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Belonging and Otherness: The Violability and Complicity of Settler Colonial Sexual Violence

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Authors' note: The University of Arkansas was founded on Indigenous land where many Nations and peoples created sacred legacies. I respectfully acknowledge the Osage, Caddo, and Quapaw Nations, who were forced to leave these ancestral lands, and the Cherokee, Muscogee Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole Nations, who on the Trail of Tears, were forced to travel through what is the university's campus today. *Hara ahau i te tangata mohio ki te korero otira e tika ana kia mihi atu kia mihi mai.*

Abstract

In this article, I problematize sexual violence as a gendered and raced tool of colonial dominance. Though the theoretical framework of settler colonialism, I demonstrate how colonialism in the United States influences current discourse and policy around sexual violence. First, I explore the ways that colonialism positions women as victims and chattel of men. Secondly, I consider why White women who are positioned thusly lean into the male dominance which disenfranchises them, thereby further disenfranchising other-embodied persons. Moving between a historical and contemporary review, I merge empirical and anecdotal evidence to make clear that sexual violence is the rule, not the exception. To conclude, liberation focused therapy and digital feminism is discussed for therapists who wish to confront the colonial forces that obfuscate the conditions under which sexual violence is produced.

Keywords: settler colonial theory, sexual violence, race and gender

Belonging and Otherness: The Violability and Complicity of Settler Colonial Sexual Violence

A prominent element of the recent rise of hashtag feminism in the United States has been the sheer magnitude of survivors to come forward (Keller et al., 2018). To some, this prevalence is surprising, while to others, it is a bittersweet acknowledgment of the reality of sexual violence in the country (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Another striking component is that some women continue to deny the salience of sexual violence in U.S. society (Koelsch, 2014) both intentionally and by inadvertently upholding the roots of rape culture through social discourse and political action (Johnson et al., 2019). Witnessing the dissonance between public awareness of sexual violence and public support for policies and politicians who deny such violence (Rothe & Collins, 2019) begs the following question: How did the roots of rape culture implant in the U.S. and how have they been maintained?

This article presents an analysis of sexual violence through the interpretive framework of settler colonialism to demonstrate colonialism's sociohistorical legacy within discourse and policy in the United States (Veracini, 2011). Settler colonial theory is an intersectional social theory that attends to the continued existence of colonialism in countries such as the United States (Arvin et al., 2013). As a colonial nation, the United States maintains persistent political, cultural, and social discourses on who or who does not belong. Undergirding this right to or lack of belonging are cultural scripts that instruct our beliefs about people's worth and visibility. Thus, settler colonial theory facilitates critiquing the structural powers that have normalized our dominant narratives of race, gender, ability, and class.

Given feminism's focus on Indigenous and decolonizing theories (Arvin et al., 2013; Hernández-Wolfe, 2011), it might seem redundant to introduce another theory of decoloniality. Settler colonial scholars suggest that "because the United States is balanced upon notions of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, everyone living in the country is not only racialized and gendered, but also has a relationship to settler colonialism" (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 9). Therefore, settler colonial theory represents all who live in settler colonial societies, rather than solely focusing on Indigeneity, while simultaneously drawing attention to the fact that colonialism still exists and is maintained in the United States (Arvin et al., 2013). The theory offers a present-day sociohistorical accounting of the centrality of identity and violence in the ideologies that undergird the United States. It also provides theoretical grounding for the support that some women give to laws, discourses, and persons representing the colonial order.

In this analysis, I look specifically at how sexual violence is gendered and raced to become a tool of colonial dominance. My specific focus is on the settler colonial ideology and structures within the United States. My intention is not to overlook the settler history of other colonialities but to untangle the United States' specific relationship to sexual violence as part of a slavery-based, genocidal colonialism. I open with a sketch of the key aspects of settler colonialism. I then move into a critical analysis of rape, harassment, and bodily policing that unweaves the settler's structural power through a review of research and anecdotal evidence. To conclude, I provide a brief review of praxis-based possibilities for therapists who wish to confront the colonial forces that obfuscate the conditions of sexual violence.

Settler Colonial Theory

As a process, settler colonialism is different from classical colonization. The goal of classical colonization is not permanent settlement, and once colonizers have extinguished all

material, human, and environmental resources, colonizers return to the metropole (Veracini, 2011). In contrast, settler colonialism's goal is to take ownership of the land and remake it as a similar version of the metropole (Veracini, 2011). Therefore, when settlers reach inhabited land, they must eradicate and otherwise disappear the Indigenous *others*, bringing in exogenous others (e.g., persons enslaved, immigrants not from settler countries) as labor (Veracini, 2010).

