for the privilege granted by whiteness. If I asked either of the two students of color in this room, main floor of Musselman Library in Gettysburg College, I am sure that they would be able to give me a plethora of examples of overt racism that has probably happened to them within the past week. According to a survey done in 2017 by National Public Radio, ninety-two percent of African Americans surveyed said that discrimination against black people exists today (Bates, 2017). The fact that I am unable to come up with examples of overt racism means that I am not paying enough attention, and I am part of the problem. Maybe you are, too. Many people would feel comfortable saying that they have not participated in overtly racist acts. While that is great, these overtly racist acts are not the greatest threat, especially today. Have you ever said “I’m not racist but...” before continuing to make an observation or form an opinion about an entire group of people based on one or two individuals' actions? Or maybe you have higher standards for students of color than you do for white students. Or maybe you even refuse to see people with non-European based names as professional. All of these things are unarguably racist, and there are even laws, rules, and regulations put in place in order to prevent them from happening. What is more difficult to have any sort of control over, even minimal control, is covert racism (Yamato 1992 p.66). The distinction between overt racism and covert racism is that overt racism refers to direct actions taken against communities of color that can be pointed to and have significant evidence, whereas covert racism flies under the radar because it goes unnoticed by almost everyone-- except those who it directly affects.

When someone hears the word racism, oftentimes groups like the Ku Klux Klan come to mind-- white men doing overtly racist acts. However, those acts are usually one harmful, isolated incident that is condemned and then society moves on. Covert racism is a key building block of the base structure of the pyramid of white supremacy and without it, the higher structures would fall apart. The reason that this topic is so important is exactly that: the systemic issues that are built up over a long period of time that stem from these unnoticeable stepping stones. One major part of this history that is always left out is the role of white women. This paper will bring light to the role white women play in these processes.

White supremacy, as defined by Robin DiAngelo in White Fragility, is a “powerful ideology [that] promotes the idea of whiteness as the ideal for humanity well beyond the West”(DiAngelo 2018 29). Simply put, white supremacy is white people thinking that because of their race, they are better than all other people of different races and deserve to be at the top of the social hierarchy. A really powerful aspect of this definition is that it acknowledges that even if the West is where white supremacy began, these ideas are forced upon people and places outside of the Western realm. While white people exist in places other than the West, the idea of white supremacy became prominent in the West which is why that is a good starting point for white identity.

White identity is the first step to achieving a white supremacist ideology, and this dates back to the beginning of colonization. In The Religion of White Supremacy, author Eric A. Weed discusses the history of colonizers coming to the Americas and their rationalization behind colonization. Weed gives an example of a specific colonizer, saying “[Sepúlveda] employed the philosophy of Aristotle to argue that the people of Spanish America were barbaric, ignorant, and unreasoning, and that due to these facts, it was natural for these people to submit to the wiser and

superior Spanish” (Weed, 2017, p.6). Sepúlveda is taking a grossly literal translation of Aristotle’s natural slave philosophy. It is true that Aristotle says people fall naturally into type categories, slave and non-slave, but Sepúlveda misrepresents his philosophy. The people Aristotle thought were natural slaves were so because of their lack of a complete soul, which is necessary in order to achieve eudaimonia, or the good life. Philosophers today do not interpret Aristotle so literally, and that is because while Aristotle did think certain people had a natural property within them that made them less capable of deciding the right thing to do for themselves, his basis was their soul, not their race. For Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, other Greeks could be natural born slaves if they did not have the opportunity for education because they were someone’s property or they did manual labor. As a philosopher, Aristotle was biased in thinking that the only way you could live a good life was through philosophizing about things, so to him anyone who did not do that was not living up to their soul’s full potential. Sepúlveda takes this idea and uses it to fit his purpose of justifying the colonization of people who did not speak his language, did not worship the same god, and did not look the same way as his compatriots.

The Religion of White Supremacy further details the ways in which white supremacy formed during colonization in the late 15th century, and stemmed from the thought that Christianity was superior to the polytheistic religions practiced in the Americas. The peoples who practiced these polytheistic religions also happened to have darker skin than the Spanish colonizers due to their location in warmer climates. Polytheism was therefore equated with dark people, and this is the beginning of white supremacy, when white people became associated with being better than people of color. This is also how these Christian colonizers rationalized them enslaving the peoples who observed polytheistic religions. Colonization is considered to have

begun in the late 1400s, and irregardless of the end date, the effects of it are still being felt today. In recent history, this is how white people rationalized enslaving South American and African peoples who had darker skin tones. From this, we see Christianity's connection to white supremacy. It is not uncommon to see racism masked as religious beliefs, which makes sense because it takes away the blame from the racist person. As Tami Harris argues in her article "Does Religion Breed Racism?": "If I can blame a group's oppression on the retribution of an angry god or some inherent physical or mental deficiency, then, well, I am let off the hook" (Harris 2010, June 07). Religion is often used as a justification or explanation for things that we fear, like death, or do not understand, such as miracles. In the case of racism, it can be used for both.

