

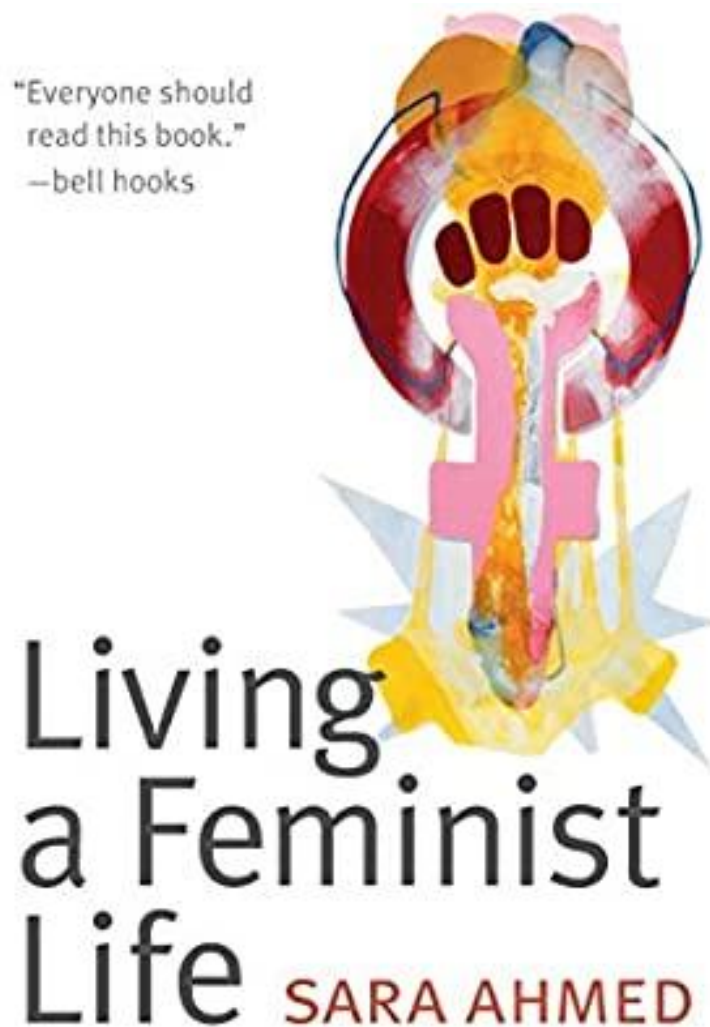
Free Online Course: Living a Feminist Life

Created & facilitated in 2022 by Valerie Shaindlin, MLISc

Part of a series started in collaboration with Laila Brown, Kiyo Egashira, and Holiday Vega

<https://www.valeriebrett.com/free-course-living-a-feminist-life>

“Feminism is praxis. We enact the world we are aiming for; nothing less will do.”
(p. 255)



Ahmed, S. (2016). *Living a feminist life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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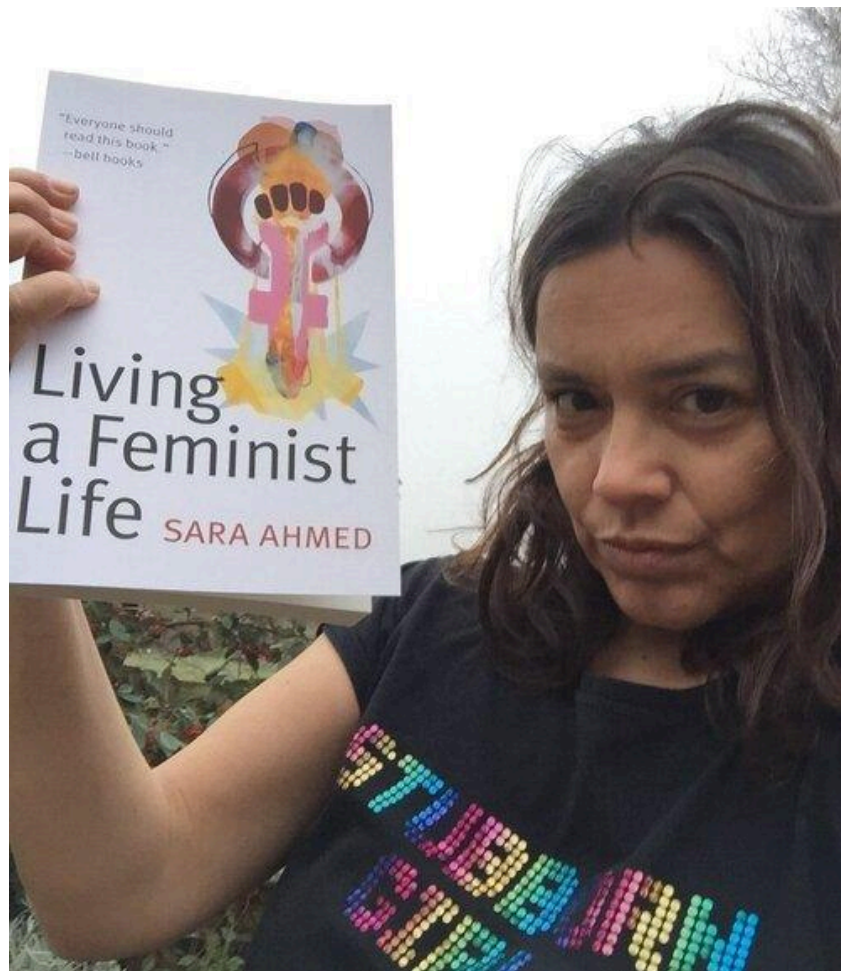
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Who Sara Ahmed Is

[Sara Ahmed](#) is a leading feminist thinker, writer, and independent scholar. Her work is at the intersection of feminist, queer and race studies, and her research is concerned with “how bodies and worlds take shape; how power is secured and challenged in everyday life worlds as well as institutional cultures.” She has published [ten books](#).

She lives in Cambridgeshire, UK, with her partner [Sarah Franklin](#) and their dogs, Poppy and Bluebell.

Until the end of 2016, Ahmed was a Professor of Race and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. Prior to that, she was based in Women’s Studies at Lancaster University. She resigned from her post at Goldsmiths in protest at the failure to deal with the problem of sexual harassment.



Who I Am

Valerie Brett Shaindlin

she/her

To help contextualize my perspective, I want to share that I am a white (eastern European & Jewish heritage), cis, heterosexual, woman. I am a third-generation American citizen and I grew up in the US and British Virgin Islands, and then Hawai'i. I've also lived in Florida and New York, and I currently reside (with my partner & our cat) in Cambridge, UK.

For fun I like to read, travel, be by/in/on the ocean, and rollerskate.

I am the Senior Library Assistant at Rosemary Murray Library at the University of Cambridge. I am also an E-RYT 200 (Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher). I have a BSc from Skidmore College, and an MLISc (master of Library & Information Science) from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. As part of my graduate studies, I took a Political Science course called Feminist Theory taught by renowned feminist [Kathy Ferguson](#); for the course we read *Living a Feminist Life* (in only one week! 🤪).



Who You Are

We will do online live introductions during Session 1. You have already opted in or out of the [online directory](#) of participants, which contains information you provided in your registration form. We created this directory so that participants can connect with other people around these ideas and issues, even if they did not participate in the same session. Please let us know if there are any corrections, additions, etc. you need us to make! We will also, of course, remove you if you have changed your mind about being included.



The Problem with Work Free Course Summer 2020

Details

This free course is the second part in a series first created in partnership with Laila Brown, Kiyo Egashira, and Holiday Vega. The first part was [a course on *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*](#) by Kathi Weeks, in 2020 and 2021.

This free online course series in Feminist Theory aims to create an ongoing, online, relational space for diverse individuals to come together to dream, discuss, and disturb internalized assumptions. We hope to help bring Feminist Theory out of the academy and into our lives.

This is a free, recurring event, open to anyone who wishes to participate. We call it a “course” because that is a recognizable format, but it is a space and facilitated discussion group in which people can read, understand, and build upon the book. This project is meant to promote and address intersectional feminist issues.

Unfortunately, at this time we can only offer the course in English, and remotely, so you must be proficient in English and have internet access, as well as a connected device.

Meeting dates/times are final; we hope you can make it to every session, but we cannot accommodate change requests. If you miss a session you are still considered enrolled, unless you let us know otherwise. We will strictly observe start and end times; if you must come late, please still attend, but we will begin right at the appointed start time.