Although U.S. citizens are taught that settlement was a historical event led by manifest destiny, our settler colonialism is a continual structuring of narratives and space (Veracini, 2011). As an ever-progressive act, the settler colonial nation adapts, claiming uneasy ground, where existence is predicated on inequality and violence. Locked in the "constitutive hegemony of the settler" (Veracini, 2010, p. 103), the United States simultaneously disavows the existence of hierarchal inequalities while conversely promising to eradicate inequality.

Early colonialism nurtured sexual violence, rape culture, and the policing of women's bodies, where colonialists both symbolically and physically took control over the land, bodies, and minds of those deemed inferior (Morgensen, 2012). Binaries of gender and race emerged to distinguish between male and female, White and non-White, civil and savage, among others (Morgensen, 2012). These binaries aligned with pioneering efforts toward *civilization*, further distancing Indigenous and exogenous others from the settler (Veracini, 2010, 2011). With these distinctions arose norms, values, and the basis of laws promoting the seizure of women's bodies through force and chattelment (Morgensen, 2012). Indigenous women were deemed unwanted and inherently rapable; enslaved women were objects of sexual release and reproductive of enslaved others; and settler women, through reproduction, became the vehicle for indigenization

(Jacobs, 2009).

To unweave the intersectional and intimate doctrine of sexual violence as a standard of practice to promote colonial order, I outline three major tenets of settler colonial theory. My focus is on the colonial determination of people's value based on the intersection of race and (cis)gender to initiate a conversation on White cis women's tacit role in U.S. rape culture.

Disappearing Indigenous Others

Colonial conquest was based on the beliefs of *terra nullius*¹ and manifest destiny (Miller, 2015), wherein settlers claimed the right to the land because it was an empty wilderness imparted to them by heavenly intervention. Upon arrival, the settlers encountered the Indigenous, which threatened their right to ascendancy. Thus, the first logic that foundationally drove settlement was that the Indigenous (e.g., Indian, and Mexican) must disappear so that the settlers could inherit what was left behind (Veracini, 2011). This elimination occurred through the forced removal, assimilation, and genocide of physical bodies, spirits, and minds.

Rape was the first act to establish the United States: the seizure and abduction of land. Indigenous women's bodies were an extension of this land, and their dehumanization made them inherently violable (Smith, 2015). Native women became de facto *terra nullius*—simultaneously empty of worth and wild to be tamed (Mack & Na'puti, 2019). Concurrently, the reproductive capabilities of Indigenous women threatened the colonial order (Smith, 2015). In the early colonies, settlers used reproduction and rape to "dilute" Indigenous blood and, thus, the Indigenous threat (Smith, 2015). Later, during westward expansion, Indigenous and Mexican women and children were simply killed to eliminate the threat of "potential through childbirth to assure the continuance of the people" (Hernandez-Avila, 1993, p. 386).

¹ Latin expression meaning "nobody's land".

Maintenance of Exogenous Others

As the Indigenous *receded*, settlers were left with no one to do the dirty work of nation-building. Whereas in traditional colonization, the Indigenous were forced into labor; in the United States slavery and migratory acts brought in exogenous others (Veracini, 2010). What ensued was a brutal campaign of enslavement and the second rape foundational to United States nationhood: the seizure of bodies from the African continent, followed by the literal rape of the enslaved. Whereas Indigenous women were portrayed as inhuman and inherently rapable, African women's sexual violation was a "right" afforded to slave owners (Feinstein, 2018). The childbearing ability of enslaved women became a commodity that was especially crucial when the nation discontinued its legal participation in the international slave trade (Feinstein, 2018). As slave owners inherited the children of slaves, the systematic rape of enslaved women and the sale of their children became profitable (Feinstein, 2018).

Immigrants were similarly exposed to the sexual exploitation inherent in colonial expansion. Chinese women and men, for example, were brought to the Americas as mobile and expendable labor sources (White, 2018). For Chinese women, this labor was in prostitution, which concomitantly marked them as immoral (White, 2018). Immorality clauses gave rise to restrictive bans imposed on Chinese women's entry, effectively maintaining settler dominance through reproductive restrictions and the denial of family formation (White, 2018).