As previously mentioned, it is often thought that white men are the primary contributors to white supremacy. This is reinforced by the fact that men are typically the only ones who get called out in the media for it. Some examples of this include a white supremacist stabbing and killing a black man with a sword (Romo 2019), a white man shooting and killing two black people at a grocery store in Kentucky (Wamsley 2018), and a white man accusing a black man of not living in his own apartment building (Pager 2018), while 'BBQ Becky', 'Permit Patty', and 'Cornerstore Caroline' are turned into memes (Farzan 2018). A meme is an image that has been rapidly spread across the internet, and has become a large part of popular culture. When white women are turned into memes, it shows how they are not taken as serious threats to the black community as men are. BBQ Becky is a white woman who called the police on a black family having a barbeque because they were using a charcoal grill, Permit Patty is a white woman who decided to call the police on an eight year old black girl for selling water on the sidewalk without a permit, and Cornerstore Caroline is a white woman who called the police on a nine year old

black boy. Each of these white women have called the police on black people for minor or nonexistent offenses, and while they do get some media attention, it is not enough.

There is a stark contrast between the ways these women were portrayed in the media and the way the men were. One reason that the women were not given as much serious attention could be that they did not commit physically violent crimes. Also, white women are seen as innocent and in need of protection (Newman 1999 p.86). This could be a reason that they are turned into memes and their real names are left out of the narrative. By omitting their real names, their identity is protected and they are less likely to be targeted in retribution. Another reason white women are portrayed in the media the way they are is gender ideology. Gender ideology is the thoughts and ideas that surround different genders and what constitutes them. For example, the gender ideology rhetoric that is dominant in white, patriarchal, middle-class society is that men and women are biologically distinct as predetermined in the womb (Corredor 2019 p.615). This means that men are naturally aggressive breadwinners who take care of their families financially, and women are naturally nurturing, innocent beings who provide for their families in all other aspects, like mental, physical, and emotional needs. Viewing the genders in this way is harmful, because it detracts from people's control over their actions. It also helps conceal aggressive acts done by white women. Gender ideology is also construed as white men feeling the need to protect white women, and help them conceal racist acts. This leads to white men always being the visible perpetrators of white supremacist acts, and white women getting to fly under the radar.

While white women's roles are often overlooked, they have been and continue to be pivotal to the success of the white supremacist movement in the United States primarily through their key role in the reproduction of racism in children's socialization, through the perpetuation

of hegemonic white femininity, and their commitment to identifying with their race over their gender.

### **Examining white supremacy through a #TradLife blog**

Much research has been done about the social construction of white identity. This includes Ruth Frankenberg's White Women, Race Matters: The social construction of whiteness (1993) which is about the ways that American women experience whiteness; white women's movements with Louise Michele Newman's book White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States (1999) which explores the ways white women explicitly constructed a racial ideology; and the historical context of it all with Eric Weed's Religion of White Supremacy in the United States (2017) which shows how racism is defined by indoctrinated beliefs that permeate throughout one's life. White women contributing to racism and upholding white supremacy in the United States is not a new idea, as it has been happening since the founding of this country. One particularly blatant instance of this is the murder of Emmett Till in 1954, which was caused by a white woman lying about the young black boy's actions towards her (Pérez-Peña 2017). While the historical aspects of white women contributing to racism is a pivotal part of this research, this paper focuses on the contemporary ways in which white women are currently upholding white supremacy.

Blogs seemed like the perfect source to examine such dynamics. I decided to start my search by looking up "white women" and "white supremacy" using google. I came across a term I had not heard before: "Traditional Life". It is often shortened into a hashtag, "#TradLife", and also extended to wives, with "Traditional Wife" and "#TradWife". I chose to explore blogs because they allow people to write extended thoughts and develop them as much as they would

like to, as opposed to social media sites like Twitter or Facebook. Those social media sites have limited word counts and readers who do not want to spend more than a few seconds looking at each post. Blogs also have all of their posts archived, so you can go back to the very beginning of someone's blog to see how their opinions have developed or changed over time. Blogs are a great way to see people's personal opinions and their own reasoning. Unlike books or articles, they are usually less well researched, and they normally do not go through an editor. This is a way to ensure you are getting raw opinions on whatever topic you are reading about.