Session 1 breakdown:

1. **Facilitator & participant self-introductions**
2. **Course introduction by Valerie**—this includes time to ask questions about the syllabus.
3. **Section introduction by Valerie**—this will not be an overview, as we’ll have all read the section, but I will call out specific ideas, themes, concepts, and terms, and provide some additional explanatory information.
4. **Group discussion**—this includes asking clarifying questions regarding the text and/or Valerie’s intro; answering the reflection/discussion questions; personal reflections; and anything else that the group wishes to cover.

Sessions 2-12 breakdown:

1. **5-15 minute introduction by Valerie**—this will not be an overview, as we’ll have all read the section, but I will call out specific ideas, themes, concepts, and terms, and provide some additional explanatory information.
2. **45-55 minute group discussion**—this includes asking clarifying questions regarding the text and/or Valerie’s intro; answering the reflection/discussion questions; personal reflections; and anything else that the group wishes to cover.

Goals

This an activist project taking the form of a structured discussion group intended to activate new ways of thinking and organizing. It incorporates elements of academic disciplines with the personal experiences of participants, and ongoing current events.

The goals in providing this free “course” are to:

1. Advance feminism* as a social justice imperative.
2. Facilitate respectful and provocative discussions between diverse people who are committed to intersectional social justice.
3. Encourage more people to, and assist in the process of, reading and digesting academic books. As Lola Olufemi [writes](#), “We must think about ways we can transform and decentre the university as the only site of legitimate knowledge production.”
4. Encourage more people to, and assist in the process of, self-identifying as feminists, including the ongoing process of what that means to each person individually, where it came from, and how it manifests in their relationships and communities.
5. At the suggestion of [Plan C](#), which exists to organise in, beyond, and against capital, this course aims to:
 - a. Maintain regular time commitments in a context of constant time and attentive pressure
 - b. Foster a slower pace and a more human scale than is culturally acceptable today
 - c. Encourage participants to “learn to speak with a self-expressive voice (rather than a neoliberal performance derived from the compulsion to share banal information), and to listen and analyse”

**When using the word “feminism,” this document refers to intersectional feminism, unless otherwise noted (e.g. “white feminism,” “radical feminism”).*

Community Agreements

This is a guided group, but as facilitator I by no means know everything, and it's up to all of us to create and sustain a healthy, respectful, and safe environment. As leader, I aim to create an inclusive and welcoming community and space for open discussion. As facilitator, I attempt to practice feminist pedagogy as defined by [Maria T. Accardi](#): "feminist pedagogy is broadly concerned with social justice and sees education as a site for social change and transformation, exposing and ending oppression against women and all other kinds of marginalization: racism, xenophobia, classism, ableism, and so on" (p. 27). This teaching philosophy values feelings, experiences, and reflection as knowledge and ongoing feminist praxis. It aims to decenter oppressive power relations by making space for and listening to marginalized voices. If you feel that I am failing in this mission at any point, please let me know immediately so that I can improve. (Anonymous feedback forms will be provided after the second and final sessions.)

To these ends, all course participants are expected to adhere to a few basic rules:

- If possible, let's try to keep ourselves on mute until we're each ready to speak.
- No need to apologize all the time; women especially tend to tend to apologize unnecessarily. Just one solution: instead of "sorry I'm late," try "thank you for waiting."
- No racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, ageist, etc. remarks will be tolerated. Expect to be called out if you speak hatefully about any group of people whether or not they are present in the meetings. If you notice someone using hate speech, you have permission to let them know. We will use "That was a _____ comment, and we do not support that type of sentiment in this space." Please keep your critique similarly clear and concise; however, if the harmful speech is directed at you (intentionally or unintentionally, implicitly or explicitly), you are not under the same expectation to remain calm and composed.
- Our identities, backgrounds, and experiences are inseparable from our interpretations of text. When concepts from the reading or discussion resonate with your lived experience, please bring that into the discussion if you feel comfortable doing so. Our goal is to learn from the text as well as from one another. In addition all participants are asked to respect one another's time by staying on topic in relating their lived experience, so we can actualize the focused learning community we agreed to participate in.
- Critique of the work is welcome; you don't have to like the book to engage with it, and critical dialogue is how we all learn!

Course Schedule

Please read the assigned pages for each week before meeting, so that we can discuss together.

There are two sessions offered per week; come to either as it suits you or stick to the same day each week if you prefer:

1. **Wednesdays at 7-8 PM British Summer Time (BST)**
2. **Saturdays at 10:30-11:30 AM British Summer Time (BST)**

Discussion/Reflection Questions: Not all questions posed here will be relevant to every participant. Please ponder, journal, and discuss them as you see fit.

Optional homework: Homework is not to be turned in, so it is optional; however, it is recommended that you complete it to get the most out of the course.

Week 1 Week starting Sunday, May 2 7-8 PM BST Weds. May 5 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. May 8	Introduction: Bringing Feminist Theory Home <u>Reading</u> Acknowledgements + Introduction p. 0-18 (19 pages) <i>Please also read through at least p. 11 of the syllabus prior to the first session.</i> <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. What do you hear when you hear the word “feminism”? 2. Do you self-identify as a feminist? a. If yes, was there a time when you did not? If so, why, and what changed? 3. Where did you find feminism/where did feminism find you? 4. Who are your feminist teachers? 5. What are your personal feminist classics (film, literature, etc.)? 6. How do you draw upon and connect with the other feminists in your life? 7. How do you (or have you), intentionally or unintentionally, reproduce/d patriarchal reasoning? 8. What does the project of “dismantling worlds” mean to you? 9. Are you holding onto anything that diminishes you? That diminishes others? 10. What do you think of Ahmed’s decision not to cite white men, even when she uses or builds upon their ideas? 11. What do you think of as unquestionable and can you question it? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Make your own LaFL playlist (no songs by men).
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Week 2 Week starting Sunday, May 16 7-8 PM BST Weds. May 19 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. May 22	PART I: Becoming a Feminist—Feminism is Sensational <u>Reading</u> Section I, Chapter 1 p. 19-42 (23 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. What memories are you carrying in your body? 2. Why is feminism “treated as a removal from the world rather than engagement with the world” (p. 38)? 3. Do you identify with the figure of the feminist killjoy? 4. Have you experienced a moment like the ones Ahmed describes of her family around the dinner table (p. 37 & 39)? 5. Have you previously thought of your experiences with/of feminism as sensational/emodied? 6. Have you noticed a problem that has no name? 7. Have you been made to feel like a stranger? 8. Have you made another into a stranger? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Do the free guided meditation, The Emotional Body Scan by Dora Kamau. 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/7DPaJswPbfXK4QXwUKoTCw?si=6372f0c103d94f09
Week 3 Week starting Sunday, May 23 7-8 PM BST Weds. May 26 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. May 29	On Being Directed <u>Reading</u> Chapter 2 p. 43-64 (21 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. How has your own life been shaped by norms in ways you didn’t even realize at the time? (p. 43) 2. What do you make of the analysis of power as directionality? 3. What have you been taught that happiness/unhappiness look like? 4. What do happiness and unhappiness look like to you, if you peel back the layers of what is “supposed” to make you happy and unhappy? 5. Do you feel it is too late to leave your life, or to step sideways (off the path)? 6. What do you make of “the happiness seal” (p. 60)? 7. If you’ve read <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>: What are your new insights/emotions/ideas about the book after reading this section?

	<u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Do something that isn't "supposed" to make you happy, but does. 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/6SRsiMI7w1USE4mFqrOhHC?si=MIqll-0tSOm9YCGZGjJjdq&dl_branch=1
Week 4 Week starting Sunday, May 30 7-8 PM BST Weds. June 2 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. June 5	Willfullness and Feminist Subjectivity <u>Reading</u> Chapter 3 p. 65-88 (23 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. How have you been willing to get in the way as a feminist? a. How have you <i>not</i> been willing to get in the way as a feminist? b. How have you observed other feminists being willing or unwilling to get in the way? 2. How have you found/do you find feminist companionship? 3. What do you make of "feminists are judged as willful women as a way of dismissing feminism as a screen behind which a will lurks: a will that is wanting" (p. 71)? 4. Contemplate and discuss willfulness as a black feminist and feminist-of-color inheritance (p. 80). 5. Have you ever been threatened (implicitly or explicitly) that you stand to lose someone or something by "going against the flow" (p. 82)? 6. Is the child in the Grimm story willful because she disobeys, or must she become willful in order to disobey (p. 84)? 7. Discuss the idea that "when being freed from labor requires others to labor, others are paying the price of your freedom. That is not freedom" (p. 86). a. Is there any ethical wage labor under patriarchal capitalism? (Example: paying a woman to watch your children or clean your house so you have time to do something else.) 8. How can we "refuse to support the system that sucks the blood, vitality, and life from the limbs of workers" (p. 86)? 9. Audre Lorde, whom Ahmed sees as one of her major inspirations, wrote "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"; Ahmed ends this chapter with "the arms that built the house are the arms that will bring it down". How do you relate these two concepts; do you see them as contrasting, complementary, call and response, or something else?