Indigenizing the Settler

A third and crucial component of settler colonialism is settlers' positioning as simultaneously exogenous and indigenized (Veracini, 2011). The settler's status as exogenous to the land, and thus civilized, made the subjugation of Indigenous others permissible (Wolfe, 1999). After White settlers claimed sovereignty over the "empty" lands, their ascendancy

enabled the naturalization of White belonging, the English language, the nuclear family, and binarized gender roles (Morgensen, 2012). As settlers shifted in position from “we tame the land” to “the land made us,” they subsequently became indigenized to the land (Veracini, 2010).

This indigenization relied on White women, who exported from Europe to ensure the creation of families, and were “key figures in promoting settlement” (Jacobs, 2009, p. 22). As outlets for bearing children, colonial women became symbols of status for the gentry and means of land ownership for poor settlers (Jacobs, 2008). Settler women had an economic incentive to rarify their reproductive capabilities as a social value, thus augmenting the power of a male-dominated gender system. Thus, *women as sexual objects* transmuted to the *others* while settler women reserved their bodies for procreation.

Distinct sexual fault lines developed, and settler women's ascendancy became tied to promoting pathological ideas of uncivilized Indigenous/exogenous mothering and sexuality (Jacobs, 2009). Maternalist politics elevated motherhood to a White woman's "sacred occupation," and with it, a singular idea of motherhood emerged alongside Indigenous women's sterilization and removal of Indigenous children from their families (Jacobs, 2009). Simultaneously, the ownership and protection of White women became a terrain upon which settler men justified the subjugation and violence of exogenous and Indigenous alike (Carby, 1985). Narrative portraying Indigenous and exogenous women as demoralized, and exogenous and Indigenous men as physically and sexually menacing, took root and established the need to protect White female bodies. The myth of the “gentle tamer” (Castañeda, 1992, p. 521), a hardy, yet benevolent, frontierswoman, omits that White women derived privilege from the ongoing oppression and violence of settlement (Castañeda, 1992).

Through this complicated biopolitical process of disappearance, maintenance, and indigenization, White settlers came to embody the United States' identity, predicated on men's violence and the enlistment of White women. Settler women enforced ideological and physical violence to assume a position of power in the nation, aided by eugenics, exceptionalism, and manifest destiny (Walsdorf et al., 2020). As Carby (1985) stated, "white women felt that their caste was their protection and that their interests lay with the power that ultimately confined them" (p. 270). While White men developed the structures that subordinated women and men of color, they became empowered to assert and privilege the White male rights to the bodies of others. These rights continue today and include decisions relating to women's bodies and their bodies (Cole, 2017). Men's power over women has allowed sexual violence to become normalized and naturalized so extensively that many women contend that men's predation on women is a natural part of manhood and a regular aspect of our nation (Ford, 2019).

Sexual Violence in the Settler Colonial State Today

Colonial sexual violence continues today through a series of physical, metaphorical, and psychological acts that devalue and dehumanize (see Smith, 2015 for a discussion). We witness the sexual violence of rape culture in all aspects of daily living, from video games that encourage the rape of native women to costumes that sexualize and deculturize (Smith, 2015). Racism comingles in rape culture, wherein Whiteness is portrayed as a symbol of purity and value (Hunt, 2016). For example, dehumanizing messages from the 1800's which portrayed Indigenous women as polluted (Smith, 2015), are contemporaneously recreated in advertisements for a soap wherein a Black woman to turn herself White (Wootson Jr., 2017).

The normalization of sexual violence, constitutive of and constituted by colonial dogma, continues to earmark certain women as violable and others as deserving of protection. All

women's bodies are rendered objects and the property of male desire—a rendering driven by heteropatriarchy and White supremacy (Walsdorf et al., 2020). As inherently violable, 91% of victims of sexual violence are female. One in five women will be raped (completed or attempted), and one in six will experience sexual coercion in their lifetime (Smith et al., 2016).

That White women report 80% of rape skews the data on sexual assault in communities of color. It is estimated that for every Black woman who reports a rape, 15 do not, and racial and gender inequities discourage women of color from reporting (Decker et al., 2019). It is also estimated that Indigenous women are 2.5 times more likely to be assaulted or raped than all other women, yet do not report (Flay, 2017). Rates of underreported sexual violence have been described with numbers ranging from 20% to 55% among various ethnicities and races (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Concomitantly, stereotypes persist of men of color as sexual predators (Hale & Matt, 2019), while estimates are that White men commit 57% of sexual violence (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014).