The blog I ultimately decided on is titled "Wife With A Purpose" and is run by Ayla Stewart, a Mormon mother of six who lives in Utah. I chose this blog because of the disbelief I felt when I first scrolled through her posts. I felt a mixture of shock, anger, and disgust, and I wanted to know if she actually believed what she was posting, or if she was just being a troll. A troll is someone who purposely tries to get an extreme reaction out of people on the internet. As it turned out, she was not being a troll. Ayla Stewart, by my views, is a white nationalist and self-identified former feminist who once was also a devoted Pagan and supporter of gay rights. After being left by her husband, Stewart was a single mother who felt betrayed by feminism for not supporting her beliefs and also ruining her marriage (Darby 2017). Just from a quick skim through her blog, I was able to see that Ayla Stewart had a strong interest in the well-being of her children, she cared about the way her femininity was viewed, and she took a pro-white stance on a variety of topics, like culture and religion, which made her blog the perfect one to analyze.

Ayla Stewart's blog posts date back to October of 2015, and I read her posts until February of 2019. I only analyzed the posts that had to do with three main themes: child-rearing and education, hegemonic white femininity, and a commitment to identifying with race over gender. Related to those themes were blog posts about European cultural practices,

homeschooling lessons, and violent crimes committed against white people. While many of the posts did relate to my research, some were about other topics, such as greeting your husband right, Christmas crafts, and household tips. I specifically chose to analyze the blog posts about the 'Traditional Life', including thoughts on child-rearing, femininity, and culture. Being from the perspective of a self-identified #TradWife, the posts come from a conservative angle. The traditional lifestyle seems to bring us back to the 1950s, similar to the era Donald Trump refers to when he says America was great. It calls for nostalgia of peaceful, prosperous, and hopeful times for white people. It is all about doing things in an old-fashioned way, from raising your kids to keeping a house and keeping a husband happy. For Traditional Wives, or white people following a traditional lifestyle, the 1950s bring them back to a time when things were simpler in their minds, even though it was not the case for black people. Dinner was always on the table, women's main jobs were being a wife and mother, men had the glory of providing for the family, and technology had not yet ruined younger generations. In the 1950s, black people had little to no rights, whereas the United States was a predominantly white country so white men had the most rights with white women close behind. Now that life is slightly better for black people, many white people stick to the claim that their success is why white people's lives are worse. Having to be 'politically correct' and care about a group of people that they are blaming for their downfalls in life is not appealing to them. Today this is how that old-fashioned lifestyle seems to resonate with racial relations. Traditional life in this sense equates to white supremacy, and that is why I chose to focus on it in my research.

### **White identity**

In the Americas, white supremacy is a historical construction that has been around since the beginning of colonization, 550 years ago when the Spaniards, French, and Portuguese invaded North and South America along with other places around the world. However, the problem did not disappear with the end of the colonies. White supremacy is linked to not only white identity, but how it works in tandem with colonial history and Christianity. Just 50 years ago, the Ku Klux Klan would lynch black people just for existing. This idea of white supremacy could not exist without the idea of white identity, so they are inextricably linked. White identity started when the Europeans came to the Americas to colonize its original people, justifying their actions through their religion, Christianity. It began as civilized Christians versus non-Christians, and eventually transformed into white versus non-white (Weed, 2017). Since Christianity was the colonizer's basis for civilization, anyone who was not Christian was not civilized, and in the Americas many of the people were not white. Weed also brings up Walter Mignolo's zero point epistemology, which is the idea of the ultimate grounding of knowledge, where knowledge is based on the culture of a particular group of people. For Weed, that one group of people is Christians (Weed 2017). The link between white identity and Christianity may have started during colonization, but it continues today. A prime example is the "birthers" phenomenon during the Obama administration. These people demanded that President Obama show his birth certificate, because they accused him of being born in another country, and of being Muslim (Moody & Holmes 2015). Being Muslim in this case should not matter, because there is no law under the United States Constitution that states that a president cannot be of a certain religion, or that he has to have a religion at all. However, claiming that President Obama is not a citizen of the United States because he was not born here strengthens the argument that he is not Christian because non-Christian equates to non-white. This exemplifies how the United States

differentiates itself as a Western Christian nation from non-Western, non-Christian nations (Straughn & Feld 2010).

