

CENTERING THE MARGINS: EXPLORING WOMEN OF COLOR
PARTICIPATION IN THE SLUTWALK MOVEMENT

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In
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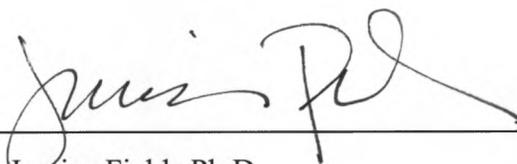
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August 2016

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Centering the Margins: Exploring Women of Color Participation in the SlutWalk Movement* by Courtney Frances Leung, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Human Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University.



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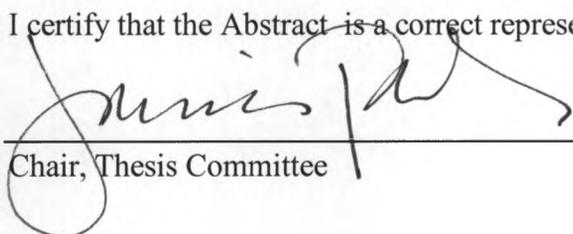
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CENTERING THE MARGINS: EXPLORING WOMEN OF COLOR
PARTICIPATION IN THE SLUTWALK MOVEMENT

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San Francisco, California
2016

The SlutWalk movement was a direct response to a Toronto police officer's statement that women should avoid dressing like sluts so they do not get raped. While the marches focused on reclaiming the term 'slut,' SlutWalk organizers' mainstream feminist agenda limited women of color from actively participating in ways that link their sexual violence to institutionalized violence. While women of color critiqued the movement, they still actively engaged with the movement through a combination of online and in-person participation. A content analysis of online participation by women of color illuminates their complicated relationship with SlutWalk more clearly and their goal to challenge the dominant narratives in mainstream feminist movements. The exploration of online and in-person participation, helps us understand women of color engaged with SlutWalk as a way to resist erasure, bring visibility to critiques, and steer movement toward a more inclusive future.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

December 9, 2016
Date

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INTRODUCTION

On April 3, 2011, almost 3,000 women gathered at Queen's Park for the first SlutWalk. Many participants engaged in theatrical and sartorial displays of sluttiness, wearing lace bras, fishnet stockings, or clothing commonly associated with "sluts." The satirical tone garnered media attention: protestors marched through the streets waving signs identifying as sluts and challenging societal norms that blame women for their assault; the media filmed the protests, posted images and discussions online, and featured discussion and commentary on victim-blaming and sexual violence. This march powerfully protested a Toronto police officer's comment at a community safety forum that women should avoid "dressing like 'sluts'" and that women should prevent their own sexual assaults (Blogando, 2011). The officer's comment reflected deeply ingrained North American beliefs that women's dress and perceived lewdness elicits sexual aggression, suggesting women are deserving of their assaults. Women attending the marches held signs in with statements like "My Body, My Choice," "My Dress is Not a Yes," and "Still Not Asking for It," in protest of victim-blaming attitudes toward survivors of sexual assault. Attendees marched over half a mile to Toronto police headquarters and demanded an apology from Toronto Police and formal retraining for officers responding to sexual violence (SlutWalk Toronto, 2011).

The outrage over the Toronto officer's "recommendation" grew well beyond the ten women in the original audience into a global movement to challenge victim blaming.

People—women, for the most part—mobilized in the thousands to confront the misogynistic blaming of women for sexual assaults. Soon after SlutWalk Toronto, women organized SlutWalks within the United States, across North America, and worldwide. Over 120 marches were scheduled by April 2011 (Satellite SlutWalks, 2011).

Organizers coined the name “SlutWalk” to challenge to the ways communities and institutions justify or overlook violence against women labeled “sluts” (TEDx Toronto, 2012). Toronto residents Sonya Barnett and Heather Jarvis collaborated with York University event coordinator, Jeanette Janzen, alumni Alyssa Teekah, and mutual friend Erika Jane Scholz. Together they organized the first protest against slut-shaming—a form of victim-blaming based on a woman’s actual or presumed sexual activity, or for behaviors that violate traditional social norms of sexual expression (Adelman, 2011). Jarvis and her partners believed that while language is powerful, “you can also change language” through reappropriation and transforming the discourse surrounding a particular word (Stampler, 2011, para. 20). The organizers called for reappropriation of the term “slut,” arguing that women

are tired of being oppressed by slut shaming; of being judged by our sexuality and feeling unsafe as a result. Being in charge of our sexual lives should not mean that we are opening ourselves to an expectation of violence, regardless if we participate in sex for pleasure or work. No one should equate enjoying sex with attracting sexual assault.

(SlutWalk Toronto, 2011, para. 4)

Barnett and Jarvis deployed the term “slut”—attempting to transform a word routinely used to incite shame and stigma against women’s sexual practices into a word that could invoke a sense of sexual empowerment and solidarity for victims of sexual assault.

While Barnett and Jarvis’s response may be unprecedented and admirable, especially with the use of social media engagement and real-time accounts, the march left many women on the margins. In the midst of SlutWalk’s rising momentum, women of color raised concerns about the limitations of SlutWalk’s agenda. Specifically, they argued that white feminists dominated SlutWalk’s discourse and left no room for women of color to discuss how violence intersects with other identities. Women of color pointed to sexual violence as a product of institutionalized violence; their discrimination and oppression, they argue, is often sanctioned by governmental structures.

SlutWalk organizers centered on reclaiming a sexual slur, ignoring these factors. In the first several months of SlutWalk Toronto’s inception, media coverage of SlutWalk fixated on the theatrical elements of the march, focusing on white women dressed in satirical presentations of “slutty” clothing and highlighting speeches given by young, white women—the prevailing demeanor and aesthetic of the middle class. Opinion pieces published on prominent media platforms such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Guardian* featured white authors, whose commentary focused on semantics and their celebration or contempt for the term “slut.” Mainstream news outlets published the think pieces of feminist authors and scholars such as Jessica Valenti, Gail Dines, and Rebecca

Traister, all of whom speak from a white, North American perspective. While SlutWalk Toronto's aim was to bring all women together in the fight to end sexual violence, the conversations about SlutWalk did not reliably acknowledge the racial and systemic implications that women of color experience in concordance with sexual violence. SlutWalk seemed to be a white feminist movement that eschewed participation and engagement by women of color.

As the SlutWalk marches took place in North America and abroad, women of color turned to the Internet as a platform to engage with the SlutWalks. In doing so, women of color effectively transformed the SlutWalk movement. Through online blogs, open letters, and think pieces published on personal websites and social media outlets, women of color shared their support, disdain, and ambivalence regarding SlutWalk's message and call to action. Women of color online engagement offered a real-time account of how SlutWalks were taking place across the world; their engagement documented the ways mainstream feminist agendas overlooked women of color and their histories with sexual violence.

In the following pages, I examine the SlutWalk movement from the perspective of a woman of color. Originally brought forth by Black women's activism in the late 70's, activists coined the term "woman of color" as a way to empower non-white people together into a coalition against racism (Wade, 2011). In contrast, SlutWalk's organizing agenda to reclaim "slut" and to end victim blaming failed to acknowledge other forms of

institutionalized violence that has been leveled against women of color throughout history. It also reflects a historical pattern of white feminism, in which white women conflate their own efforts and overshadow and co-opt many social movements that women of color spearheaded. SlutWalk's mainstream feminist agenda limits women of color seeking to actively participate in ways that reflect their lived experiences. Nevertheless, women of color engaged with SlutWalk to challenge the dominant white feminist narrative, bring visibility to their critiques, and steer the movement toward a more inclusive future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, mainstream feminist movements led by white, middle-class women received the most attention from mainstream media outlets (Luna, 2009). While mainstream feminist movements gain significant media attention, these movements typically center on white women's experiences and subsequently exclude women of color from broader dialogue about violence. Rooted in Eurocentric and Western experience, mainstream feminism has traditionally focused on gender as the basis of racialized and classed violence and oppression. Amos and Parmar (1984) describe white women's amnesia to racial issues: their conflation of their own political organizing leaves little room for women of color to describe violence beyond their gender identity. Feminist author bell hooks (1982) has criticized white feminists for overlooking the ways institutional racism within the movement repeatedly excluded Black women in the early

women's movement. Similarly, Chicana feminist theorist Aída Hurtado (1989) examines the exclusion of women of color in feminist academic spaces, arguing that most contemporary feminist theory in the US has been written by white, educated women. According to Russo and Vaz (2001), these dialogues do not fully recognize or address the diversity of women's experiences within the United States and abroad.