It is important to note that, from a settler colonial orientation, race is not the only marker of who is considered violable, and today, persons of oppressed social identities continue to experience high rates of sexual violence (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). For example, trans, non-binary, and genderqueer identities stand in opposition to settler ideologies of binary sexuality and gender and experience sexual violence fueled by transphobia at rates as high as 47% (James et al., 2016), with 82% of victims being persons of color (Office for Victims of Crime, 2014). People with disabilities, treated as deviant in colonies (Baynton, 2016), are at a high risk of sexual assault (Shapiro, 2018). As settler colonialism establishes masculinity as either violent, conquering, or protecting, a contemporary culture of silence and disbelief surrounding men's sexual violence experiences exists (Javaid, 2015). With each of these social

identities, the colonial narrative of who is worthy of citizenship and who should be excluded parallels myths of who is inherently violable and promulgates the dangerous reality of sexual assault. These myths rooted in contemporary settler colonial states have contributed to the legality of violability in the gendered U.S. nation-state.

The Legality of Viability

The criminal justice and legal systems consistently fail survivors by perpetuating settler logic. One of the tricks of settler colonialism is its ability to “cover its tracks” (Veracini, 2011, p. 3). Just as the dehumanization of Indigenous and exogenous others rationalized genocide, slavery, and expropriation, today, we dehumanize women to excuse those who violate them. We blame survivors of sexual violence for their complicity, thereby justifying and normalizing rape culture. Evidence reports that survivors of color are disinclined to report because they are shamed for sexual violence (Decker et al., 2019). Unreported assaults translate to invisible data on violence. The history of survivors is forgotten, just as the United States’ violent history is whitewashed, and victims excluded from justice.

Legal Inequity

One way that sexual violence is hidden is in the ongoing demonization of men of color, creating a system where Black men are more likely than White men to be accused and falsely accused of rape (Hale & Matt, 2019). Laws and the legal system are consistently applied inequitably to Black men, who are imprisoned at higher rates and given more extensive sentences than White men convicted of the same crimes (Hale & Matt, 2019). These realities continue to promote the myth of the inherently dangerous Black man (Hale & Matt, 2019). This stereotype creates another challenge for Black women who may have experienced sexual violence perpetrated by a Black man, but do not report it for fear of community backlash (Eligon,

2019). In Native communities, 45% of women report sexual violence (at least 86% of their perpetrators are non-Native men; Smith et al., 2016). Their assaults are overlooked in policies and policing, and their perpetrators spared more often than any other identity group in the United States (Amnesty International, 2008). These are just some examples of how social identity and laws intersect and maintain silence, fear, and further narratives of un-worth in our settler society.

Legal Protection

Today, White men who commit sexual violence are granted leniency in the courts because they have "promising futures" (Tierney, 2018, p. 344). The courts primarily regard the promise of their settler futurity as more valuable than the survivors left in their wake. Perhaps no one signifies these colonial moves more than Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who as a Supreme Court nominee, faced reports of sexual violence by three women (Spearit, 2019). A significant display of abrogation followed, aided by the ferocity with which other women publicly denounced the accusers and the tendency for courts to favor the future of settler men over women. As Spearit (2018) explained, "the sexual economy in this country has been controlled by those who control the law, and Kavanaugh's confirmation is confirmation of the very rape culture that helped mitigate his actions" (p. 1). Most outstanding was the broad support Kavanaugh gained for showing promise that as a justice, he would battle the legal right to abortion, continuing the decline of women's rights and place within this society (Spearit, 2018).

Structural Violence

The physical violence of rape and assault, the ideological violence of overt sexualization, and the continuum of sexual harassment do not occur in a vacuum. These acts merge and form settler justifications for women's routine exposure to structural violence, ranging from sex-segregated wages to inadequate healthcare (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Structural violence

feeds into and stems from state-controlled access to women's bodily sovereignty; thus, we must consider what such sovereignty means (Mack & Na'puti, 2019).

The United States was founded in the search for freedom through personal sovereign rule and the belief that government should not impede individual freedoms and choices (Miller, 2015). To have bodily sovereignty, one must have autonomy over one's choices, including the right to consent, respect for one's body, and reproductive decisions (Cole, 2017). While White men generally enjoy such autonomy, every aspect of female bodies are open to interpretation, jurisprudence, and objectification. In reproductive acts of colonial order, men define and claim ownership over women's violable and reproductive bodies, having created laws preventing women from the right to bodily sovereignty.