	10. If you've read <i>The Mill on the Floss</i>: What are your new insights/emotions/ideas about the book and about the character Maggie Tulliver, after reading this section? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Get in the way. 3. Submit the mid-course feedback form. 4. Find a book that has a willful girl or woman at its center and that you feel provides you feminist companionship; if you don't know where to start, try the books Ahmed mentions (<i>The Mill on the Floss</i> or <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> or <i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>), but keep in mind that they are all older books by and about white women. 5. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/6g0Orsxv6glTJCt4cHsRsQ?si=9J6bEt0XQY-NCz109jfyvQ&dl_branch=1
Week 5 Week starting Sunday, June 13 7-8 PM BST Weds. June 16 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. June 19	PART II: Diversity Work—Trying to Transform <u>Reading</u> Chapter 4 p. 89-114 (25 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. What are some of your stories of how you have arrived & progressed as a feminist at work? How have you entered, exited, moved forward, gotten stuck (p. 90)? 2. Have you ever tried to intervene in the reproduction of power? 3. Think of the institutions you belong to whether by choice or circumstance (your workplace, school, nation, the patriarchy, etc.). How have you been complicit? 4. Why do you agree or disagree with the strategy of appearing to align with the institution (by smiling, not being a killjoy, etc.) as the best way for diversity workers to achieve their goals (p. 100-101)? 5. What are the pros and cons of using non-threatening language in diversity work? 6. Have you ever been “thrown by how things are thrown” (p 102)? 7. Ahmed illustrates this section with a time that a document that documented the inequality at a university where she worked “became usable as a measure of good performance” (p. 103). Have you ever encountered a similar experience? 8. If writing diversity documents can make it feel that diversity work is done, is it worth writing them? Why or why not?

	9. Do you agree with Ahmed that mainstreaming does not work, that there need to be specific officers and offices who keep pushing for equality? If so, how do we make sure this doesn't take the responsibility and pressure off everyone else? 10. If you also took part in TPWW: Imagine Weeks & Ahmed in conversation about feminism at work. What do you think they would agree and disagree on? How do you interpret these two texts in dialogue? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Find out what policies on diversity & equality are at your institutions. Are these documents actualized, or are they just PR? 3. Write your story of you've arrived & progressed at work, how you've entered, exited, moved forward, gotten stuck (p. 90). 4. Song of the week: https://open.spotify.com/track/7zbX1txfcs42K2PIhFJNNE?si=61UNsEyrQpS3Yi53KOO7cw&dl_branch=1
Week 6 Week starting Sunday, June 20 7-8 PM BST Weds. June 23 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. June 26	Being in Question <u>Reading</u> Chapter 5 p. 115-134 (19 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. Have you been asked where you are from, even when you are home? How did it feel? a. If you have never been asked to account for yourself in this way, reflect on that. b. Have you been the one stopping someone to ask where they are from? 2. "When admiration is given as compensation, it is not admiration. The effort not to be sorry can be a way of being sorry" (p. 118). Have you experienced this form of "polite racism" either as someone who was enacting it, or as someone to whom it was directed? 3. How have you been made to feel questionable? Have you made others feel questionable? 4. Ahmed says that the way we answer the question "What's wrong?" matters: "The political struggle then becomes: to find a better way of answering the questions, ways of questioning the questions, so that the world that makes some beings into questions becomes what we question" (p. 125). Discuss this and develop some ideas. a. Here's an idea: answering questions with questions, rather

	than answers: When asked when you knew you were queer, ask “When did you know you were hetero?” - Have you ever arrived somewhere you didn’t belong? What was it like? Did you remain? What happened? - Have you ever been asked or made to embody diversity? Whether the answer is yes or no, reflect on that--especially in terms of previous weeks’ questions (for example, what emotions are you carrying in your body?). - How have you taken on the emotional work of diversity work? If you are white: in what ways have you failed to take on the emotional work of diversity work? - How do you interpret Ahmed’s idea of whiteness as a seal (p. 133)? <u>Optional homework</u> - Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. - Use the checklist White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh to see how you have benefitted from or been excluded by white supremacy. - Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/7ia5l12mCvbQTeAnG1oYpg?si=4a19141f58394057
Week 7 Week starting Sunday, July 18 7-8 PM BST Weds. July 21 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. July 24	Brick Walls <u>Reading</u> Chapter 6 p. 135-160 (25 pages) <u>Discussion and/or Reflection Questions:</u> - What brick walls have you come up against? - What does Ahmed mean by “social categories precede bodily encounters” (p. 147)? Do you agree or disagree with the statement? - What social categories are more or less material to you based on your positionality? (examples: race, dis/ability, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, etc.) - How can we “create a crisis around citation” (p. 148)? - How can we make use of Ahmed’s discovery that diversity work is so trying because of the conscious willed effort it takes to not “reproduce an inheritance” (p. 149)? - Throughout this chapter, Ahmed uses examples presented almost like vignettes (especially in the “Academic Walls” section). Are there vignettes from your own life that illustrate similar mechanisms of racism and sexism?

	7. What are some ways people have thrown (and that we can throw) a wrench in the works, stopping the system from working? 8. How can we make sure that as feminists, we never become the master's tool (p. 160)? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Take a walk with no podcasts or music, etc. to distract you; keep the idea of walls in mind. What do you notice? What do they look like? What is their purpose? If you're able to, touch or come up against walls you encounter. What does it feel like? 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/78eouBKVRyhbSzJwChr6QM?si=z57Cag5yTjebkduuR3qQ0w&dl_branch=1
Week 8 Week starting Sunday, July 25 7-8 PM BST Weds. July 28 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. July 31	PART III: Living the Consequences Fragile Connections <u>Reading</u> Chapter 7 p. 161-182 (21 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. Is fragility a strength or a weakness? 2. How do you currently handle mockery and other hostile responses to being a feminist, and how can we as feminists better handle it? 3. Ahmed describes a model of emotions that is economic, i.e. "emotional labor" (p. 161); can you think of other models? Do you think of emotions in terms of the economic model or in another way? 4. What do you think Ahmed means when she writes that our histories can bring us to feminism but can also leave us fragile (p. 162)? 5. Do you become more aware of a feeling once it's peaking or once it dissipates? 6. What does it mean to relate to things as being breakable? 7. Do you believe Ahmed's theory that things (objects) can be willful? 8. How/where/when have you noticed a consequence being recruited as a cause? 9. Ahmed says sometimes we don't choose our battles; they choose us. Has this ever happened to you? 10. How have you and how can you refuse to be aspirational? What would it mean if you were to refuse to be aspirational? 11. This chapter delves into white feminism and disability studies. Can we aim to break without restoration, and what would that mean?

	<u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Buy some zines if you can afford to; if not, check some out from the library or find them free online. Etsy is a good place to look, as is the good ole Google. This is to become familiar with zines in advance of our shared final project. See one we did here. 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/2QDyYdZyhlP2fp79KZX8Bi?si=u1K6xoUxS3KdnTvaw2HGNg&dl_branch=1
Week 9 Week starting Sunday, August 1 7-8 PM BST Weds. August 4 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. August 7	Feminist Snap <u>Reading</u> Chapter 8 p. 187-212 (25 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. When and how have you snapped? 2. Ahmed says that perhaps there is a connection between will and snap (p. 190); do you think there is? If so, what is the connection? 3. What is it like to find out that a bond you thought was sustaining actually is damaging? 4. Have you experienced (or do you experience) yourself in the terms used to dismiss you? 5. Remembering that Ahmed writes that it is not our job to resolve these questions, think about/discuss: a. How do we know what diminishes us? b. How do we know when a life is working or not working? c. Who judges whether a life is working or not working? 6. If you watched any of the films Ahmed uses as illustration in this chapter, discuss them in relation to living a feminist life in general, and the feminist snap in particular. 7. Ahmed says in relation to a scene in one of the films that fantasy of reversal shows that men “don’t get it” (p. 204). What does she mean and can we extrapolate that into/onto real-life scenarios? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Watch one (or two or three!) of the feminist films discussed in this chapter. 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/133QrUrTUKBVXrbleRY3On?si=5Yt_nIQzPRHK1jvuZbK5YmQ&dl_branch=1
Week 10 Week starting Sunday, August 8	Lesbian Feminism <u>Reading</u>