White women continue to dominate the activism and conversations, upholding a 'master narrative' that centers the experiences of a dominant group (Montecinos, 1995). This narrative excludes women of color from the conversation and does little to address their experiences with violence. Mainstream feminist discourse fosters an environment in which the ideas, needs and agendas of white women are prioritized and frequently regarded as the only acceptable feminism. Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1989) argues that Black women in the United States experience institutional violence that intersects with race and gender. Examining gender oppression among women exclusively prevents feminist scholars from capturing the range of experiences and oppressions that women of color face. In her foundational work on intersectionality, scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) brought attention to a new lens of examining discrimination against Black women. Crenshaw (1991) explores the organizing power of Black women who pushed policy and lawmakers to understand their violence as part of a larger institutional system that intersects with multiple identities such as race, class, and gender. This lens offers a more in-depth analysis of the violence

Black women experience; nevertheless, mainstream feminist discourse continues to focus on white women's experiences and to ignore women of color's organizing.

Women of color have always been actively engaged in feminist political movements, yet their efforts have long often overshadowed—even co-opted—by white women. Mainstream feminism routinely fails to acknowledge the experiences and contributions of Black women who spearheaded anti-violence movements and organized the first public protests against sexual abuse (Davis, 1983). The mainstream media coverage and academic conversations regarding feminism continue to distort history, rendering Black activists and women of color invisible and framing feminism as a movement created for and by white women (Lorde, 2003; Ortega, 2006). While 19th-century white women's right's advocates engaged with Black women in abolition movements, these working relationships were often led by white women's religious or moral motivations and their intention to re-center the movement to themselves rather than dismantling a racial hierarchy (bell hooks, 1984). White activists' co-opting and conditional organizing created strain with Black activists. While Black women were fighting for multiple causes, white women refused to participate or support until they felt it was politically convenient to do so.

White women and women of color have long struggled with tensions when collaborating on anti-violence movements. White feminists struggle to collaborate with Black sisters who were pessimistic about working with white feminists (Amos & Parmar,

1984). Women of color have been reluctant to organize with white women because their agendas rarely benefitted women of color. Under the guise of lobbying for all women, white feminists have historically engaged in political work that upholds whiteness and elevates the voices of white women over women of color. For example, the passage of the Violence against Women Act (1994) was a major legislative victory in the effort to promote anti-violence measures. White feminists were largely credited for VAWA's passage (Pérez, 2014), but women of color had been deeply involved for decades in efforts to pass more legislation and resources for fighting sexual violence. Long before VAWA passed, Loretta Ross, former director of the Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective pushed for similar legislation since the 1970s (Luna, 2009). At the time, Ross worked with the Washington D.C Rape Crisis Center, the only site run by Black women, and lobbied for more resources to support their work (Pérez, 2014). When white feminists lobbied for VAWA, their political agenda overshadowed the work that Ross and director of the national Women of Color Network Tonya Lovelace had engaged in long before. White women lobbied for more police involvement, but failed to acknowledge how women of color often experience violence and abuse at the hands of police. Prison abolition organization Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence critiqued the white-feminist-led antiviolence movement for its reliance on United States justice system, which employs a rhetoric of "safety" that actually harms communities of color, silences activism, and generates profits for privately-owned prisons (2001).

Despite these major shortcomings in mainstream feminist organizing, women of color remained involved with political and social change efforts—even while still acknowledging the complicated process with aligning with mainstream feminist efforts. Ross and Lovelace understood that VAWA “would have backlash for communities of color” but remained involved in hopes for setting precedence to increase more funding for subsequent anti-violence efforts (Pérez, 2014). Lovelace recalls the complicated process of organizing with white feminists who often garnered more political visibility, stating, “I think women of color have always stood in that place with mixed feelings and emotions around the work around that. It’s not like we didn’t know these systems were problematic” (Pérez, 2014, para. 4). Women of color navigate similarly complicated terrains as they decide to participate in similar movements where their needs are neither central nor addressed. However, by staying involved with movements such as VAWA, women of color have been able to push for subsequent provisions that addressed the specific needs of women of color, particularly immigrant and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (Bogado, 2014).

Historically, mainstream feminist movement has limited the ways women of color participate in larger feminist movements. Attending to women of color organizing efforts offers a different perspective and analysis of a popular feminist movement through the eyes of women who have been overlooked. SlutWalk’s organizing agenda runs the risk of repeating these historical patterns, with women of color sharing reluctance to participate and engage politically alongside mainstream feminists. With the rise of online social

media, more of these critiques are gaining traction, offering valuable insight and feedback with the potential to create a more sustainable and inclusive movement that respects and honors all women's identities and cultural histories.

METHODS

In spite of their critiques and complicated feelings about participating in movements dubbed as feminist movements, women of color participated in SlutWalks through discussion on the Internet and in-person at the marches. While much of the mainstream media conversations centered on SlutWalk's semantics and reclamation debates, rich conversations unfolded in the online feminist blogosphere and made their way back to SlutWalk's founding organizers. Women of color used the Internet as a platform for participation and dialogue with SlutWalk participants and organizers, and their participation at the marches disrupts the mainstream feminist narrative of SlutWalk. In the following pages, I present the results of a content analysis of this online participation in the SlutWalks from April 2011 to December 2012. A qualitative content analysis allows me to examine "meaning in context" and explore a counter-narrative to what mainstream accounts of SlutWalk already provides (Merriam, 1998).

I analyze nine online articles that were posted online and publicly available. I focus on articles written by women of color and posted on their own personal websites or featured as guest contributions to websites focused on women of color's experiences. Of the nine online articles, five of the articles are written by and from the perspectives of

Black women, two articles are written by a Malaysian woman's perspective, one article is by a South American Latina, and one article is by a collective of transnational women whose histories trace from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. These online spaces feature developing discourses that incorporated an intersectional approach to SlutWalk's impact and illustrate the ways multiple, intersecting identities inform women of color's discussions about sexual violence.

I emulate Sara Ahmed's (2010) method of data collection and analysis, in which she tracks the concept of happiness through selected examples and data she encountered in her women's writing courses in the 1980's, recent books that had left an impact on her and contributed to her recent analyses, informal discussions, and suggestions from colleagues. Eventually, Ahmed chose items that resonated with her own positionality as "a reader of feminist, queer, and anti-racist books" (2010 p. 18). I used this method by starting with examining articles about SlutWalk from SlutWalk's Wikipedia page, a user-content submitted website regarding news, people, movements, and political topics. I got a sense of the general description of SlutWalk—an online picture of how SlutWalk was described and perceived. I next conducted an academic literature review looking for data related to SlutWalk. At the time of my search in 2011, no academic published articles were available. By 2015, several articles had been published, many focusing on SlutWalk's implications in mainstream feminist organizing, third and fourth-wave feminism, and transnational feminism (Carr, 2013; Miriam 2012; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Carr drew on social-movement research to examine SlutWalk's contributions to

anti-violence movements and argued SlutWalks have the potential to open up new spaces for political and intellectual engagements across the world, and can challenge the historical definition of Slut (2013). Using SlutWalk as a case study in transnational feminist solidarity, Carr studied YouTube videos of SlutWalks, public media, and social media commentaries from SlutWalks around the world, and added to ongoing conversations about sexual agency, challenging victim-blaming, and acknowledging racialized sexual violence (Carr, 2013). On the other hand, Miriam (2012) argues SlutWalk's form of feminism fails women because it emphasizes personal choice to be a 'slut,' but fails to interrogate power dynamics that limit sexual agency and choice, particularly among women of color. Furthermore, Miriam argues SlutWalk's one-dimensional slogan fixates on a capitalistic, patriarchal construct of 'slut' that presents sexual agency as an ability to wear stilettos, fishnets, and lingerie (2012). When working with teen girls who attended SlutWalk, Ringrose and Renold (2012) found that teen girls struggled to simultaneously perform "sexy" but also manage themselves in a desexualized context in schools. Furthermore, they suggest SlutWalks are more adult-centric and did not offer any critical impact for teen girls regulating their sexuality in their everyday lives (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Many of the researchers offered critical analysis to SlutWalk's organizing strategy, and suggested more research and analysis is needed to assess SlutWalk's contributions to anti-violence efforts.

While many scholars applaud SlutWalk's unprecedented popularity and media traction, scholars and activists continue to question SlutWalk's long-term contributions to

anti-violence efforts, their emphasis on white, North American experiences of violence, and its implications for women of color. I add to this growing literature by documenting women of color in-person and on-line participation and engagement in the SlutWalks, which provide a better understanding of SlutWalk's contributions to the anti-violence movements. Women of color participation provides valuable critiques and jumpstarted efforts to create a movement that decentralizes White, North American perspectives. I also add an analysis of sexual agency by analyzing how institutionalized violence stemming from racism and colonization limits women of color agency.