To understand how these intentions and acts work together to demean women and position them in U.S. society, one need only look at the former U.S. vice president, Mike Pence. The Mike Pence Rule (originally the Billy Graham Rule) instructs men never to be alone with a woman to avoid sexual temptation and accusation (Kreis, 2019). Evangelicals point to this rule as integrity-filled and protective of women. A mere surface-level analysis shows what is truly at stake: women's ability to participate fully in a society dominated by men. While this "rule" is certainly not law, it is reified by women who admire the men who enact these rules, and it has gained popularity in discussions of how to respond to movements such as #MeToo (Kreis, 2019).

Reproductive Futurity

From a settler colonial lens, denying access to reproductive control over one's body is sexual violence. It is the power of ideology and social control that privileges heterosexuality, patriarchy, citizenship, and motherhood over sovereignty. Control of reproduction was used as a

tactic to eliminate or assimilate the Indigenous, produce the labor-born bodies of the exogenous, and reproduce settlers—and it remains essential in state-making today (Calkin, 2019).

In the United States, reproductive control and surveillance of women's bodies cannot be separated from colonial claims of rightful occupation and is seen in the prominent intersection of racial disparities and disparities in family planning resources (Dehlendorf et al., 2010). While the struggle for equal access to abortion persists, women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have more access to desired and undesired fertility planning than do women from minoritized backgrounds (Dehlendorf et al., 2010). Less access, racism in healthcare, and mistrust of systems has allowed for increased rates of undesired or mistimed births and increased maternal and infant mortality (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020). Decreasing access to reproductive freedom occurs in tandem with programs of coercive sterilization and abortions to control the growth of racialized demographic groups (Calkin, 2019). Sterilization is encouraged among Black and Latinx women and are more frequent than White women (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2020), while evidence of forced sterilization in immigrant women along the Southern U.S. border recently emerged (Shoichet, 2020). From a settler colonial lens, interventions that govern reproduction are conversely coupled with pro-natalist (coerced sterilization) and anti-natalist (anti-choice) policies that manage the growth of the labor force, moderate racialized demographic transformations, and perpetuate patriarchal gendered relations (Calkin, 2019).

The Protected Class: The Complicity of White Women

We must ask why women support men who commit sexual and structural violence against women and the laws that support this: Why do they endorse de-sovereignty? In settler colonialism, White women maintain power by preserving settler colonial futurity. From this analysis, settler women would support laws and acts that give credence to their power while

denying others' power. Women guard their economic and social viability by voting for politicians and supporting policies that protect their husbands, thus improving their outcomes (Kray et al., 2018). Data supports this argument showing that women from all demographic strata earn less than men, hold less power than men, and tend to vote following their husbands (Kray et al., 2018). In addition, White women marry at higher rates than Latina and Black women, and they tend to marry White men who lean heavily Republican (Kray et al., 2018).

In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, these numbers held with White women, who represent 41% of the electorate, voting for Donald Trump for president at a conservative estimate of 45–47% (Pew Research Center, 2018b). These voters opted to support a candidate who has made a career of denigrating the *other*, has been accused by at least 22 women of non-consensual acts (Graves & Morris, 2019), and described acts of sexual assault on tape (Johnson, 2017). This election was not a random occurrence, as evidenced months later, when White women supported Roy Moore for U.S. senator of Alabama and Brett Kavanaugh for a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court at higher rates than any other segment of the population (Graves, 2018).

Does it suffice to suggest that White women vote for accused sexual predators simply because of their husbands' political leanings? After all, White persons regardless of political affiliation benefit from the maintenance of settler colonialism, and at the time of this writing, attempts to maintain the settler's power in the United States are exemplified. A new awakening of White persons to the reality of structural racism has occurred as the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on communities of color and the reality of police violence in Black communities becomes clear (Worland, 2020). At the same time, the United States faced a troubled vote with the 2020 presidential election. The United States is largely a two-party system, and both democratic and republican candidates entered the election with shaky track records on race and gender. Joe

Biden, the democratic nominee, complicated the #MeToo discourse as he was accused of, at best, being “creepy” and, at worst, assaulting a Senate aide (Liasson, 2020). Thus, women voters overlooked the reports made against both incumbent (former U.S. president Trump) and his challenger (current U.S. president Biden) as they cast their ballots for men, who on the surface violated the sanctity of the seats of settler women’s power: family and motherhood.