7-8 PM BST Weds. August 11 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. August 14	Chapter 9 p. 213-234 (21 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> 1. A main critique of Lesbian Feminism (that Ahmed addresses right away in this chapter) is that how individuals choose to live their lives does not change the structures of society; do you agree or disagree? 2. Ahmed writes that “lesbian feminism can bring feminism back to life” (p. 214); after reading this chapter, do you agree or disagree? 3. How do you interpret Ahmed’s statement that “A masculinist model of creativity is premised on withdrawal” (p. 217)? 4. Discuss what Ahmed calls an “investment” in the abject/miserable lesbian figure (p. 223). 5. Ahmed wants us to think about willfulness as creativity, as standing against a world that does not give us standing; think about it! (Discuss.) 6. How have you oriented/reoriented yourself toward or away from men? From women? 7. What does Ahmed mean by “You have to wrap life around being” (p. 227)? <u>Optional homework</u> 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Start thinking about and/or work on your zine contribution (due August 31). 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/6h2wpo2pshM8QnAvRySEO0?si=4f409d47d7644df8
Week 11 Week starting Sunday, August 15 7-8 PM BST Weds. August 18 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. August 21	A Killjoy Survival Kit <u>Reading</u> Conclusion 1 p. 235-249 (14 pages) <u>Discussion and/or Reflection Questions:</u> 1. Do you identify with the term/concept Feminist Killjoy? Why or why not? a. Have your feelings about this changed since the beginning of this course? 2. How has the world promoted your welfare, especially if you do not identify as disabled or poor? 3. What have you been given to you as your birthrights? 4. How can we avoid making feminist self-care into a neoliberal ideal of individual resilience? 5. How have you blamed yourself, rather than external systems, for

	your own ill health? - Have others blamed you rather than external systems for your ill health? - How have you blamed others rather than external systems for their own ill health? 6. Has Ahmed and Lorde's definition of self-care changed your perception of it? How? - If you now have a new understanding of why/how self-care can be political, can you identify how you misinterpreted or misappropriated the term and act of "self-care" in the past? - If you now have a new understanding of why/how self-care can be political, what will self-care look like in your life? In your community? 7. How and why do you think a Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit will be useful to you going forward? <u>Optional homework</u> - Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. - Create your Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit. - Add to our shared LaFL 2021 Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit (you will need to request permission to edit the document). - Do one thing for self-care, in the correct sense of the term. - Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/2etHqJxlbV0soyPhelVs9Y?si=9c5b170afaba4ccb.
Week 12 Week starting Sunday, August 22 7-8 PM BST Weds. August 25 10:30-11:30 AM Sat. August 28 LAST DAY!	A Killjoy Manifesto <u>Reading</u> Conclusion 2 p. 251-268 (17 pages) <u>Discussion/Reflection Questions</u> - What do you think of Ahmed's 10 principles? - What are some manifestos that have influenced you? - What's your Killjoy Manifesto? - How do you feel the weight of history? How can we make others feel the weight of history, when they are uninterested or unwilling? - Ahmed identifies feminist trouble as an extension of Butler's gender trouble (p. 255); do you agree? - Ahmed gave us new ways of thinking about many familiar words throughout the book; are there any in particular that you think of in new ways after completing this course? - How are you feeling about the book and the course now that it's ending? - If you could ask Ahmed a question, what would it be? If you also took part in TPWW: How do you feel about Ahmed's

	Killjoy Manifesto in light of Weeks' assertion that manifestos are too prescriptive? What do you imagine an Ahmed/Weeks dialogue on this would entail? Optional homework 1. Journal your responses to the above discussion questions. 2. Write your Killjoy Manifesto. 3. Song _____ of _____ the _____ week: https://open.spotify.com/track/0NB9wJK1drissTXrrgj63w?si=YXd-Ngr8Tla0UX_EB_kufw&dl_branch=1
31 August 2021 NO MEETING!	Submit your zine contribution(s) to vshaindl@gmail.com by TODAY

Additional Course Materials

Optional. Feel free to bring these into our discussions. Listed alphabetically.

Academic

- [A FLY Girl's Guide To University](#) (2019) by Odelia Younge (ed.)
- [A Long Line of Vendidas](#) (1986) by Cherríe Moraga
- [Courageous Conversations: Complaint, Diversity and Other Hostile Environments](#) (2021)
- [Haoles in Hawaii](#) (2010) by Judy Rohrer
 - Rohrer references Ahmed, and agrees with her that “We must stay implicated in what we critique, become answerable for what we begin to see, not try to escape via confession, denial, indigenizing ourselves, or cleverly twisting legal discourse” (p. 188).
- [The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House by Audre Lorde](#) (1984)
- [Notes toward a Politics of Location](#) (1984) by Adrienne Rich
- [Susan Fraiman reviews Living a Feminist Life – Critical Inquiry](#) (2017)
- [The Sound of Bolt Cutters A Feminist Snap](#) (2020)

[Fiction] Books Discussed in the Text ([Goodreads shelf](#))

- [The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison](#) (1970)
- [Keeping You a Secret by Julie Anne Peters](#) (2005)
- [The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot](#) (1860)
- [Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf](#) (1925)
- [Rubyfruit Jungle by Rita Mae Brown](#) (1973)

Non-academic Articles

- [Bitch “Power” issue \(2020\)](#)
 - Particularly *Let it Burn: Transgender Cooks are Changing Kitchen Culture*
- [Birth of a Progressive Protest Movement Under Trump](#)
- [Facing the Feminist in the Mirror: On Sara Ahmed's “Living a Feminist Life”](#)
- [Feminism Must Be Lived: An Interview With Sara Ahmed](#)
- [Sara Ahmed: “Once We Find Each Other, So Much Else Becomes Possible”](#)
- [Sara Ahmed: Notes from a Feminist Killjoy](#)
- [The Road to Terfdom](#)

Podcasts

- [Audre Lorde Pt. 1 + 2](#) | Stuff You Missed in History Class
- [Living a Feminist Life with Sara Ahmed](#) | Secret Feminist Agenda
- [Feminist Killjoys, PhD](#)
- [Killjoy Survival Kits](#) | Secret Feminist Agenda

Projects

- [A Demographically-Representative American Reading List](#)
- [BooksxWomen](#) Book Club
- Collection of feminist manifestos published by [Verso](#)
- [Everyday Sexism Project](#)
- ["Feminist Killjoy Survival Kits"](#)
- [feministkilljoys | killing joy as a world making project](#)
- [Feminist Micro-activism](#) action items
- [I May Destroy You \(TV Series 2020\)](#)
- [Make a Fuss](#)
- [Making a Feminist Life](#)
- [Mattress Performance \(Carry That Weight\)](#)
- [VIDA: Women in Literary Arts](#)

Notes

These are optional notes to help you get through the text (not required reading).

Acknowledgements

- [This is Ahmed's blog](#) that she mentions
- The message she's tried to write about in this book is that "living a feminist life is about how we connect with and draw upon each other in our shared project of dismantling worlds" (p. 0)

Introduction: Bringing Feminist Theory Home

- You'll notice that she sprinkles in different fragmentary definitions of feminism throughout the book; here is the first: "**Feminism: how we pick each other up**" (p. 1)
- First mention of coming up against history as solid as walls
- Seeing feminism as a way of policing can be a way of dismissing feminism
- The "we" that is feminism is something that we are working toward, rather than an existing foundation
- Hope is difficult but it animates struggle; it gives the work a purpose or a point

A Feminist Movement

- "**Feminism: the dynamism of making connections**" (p. 3)
- [Movement](#) means many different things, and feminism is a movement in all these various ways/definitions
 - Ahmed loves finding and using multiple meanings and we will see this throughout the book
- When she says "in recent years," remember that this book was published in 2017 so it was probably finished in 2016, and started a few years before that
- First mention of the "snap" (more to come later)
- Feminism can be anywhere and everywhere, and Ahmed says it needs to be everywhere (both private and public)
- "She" includes "he" but "he" does not include "she"
- It is often assumed that feminism flows from west to east, but that story is not accurate
- Patriarchal reasoning "goes all the way down" (p. 4)
- If we are in a movement that means we will be/must be moved
- If we want to account for how power works, we must start with intersectionality; sex cannot be separated from race
 - Throughout the book "feminism" refers to intersectional feminism
 - Feminism without intersectionality is not feminism
- Post feminist fantasy: that feminism is no longer necessary, that individuals have the power to overcome systemic obstacles (p. 5)
 - Corollary: post race fantasy