Some researchers conducted ethnographies and field studies, participating in the SlutWalks and interviewing participants there. While this offers insight into who is at the marches, I was interested on who was not involved and their motivations for choosing to participate or not participate. Adding to further analysis of online spaces as platforms for participation, I focus on works written on-line by women of color. Capturing these writings are important as they highlight another platform women of color engage in rich discussion about their experiences, which do not necessarily take place in academic spaces. I specifically focus on Black feminist theory, as Black women were some of the first respondents to SlutWalk organizers and called for a more critical analysis of their organizing strategies. Additionally, I focus on Black feminist theory as a means to credit Black activists who spearheaded many of the first anti-violence feminist initiatives in North America. I draw on intersectionality as an approach to examining online participation of women of color and think about identities and their relationship to power

(Collins, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991, 2015). Intersectionality describes how race and gender intersect as forms of oppression, specifically in relation to Black women. Originally articulated on behalf of Black women, this term has broadened to address a number of additional categorical differences such as sexuality, class, nationality, ability, and histories of colonization. I use this theory specifically when I talk about women of color's online participation because they cite intersectionality in their calls for movements to recognize multiple identities and those identities' relationships to power within social movements and in their criticisms of the movement's failure to represent these differences and identities.

In data analysis, I looked for themes that countered or critiqued SlutWalk's aim to reclaim the term "slut." I coded for themes relating to forms of institutionalized violence, intersecting identities, and representation. I also explored online narratives about in-person participations at the marches. This coding yielded three themes: racism, histories of colonization and militarization, and in-person participation that challenged the dominant narrative of SlutWalks.

My thesis directs conversations about SlutWalk toward an intersectional lens and centers the experiences and participation of women of color. Contrary to the dominant narrative of SlutWalks, women of color are engaging with the movement, they simply aren't represented in the larger dialogues and representations. In the first two sections, I explore how SlutWalk's organizing agenda to reclaim "slut" and end victim blaming fails

to acknowledge other forms of institutionalized violence that has been leveled against women of color throughout history. In my third section, I explore how women of color use a combination of on-line and in-person participation to resist erasure, bring visibility to critiques, and steer movement toward a more inclusive future. In my conclusion, I focus on SlutWalk Toronto organizer's responses to these critiques, and offer implications of future SlutWalks that were brought forth by women of color organizing and participating in SlutWalks.

ANALYSIS

Racism

If SlutWalk aims to end sexual violence against all women, their organizing efforts must include critical analysis of how racism is interconnected with sexual violence against women of color. In response to the SlutWalk movement, women of color have called for recognition of race as a form of institutionalized violence. Black women's particular experience with racism in the United States obstructs their ability to reclaim "slut," participate, and be visible at SlutWalks.

Several months after the SlutWalk marches gained traction across North America and abroad, Brooklyn-based racial justice organization Black Women's Blueprint (2011) penned an open letter on their blog directed at SlutWalk NYC organizers. Founded in 2008, Black Women's Blueprint first started as groups of Black women meeting to discuss the state of Black women in the United States across multiple intersecting

identities. Meetings in living rooms, backyards, and kitchens eventually grew into an organization prioritizing Black women's empowerment and envisioning a world where the concerns of Black communities are integrated into broader social justice organizing. Members' work toward this mission through research, historical documentation, grassroots organizing, and social/public advocacy, all of which prioritize the concerns and struggles of the Black community. Their open letter circulated throughout social media, and followed with more than 150 endorsements from social and racial justice organizations, activists, and scholars.

Black Women's Blueprint addresses SlutWalk's organizing failures in addressing race and historical sexual oppression of Black women, specifically in their reappropriation of the term "slut." The Blueprint declares that "as Black women and girls we find no space in SlutWalk, no space for participation and to unequivocally denounce rape and sexual assault as we have experienced it" (Black Women's Blueprint, 2011). While the authors applaud the efforts of SlutWalk organizers in addressing victim-blaming and sexual violence, they also vocalize concerns that they as Black women do not have the privilege to reclaim 'slut,' "even in name," without "validating the already historically entrenched ideology and recurring messages about what and who the Black woman is." Furthermore, Black Women's Blueprint recalls their own histories of enslavement, abuse, and rape at the hands of white men as a reason for these concerns.

Racialized Tropes. According to Black Women's Blueprint, reappropriating "slut" does not offer Black women sexual liberation. Instead, it validates and reaffirms violent sexual stereotypes that have been thrust upon them since their enslavement. Since the beginning of their enslavement, racist tropes depicting Black women have been used to justify their enslavement and dehumanization. Historically, Black women's bodies have been oversexualized and presented as the antithesis of the innocence and purity associated with white womanhood. A few months after SlutWalks gained traction, Black feminist scholar Brittney Cooper (2011) took to her blog Crunk Feminist Collective to voice her critiques about SlutWalk organizers organizing around a white female experience. Cooper specifically addresses how, as a Black woman, she finds it difficult to organize under the word "slut":

As a word used to shame white women who do not conform to morally conservative norms about chaste sexuality, the term very much reflects white women's specific struggles around sexuality and abuse. Although plenty of Black women have been called "slut," I believe Black women's histories are different, in that Black female sexuality has always been understood from without to be deviant, hyper, and excessive. Therefore, the word slut has not been used to discipline (shame) us into chaste moral categories, as we have largely been understood to be unable to practice "normal" and "chaste" sexuality anyway. (2011, para. 9)

In addressing the inadequate race critique that surrounds SlutWalk organizers' use of the term "slut," Cooper and the Crunk Feminist Collective build on the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990). Collins describes the virgin/whore dichotomy that categorizes female sexuality: virgins are the women who remain celibate before marriage and subsequently engage in heterosexual sex, while the whores are women who have sex outside of wedlock. This binary is racialized; white female sexuality has historically been presented as normative and desirable also viewed as models sexual purity, whereas Black women's sexuality is presented as deviant. In addition, variations of the meaning of "slut," such as "hoochie" and "jezebel," have been used against Black women historically to justify their rape, forced prostitution and enslavement (Collins, 1990, p. 81). These variations continue to reinforce a racialized virgin/whore dichotomy in which Black women, regardless of actual behaviors, are defined as whores, making white virgins possible (Collins, 1990). While white women are more likely to benefit from the reclamation of these historical tropes, Black women must consider how their reappropriation of "slut" and participation in SlutWalks addresses their histories of violence and in fact risks the affirmation of racist stereotypes.

Racialized and Sexual Violence. Black Women's Blueprint describes how slavery intertwined with sexual violence, rendering Black bodies as property, and racism legitimized sexual violence, cutting off access to self-determine sexuality. In this thread, the Blueprint builds on the work of Black feminist Angela Davis, one of the most important advocates to highlight the connection between sexism and racism in the context

of sexual violence. Davis (1983) points to slavery's reliance on sexual abuse to establish social relations between slave masters and slaves, and even after the abolition of slavery, this racialized, institutional sexual abuse endured through individuals and groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the police. These assaults were routinely and ideologically sanctioned by politicians, historians, and public figures who enforced racist stereotypes about Black women.

Black Women's Blueprint and Brittney Cooper called attention to racist and sexual tropes of Black Women, citing how institutionalized violence stripped them of their agency to define their own sexualities and identities. They argue that similar terms like "slut" have different implications and associations for Black women due to "Jim Crow kidnappings, rape and lynchings, gender misrepresentations" (Black Women's Blueprint, 2011, para. 3). These racist tropes and histories of abuse and violence sanctioned by the state undermine Black women's ability to determine their own sexuality.

While the founding SlutWalk organizers have maintained that participants are not required to reclaim the term "slut" at SlutWalks, the authors of Black Women's Blueprint point to their repeated exclusion from movements in which their participation is most critical and asked that SlutWalk organizers reevaluate their use of the term "slut." As much as they applaud the efforts of the Slut Walk's organizers to bring awareness to victim-blaming and sexual violence, they cannot even in name reclaim the term "slut":

We don't have the privilege to play on destructive representations burned in our collective minds, on our bodies and souls for generations. Although we understand the valid impetus behind the use of the word "slut" as language to frame and brand an anti-rape movement, we are gravely concerned. For us the trivialization of rape and the absence of justice are viciously intertwined with narratives of sexual surveillance, legal access and availability to our personhood. It is tied to institutionalized ideology about our bodies as sexualized objects of property, as spectacles of sexuality and deviant sexual desire. (2011, para. 4)

Black Women's Blueprint harnesses their critique of the SlutWalk by naming this history of sexual and racial denigration. From their participation and engagement in SlutWalk, Black women ask an important question: What would it mean to for women of color to call themselves sluts when the world already takes that as a given?

Black women have questioned their capacity to engage meaningfully in the performative resistance of SlutWalks because their hypersexualization is based on a permanent status and not contingent on their perceived behavior. While women of color participate in the SlutWalks, many are skeptical that performative participation could actually be a reality for them and actually end violence against women. As stated in Black Women's Blueprint (2011), the ways "in which we are perceived and what happens to us before, during and after sexual assault crosses the boundaries of our mode of dress" (para 3).