There is yet another interpretation of women’s support for men accused and found guilty of sexual predation. Trump rallied support for himself, Moore, and Kavanaugh by directly appealing to women, framing his argument around the suggestion that it could be their sons or husbands who are one day accused (Johnson, 2017). Being accused jeopardizes men’s ability to be productive and live full and healthy lives, thus endangering women’s ability to lean into these lives. This logic, while faulty, is continually applied. Most recently, the United States saw how Trump pulled the strings of paternalistic maternalism to entice Republican women to support Kavanaugh (Wolf, 2018). Accusations of sexual predation became weapons against the futurity of settlement, which called on White women to protect male children from accusations. These fears were stoked symbolically, as Kavanaugh’s wife and children stood by him, fiercely protecting and defending him, leaning into his power while reinforcing the role of White maternalism (Wanzon, 2018). And it worked: Republican women were the only people whose support for Kavanaugh increased during his confirmation process (Graves, 2018), and a Washington Post-Schar School survey found that 76% of polled Republican women (compared to 34% Democratic women) fear men in their lives will be unfairly accused of sexual assault (Balz & Clemeent, 2018). Moreover, women consistently repeat the refrain, “boys will be boys,” (Ford, 209) as seen in Melania Trump’s defense of her husband’s “boy talk” and “locker room talk,” when he was caught speaking of sexual assault on a hot mic (Schneider & Hannem, 2019).

The commitment to framing men as boys assures that women maintain their settler power and place as the only adult in the room.

When Trump spoke out against Christine Blasey-Ford, he aimed his attacks at the #MeToo movement (Wolf, 2018). Following the Kavanaugh hearings, movements that publicly countered sexual violence became framed as “movements towards victimization” (Kray et al., 2018, p. 5). Kevin Cramer (R-ND) pitted vocal survivors against the “pioneers of the prairie”—women who withstood the trials of settlement (Kray et al., 2018, para. 30). Cramer all but suggested that women should bear the brunt of assault with quiet fortitude, directly referencing the colonies and westward expansion (Kray et al., 2018). Therefore, as others have done, Cramer suggested that it was not only the right of men to violate, but also that these very violations enabled the United States’ nation-building. These discourses bestow White women with a sense of strength due to their ability to withstand womanhood's inherent trials in our gendered nationalist spirit.

Gendered Nationalism and Sexism

Gendered nationalism emerged from a colonial discourse of *American exceptionalism* (Deckman & Cassese, 2019). Masculinity and nationalism intersect to produce the feeling that masculine traits are more *American* than feminine traits (Van Berkel et al., 2017). Deckman and Cassese (2019) argued that gendered ideas of the nation assisted in electing Trump. Following eight years of President Obama's administration, the Trump campaign positioned the United States as too "soft," thus, voters swung toward a hypermasculine leader. Given the United States’ settler colonial status and that gender and the masculine ethos are intertwined in its conceptualization (Morgensen, 2012), sexism serves to legitimize ideology (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Ambivalent sexism depends on persistent ideas about men's role in the dominant position

and women's dependence on men's protection (Glick & Fiske, 1996). It promotes the "reinforcement, and internalization of gender roles and stereotypes towards the maintenance of the status quo" (Frasure-Yokley, 2018, p. 7). Ambivalent sexism predominantly occurs through hostile and benevolent sexism, and both forms "serve to justify men's structural power" through the exploitation of women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 492).

Hostile sexism emerges as antipathy toward women who appear to usurp male power and violate gender roles. In our settler coloniality, voters who held explicitly hostile sexist views were more likely to vote for Trump (see Deckman & Cassese, 2019). Trump mocks women in power, praises supplicant women, and vilifies women who did not assume a servitude toward him (Sclafani, 2017). Painting Hillary Clinton, his opponent, as unsupportable by Republicans, Trump argued that she was outside the norm of womanhood, having abandoned her role as mother to climb the political ladder (Schneider & Hannem, 2019). Clinton's political foes also leveraged her husband's sexual transgressions to vilify her and cast Clinton as a woman who enabled harm to other women. Clinton's role as her husband's co-conspirator became transfixed in a political arena where she was expected to preserve her family and either defend her husband or publicly disparage him. Either approach represented a gamble, and what emerged is a citizenry convinced that Clinton remained with her husband, not out of love, but as a bid for power that necessitated silencing herself and other women (Schneider & Hannem, 2019).