- As feminists, we find that what we aim to bring to an end, others might not recognize as existing in the first place
 - Too much feminist & antiracist work involves convincing people that sexism and racism in fact exist
- Practicing feminism is being willing to continue despite or because of what one comes up against
- We must never be overconfident because we might not always be just, even as we struggle for justice

Homework

- Feminism is homework, in other words, a self-assignment
 - Intellectual and emotional work
 - Life lessons and philosophical lessons
 - This book thinks about feminist theory as homework
- Homework's connection with housework
- We need to rethink what counts as feminist theory; where it comes from, how it is used, who it is for
 - Currently it is purely academic, something you do or learn at school
 - Has cache; seen as empirical
 - Theory vs. politics
- Ahmed is an academic and a critical theorist
 - [Encyclopedia definition of critical theory](#)
- Homework: bringing feminist theory home
- "We use our particulars to challenge the universal" (p. 10)

Building Feminist Worlds

- Theoretical work is seen as being abstract, removed from reality, but it *can* be in touch
 - We can bring it to life
- Being a feminist means remaining a student; Ahmed says this book is addressed to us as feminist students
 - She is retracing her own intellectual journey in this book through two figures: the willful subject and the feminist killjoy
 - She hopes to make feminist theory more accessible (that is also one of the main aims of this course!)
 - She will turn words around like objects; repeat them and play with them so we can learn about them
- "Feminist theory is what we do when we live our lives in a feminist way" (p. 11)
- Feminism as poetry
- Feminist instruction—>starting with our experiences—>generating new ideas
- "Sweaty concepts" (p. 12)
 - Credits Audre Lorde
 - Lifelines find you where you are
 - Descriptive work is conceptual work

- Showing the struggle in working out ideas
 - Tension
- Whatever we do, concepts are at work (whether we are aware of it or not)
- **“Feminism: it can be a strain”** (p. 14)
- Feminist theory is seen as the tool, but it should be seen as the product (the house, the world we’re building)
- Trans women are explicitly included in her conception of “women” --she uses the term “women” to mean those who self-identify as women
 - No one is born a woman; it is assigned
 - Even if someone self-identifies as a woman she can be deemed not woman because she’s not doing it correctly
 - Violence can be at stake in being recognizable or not being recognizable as a woman
- Ahmed uses a strict citation policy in this book: she chose not to cite any white men, by which she means an institution (“White Men”)
 - Instead she follows what she calls “desire lines” (p. 15)
 - “Citation is feminist memory” (p. 15)
 - Citations as bricks or as straws
 - Ideas assumed to be masculine or originating from men’s bodies; the history of ideas is conflated with white men
 - Her book is meant to contribute to feminist of color scholarship, to which she both adds and is indebted
 - A too-strict canon is oppressive; is her method here truly liberating?
- Ahmed credits some of the books I’ve listed in [“Books Mentioned in the Text”](#)
 - She calls these feminist classics, but she doesn’t mean they’re canonical
 - Feminist classics to her means they’ve created community; passing books around can create feminist community
 - These titles are in her own personal “killjoy survival kit” (more on that later)
 - Books change us
 - Books can be “spaces of encounter” (p. 17)
- This work wants to remind us that feminism is embodied; we are minds but we are in bodies, we belong or don’t belong in the world, yet we exist
- Feminism causes fear because together we are dangerous to the status quo

PART I: Becoming a Feminist

- This section explores the process of becoming feminist--how it is embodied, how Ahmed became a feminist, and how feminism is part of our lives
- Feminism can be understood as an “affective inheritance” (p. 20)
- This section also addresses some key concerns in feminist theory:
 - The role of sensation in knowledge formation
 - The sociality of emotions
 - How power operates

- How to think about happiness
 - The relationship between will and force
- Feminist theory comes out of the sense-making process of becoming feminist

Chapter 1: Feminism is Sensational

- Ahmed will share her personal experiences that led her to feminism
- “Something is sensational when it provokes excitement and interest” (p. 21)
 - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensational>
- Feminism is a bother, a public disturbance; this is how we learn about it
- Chapter one assumptions:
 - Feminism begins with sensation / a sense of things
 - Feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world

Sensing Wrongs

- Sensation is how bodies are in relationship with the world
- **“Feminism: how we survive the consequences of what we come up against by offering new ways of understanding what we come up against”** (p. 22)
- Feminist work = memory work
 - Memories are carried/stored in the body
 - They become heavy
 - Sensory events (especially violence) can be too overwhelming to process in the moment
- Strangers are containers of (for?) fear
- Violence accompanied by a narrative becomes instruction; violence is a way of addressing or being addressed
- “Gendering operates in how bodies take up space” (p. 25)
 - It's a tightening loop
 - Example: manspreading
- Gender fatalism: gender follows from sex
 - Explains violence against women and girls as expected and inevitable
 - Likeness becomes explanation becomes expectation becomes prediction becomes command (“boys will be boys”)
 - Living up to expectations makes one agreeable
- Matter = sex, meaning = gender
- Gender assignment as homework
 - It's perhaps more work for those who don't identify with their assignments

Feminist Consciousness

- Feminism is a form of self-assembly, in which case it's DIY
- Becoming feminist can be a process of redescribing our world
 - This process is bumpy; it's not smooth or easy
- To think again about how you were wronged can be to experience feeling wronged all over again
 - It can start as anxiety or a gut feeling

- “Feminism [is] a way of challenging the universal...Questioning sexism is one of the most profound ways of disrupting what we take to be given and thus learning about how the given is given” (p. 29)
- “Reality” might just be someone else’s “tired explanation”
- It can be hard to understand or accept sexism or feminism because it may mean painful or difficult realizations or understandings about the world and oneself
- All of p. 30
- The Everyday Sexism project (see [Additional Course Materials](#))
- **“Feminism: the releasing of a pressure valve”** (p. 30)
- Others have been here before; the sexism you experienced was analyzed by others before it even happened to you; feminist books can be like encountering friends, feeling less alone
- Knowledge directs your rage appropriately: not to yourself or another individual, but toward the world that reproduces and explains away violence

Problems with Names

- Feminist consciousness is like having the on switch as the default position; you work to turn it off, not to turn it on
 - It’s difficult to un-become a person who sees sexism and racism
 - This can be seriously exhausting
- We have been taught to turn away from suffering (example: homeless people are ignored) so we must learn to turn toward
 - Turning toward can (will?) make life more difficult
- Words are important because they help us understand our experiences
 - Names tend to lag behind problems
 - People who experience racism and/or sexism likely do before they know the words
 - Words are tools--we use them to “hammer away at the past” (p. 33)
- Being considered out of place turns a person into a stranger
 - “The stranger is a racialized figure” (p. 34)
- Naming problems is imperative because then we can recognize them
 - Some will perceive that you are the problem because you’ve named a problem
 - It externalizes the problem so you don’t think it’s yourself
 - It shows that an event isn’t isolated but part of a system
 - It modifies the relations of things and our understanding of those relations
 - It makes real & tangible what we are pressured not to notice
- Sexism is individually and systemically rewarded
 - It can be costly to not participate in sexist culture; you become the problem by disapproving
 - Simply not participating is often interpreted as the policing of others
 - Being unwilling to participate can be dangerous for women

Becoming the Problem

- Exposing a problem = posing a problem (YOU pose a problem by exposing it)
- The feminist killjoy
 - Makes things tense
 - Is heard as causing the argument
 - Gets in the way of the achievement/accomplishment of some “we” (like “the family”) that is created by what is not said
 - Is used as a container for discord by the “we” other
 - Causes eyes to roll
 - Becomes a problem when describing a problem
 - Is considered a sensationalist and thus is discounted
 - Is dismissed as emotional (e.g. “an angry black woman”)
 - Is considered mean or unhappy or frustrated *as a person*, rather than due to our sexist world/culture
 - Can experience alienation
- Feminists are often seen as looking for/creating problems
- Sensation brings us to feminism; being a feminist causes sensation

Conclusion: Alienation as Sensation

- Being a feminist can feel like living in a different reality or world, like one is out of tune with others
 - Thus one being “out of tune” ruins the song
- The other “we” (the family) becomes more tangible the more one is alienated from it
- Dismantling worlds/ruin/collapsing/falling
- Discussion of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* p. 40-41
 - Ahmed sees the main character Claudia as a black feminist killjoy
- Alienation=sensation=wonder
- Does working things out destroy them, or is it only perceived to?