A clear example of the way white people create a western/white vs. non-western/non-white dynamic is Ayla Stewart's blog post titled "Christian America Has Been Replaced". This post includes a picture comparing schools from the 1950s and schools from today. Although there is no text in this post, the images speak volumes. In this split picture, the top image is of white children and is not in color but has a high resolution and appears clear. The bottom image says "School in America Today" and is a grainy, low resolution image of ten brown children, some of which look visibly Muslim which we can tell by the head coverings two of the students are wearing. It is interesting that you can only tell the girl students are Muslim but not the boy students. Immediately, the viewer notices that the Christian America Stewart refers to is all white, and the risk of it being replaced is by non-Christian, brown people. Ayla makes it clear

that her idea of a threat to Christianity is people of color, which convinces the reader that white people are Christian and non-white people are not Christian.

I was curious about where these original images were from before Stewart photoshopped them together, so I decided to do a reverse image search on the bottom half of this photo. As it turns out, this is an image that was taken in 2012 in Massachusetts of children from Somalia, Thailand, and Kenya who were saved from refugee camps and are in the United States to learn English. Stewart has used an image under false pretenses in order to promote her message. The image on her blog was put together by her, so that if you reverse search the image, you only get what she did herself. However, by cropping the “School in America today” image and searching



**School in America, 1950s**

**School in America today**



that, you can trace the image back to its original source, which is an article titled “Springfield School Department’s ‘Literacy Through the Arts’ encourages these kids to dance like fish to learn English!” (Caldwell 2012). The tactic Stewart is using here is to anger and scare her audience by suggesting that multiple things are at stake: children’s education and well-being, Christianity, and their country. Also, Stewart presents this photo as evidence: people are seeing with their own eyes the issue she is raising, which is sometimes all the evidence a person needs to reinforce an already held belief.

Another common practice that contributes to racism is putting unnecessary focus on white people. In October of 2016, Ayla Stewart's seemingly harmless blog entry titled 'Top Fall Movies' gave some interesting insight into this. As I was scrolling through the movies, I saw some childhood favorites like Winnie the Pooh and Charlie Brown. What really peaked my personal interest was October Sky, a movie I loved in seventh grade. Her blurb about the movie was that it is "A true story about the awesomeness of the white mind" (Stewart 2016, October 3). This film is about a small town son of a coal miner who wanted to become an engineer against his father's wishes (Butterman 2012). While the film focused on white kids, that is not the primary take away from the film. By highlighting race, Stewart puts an unnecessary focus on it and also makes it seem like the 'white mind' is in direct competition with non-white minds. While I do not know what her goal with this comment was, I do know how it could be perceived by an audience. If I had not previously seen this film and was a consistent frequenter of Ayla Stewart's blog, I would probably be really excited to hear about this pro-white movie that would align with my white nationalist beliefs. If I had seen the movie before, I would agree with this comment because the person the film is based on is a white man, and so that does show how awesome white people's minds are. What is not thought about, however, is that this film was based in a time when coal mining towns were thriving, meaning sometime in the 50s or 60s, when black people had even fewer opportunities for higher education and work than they do now. By highlighting whiteness, Stewart further reinforces the superiority that comes with a white identity.

The following section is about how European ethnic groups came to form a "white" panethnicity, and also their fear of losing this ethnic identity. 'White' is an identity that has had

to develop over time, as people did not always identify themselves or others in that way. As Louise Michele Newman points out

“In the 1890s, for example, the Irish and Italian Catholics, as well as Jews of East European origin, were each considered separate races, distinct from Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and definitely not white. But by the mid-twentieth century, the descendants of these groups were assimilated as part of a newly defined white race and were classified as ‘Caucasians’”(Newman 1999 p. 11)

Who is encompassed by the term ‘white’ has fluctuated depending on who is assimilated well and who is not. The mid-twentieth century was when the fight for civil rights became more prominent, and all of these different European groups banded together to create an ‘us versus them’ mentality (Bonnett 1998 p. 1043). Sticking together to create one large cohort based on skin color allowed them to feel powerful, and to have a larger group to identify with as opposed to the smaller, more distinct ethnic groups they once were. In a post titled “Santa Lucia Day” from December 13, 2016, Ayla Stewart writes about her “favorite European, or white, tradition of all time” (Stewart 2016). In the post, Stewart says “Unfortunately, like so many European holidays, Santa Lucia Day has been accused of being too ‘white’ or too ‘European’ and offensive to Muslims”. This is *reductio ad absurdum*, a fallacy within informal logic that tries to prove an argument by showing that the argument leads to a drastic conclusion, which can often be seen as absurd. In this post, Stewart draws the conclusion that traditional Nordic holidays such as Santa Lucia Day are being forgone by Nordic youth and more global traditions are taking the place of it because groups like Muslims are offended by European holidays. The contrast between Europeans and Muslims is what creates the ‘us versus them’ mentality

in this post, and it also gets people who identify as the 'us', or European, to feel protective of their culture. If the readers of this post feel the need to protect their culture for this reason, they might feel the need to cling strongly to their identity in order to feel some sort of power there. This is how white identity is a powerful tool used in creating white nationalist ideals.