At one SlutWalk, Black feminist and academic Salamishah Tillet (2011) wondered if the sartorial reappropriation that a “white, college-educated Mid-Westerner managed to find at SlutWalk” is possible for women of color, “who always wear the added complication of race” (para. 9). A white, college-educated white woman has the privilege necessary to engage in sartorial display of a “slut” in the context of SlutWalk and to return to being a symbol of sexual purity outside of SlutWalks. White women, Tillet adds,

with the exception of prostitutes and some manual laborers, could be a “lady,” the model of respectability, modesty, and even sexual purity. Unlike women of color, a white woman can be labeled a ‘slut’ on the basis of specific behavior, such as perceived promiscuity. (2011, para. 12)

Tillet brings attention to privilege of respectability, how white women are by default, models of respectability. White women are assumed “sluts” on the basis of a behavior, whereas women of color are seen as inherently sexually deviant and corrupted; they do not have the safety of white respectability. Tillet’s analysis identifies how, white women’s bodies have been assumed to be sexual pure, ideal models of sexual purity. Black women, on the other hand, must carefully choose how to represent themselves in public in order to be perceived as credible, or worthy of respect.

The politics of respectable sexuality raised in Tillet’s (2011) critique are a longstanding issue for women of color—Black women in particular. Evelyn Brooks

Higginbotham (1993) describes how Black women use of a politics of respectability to counter the dominant racist constructions of Blackness and gender. During the Civil Rights movement, middle-class Black women, many in the Black Baptist Church, invoked an image of respectability, a set of behaviors that emphasized “cleanliness of person and property, temperance, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity” in order to combat the prevailing ideology of Black women’s sexual immorality (Collins, 2004, p. 71). Black men and women adopted these behaviors in an effort to be seen as non-threatening and safe to white people. By maintaining a respectable image, they could potentially improve their quality of life and opportunities outside of the racist discourse in the United States. On the other hand, this image of a respectable Black woman again is still rooted in a virgin/whore dichotomy and a belief that presenting oneself in a respectable way will protect one from sexual/racialized violence. For the Black women, who do not adopt a “respectable” image, are they “asking for it”?

In her critique of the SlutWalk, Tillet (2011) brings attention to the narratives of sexual deviance that pervade Black women’s histories and the conflicting and sometimes unrealistic narratives of what makes a Black woman respectable and deserving of justice in the face of sexual violence. Given the history of sexualization under the racialized virgin/whore dichotomy, women of color are often presented as sexually deviant. Black women must continually fight to defend themselves against assumed notions that Black people are deviant, hypersexual, and unfit for anything other than manual labor. In the context of anti-sexual violence movements, SlutWalk, a movement emphasizing overt

sexuality and reclamation of a “slut” might deter women of color from participating in SlutWalk.

Black women highlight SlutWalk’s failure to acknowledge that sexism coincides with racism. Black women’s critique of SlutWalk points to a lack of alliance and solidarity among the primarily white organizers of SlutWalks, that as Black women, they “do not recognize ourselves nor do we see our lived experiences reflected within SlutWalk and especially not in its brand and its label,” particularly the term “slut” (Black Women’s Blueprint, 2011, para. 3). Their concerns reflect how the lived experiences of women of color have historically been alienated or ignored in mainstream feminist movements (Crenshaw, 1991). Black Women’s Blueprint and their endorsers feel the term “slut” does not acknowledge the intersection of racism and sexism and in fact re-invokes historical trauma and further alienates Black women from feminist movement.

Intersectional Organizing. Women of color also critique the founding SlutWalk organizers’ reliance on a mainstream feminist framework. Shortly after Black Women’s Blueprint penned an open letter to SlutWalk organizers, women of color were livid after a photo of a white woman holding up a sign quoting Yoko Ono’s song “Woman is N*gger of the World” at SlutWalk NYC was widely publicized. The image crystallized the ongoing criticism of SlutWalk organizers’ reliance on a white female experience with a lack of accountability to women of color. Black feminist and academic Aishah Shahidah Simmons, who also participated in SlutWalk Philadelphia, wrote about the NYC incident:

How can so many White feminists be absolutely clear about the responsibility of ALL MEN TO END heterosexual violence against women; and yet turn a blind eye to THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO END racism? Is Sisterhood Global? This picture says NO! very loudly and clearly. (2011b, para. 7)

Simmons refers to white feminists' emphasis on dismantling patriarchal systems and their failure to interrogate race in the context of sexual violence. Similarly, Black Women's Blueprint (2011) raised a similar concern when they shared they felt they as Black women had no space within the SlutWalks.

Since the beginning of the women's movement, anti-rape efforts have emphasized the experiences of white women's oppressions, rendering women of color and their experiences of victimization invisible within the larger western feminist movement (Smith, 2003, p. 70). The SlutWalks primarily highlight white women's experience and emphasize ending gendered violence but not racism, failing to see how race, gender, and sexuality are connected. Some women of color have argued that this march benefits white women at their expense. For example, historically white women benefitted from police and state protections, whereas communities of color often experienced violence at the hands of the state. At the first SlutWalk, Toronto organizers sought an apology from the Toronto police services, and even called for future meetings with them in hopes they "take serious steps to regain our trust" (SlutWalk Toronto, 2011). Women of color critiqued this initial request, citing historical racial tensions between authorities and

communities of color are very different from educated, middle to upper class women. Many communities of color, often low-income women, continue to experience sexual victimization at the hands of police and the authorities. Even during the Civil Rights movement, Black women often faced a 'second rape' by the authorities when reporting an initial rape or assault (Davis, 1983). While Black women were no longer slaves, the myths about their bodies and sexuality persisted, further fueling violence against Black women. The Toronto organizers' perceived lack of awareness of police relations between women and communities of color could also further alienate women of color from participating in this march, with their initial call to action implying a previous trusting relationship with police and authorities.

Black women brought attention to the ways institutionalized violence has informed their historical struggle with racial justice, and more recently their particular struggle with their ability to reclaim "slut," participate, and be visible at SlutWalks. Since the beginning of SlutWalk's origins, Black women have called attention to the lack of space for them to participate at the SlutWalks and be seen as Black women, with their particular relationship to hypersexualization, slavery, and violence at the hands of the state. They specifically describe how institutionalized racism obstructs Black women's ability and thought process with participating in SlutWalks, particularly if the goal of SlutWalk is to end sexual violence and victim-blaming against all women. Other women of color have also raised concerns with the universalized rhetoric of SlutWalk Toronto's

call to action, and again call for a more critical analysis of how institutionalized violence informs women of color's strategies with participating in anti-violence movements.

Institutionalized Violence

SlutWalk's formal agenda obscures and overlooks the myriad ways that women of color experience institutionalized forms of sexual violence. Women of color's sexual victimization can be traced to a history of colonization that renders them sexual objects legitimately occupied by foreign military and law enforcement. These histories of colonization continue to impact the ways they experience and respond to sexual violence, yet SlutWalk Toronto emphasizes experiences of sexual violence associated with North American women. While SlutWalk marches are occurring globally, white North American women's experiences with slut-shaming on the basis of perceived sexual behaviors are still centered and framed as a universal experience. SlutWalk's call to action obscures transnational women's experiences with sex trafficking and violence perpetrated by foreign military and law enforcement, thus impacting their ability to reclaim "slut" and participate in SlutWalks.

As AF3IRM argues, if SlutWalk claims to be a global movement, their agenda must examine and address the ways colonization produces different experiences of sexual victimization.

Our collective transnational histories are comprised of 500 years of colonization.

As women and descendants of women from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, we

cannot truly “reclaim” the word “Slut”. It was never ours to begin with. This label is one forced upon us by colonizers, who transformed our women into commodities and for the entertainment of US soldiers occupying our countries for corporate America. (2011, para. 6)

Because the victimization of transnational women of color is largely due to institutionalized violence, reclaiming “slut” is a low priority in the movement to end sexual violence against all women. SlutWalk Toronto’s call to action emphasized participation by reclaiming the term “slut,” a slur often used to justify victim-blaming and sexual violence. However, this call fails to consider how colonizers used the term “slut” to objectify women of color and obscure transnational women’s histories of sexual victimization steeped in twentieth-century imperialist projects, fueling an ever-growing sex trafficking industry as well as continued sexual victimization by foreign military and law enforcement (Woan, 2013). These histories followed transnational women of color from their countries of origin to North America, impacting the ways they can participate at SlutWalks (AF3IRM, 2011). SlutWalk Toronto’s emphasis on reclaiming the term “slut” may resonate with North American white women, but the emphasis also risks excluding women of color from meaningful participation.