Chapter 2: On Being Directed

- “Thinghood” has its own vitality (the pot, the table)
- What does it mean to be a lively participant in life
- Ahmed is developing her theories of power and relationality from the body, a tangible thing that senses things
 - Power as directionality

Traffic Systems

- Ahmed focuses a lot in this book on another book, a fictional book, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by [Virginia Woolf](#), because she thinks it’s important to be curious about why this novel “holds such a place in feminist imagination” (p. 44)
 - It depicts just one day; any day, an ordinary day

- Woolf captures that gathering can be queer, connection can be odd, in that they are spontaneous and temporary
- The sense of her own body
- Becoming Mrs. Dalloway as a sort of predetermined path, in which she loses her true self
 - Life itself understood as a path, a trajectory with certain landmarks against which we measure progress
- Traffic occurs when people are going in the same direction
 - She's talking about embodiment here
 - Traffic is organized
 - There are formal and informal rules that are meant to make travel easier and safer, and help us avoid bumping into one another
 - You can be carried along by the force of it
 - Routes are kept clear through collective labor
 - There can be congestion
 - Being part of the crowd can save you energy
 - but if you don't want to go along with the flow/momentum, then you are in the way and can get trampled
 - It can stop you from stopping or slow you down
- Path Paradox: "a path is created by being followed and is followed by being created" — we can only use a path insofar as we DO use a path (p. 46)
- "a little sideways movement can open up new worlds" (p. 47)
- It's never too late to "leave a life"
- Feminist and queer worlds are built via efforts to support the unsupported

The Path of Happiness

- Happiness is tied to "gender fatalism"
 - "Will be" as a moral instruction and a prediction (a girl will be happiest on her wedding day)
 - Happiness is a path, it becomes the straight path, the easy path, the "right" path, a form of pressure
 - "What we could call presumed heterosexuality means that not to be presumed as heterosexual, you have to unbecome one. Such an unbecoming is narrated as the loss of possibility of becoming happy" (p. 49)
 - Sadness is a consequence, a judgement, a feeling, meant to be avoided
 - Press → pressure → force → oppression → tangible feeling/experience
 - Parents thinking/believing that being queer will make their children unhappy because it is a less-trodden path--are they really talking about their child's happiness or their own?
- Pages 51-53
- The additional complications of race and immigration--happiness becomes a proximity to whiteness

Misdirection and Disaffection

- Killjoys (downers, party-poopers) may be seen as such just for not wanting what others want them to want--people are threatened by this
- Emotional labor removes traces of itself
- P. 53 dresses/girlhood
 - To get “dressed down” can mean to get scolded
 - Killing joy just by not being made happy by the right things, like dresses if you are a girl
- Not smiling enough is interpreted as being mean; oppression as a requirement to show signs of happiness in situations ([Marilyn Frye](#))
- Queer girls stretch the meaning of girlness
- Lines, crossing lines, being out-of-line, aligning oneself (p. 55)
- Failing to be habituated to a gender system is one possible way to live feminism
- Being a killjoy can be intentional or unintentional
 - Feminist killjoys are not made happy by the right things

An Unhappy Archive

- “The expectation of happiness does not necessarily create unhappiness but it might make unhappiness harder to bear” (p. 57)
- Smiling & happiness as emotional labor: p. 58
- Living feminism by no longer being willing to pretend to be happy (to appear happy) or to strive to be as happy as you appear
 - “A feminist sympathy is sympathetic to an alienation from happiness” (p. 59)
 - When sympathy is given in accordance with how we “should” feel (rather than how we DO feel) we are alienated
- Consciousness of suffering (the suffering in the world) pierces the “happiness seal” p. 60
 - **“Feminism: how we break through a happiness seal”**
- Learning *how* we become unconscious of things happening in plain sight
 - Feminists are conscious of violence and power concealed by the languages of love, happiness and civility

Conclusion: A Feminist Inheritance

- **“Feminism: living in proximity to a nerve”** (p. 62)
- Sadness as a feminist inheritance
- **“Feminism: how we inherit from the refusal of others to live their lives in a happy way”** (p. 63)
- Rebellion:
 - Being unhappy when you’re meant to be happy
 - Being happy when you’re meant to be unhappy
 - Being made happy by the wrong things makes one selfish, silly, inauthentic

Chapter 3: Willfulness and Feminist Subjectivity

- Ahmed has an entire book on this: [Willful Subjects](#)
- This chapter draws heavily on “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” by [Audre Lorde](#)
- This chapter reflects on the word “willfulness” which Ahmed finds “sharp, pointed”
 - Related to stubborn, obstinate, contrary
 - Seen as a problem (unyielding, unreasonable)
 - Negative connotations
- Feminist history is related to moods, feelings, attitudes
- “It is not simply that we first become feminists and later become killjoys. Rather, to become feminist is to kill other people’s joy; to get in the way of other people’s investments” (p. 65)
- The word feminism is often heard as an assertion of will[fulness]
 - This makes feminism a problem of [will](#)
 - Whose subjectivity becomes a problem?
- “living a feminist life requires being willing to get in the way” (p. 66)
 - We can convert the judgement of “being willful” into a project

Willful Girls

- Feminist companionship through books--especially those featuring willful girls and women
- Grimm’s fairy tale [The Willful Child](#)
 - The story itself is a tool and it teaches us about willfulness and about tools
 - It doesn’t matter what one is willful or disobedient about
 - How power works, how tools work
 - The willful child has her own story
 - Judgement allows violence to be seen as care (discipline)
- Strong willed (coded masculine) vs. willful (coded feminine)
 - The same actions have different meanings and consequences for boys and girls
 - “This is how the judgement of willfulness falls: figuring who is behind the problem creates a figure, the one who is behind a problem; you might catch someone lurking just because you expect to find her there. Willfulness falls on the fallen” (p. 69)
 - femininity=willingness to give up one’s will
 - The lexicon and stories of the willful girl/woman starts with Eve eating the apple
- “will becomes a willful will insofar as it is defined against a collective or general will” (p. 71)
 - Willfulness gets in the way of others’ happiness (and we are seen to get in our own ways if we are willful)
 - Is seen as a will to govern others (even if it is not)
 - Therefore speaking injustice is seen as a way to exert will over others

Willful Feminists

- Violence can so quickly become racialized

- Ahmed uses the example of her Muslim father beating her--further entangled with and complicated by religion
- Violence in your own home where it is supposed to be safe vs. from strangers and who is "other"
- "Some" forms of violence being seen as cultural is the racist aspect (p. 72)
- Violent people may not see their actions as violent if they see it as discipline or morally correct
- Screaming to make the violence known--a feminist act
- A will of one's own corollary to a room of one's own (Woolf)
- Feminist history is a history of disobedience
- Willfulness as unwilling to be owned
- The killjoy is unwilling to make others' happiness her cause
- Two senses of causality:
 - Bringing about certain effects
 - Something being pursued
 - These are both implied when feminists are diagnosed as "willful"
- The will is a "moral technology" (p. 75) — becoming willing as a way to relieve pressure
- The history of feminism becomes entangled with the history of diagnoses, of madness

Reclaiming Willfulness

- Being willing to be willful is a way to reclaim willfulness, historically used to dismiss feminists, queers, and antiracists
- Any will is willful if one is not supposed to have a will
- [Womanist](#) (Alice Walker) — derived specifically from (and is meant to be about) black culture
 - Can also extend to other feminists-of-color but we must remember the roots in black feminism
 - It's about loving connections between women
 - A womanist interpretation of *The Willful Child* would read the child as serious and responsible *because* she was willful
 - Seeing the girls becoming a woman by being willful
 - Education as a colonial tool; treating adults (women, slaves) as children
 - See the entire final paragraph on p. 80
- We must not turn "willfulness" into individualism or simply "againstness"
- Reclaiming "maladjustment" to an imperative not to adjust to an unjust world
 - Reclaiming willfulness does not mean reframing it as something positive
- Feminists can be seen as stopping the flow of conversation BUT ALSO black and POC feminists can be seen by white feminists as stopping the flow of feminist conversation; this is why feminism must center black women and women of color
 - We have to bring up racism within feminism, which requires willfulness