Benevolent sexism, however, might better explain women's support for men who are sexually violent (either through acts or the law). In part, Trump campaigned on ideas of protecting and "cherishing" women (Sclafani, 2017). Colonial benevolent sexism promotes settler women as inherently valuable, morally superior, and, thus, in need of protection (Sibley, 2010). These views engender settler women as pro-social, intimacy-seeking, and befitting the

roles of woman and mother. Men provide love and affection only if women adhere to the hierarchical relationship accorded to their subordinate status (Sibley, 2010). From a settler colonial analysis, those worthy of protection are White women. Through men's protection of White women, the resources remain within the centralized power of White Americans (Frasure-Yokley, 2018). Thus, women consent to their need for protection while excusing the violence epitomized in Trump's aggression toward women by establishing the idea that sexual assault is typical and, at times, deserved. Women have inherited ideas of sexism that are now normal to them, making the #MeToo movement an affront to the idea of White womanhood (Tolentino, 2018). After all, boys will be boys.

Finally, we must not overlook the power of racism in White women's support for the laws, policies, and men in power who work against women's interests. A recent study found that women and men who support Trump hold racially resentful beliefs (Setzler & Yanus, 2018). From the settler colonial view, women support maintaining separate gender spheres to preserve their power, and they also fear outsider groups that might usurp that power. White men and women in equal measure uphold the structures, institutions, and ideologies of White supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and colonial power (Walsdorf et al., 2020).

Unsettling: Anti-colonial Responses in Treatment and Advocacy

My use of settler colonial theory emerged from a desire to understand how I might unwittingly continue colonial narratives as an activist-scholar and clinician. This analysis clarified that I cannot separate the struggle against sexual violence from the struggle against colonialism. As practitioners, we must deconstruct and consider the political reality that therapeutic practice is part of the colonial project. Mental health as a profession, developed by mostly European and U.S. White men, has pathologized women (Hernandez-Avila, 1993),

persons of color (Tegnerowicz, 2018), sexual minorities, and genderqueer persons (Connors et al., 2020) routinely and neglected persons with disabilities altogether (Standen et al., 2017). Simultaneously, androcentric and Westernized approaches to "science" determined what health and healing are, risking the recolonization of women's experiences and bodies (Walsdorf et al., 2020). As language is also a tool of colonialism (Jordan et al., in press), we should attend to how we language victims of sexual violence.

In the helping professions, we either use the term "victim" or the term "survivor," which is symbolic of emblematic powerlessness (Spry, 1995). Being a victim denotes a lack of agency and helplessness that requires external intervention (Koelsch, 2014). By contrast, a survivor emerges in response to another person's choices—that is, we must survive what another has wrought. This binary develops a paradox wherein male bodies' activity determines a woman's identity—an identity whose "body is already colonized by the hegemony of male desire" (Dallery, 1989, p. 55).

The language of victim and survivor intertwine with the power that men have to describe, objectify, and decide for others. Women often de-identify their own sexual violence experiences because they do not feel overly victimized or un-agentic (Littleton & Henderson, 2009). These tendencies relate to colonialism, wherein the problematic discourses that are prevalent in our society hold fast to myths of what constitutes rape (Littleton & Henderson, 2009). Simultaneously, persons in power decry women's experiences of sexual violence as usual and something to be withstood as part of the United States experience (Kray et al., 2018).

Further complicating the identification of sexual violence are the sexual scripts that we have inherited from coloniality. If White women's sole power in the colonies was to ensure reproduction, then gatekeeping became power-broking. The primary sexual script in the United

States continues to be, albeit to a lesser extent, the idea of woman as gatekeeper and man as the instigator. Following the proffering of "token resistance," sexual advances can be succumbed to (Koelsch, 2014, p. 15). Problematically, this pervasive sexual script of resistance and persistence establishes roles where sexual relationships mimic sexual violence, making it harder to distinguish non-consensual encounters from consensual ones.