Shortly after Black Women’s Blueprint penned an open letter to Toronto SlutWalk organizers, United States-based Association of Filipinas, Feminists Fighting Imperialism, Re-feudalization, and Marginalization (AF3IRM) penned another open

letter, highlighting their reluctance to join SlutWalk. AF3IRM referred to their collective histories of colonization as a form of institutional violence, impacting their ability to reclaim “slut” in the ways a North American white woman might. AF3IRM expanded on the definition and implications of the term “slut,” referring to a colonial history in which women of color were objectified and sexual slurs acted as another mechanism of colonization. Through this racialized and sexualized labels, colonizers legitimized victimization against women of color. In Latin America, women were dubbed “little brown fucking machines,” and in the Philippines, they were known as “Little brown fucking machines powered by rice” (AF3IRM, 2011). In light of SlutWalk Toronto’s oversight, AF3IRM called for a critical analysis of how their histories of colonization intertwine with sexual violence and sexual agency.

Sexual Agency and Sex Trafficking.

Historically, the term ‘slut’ has carried a predominantly negative connotation.

Aimed at those who are sexually promiscuous, be it for work or pleasure, it has primarily been women who have suffered under the burden of this label...Being in charge of our sexual lives should not mean that we are opening ourselves to an expectation of violence, regardless if we participate in sex for pleasure or work.

(SlutWalk Toronto, 2011, para. 3)

SlutWalk Toronto’s (2011) call to action reflects a mainstream feminist narrative that rests on an assumption that women possess sexual agency and choose to participate

in sex “for pleasure or work.” This reference to “work” assumes that women choose to engage in sex work and fails to examine forms of coercive and forced sex work that result from colonization. While they call for women to end slut-shaming and sexual violence, SlutWalk’s agenda overlooks sex trafficking as a form of racialized and sexualized violence, devoid of choice and sexual agency.

And herein lies a problem. Transnational women of color are hesitant to participate in SlutWalk because the formal agenda obscures the ways in which women of color are coerced or forced into sex work. Women of color refer to their histories of colonization and how colonizers created industries and systems that relied on their sexual victimization (AF3IRM, 2011). During the Philippine-American war and occupation in the Philippines, a sex industry arose to cater to the U.S. Military men. Feminist attorney Sunny Woan (2013) asserts that Americans jump-started the sex entertainment industry, legitimizing access to indigenous women’s bodies as a necessity for American military men stationed in the Philippines and other parts of Asia. In this case, indigenous women’s bodies were objectified and became another object to colonize. Furthermore, military personnel created “Rest and Recreation” (R&R) facilities in Thailand, where coerced into providing sexual services to military men during the Vietnam War (Woan, 2013). Once the war ended, sex tourism campaigns continued to target white men to sustain Thailand’s sex industry, which continues to sexually victimize young women of color. This rampant objectification dehumanized women of color, thus invalidating any

expectation of sexual agency or safety. AF3IRM brought attention to these histories, reminding SlutWalk organizers,

we are the ones who compose the majority of sex trafficking victims in this country, who comprise the majority of those sold in the mail-order-bride system, who are the commodities offered in brothel houses ringing US military bases in and out of this country, who are the goods offered for sexual violation in prostitution. (2011, para. 3)

AF3IRM (2011) asserts that women of color make up the majority of sex trafficking victims, yet SlutWalk organizers, in their position of privilege, advance an assumption that all women possess universal sexual agency. By emphasizing the experiences of women who engage in sex for “pleasure or work,” SlutWalk Toronto’s (2011) call to action overlooks the ways women are coerced into sex work and victimization. SlutWalk Toronto’s call to reclaim “slut” rests on a North American definition of sexuality- the term “slut” is a transitory label contingent on perceived or actual sexual behaviors. AF3IRM (2011) highlights their frustrations with SlutWalk’s call to reclaim “slut,” asking organizers,

...to walk the brothel houses and see how our women are treated truly as “sluts” – i.e., mindless flesh with orifices from which profit can be made. Surely that would suffice to underscore why every fiber in our mind and being scream in protest at the word. (para. 10)

For transnational women of color, reclaiming or identifying with the term “slut” does not offer sexual agency, or provides safety from violence, but in fact reinscribes their status as objects. Unlike the women who organized SlutWalk Toronto, transnational women of color must contend with their histories of sexual victimization through sex trafficking.

Women of color see SlutWalk’s emphasis on reclamation as a low priority in their fight to end sexual violence against women. SlutWalk’s framework focuses on sexual agency and choice, but does not reflect on systemic victimization resulting from coercion or force by colonizers. SlutWalk Toronto organizers wrote that they “are tired of being oppressed by slut-shaming; of being judged by our sexuality and feeling unsafe as a result,” which is why they call on women to reclaim “slut” (SlutWalk Toronto, 2011). While all women may experience slut-shaming and other forms of sexual oppression, SlutWalk’s call to action assumes that all women similarly hold sexual agency and have access to feelings of safety while expressing their sexuality. Women of color argue that they do not have the privilege to reclaim “slut” and feel safe by reclaiming such a label, noting that institutionalized forms of violence like racism and colonization eliminate any expectation of sexual agency or safety.

Journalist Aura Blogando (2011) voiced her resistance to SlutWalk’s organizing around the problematic use of terminology endemic to white communities and cultures. Like AF3IRM, Blogando (2011) argues that she and many low-income, transnational women do not come from communities in which it feels safe to refer to themselves as

“sluts,” noting that it is their “skin color, not our style of dress, often signifies slut-hood to the white gaze” (para. 10). For women of color, SlutWalk’s agenda fails to consider the ways sex trafficking invalidates sexual agency and an expectation of safety, thus impacting their ability to participate at SlutWalk in ways that reflect their own experiences. If SlutWalks aim to end violence against all women, then their agenda must move beyond reclaiming sexual slurs and, instead, challenge other forms of violence that impact women globally.

Violence of the Military and Law Enforcement.

We are here to call foul on our Police Force and demand change. We want Toronto Police Services to take serious steps to regain our trust. We want to feel that we will be respected and protected should we ever need them, but more importantly be certain that those charged with our safety have a true understanding of what it is to be a survivor of sexual assault — slut or otherwise. (SlutWalk Toronto 2011, para. 5)

In addition to focusing on reclaiming the term “slut,” SlutWalk Toronto’s (2011) demand to “regain trust” with the police neglects a long history of continued “victimization of rape victims by police, the justice system and other agents of authority” (AF3IRM, 2011). While SlutWalk Toronto organizers rely on law enforcement to protect women from sexual violence, transnational women of color rarely find protection or respect from law enforcement or authorities. SlutWalk stemmed from a law enforcement officer’s remarks about victim blaming and slut shaming, and yet, to the surprise and

dismay of many women of color, SlutWalk Toronto organizers demand continued meetings with law enforcement to discuss safety. Blogando (2011) acknowledges the need to denounce the slurs that are uttered by law enforcement officers but notes,

what struck me was the fact that a group of students gathered with law enforcement to begin with. As people of color, our communities are plagued with police brutality, and inviting them into our spaces in order to somehow feel safer rarely crosses our minds. (para. 3)

Blogando's (2011) critique raises an important question about safety at SlutWalk marches: which women feel safe in talking about sexual violence with law enforcement officials, when historically they have themselves perpetrated sexual violence? In addition to police brutality occurring in communities of color, women of color must also consider how institutionalized violence, such as colonial practices, racism, and sexism provide law enforcement and other agents of authority, such as the military, power to sexually victimize women of color.

Critics argue that SlutWalk's agenda does not acknowledge that police and law enforcement are hazardous to communities of color. Similarly, SlutWalk's formal agenda to repair relationships with law enforcement reflects a form of carceral feminism, an approach that relies on state power through increased policing, prosecution, and imprisonment as a solution to violence against women (Law, 2014). In her work

exploring the lives of incarcerated women, Victoria Law argues that carceral feminism overlooks the social and economic forms of violence faced by women.

Similarly, SlutWalk's formal agenda overlooks the forms of violence that women of color face, and fails to address state-sanctioned violence that occurs outside of North America. After SlutWalk's went viral, AF3IRM (2011) critiqued SlutWalk's demands, and brought special attention to the ways foreign military personnel are complicit in sexual violence against women of color. They argued that sexual victimization by military personnel is a result of colonial practices, and that "police, the justice system and other agents of authority" perform the same function, that is, enforcing and maintaining institutional violence that thrives off sexually victimizing women of color (AF3IRM 2011). As Woan (2013) described how foreign military occupation formed global sex industries in other countries, women of color do not find safety in relying on law enforcement to protect them from sexual violence. Transnational women of color have experienced violent interactions with agents of authority, state, particularly police and military, and historical legacies of violence inform the ways women of color will participate at SlutWalks. By emphasizing a demand to rebuild trust with the police, SlutWalk's agenda obscure a history of colonial violence against women of color perpetrated by military and law enforcement and runs the risk of pushing transnational women of color further away from participation.