Conclusion: A Feminist Army

- The arm as an embodiment of hope, of a spark, of suspension

- Persistence can be disobedience (in which case, to exist can be disobedient)
- The Grimm story teaches that being willful/disobedient is lonely and unsupported; in response to this, we can form “a feminist army” (p. 84)
 - A call to arms?
 - That the limb is an arm is significant
 - Supporting those who do not support the unjust social order
 - This is how we become willful subjects
 - Relation to capitalism (p. 85) in that laborers arms are “owned” by the employers, who free their own arms by employing others’ arms—also, [the raised fist was an remains the international symbol for revolutionary labor movements](#) — labor is a feminist issue
 - WOC, migrant/immigrant women, women who care for others’ children as well as their own have “*become the arms for other women whose time and energy has been freed*” (p. 85)
 - Feminism cannot simply replace some womens’ arms with other womens’ arms
- A feminist does not lend a hand; she curls a fist
- “it is those women who have to insist on being women, those who have to insist willfully on being part of the feminist movement, sometimes with a show of their arms, who offer the best hope for a feminist revolution” (p. 88)
 - Val’s comment (not in the text): example used by Ahmed is Sojourner Truth/black women/slaves--we see this similar struggle today with trans women

PART II: Diversity Work

- This section of the book focuses on being a feminist at work
- Ahmed’s work background is in universities
- As feminists, we often work at/for/with organizations that are not feminist, and we acquire new commitments based on what is not being done
 - We end up working to transform the places where we work
 - Often organizations use language to espouse their commitments to diversity/equality, but there is no substance behind those claims (if this particularly interests you, look into the work of [Kylie Message](#))
- See p. 90 for her crediting the work of others for her own work in this area as a WOC academic
- Ahmed urges us to share our stories of how we arrive & progress; how we “enter, exit, move forward, get stuck” (p. 90)
- Within universities specifically, the “natives” are hetero white cis men
 - WOC academics participate but also observe, like ethnographers, since they are often perceived as not belonging
 - Ahmed has an entire book on this: [On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life](#)
- Ahmed here defines diversity work in a few ways:

- The work we do when trying to transform institutions
- The work we do when we do not adhere to the norms of an institution
- Diversity work = feminist theory
- Messy work that generates sweaty concepts

Chapter 4: Trying to Transform

- This chapter is on the effort to transform an existence and/or an institution
 - She means transforming institutions by opening them up to those who have been traditionally excluded
- Ahmed is committed to praxis, in that she thinks we best learn about institutions in the process of trying to transform them
- This chapter draws on her own experiences, informal conversations, and formal interviews
- Ahmed claims that rather than theory informing her practice, her lived experience (practice) informs her theory
- Trying to intervene in the reproduction of power means we have to think differently
- There is an assumption that time to think/contemplate is time taken away from acting (especially in academia)
 - Strategy seen as opposed to thinking but can be thinking in action
 - We must accept our complicity when we think strategically

Working the System

- Institutions can task individuals to transform the institution, when really the institution is unwilling to be transformed
- Diversity becomes about compliance
- [Race Relations \(Amendment\) Act 2000 \(c. 34\)](#) (UK)
- Diversity workers embody diversity work; institutions see appointing diversity workers as doing diversity work (and it often ends there)
 - Institutions are more concerned with appearing willing to be transformed, than they are actually willing to be transformed
 - The task of the diversity worker is to make themselves obsolete
 - If the institution were really equal and diverse, the diversity worker would be necessary
 - Diversity workers = communications workers
 - Getting the right information to the right destination
 - You need more paths when most paths are blocked
 - “Institutional plumbers” (p. 96) — seeing where and how things get stuck
 - “Institutional killjoys” (p. 99)
- Diversity work is less supported than other work, so diversity workers must be persistent
 - Persistence is necessary because the institution is resistant
 - Persistence becomes a requirement of the job
- The institution as a brick wall/a job description as a brick wall

- Doing diversity work feels like coming up against (banging one's head against) something tangible, solid, immovable
- The fact that the systems cannot be transformed is proof that the system is working

Strategic Work

- Diversity work is [trying](#) in all senses of the word
 - Trying to accomplish it
 - Difficult
 - Trying on/trying out different styles and methods
- “much of what counts as diversity work for organizations is not about structural transformation: diversity is often a technique for rearranging things so organizations can appear in a better or happier way” (p. 98)
- Words become tools that are less effective the more you use them
- Like the feminist killjoy from chapter 1, the diversity worker is perceived as causing the problem when they simply point out the problem
 - In this case, diversity work becomes about managing the image of diversity work
 - Some diversity workers aim to be perceived as aligned with the institution even as they attempt to transform it
 - Using the language of diversity (rather than that of equality) can be a way to pander, to avoid confrontation
 - Others may see it as a way to get through peoples' defences
- A non-threatening strategy does less, gives up in a way, uses language that is less threatening and can accomplish less (like using “diversity” but not “racism”)
- Ahmed draws a parallel between the image of diversity as a shiny red apple with a rotten core, and [Betty Friedan](#)'s image of a smiling housewife hiding infection
 - “The labor of creating shiny surfaces” (p 102)
 - Removes traces of labor
 - Diversity work as “institutional polishing” — “shiny surface is how an institution can reflect back a good image to itself” (p. 102)
 - Some diversity workers polish, others tarnish (different approaches/strategies)

Sending Things Out

- What diversity workers introduce to unblock a system can be used to re block the system
 - This is why Ahmed says our theory should come from our embodied work
- Diversity is often used as PR
 - Changing the image of whiteness instead of the whiteness itself, for example
- [Equality Act 2010](#) (UK)
- “Marshmallow feeling” (p 104): a feeling that we are doing enough or well enough, that there is nothing left to do
- Writing documents becomes a substitute for action
 - A family of documents
 - A paper trail

- However a positive is that we can show institutions their own documents to show them they aren't doing what they said they would
- “Non-performativity” (p. 106) — when a yes can be said because the “weight of the past will not allow that yes to acquire the force needed to bring something into effect”. When naming something does not bring it into effect; when something is named *in order not to* bring something into effect

Pushy Work

- Diversity workers have an [oblique](#) relation to their institution
- Gap between what institutions say and do
- When one person in an organization become the equity person, then no one else has to
- You have to choose to attend to equality or it will not be attended to
- Mainstreaming does not work; there need to be specific officers and offices who keep pushing for equality
- Pushing has a unique affective and temporal quality; it strains temporality because the pusher is straining for a future
 - Diversity work is pushy--one must push against what already is
 - Feminists must push, must be pushy
 - See p. 109 for bodies/making adjustments for accessibility/access as pedagogy
- “Feminist work in addressing institutional failure is appropriated as evidence of institutional success” (p. 111)
- Feminists in the academy:
 - Have tried to change curricula for the last few decades
 - Have shown how the university often = men’s studies
 - Certain language and/or bodies are not admitted into the university
 - The universal allows for some bodies to pass through--white men has become an institution
 - There is the collective illusion that feminism has already been accomplished
 - Some bodies are kept out (excluded) by the fantasy that they have been included
 - Even where there has been progress (such as diversifying curricula) it is fragile and reverses when we stop pushing
 - “Women’s studies as a project is not over until universities cease to be men’s studies” (p. 112)
- “We have to shake the foundations. But when we shake the foundations, it is harder to stay up” (p. 113)
- “If we cannot sustain the labor required for some things to be, they cannot be” (p. 113)
 - This is exhausting

Conclusion: Diversity Work as Willful Work

- Diversity work is willful because there is resistance to it
- Spaces are shaped by the bodies inhabiting them; so, making spaces accessible is registered as an imposition on those who were there first
- The more we are blocked, the more inventive we must become

- If accessibility information is difficult to find out about, it is not accessible (access becomes inaccessible)
- *Whether or not they aim to modify the system*, diversity becomes work for those who are not accommodated by it (this is where we turn to in the next chapter)

Chapter 5: Being in Question

- This chapter is on existence itself becoming an effort [to transform institutions]
- Work done by those who do not inhabit the norms of an organization (just by being)
 - Norms are things that can be inhabited--thinking of them as spaces/dwellings
 - So not inhabiting or not fully inhabiting a norm can feel like not easily dwelling even in a place you reside
 - Norms are maintained by exclusion/othering (see [Butler's abjection](#))
- To be in question is exhausting because it turns being into trying
 - Existence as political labor
- Being in question (having one's being questioned) is often about "passing" → passing through, passing as something one is not or is assumed not to be

Where Are You From?