### **Hegemonic White Femininity**

Hegemonic femininity is, as the words suggest, how the dominant culture defines what it means to be feminine, and by extension, a woman. This includes but is not limited to the way women look, behave, the jobs they should prefer, their role in the family, and attitudes that could be seen as 'doing gender'. In their article titled "Accounting for Doing Gender", Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman write about how gender is a matter of doing rather than a state of being. They explain that "the relationship between sex category and *gender* is the relationship between being a recognizable incumbent of a sex category... and being *accountable* to current cultural conceptions of conduct becoming to ... a woman or a man" (West & Zimmerman 2009). Gender is linked to current cultural conceptions of becoming that gender, which for women is linked to hegemonic femininity.

Femininity is not a problem in and of itself. If a woman decides that she wants to do all of the things that society tells her is feminine and appropriate, then she has that choice. The problem arises when femininity is forced upon women and when it is society's hegemonic expectations of white femininity that is forced upon all women, including those who are not white. Making all women conform to hegemonic white femininity sets up the expectation that the only correct way to be a woman, is to be a white woman, and if they are not feminine

enough, then they are also not truly worthy of womanhood. An example of this on Stewart's blog is a video of herself giving advice to women who protest Trump. The first piece of advice was to have appropriate hair, because a half shaven head is "not how ladies look in our society". Along the same vein, the next piece of advice is to dress appropriately. Here, Stewart outlines an appropriate outfit: "Put on a nice skirt, knee length, stockings, modest, and not too high heeled shoes, a nice blouse fresh pressed, some nice modest jewelry, nice earrings, a pearl necklace, a little makeup to keep you looking fresh and happy, and a nice smile" (Stewart March 2016). Her last piece of advice for women who are protesting Trump is to move in with their fathers or husbands, because if they see her leaving the house in an inappropriate way, they will tell her not to. This advice, coming from one woman to another, is perceived as the necessary things a woman must do to be seen as respectable in society, and it has added weight because it is coming from someone who has the same social status and authority on the matter.

White supremacy is enforced on Ayla Stewart's blog with hegemonic white femininity in particular through its inference of fragility and the need to be protected. The very first thing that you notice when you visit a blog is the title. In this case, that is "Wife With A Purpose". Right away, the reader knows that this woman is married, and that she has a purpose of some sort, so she is probably pushing an agenda. Next, the reader sees the 'About' section of the blog. From this section, we learn that her name is Ayla Stewart and that she is a Christian woman with six children. She wrote that she is a "survivor of stalking, slander, and abuse from radical journalists", and just that sentence packed a lot of information (Stewart, 2015). Normally when we hear the word survivor, we think of survivors of rape or domestic violence. Using this word to refer to her being "stalked and slandered by journalists" is her way of reappropriating the word usage, and also taking away meaning from the original usage. Her readers will no longer

associate the word 'survivor' with a serious assault such a rape, but now with a less serious act such as slander, or damaging a reputation. We see a similar instance of reappropriation when Stewart says she is "paving the way for the average man and woman to reclaim the right to be normal without being terrorized" (Stewart 2015). In American society, the word 'terror' is often associated with 'terrorism', which is given to more serious acts than what Stewart is referring to. This heightens the importance of what Stewart claims is happening to these "average men and women" by associating it with the word that is typically given to gravely serious acts of terrorism.

By portraying herself as a survivor and terrorized, Ayla Stewart puts herself in a position of needing to be saved. I would argue that part of hegemonic white femininity is victimization, whether it is done by the self or by others. The typical example of this is white men hurting black men in order to protect white women, as was the case with Emmett Till. This victimization benefits these white women, because it creates a need for white men to be saviors and protectors, creating a co-dependency on one another. White women need white men to protect them, and white men need to protect white women to feel powerful. For women, the prime issue with this is that if you do not fit this mold of hegemonic white femininity, you are not seen as a good woman because you are not performing your gender properly. As previously mentioned, this task is nearly impossible for non-white women especially those of African descent because societal expectations for them are different. Black women are not construed as in need of protection in the same way white women are, nor are they portrayed as in need of being saved. This stems from the legacy of slavery as well as a different gender ideology for black women than for white women. An example of this is how white women are seen as needing protection, while black women are seen as strong and angry. These ideologies exist for the benefit of white patriarchal

standards. Having white women constantly need saving puts white men in a position of power, while black women being seen as strong and angry takes away from their femininity, and their claim to womanhood. Neglecting to allow black women the same femininity as white women also takes away all of the benefits that come from white femininity, like protection.