SlutWalk fails to address the ways institutionalized powers like law enforcement and the military have perpetuated sexual violence against women, and their framework does not offer any hope that participating in SlutWalks could end violence against transnational women. Women of color bring attention to how military personnel and police have been complicit in the ongoing sex trafficking industry, frequenting brothels and perpetrating sexual violence against women of color abroad (AF3IRM, 2011; Woan, 2013). Moreover, much of this violence stems from colonization. Military and law enforcement legitimized sexual coercion and rape of transnational women by framing them as uncivilized, hypersexual, savage, and in need of saving from their own men (Woan, 2013). These forms of sexualized violence beliefs became ingrained in nationalist rhetoric and were even viewed as patriotic duty. During the Vietnam war, US soldiers were taught that raping Vietnamese women was a “necessary military duty,” and that it was the unwritten policy of the US military to encourage rape as an “effective weapon of mass terrorism” (Davis, 1983, p. 177).

In their open letter, AF3IRM raised reflective questions to SlutWalk Toronto, asking organizers to consider

how many times im/migrant women of color have been coerced into sex by immigration personnel, by border patrols, by jailors. Surely that will suffice to underscore why even the idea of joining a SlutWalk is like a massive boulder on our chests, squeezing out our breath, killing us, in effect. (2011, para. 8)

Because sexual violence has and continues to be legitimized and encouraged by law enforcement, it comes as no surprise that women of color voiced hesitation with participating in SlutWalks—SlutWalk’s agenda is not reflective of their experiences with sexual violence. Unlike SlutWalk Toronto organizers, women of color do not have trusting relationships with law enforcement, nor do they have the institutional privilege to rely on law enforcement to provide safety or protection from violence. SlutWalk’s agenda pushes to include “all women,” yet its silence around these experiences pushes women of color further away from participation, because women of color do not see their experiences reflected in SlutWalk’s agenda, nor do they see SlutWalk as a movement that will end their victimization.

Centering Women of Color’s Experiences of Sexual Violence. While SlutWalk’s organizers claim they are part of a global movement, their silence around transnational women’s experiences contradict their agenda and demands to end sexual violence against all women. Despite the decades of previous work and movements to bring visibility to women of color’s histories of sexual and institutionalized violence, SlutWalk’s leaders and participants ignore the ways sex trafficking and military violence is linked to women of color’s experiences of colonial violence that date back to the twentieth century. Instead, SlutWalk’s agenda fixates on reclaiming “slut” and regaining trust and feelings of safety with law enforcement, which reflects a mainstream feminist discourse primarily shaped by the experiences of white women in North America. The transnational, radical feminist, anti-violence network INCITE! (2014) has done extensive

work confirming that sexual violence against women of color is qualitatively different from sexual violence against white women. Women of color's intersecting identities as low-income, queer, or im/migrants produce social and economic barriers that coincide with sexual violence, and SlutWalk's organizing tactics do not address these factors. While sexual violence impacts all women, institutional violence, such as the process of colonialism and racism, produce different experiences of sexual victimization (Smith, 2003; INCITE!, 2014). SlutWalk's agenda overlooks these forms of institutional violence and thus dismisses the decades of work women of color have done to end sexual violence in their communities.

SlutWalk organizers risk pushing transnational women of color further away from a movement that could raise attention to a global problem of sexual violence against women. Women of color have been fighting to end sexual violence; they call on SlutWalk organizers to include an analysis of the ways institutional violence is linked to transnational women's experiences of sexual violence. AF3IRM (2011) asserts that SlutWalk's "indolent ideology," will only prevent transnational women of color "from establishing a broad front that can create a powerfully dynamic and long-lasting women's movement" (para. 5). If SlutWalk aims to end sexual violence against "ALL women," then they must consider the ways colonialism also coincides with sexual violence (SlutWalk Toronto, 2011).

Women of transnational experience state the ways in which violence produced by colonization has impacted their particular struggle with their ability participate in SlutWalks. Despite their struggle with participation, women of color have also expressed a desire, sometimes, to participate and, other times, to use critiques to highlight the ways in SlutWalk's agenda could truly be global. They describe the ways twentieth-century colonization fueled the sex-trafficking industry in their countries of origin, and how military personnel and law enforcement officers perpetuated sexual violence against women of color. They bring attention to how SlutWalk's agenda is centered around a mainstream feminist discourse, which includes no critical analysis of the ways institutional violence impacts the ways transnational women of color can participate at SlutWalks. Women of color call for an organizing framework that is inclusive to the multiple forms of sexual victimization women experience locally and abroad. In the next section I highlight the ways some women of color have chosen to participate in the SlutWalks in light of these critiques.

Rethinking Participation

Slut is being reappropriated...we are asking you to join us for SlutWalk, to make a unified statement about sexual assault and victims' rights and to demand respect for all. Whether a fellow slut or simply an ally, *you don't have to wear your sexual proclivities on your sleeve*, we just ask that you come. (SlutWalk Toronto, 2011, para. 7)

SlutWalk Toronto emphasized direct action in its first year of protests in 2011, asking women to participate by coming to the marches. Thousands of women worldwide responded to this call with sartorial displays of “sluttiness,” marching under the banner of “slut,” reclaiming “slut,” challenging victim-blaming, and denouncing slut-shaming. While many women responded to SlutWalk’s call, the emphasis on direct action also limited the ways women of color show up at the marches. Many women of color struggled with SlutWalk Toronto’s emphasis on slut shaming and word reclamation, which obscures lived experiences linked to institutionalized violence. Furthermore, women of color were unsure that simply participating in the march would actually bring awareness to their experiences, and end forms of sexual violence that are linked to systemic powers. The critiques, however, should not be read as an overall dismissal of the SlutWalk. Women of color still engaged with SlutWalk in ways not limited to direct action. Women of color used online and in-person participation to resist erasure, call attention to critiques outside of the marches, and cultivate a more inclusive response to sexual violence.

Combining Online Critiques and In-Person Participation. Some women of color participated at the SlutWalks as speakers to expand the events’ framework and bring visibility to people and critiques that have been largely ignored in mainstream feminist movements. The significance of their participation is two-fold: they highlight the erasure of women of color at SlutWalk through online critiques and social media posts, and they march as a means to resist this erasure and steer the movement toward a more

sustainable future. Their participation can be seen as representations of women whose race, gender, ancestry, and sexualities are marginalized and not visible through a white, mainstream feminist lens. Additionally, women of color use the Internet as a platform to highlight oppression and violence they face, challenge the mainstream feminist lens of SlutWalk, and call for accountability of SlutWalk organizers. Accordingly, examining both their online and in-person participation helps place their engagement with SlutWalks within a broader context.

At the marches, some women of color did not participate as “sluts” but instead used their bodies as statements and to highlight their visibility as women of color. At SlutWalk Philadelphia, feminist activist and scholar Aishah Shahidah Simmons spoke to participants and, while critical of marching under the banner of “slut,” maintained there is value in being present at SlutWalk and other anti-oppression movements. Simmons noted,

documented herstory and contemporary reality has shown us that more often than not, it is our bodies that catch the most hell not only by the State but also by people in and out of our communities (however we define them). It is our bodies that have a demonstrated track record of being on the frontlines of the movements to end all forms of oppression. (2011a, para. 7)

Simmons’ call for in-person participation aligns with the goals of SlutWalks, which is a shared goal to end all forms of gender-based violence.

When first invited to speak at SlutWalk Philadelphia, Simmons was apprehensive about what it would mean for her as a Black feminist lesbian “whose contemporary reality and ancestral lineage has been rooted in the legalized name calling/marginalizing/denigration of mind/body/spirit for centuries without too much recourse” (2011, para 7). In light of her own conflicting feelings, Simmons supports the “premise of SlutWalk” and chose to speak because wants to see an end to victim-blaming (2011a). During her speech, she acknowledged that victim-blaming will not end because of one SlutWalk march, but maintained that it is important that SlutWalk positions itself as an inclusive movement where “the faces, voices, and perspectives of women of color (inclusive of all sexualities) and trans people of color are seen and heard” (para. 8). Simmons called on SlutWalk organizers to center the voices of people who most often get left out of mainstream anti-violence movements, declaring,

We must centralize the margins of the margins of the margins of society so that ALL of us are free from assault, harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence. No One Is Free While Others Are Oppressed. NO ONE IS FREE WHILE OTHERS ARE OPPRESSED. (2011a, para. 19)

Through participation at SlutWalk Philadelphia, Simmons counters widespread coverage of white women at the marches, and instead centers lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans people, who experience sexual violence resulting from racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Simmons also engaged in online interviews and personal blog posts before and after SlutWalk marches. In an online interview with the Line Campaign, an anti-sexual violence organization, Simmons added to the post-march dialogue about SlutWalk's future by continuing to center women and trans people of color in future planning and organizing stages (Joey, 2011). Referring to SlutWalks based in North America, she highlights the importance of creating a movement that reflects a diverse range of experiences not limited to one narrative of sexual victimization. She makes it a point to declare,

the voices and perspectives of women and trans people of Color have been relatively speaking very low. We must move beyond Whiteness being viewed as universal with one or two tokens of Color. It is the height of racism to expect or even want people of Color to feel like it's their march too if there isn't representation not only on stage but most importantly in the planning and organizing stages. (Joey, 2011, para. 31)

Simmons contributes an essential critique and states what is needed to create an inclusive SlutWalk during the planning phases and execution of SlutWalk marches. Because women of color have been excluded and tokenized in movements, they think about others who are excluded from movements like the SlutWalk and find multiple platforms to include them in conversations about SlutWalk and sexual violence. In her online participation, Simmons names others who should be included under SlutWalk's

framework. While SlutWalk's agenda centered on sexual violence against women perpetrated by men, Simmons used her combination of online and in-person participation to push for a more inclusive framework that includes the faces and perspectives of women and trans people of color at risk for sexual violence.