While the settler colonial lens is far from perfect, it does offer a socio-cultural, historical-contemporary, and intersectional accounting of the pervasiveness of sexual violence and injustice in our society. It is not the only critical social theory that can describe why some women disempower other women to maintain status, security, or position, as exemplified by feminisms such as womanism (Hudson-Weems, 2019), intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020), mestizas and borderland, and third world (Hernández-Wolfe, 2011) feminisms. The power of settler colonial theory is that it can assist in evaluating how White supremacy and paternalism have served as foundational ideologies in tilling in the soil of the United States and have furthered the demands of patriarchal, heterosexist, and raced hegemonies (Morgensen, 2012).

A settler colonial analysis of mental health highlights how therapy frequently focuses on Westernized trauma symptomology (Clarke, 2016). Approaches to treatment are often steeped in colonialism, which removes the problem from its context and ignores systemic oppression (Goodman, 2015). To attend to structural inequalities that reify sexual violence, we must provide an anti-colonial response. Such a response requires us to think differently about "treatment" and to work in ways that might be antithetical to the expected methods. We must carefully recognize how our models, language, and policies may reinforce the status quo's covert ideas if we do not actively confront colonialism in our practice (Jordan et al., in press).

Healing Through Therapeutic Activism

Many in the therapeutic fields bring attention to healing methods that move beyond individualized, behavioral, and medicalized treatments. Two recent additions to the literature include Goodman's (2015) approach to decolonizing trauma-informed therapy and Almeida's (2018) liberation-based healing. Similarly, an increasing number of outlets recognize the impact that Indigenous science can have on our psychotherapeutic culture (see, for example, the special issues of *Women & Therapy*, 41[1–2] and 34[3]).

One approach that aligns with liberation is testimonial therapy, a political therapeutic response to structural inequality and systemic violence (Aron, 1992). In the process, a client's testimony is transformed from a narrative of shame and victimization to one of dignity and activism (Lustig et al., 2004). It is a brief intervention where, through an iterative process, the therapist and client dialogue, question, and inscribe memories and feelings, yielding a written testimony (Lustig et al., 2004). Often, the completed testimony is narrated to the client in a public ceremony that gives voice to, provides evidence of, and expresses protest. This reading can be the beginning of a public activist's work and a symbol of the "transformation of private pain to political or spiritual dignity" (Lustig et al., 2004, p. 33).

Testimonial therapy accords with the work of feminist scholars who have highlighted the importance of relocating the body through the telling of experience as performative and liberatory (Spry, 1995). Dallery (1989) described *écriture féminine*², wherein the body is a text upon which women construct narratives. The healing potential of *écriture féminine*, through a method such as testimonial therapy, is evidenced in the rise of hashtag feminism. As seen in movements like #SayHerName, #MeToo, #BeenRapedNeverReported, Hollaback!, and

² French feminist, Cixous et al. (1976), devised *écriture féminine* (women's writing) as a departure from androcentric and anglocentric literature, writing, "woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (p. 875).

#YesAllWomen, women have been voicing their experiences of sexual harassment to de-normalize rape culture (Keller et al., 2018). While digital feminism is not without its challenges (for a discussion, see Phipps, 2019), it holds possibilities for increasing cultural and critical consciousness (Keller et al., 2018) and for promoting healing in solidarity (Mendes et al., 2018).

Ultimately, I suggest for an approach to healing that bridges the public/private, political/personal divides that have been artificially constructed in mental health grounded in settler ideologies (Jordan & Seponski, 2018). In so doing, therapists push back against artificial binaries of victim/survivor and shift to the activist's language. Rather than speak of what was inscribed into women's identities by settler colonialism's narrative power, women must narrate their experience (Spry, 1995). Others' actions make victims and survivors, while activists make themselves.

Conclusion

If we accept that the United States is a settler colonial nation built on and maintained through sexual violence, then we must engage in critical action towards structural change as therapists and academics. While everyone in the settler colonial nation is subject to the conditions therein, White settlers face limitations in interpreting colonial realities because we participate in and reproduce it daily. Thus, White, cis women must be diligent in monitoring our political engagements, as despite our best intentions, we can fall prey to perpetuating the colonizing discourses we hope to counter. This ongoing tension is evident in the #MeToo movement, where White, cis women coopted the movement, excluding persons with disabilities, persons of color, and LGBTQI+ persons (Corrigan, 2019). To subvert these tensions and potential exploitations, we must apply the principles of resistance and anti-colonial practices to

destabilize colonial power, recognizing that disrupting colonialism is for our good, not just for the good of the *other*.

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