### **Child-Rearing and Education**

A significant way that white women uphold and contribute to white supremacy is through the reproduction of it, and the best way to do that is by socializing and teaching children. White women are the primary caretakers of all children, whether it be their own children living in their house, or students of theirs that they teach in a classroom. In the 1999-2000 school year, 84.3% of all school teachers were white, 7.6% were black, 5.6% were hispanic, and 0.9% were American Indian (Aniagolu 2012 p. 224; original source U.S. Department of Education). In the same year, 74.8% of teachers were female (“Digest of Education Statistics” 2013). These statistics prove that white women have a significant effect on children of all races because of their high level of exposure to them, and so their own ideologies get passed down one way or another.

In the case of Ayla Stewart, her children are being taught, either outright or covertly, that what is white or European is best and what is not white or European is worse, and that will stick with these children as they grow into adults unless taught otherwise, and then they will pass it down to their children. In Co-whites, Aniagolu explains that “In effect, we become what we have been taught or failed to be taught. And that which we become cannot be disentangled from *how* and *whence* we came” (Aniagolu 2012 p. 217). A child’s upbringing will significantly impact the type of person they are, and that includes whether or not they are racist, because racism is a

learned behavior (Cross 2003). Just as habits are hard to break, beliefs are difficult to unlearn once they have been drilled into you.

One blog post that ties into both white identity, hegemonic white femininity, and child-rearing is Stewart's post titled "Dance Classes for Little Girls". Stewart starts the post by suggesting to her readers that they take a look at enrolling little girls in dance classes from a "European or white cultural perspective" (Stewart 2015). Right away, we see that she equates European and white, which is problematic because white identity in the United States is distinct from white identity elsewhere, including Europe. Stewart states that parents should make sure their children learn a European or white American form of dance, and then goes on to list some dance styles she deems appropriate, like polka and ballet. Dance styles such as hip-hop and salsa were not included, and it can be concluded that it is because they are not considered appropriate, or white, by Stewart (2015). One type of dance she lists is Spanish, but she makes sure to clarify that she means from Spain and not from a Latin American country. This is a form of positive reinforcement of negative stereotypes, as author Emeka Aniagolu talks about in his book Co-Whites: How and Why White Women "Betrayed" the Struggle for Racial Equality in the U.S. (2012). Stewart is taking a negative stereotype of other cultures not being worth celebrating and reinforcing it in her children by positive interaction with other forms of dance. On the surface, this seems to just be celebrating one's own culture, but subconsciously, she is teaching her children that it is encouraged to do things that are associated with European culture and wrong to do things associated with any other culture. Another highlighted aspect of this post was that little girls should be taking dance classes because it teaches them key aspects of being a lady, such as discipline and respect (Stewart 2015). The last section of her post reminds her readers that "Every choice we make for our children can either strengthen or weaken their sense of cultural

pride and heritage. Choose wisely ...". By framing this as a choice for the children, she is using it as a ploy to hide her white supremacist views. Since she only wants her children to take a style of dance that originated with white people, it is assumed that she thinks other styles of dance are not good enough, and that is because they are not white/European. The claim that she is doing it to celebrate her own culture is easily dismissed because one can have and celebrate their own culture while learning about and appreciating the culture of others at the same time. By making the two mutually exclusive, Stewart is creating an isolating system for her children, and one that is hierarchical.

Child-rearing and education are so important to the white supremacist movement because they are the key factors that allow it to continue. It is easier for people to grow up believing something and continue to believe it, than to have to convince others that they believe it. Since white women are the main educators in children's lives, they have an undue influence on whether or not white supremacist values are reproduced for the next generation.

### **Positionality**

Research is a process that is affected by not only the researchers' perception of others, but also the way the researcher expects others to perceive them (Bourke 2014 p. 1). This means that there must be reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Reflexivity is continual self-analysis that allows you to constantly think about your own position in your research (pp. 1-2). For me, reflexivity was extremely important in this research. As a white woman talking about race relations, I had to check myself on what I knew as fact from reading about it versus what people of color know as fact from experiencing it.

I come from a white, low socioeconomic, inner-city background. I grew up with an almost entirely white family with almost no white friends, because the neighborhoods that fed into my school were mainly black and hispanic. When I was younger and the people who raised me scheduled my play dates, most of my friends were white, but as I got older and started making friends on my own, my friend group by chance became less white. Growing up in an inner city exposed me to a large variety of people from all different backgrounds, but even with this multicultural experience I never had a good understanding of race relations. I knew that my grandparents would let me go to some friends' house and not others, that my favorite teacher in first grade was a black woman named Mrs. Bowks, and that the neighborhood around the corner from ours was dangerous where all happened to speak Spanish. I remember one time when my mother took me to get a haircut, she lied to the hairdresser and said that I had recently been treated for lice, and asked if we should come back another day. The hairdresser said that for the safety of other clients, I should. When we left, my mother told me we were going to a different salon and that she lied so a black woman would not be the one to cut my hair because she would not know how to do a white person's hair properly.