Similarly, online and in-person participation at SlutWalks have the potential to broaden conversations about sexual violence and intersecting identities. In-person participation offers space for visibility, and online engagement offers a variety of resources to SlutWalk and women who are left out of the broader dialogues. The Internet has become a crucial place for feminist organizing among women not included in—or purposely excluded from—movements. The Internet makes it possible for working-class women, women who without access to the platforms white feminists have, to use twitter and social media accounts to speak to their peers. Online engagement has been a primary medium through which less economically privileged and represented women, most notably women of color, can share their narratives, analyses, and opinions about SlutWalk and engage with like-minded women.

Online participation has been a main platform that has potential to elevate the voices of women of color locally and abroad. Women of color's online engagement with SlutWalk places their in-person participation at the SlutWalks within a context that extends beyond North America. For example, Malaysian artist and activist Creatrix-Tiara (2011a) first wrote about SlutWalk on her blog, declaring that the term “slut” was not

applicable to her because she grew up in a society where sex was not even discussed. She argues that cultural norms influence the ways people discuss sexuality and violence and while she writes the term “slut” does not offer her the agency that some of the marchers find through reappropriating “slut,” she declares she finds agency through SlutWalk’s framework. Through in-person participation at SlutWalk Brisbane, Creatrix-Tiara (2011b) resists her erasure as a South East Asian woman by challenging the primarily white representation of SlutWalk, explaining how her cultural upbringing and experiences with sexual agency informed her decision to participate. At the march, she centered the experiences of women of color:

And that is why I’m here for SlutWalk. And a lot of people have said “Oh, it’s a white woman’s problem, it’s a white country’s problem.” And yes, in one way the issues of sexuality around minorities like myself become a lot more complicated. Because people put assumptions on you - like “oh, you wear a burqa, you can’t possibly have sexual agency” or “oh, you’re a Black woman, therefore you must be sexual all the freakin’ time.” (para. 7)

Creatrix-Tiara maintained that participation at SlutWalks is important and used her speech, which she also posted on her blog, to brought attention to people of color and minorities whose sexual victimization coincides with racism. She also brought attention to the ways mainstream resources are limited in that they do not address sexual violence outside of a heterosexual scope. During her speech, Creatrix-Tiara (2011b) recalled her

own victimization by a woman “in a sexually-charged situation” and brought attention to the limited resources that were available through mainstream feminist and anti-rape groups that mainly emphasized men perpetrating violence against women. Creatrix-Tiara highlighted a need for SlutWalk to address sexual violence beyond a heterosexual scope and to acknowledge that perpetrators of violence and shaming are not just male.

Women of color responded to SlutWalk’s call to action, and incorporated online and in-person engagement to generate dialogue before, during, and after the marches. Using multiple forms of participation not only broadened the conversations about SlutWalk and sexual violence, but also called on organizers to create a framework that is inclusive of women of color. Scholar and feminist Salamishah Tillet spoke at SlutWalk DC after reading the critiques offered by women of color. In her online post about SlutWalk, she recounts SlutWalk’s shortcomings in addressing sexual violence against women of color, but declares,

...that’s precisely why I decided to march. While I had heard the critiques, and agreed with aspects of them, I made the choice to participate as a way of protesting the alarming rates of sexual violence that black girls and women experience. (Tillet, 2011, para. 18)

While Tillet recognizes the value in the online critiques, she participates in this ongoing discussion by prioritizing visibility of girls and women like her, who have often been

ignored by mainstream feminist movements. At the event, she delivers her speech, citing her reasons for being at SlutWalk:

Because too many women and girls, who look like me, haven't always been invited to marches like this.... Because young girls, and especially girls of color, are called Jumpoffs. Whores. Sluts. Almost everyday. By friends. By strangers. By parents. By police officers. 'Cause when I took that long walk home after I was raped, my spaghetti strapped dress was turned inside out. And I was afraid to go to the police and be told it was my fault. Scared of someone telling me that being trapped in a room wearing a spaghetti-strapped dress with a man who threatened my life wasn't rape. (Tillet, 2011, para. 19)

Tillet describes an all-too common experience of women and girls of color—they are sexualized on a daily basis and cannot expect to be immune to slut-shaming.

Furthermore, she describes a fear of going to the police, who would dismiss their victimization. Tillet's reflection on this common narrative was precisely why she supports the premise of SlutWalk:

As a longtime activist against sexual violence who has seen the way survivors are consistently silenced, the idea of a march that brought attention to sexual violence and celebrated its survivors was too compelling to ignore. I had to be there. (2011, para. 20)

Tillet's online post paints a picture of her thought process with her SlutWalk participation: she acknowledges SlutWalk does not address Black women and girls' experiences of violence, yet is compelled to participate for visibility. While white women have the privilege of having their stories told through mainstream media, women of color must often fight against stereotypes, institutionalized violence, and exclusion to participate and share their stories. With the overwhelming media coverage and conflation of white women's participation at the SlutWalks, the Internet was a place for women to air grievances in exclusionary spaces. Tillet's combination of online and in-person participation offers another narrative and method of engaging with SlutWalks. Tillet's online post acknowledges SlutWalk's organizing shortcomings and their draw, and her in-person participation in SlutWalk sends a message to other Black women and girls that their participation and visibility in anti-sexual violence movements are important.

The women of color who participated at the marches are aware of SlutWalk's shortcomings but recognize the importance of visibility, participation, and potential of a dynamic movement led by women with a range of experiences. Women of color responded to SlutWalk by generating conversations through multiple platforms. In combination with marching and speaking at the SlutWalks, their online critiques contributed to SlutWalk's growth and created a space for dialogue after the marches.

Organizing towards an Inclusive Anti-Violence Movement. Mainstream anti-violence movements often fall short of including concerns specific to women of color

within their framework, yet women of color still participate in movements like the SlutWalk. Women of color use multiple forms of participation to push for more inclusive organizing strategies that allow them to participate in ways that are reflective of their lived experiences. For women of color, meaningful participation at SlutWalk require strategies beyond direct action as well as ongoing dialogue that will make anti-violence efforts long-lasting and sustainable. During the height of SlutWalks in 2011, many women expressed concern that the viral coverage of the marches was primarily due to the theatrical spectacle of “slut.” Women of color were unsure if the SlutWalk marches alone would actually end sexual violence against women (Black Women’s Blueprint, 2011). Similarly, Tillet (2011) brought attention to the attention SlutWalk garnered, but “like any great spectacle, SlutWalk risks going out of style” (para. 23). Tillet expressed a need for a sustainable future if SlutWalks truly wanted to end sexual violence: in order to “be more than a passing fad, it has to become a healthy marriage of substance and spectacle” (2011, para. 23). While participating at the marches is important for visibility, women of color are also committed to creating a long-lasting anti-violence march. Adding to SlutWalk’s direct action call, women of color used a combination of online and in-person participation intended to steer the marches toward a more sustainable and inclusive organizing framework.