Looking back on my life makes me question how much my positionality affected my research. In the book White Fragility: Why It's So Hard For White People to Talk About Racism, Robin DiAngelo (2018) argues that one of the reasons white people have a difficult time talking about racism is because they are uninformed. White people do not understand the importance of socialization, the complexity of racism, and the status that race brings, in the same way a black person does (2018 pp. 52-53). In doing this research, I tried to take a reflexive approach and always have in mind where I am coming from as I was researching. How was I perceiving the people and issues I was researching? Was I being biased in an attempt to distance

myself from the likes of Ayla Stewart? After all, I am a white woman talking about white women being racist. Another aspect DiAngelo talks about is aversive racism, where white people get to be racist but do so in a way that allows them to maintain a positive image of themselves (2018 p. 43). Am I doing this? By talking about the racist people in the group I identify with, am I just trying to maintain a positive image of myself and distance myself further from those people so I do not become associated with them even though I look like them? Many of my friends of color on this campus have uttered a blanket statement about white people, and then have followed it up with “you know I’m not talking about you, right Raegan?”. When they reassure me that I am not one of the racist white people, I feel better about myself. I feel happy that they know I would not behave in the detrimental ways that some people in my aggregate do. And maybe that is why I am researching this topic, to further prove my separation from the white women who support white supremacy by marrying KKK leaders or only allowing their children to do culturally European things.

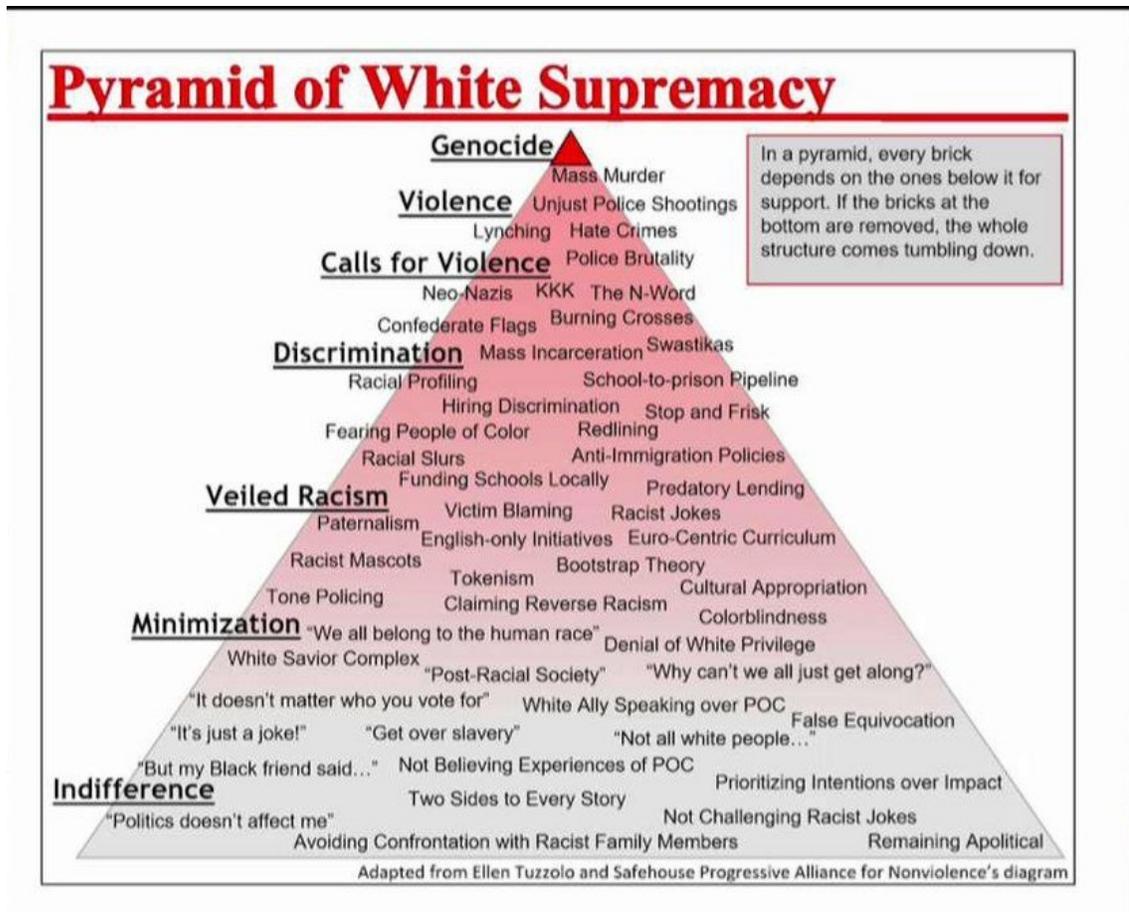
Whether I did it consciously or not, I am creating this distance between myself and *those* white women. That distance is dangerous. It allows me to take a back seat in race relations, when I should actually be taking the lead in getting white people to stop being racist. I cannot speak for the people experiencing racism, and I also cannot speak for the people perpetuating overt racism, but I can speak as someone part of the majority group that does perpetuate racism and my views on how to stop it. My main goal in regards to my positionality on this research was to write about racism from my experience and the experience of people who have had the same societal upbringing as me.