While marching at SlutWalks was a way to bring attention to the problem of sexual violence, there is a risk that the conversation will end once the marches lose momentum. Accordingly, women of color used online participation to continue the

conversations about sexual violence post-marches. This way, women who chose not to be physically at the marches were able to participate by engaging in dialogue via the Internet. Here, they could read critiques—first-hand accounts of SlutWalks by women of color, before, during, or after the marches in their city were over. Additionally, women of color’s online critiques such as *Black Women’s Blueprint* (2011) offered opportunities for dialogue with SlutWalk organizers beyond the march:

We would welcome a meeting with the organizers of SlutWalk to discuss the intrinsic potential in its global reach and the sheer number of followers it has energized. We’d welcome the opportunity to engage in critical conversation with the organizers of SlutWalk about strategies for remaining accountable to the thousands of women and men, marchers it left behind in Brazil, in New Delhi, South Korea and elsewhere—marchers who continue to need safety and resources, marchers who went back home to their communities and their lives. We would welcome a conversation about the work ahead and how this can be done together with groups across various boundaries, to end sexual assault beyond the marches. (para. 14)

Women of color’s online and in-person participation challenge SlutWalk’s global impact, calls out organizing shortcomings, and generate new dialogue that integrate transnational women’s experiences with sexual violence. *Black Women’s Blueprint* (2011) contributes to the conversation of sexual violence by bringing attention to how

feminist movements have historically excluded Black women's experiences, needs, and contributions to other movements. They go on to list what they, as Black women, need from SlutWalk's framework in order to participate in a way that is meaningful and reflective of their experiences. Similarly, AF3IRM (2011), while very clear about their position on reclaiming "slut," penned their open letter in hopes of creating dialogue and establishing an anti-violence movement that is inclusive of transnational women's histories:

We call upon the SlutWalk steering committee to reassess language use and re-examine how it is, in a sense, offensive to our history, how it is neglectful of historical and cultural sensitivity and competency. Indolent ideology only further pushes transnational women, women of color, away from the current mainstream feminist narrative. It prevents us from establishing a broad front that can create a powerfully dynamic and long-lasting women's movement. The ebb-and-surge of the women's movement in the US is clear enough an indictment of such neglect of the historic particularities of the condition of transnational women and women of color. (para. 5)

These online critiques are important forms of participation; they not only engage SlutWalk organizers in dialogue and movement building, they also provide other strategies of participation at the SlutWalks. In addition to direct action, the online critiques offer another platform of participation for women of color. These critiques create a new dialogue within the context of SlutWalk about how to create an inclusive

organizing framework that exemplifies global solidarity. Much of the critique from women of color points to SlutWalk's emphasis on reclamation and slut-shaming, reflecting a white, North-American experience of sexual violence. This oversight renders women of color invisible. Additionally, SlutWalk's emphasis on a white, western narrative of sexual violence overlooks the ongoing anti-violence efforts that women of color have been addressing for decades (INCITE!, 2014). Women of color use a combination of online and in-person participation to counter SlutWalk's narrative, bring visibility to their experiences, and push for a more inclusive framework. In their online critique, Black Women's Blueprint and AF3IRM both allude to their erasure throughout history, particularly in women's movements, such as SlutWalk. Rather than dismissing SlutWalk's agenda, women of color harnessed online engagement with SlutWalk organizers, asking to break away from "indolent ideology," a fixation on clothing choice and slut-shaming, and make efforts to build an inclusive women's movement that acknowledges sexual violence as a product of institutional violence.

CONCLUSION

My thesis documents the ways women of color used multiple platforms to participate in SlutWalk, specifically on-line engagement to bring attention how they experience sexual violence as a product of institutionalized violence. Women of color's online participation brought attention to SlutWalk organizer's shortcomings in acknowledging the ways women of color experience sexual violence as a product of

racism. Black women's particular experiences with racism in the United States compromise their ability to reclaim "slut," to participate, and to be visible at SlutWalks. I have also documented women of color using online participation to bring attention to the ways their sexual victimization results from colonization. Furthermore, women of color argue their experiences were not integrated into the Slutwalk's organizing framework and subsequently discouraged their participation. Finally, I described how women of color use a combination of online and in-person participation to resist erasure, bring visibility to their critiques and experiences, and call for a more inclusive organizing framework.

SlutWalk marches are displays of resistance that bring necessary attention to sexual violence, with its theatrical displays of "sluttiness" gaining traction on mainstream media outlets. Additionally, online participation is also a powerful medium that should be examined alongside in-person participation. Framing online engagement allows us to observe the process of creating a more sustainable and inclusive anti-violence movement, as this type of participation offers valuable insight to experiences of sexual violence that occur on lines of race, gender, and histories of colonization and has the potential to influence future marches. My thesis documents women of color's online engagement, as well as the changes that SlutWalk incorporated in subsequent marches that resulted from online critique. The online critiques were significant forms of participation that disrupted the mainstream feminist narrative of SlutWalk. Moreover, SlutWalk Toronto organizers and other SlutWalk organizers responded shortly after the emergence of the online critiques, and incorporated the feedback and critiques into subsequent planning.

With the rise of online activism, scholars must look at the Internet and not just scholarly texts and mainstream media outlets to understand the experiences of women who do not fit into the dominant narrative of a movement. Online activism has been a powerful medium through which women of color, low-income, working class, of immigrant backgrounds, and LGBTQ, offer their own analyses and critiques of issues related to sexual violence, women's rights, and feminist organizing. Women of color's online engagement offered another platform to discuss SlutWalk's organizing framework and accountability, which continued to happen after SlutWalk Toronto's initial response to Black Women's Blueprint. After women of color brought attention to a racist sign carried by a white participant at SlutWalk NYC in October 2011, some of the SlutWalk NYC organizers met with members of Black Women's Blueprint and partners to discuss the concerns brought by Black women and find ways to move forward and center "narratives of race, sex, gender, class, sexuality, ability, nationality, and more" (SlutWalk NYC, 2011). SlutWalk Toronto founder Heather Jarvis (2011c) also responded condemning the act, and offered an analysis of why anti-racist practices must have a footing in the movement:

As many women of colour have said, they wake up women AND black (or brown, or Asian, or aboriginal, etc.) everyday and one does not override the other. There is no 'choice' to overlook and 'get over' racism because it is a built-in reality many people have to face as an inseparable part of their existence. This existence determines how the world, and all of these interlocking systems of oppression,

including gender-based violence, treats them. Racism is everyone's problem.

People of colour are not solely responsible for fighting racism or educating about racism. White people need to be a part of the solution. (Jarvis, 2011, para. 19)

Here again, the SlutWalk Toronto team named the concerns brought forth by women of color, acknowledging the importance of moving forward with an intersectional approach, noting how they as allies can support this approach in future organizing efforts. Much of the online critiques and direct calls for accountability took place primarily online through social media and personal blogs, and here, I document how a combination of online and in-person participation eventually influenced the organizing process of subsequent SlutWalk marches.

Online engagement with SlutWalks has informed in-person participation and shifted the organizing framework of subsequent marches. While this work is powerful, there are some unresolved issues around the capacity and sustainability of the SlutWalk. When confronted with critiques, SlutWalk Toronto thoughtfully acknowledged critiques and responded, and stated the ways they intended to move forward with a more cognizant and inclusive approach to anti-violence efforts. Unfortunately in the following years, many localized SlutWalk's disbanded due to lack of capacity, organizing shifts, and disagreements on their marches' values and execution. In March 2012, SlutWalk NYC organizers posted on their Facebook page that they have "splintered," realizing that working "under the 'SlutWalk' moniker was too oppressive to many communities that we

should be allying with,” and that many of the former organizers went on to form new feminist organizations (SlutWalk NYC, 2012). In early 2013, SlutWalk Toronto announced they would not be holding a SlutWalk that year, citing their efforts to collaborate and create a march that reaches a wider audience.

Considering that feminist movements organize in response to a white North American experience of oppression, we must pay attention to other settings, populations, discussions that are not always visible or represented in these movements. For example, as SlutWalks continue to take place worldwide, women have raised questions about SlutWalk’s impact outside of North America, given their organizing framework is rooted in a North American experience of sexual violence. Taking different cultural and societal norms regarding sexuality, politics and violence into account, further analysis is needed to explore how SlutWalks take place outside of North America, and how the politics might shift when organizing around different experiences of colonization, racism, and foreign occupation. In my own analysis I touch on one person’s account of same-gender violence, and same-sex violence has not been documented well, given that most anti-violence movements center on a heterosexual experience of males perpetrating violence against women (Creatrix-Tiara, 2011). As Simmons (2011a) pushed for more representation and inclusion of people of color, including queer and transgender people, future SlutWalks must consider who is included in SlutWalks. More recently discussions and statistics regarding transgender identities are much more visible in feminist organizing. With recent statistics regarding with high mortality rates of trans women of

color often coinciding with sexual violence, more conversations are needed to center their accounts of sexual violence.

At the start of SlutWalk, the SlutWalk Toronto (2011) team penned a powerful open letter, calling on women to join a march to combat victim-blaming, and sexual violence:

WE ARE COMING TOGETHER. Not only as women, but as people from all gender expressions and orientations, all walks of life, levels of employment and education, all races, ages, abilities, and backgrounds, from all points of this city and elsewhere. (para. 6)

Women of color's online and in-person participation is paving the way to hold SlutWalk organizers accountable to their agenda. In order to make a movement global and inclusive of all women, gender cannot solely be analyzed to grasp the full dynamics and dimensions of how sexual violence impacts all women of color. We must adopt anti-violence strategies that are reflective of institutionalized violence that shape women of color experiences. That is, the strategies organizers use to combat sexual violence within communities must relate to strategies that combat racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and colonization.

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