As a white woman, it is difficult to hear that I am part of the problem, and that I play such a powerful role in an institutional structure that I despise. There are probably things that I did not

bring up in this research, because I am unaware of other ways that white women like myself are harming communities of color, and the ways in which I personally am harming communities of color. No white person is free from blame here, and that is why it is so important for everyone to work together to fight it. White women, including myself, my mother, my grandmother, my aunts, and every other white woman in my life, are not going to be able to combat the oppressive structures we are supportive of if we do not first recognize them.

### **Conclusion**

One does not have to be a member of the Ku Klux Klan in order to be racist. Racism is not just white men lynching black people, or using the 'N' word as a non-black person. Racism takes many forms, including the most dangerous one, covert racism. It may seem confusing how covert racism that is often disguised could be considered more dangerous than overt racism, but the pyramid of white supremacy does a good job helping to explain it.



This pyramid of white supremacy begins at the bottom with things considered indifferent, and makes it way up past veiled racism and shoots to the very top with genocide. In the top right hand corner, there is a reminder that the bricks at the top rely on the bricks at the bottom to hold them up. This shows that the things at the bottom, like not challenging racist jokes, lead to accepting cultural appropriation, which then leads to accepting mass incarceration and police brutality, which are just a few steps behind mass murder. The point of this pyramid is not to suggest that remaining apolitical directly causes neo-nazis, but it is to say that without the majority remaining apolitical, neo-nazis would have a much more difficult time doing the horribly racist things that they do.

Ayla Stewart is a clear example of someone who upholds not only the base of the pyramid, but also contributes to the middle of it. Many of the ideals she expresses falls under

veiled racism and discrimination on the pyramid, including a Euro-centric curriculum, claiming reverse racism, and fearing people of color. Stewart is able to contribute to these aspects of the pyramid of white supremacy because there are people supporting her who are contributing to the socialization and education of children, which is not shown of the pyramid but plays a large role nonetheless. Stewart's contributions also support all of the actions under the violence sections of the pyramid. Even though Ayla is a housewife who seemingly just writes a blog, she influences people to let them know supporting white supremacy is okay. Her purpose is a political one, where she publishes her white nationalist views in hopes of influencing others.

A missing aspect in the literature for this topic is what white women can do to help stop the cycle of unknowingly upholding white supremacy. I would like to suggest that the way to do this is by refusing to uphold the base structures of the pyramid of white supremacy. Do not remain apolitical, because doing so always supports the oppressor. If you are already trying to be anti-racist, get the white savior complex out of your head. Thinking you are saving people of color does nothing to actually help them, and is only about making yourself feel better. Also, challenge every racist joke you hear. Do not let family, friends, or yourself get by saying racist jokes without being corrected for it. If you are dating someone who is a white supremacist but think of yourself as okay because you do not take the same actions, you are actually worse because you are supporting it and allowing the white supremacy to continue and be reproduced. Instead, white women need to stop these actions in their tracks. It might be uncomfortable, but we can no longer allow ourselves and people around us to uphold and contribute to systems of oppression, even if that oppression is not geared toward us.

This topic is important to pay attention to because unless you seek out this knowledge, you will not find out. Our sexist society tends to overlook women in all that they do, whether it

be the double shift of housework or the perpetuation of a white supremacist society. By erasing the roles white women play in our society, particularly in children's socialization and education, just demonizes men and allows women to continue doing what they do even though it is just as harmful. We must not tackle this problem at the apex, which would be the overt racists, but also the covert racists that help the overt racists do get to the critical point they are at.

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