- I find an echo of [Foucault](#) in this section
- Life is temporary since we are all born and we all die; this makes us all temporary residents of the world (we pass through the world)
 - Some are stopped as they try to pass, made to give an account of themselves
- To be questioned is to be questionable is to feel like one resides in a question is to feel like one is not where they are
- Being asked "where are you from?" = being told "you are not from here" (questions working as assertions)
- Brownness is seen as foreign, as elsewhere, as something that must be explained/accounted for
- "When you are stopped, a right to stop you is asserted. In being assertive, such speech acts render you questionable, as someone who can be questioned, as someone who should be willing to receive a question. A body can become a question mark...Some do not get stopped, some can move along, because how they appear is consistent with an expectation of what or who is here" (p. 117)
 - Being questioned in this way is being made into a stranger
 - The *not from here* is seen as endangering the *from here*
- Race is complicated and hierarchical
 - Ahmed uses the example of a white woman being bronzed but not brown
 - "Polite racism" (p. 118) presumes whiteness
 - Colorblindness says race: of color but white=not of color
 - "I don't see race" = "I don't see people of color"
 - POC then have to assert their brownness in order to be seen
- Intersectionality is embodied & messy

- Ahmed uses an example of being stopped by police in Australia (p. 118-119)
- [Crosscurrents. Crosstalk: Race, 'postcoloniality' and the Politics of Location](#) by Ruth Frankenberg & Lata Mani
 - Individual histories are shaped by longer histories of colonization
 - Locations are unstable
 - You are in or out depending on whom encounters whom
- Ahmed says she is talking about doors when she is talking about passing, and doors are both physical things and mechanisms
- When one's legitimacy is in question, one has to work to pass
 - Example: trans women
 - Sometimes one has to pass to stay safe from harassment
 - Passing can mean confidence creating an impression that one has a right to be where one is

Being a Question

- One can live their life as a question, can feel questionable, can be questioned all the time
 - "You feel like a question mark; you feel marked by questions" (p. 120)
- Sister as euphemism or obfuscation of lesbian
 - A relationship as a willful object
- Those in heterosexual relationships aren't asked to explain themselves
 - Deviation must be explained
 - Others are asked to give an accounting of themselves
 - There is a lot of word play in this chapter (as in the rest of the book!). Notice Ahmed's language: "accounting" indicates price/costs; being "unhoused" by gender/gender as accommodation; somethings functioning "as straightening devices"
- Ahmed mentions another of her books, [Queer Phenomenology](#)
- The pronoun as personal & political struggle: p. 122
 - Political correctness as a demand
 - Seen or felt as an imposition by some who are therefore against it
- "the desire for a more normal life does not necessarily mean identification with norms, but can be a desire to avoid the exhaustion of having to insist just to exist" (p. 122)
- The politics of comfort
 - It can be uncomfortable to not fit existing norms
 - The metaphor of the chair (p. 123)
 - Heteronormativity
 - Queer people asked not to or choose not to make others uncomfortable by displaying their queerness
- "What's wrong?" as a question about what's up, why you're down, even if you're not, indicating that something is wrong with you even if you think/feel it isn't, can be a medical question, baby not having anything wrong—>disabled babies becoming strangers in their own families by not being "right" (p. 124)

- See the [social model of disability](#); Ahmed doesn't use the term but she uses and seems to endorse the concept

Institutional Work

- Those who do not appear consistent with the norms of an institution embody diversity
 - Misfits
 - “Space invaders” (Nirmal Puwar, 2004)
 - Square peg in a round hole
 - Incongruities
- The institution as a garment (p. 125)
 - Privilege as something easier to wear; as an energy-saving device
 - The multiple meanings of the word [wear](#)
- Some are given their due based on their social group; others have to insist on it and then they are seen as self-promoting
- Institutional passing: last paragraph of p. 127
- Proximity to whiteness, proximity as inheritance, discomfort in not fitting, pretending to be something you are not but also the discomfort of pretending not to notice that you are not what was expected
- Even if someone who is outside the norms of an institution is welcomed in, that implies that they are a guest or stranger
 - Connection between the words [welcome](#) and [will](#)
 - Meaning of the word [precarious](#)
- Difference interpreted as willful, disruptive, disturbing, rocking the boat
- Managing your own body and self so as not to appear how you are expected to appear (negative stereotypes)
 - Softening one's appearance so as not to appear threatening, so as not to fulfill a stereotype
 - Work to not appear aggressive before you even appear
 - Maximizing the distance between how one appears and the stereotype/expectation
 - “Diversity work: when you have to try to make others comfortable with the fact of your own existence” (p. 131)
 - This section talks a lot in particular about race
 - It is also about the Feminist Killjoy: smiling as an apology for existing

Conclusion: Questioning Being

- “I am” —> “am I?”
 - Questions as murmurs, as hovering, as a weight we can feel
- Privilege as a buffer zone, a place without questions
- What Ahmed calls diversity work includes “transforming questions into catalog” (p. 132)
 - Accumulation of questions
 - Cumulative effect on those questioned
- Worlds can open up when we are uncomfortable

- reorientation/disorientation
 - Much political work begins with moments of disorientation
 - Disorientation: failed orientation
- Something can be present by being missing (example of a vase missing from a mantelpiece)
- Disorientation as bodies becoming objects sealed by whiteness (p. 133)
 - Whiteness assumed to be universal

Chapter 6: Brick Walls

- This chapter is on what we learn from our existence and/or our efforts to transform an existence--Ahmed uses the brick wall as a metaphor for power that we come up against and she thinks through what this means about the materiality of power
- The less you conform to “the norm” the more likely you are to be made to labor on committees aimed at addressing DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion)
 - Those NOT asked to be on the committees then have more time to do more highly-valued labor for the institution (and receive the attendant rewards for that work)
- Meeting points as laboring points
- Diversity workers (the majority of whom are diverse themselves) can never “just be” (they must always be DOING)
- Walls, brick walls, institutional walls
 - Banging one’s head against them
 - This metaphor was used by many people Ahmed interviewed
 - “hardening of histories into barriers in the present”
 - Taking walls seriously can teach us about [materialism](#) & about how history becomes concrete--she is speaking of walls as metaphors but also more literally
- Diversity work meeting in our bodies and at the wall

Hard Histories

- “A wall is what you come up against. It is a physical contact; a [visceral](#) encounter” (p. 136)
- What Ahmed says we need to do:
 - Understand the mechanisms at work
 - Make any impasse/blockage an opportunity to THINK
 - Learn from the struggle
- Agreeing to something can stop something from happening
- What does Ahmed mean by “what stops movement moves” (p. 137)?
- Although the wall is metaphorical, it is having the same effect that a literal wall would have
 - The wall only comes up *in response* to attempted change
 - The wall has its own job description (because it serves a purpose)
- Others can not see something or they can be invested in not seeing it

- Multiple meanings of the word [hard](#); again, Ahmed uses them all
- Encounters between things is what harness and diversity work are all about
 - Because the wall keeps its place, it is the person who throws themselves against it that gets sore or hurt
- Diversity work generates its own data
- Intangibility becomes a problem for diversity workers
 - For example how to locate the problem of sexual harassment (see p. 139-141)
- Institutional diversity often becomes about damage control
- Patterns experienced as weight--the weight of history
- Ahmed does not use the term "rape culture" but she writes "a culture is built around this affection, which is to say: harassers are enabled by being forgiven, as if their vice is our virtue" (p. 141)
- What follows from the earlier idea that to expose a problem is to become the problem, people who don't come up against walls perceive those who talk about walls as wall-makers
 - The feminist killjoy seen as a wall-maker; she makes things harder for herself and others
- "What is the hardest for some does not even exist for others" (p. 142)

A Life Description

- ...can be a wall description or a job description
- Perception, phantom walls, being stopped by other's perceptions
- BLM/Trayvon Martin are discussed: "some bodies are in an instant as suspicious, or as dangerous, as objects to be feared, a judgment that is lethal. There can be nothing more dangerous to a body than the social agreement that that body is dangerous...it is dangerous to be perceived as dangerous" (p. 143)
 - "The unarmed black man is seen as armed whether or not he is armed. He is seen as armed; seen as arm. The wayward arm makes another appearance. You become arm when your whole body is perceived as a potential weapon" (p. 144)
- "Racism is a blunt instrument" (p. 144)
- Walls as borders/borders as walls
 - These walls are any/everywhere if you know you can be stopped at any time
 - Whiteness as a wall
- P. 147 for discussion on reactions to those who make it through/past walls
- Social categories precede bodily encounters

Academic Walls

- Ahmed turns to a more niche discussion here because it's through her diversity work in universities that she says she learned about walls
 - She says she is mostly referring to the diversity work of pointing out the race and sex of who is cited and who is asked to speak at events
 - She wants us to "create a crisis around citation" (p. 148)
- By pointing out, you become a sore point

- By noticing a restriction you become the restriction (this is a motif throughout the book)
 - By describing the structure of something you are seen to impose that structure
- Furthering the traffic metaphor: a book will just open to any page (it's random; there's no structure) but a book in reality will open to pages that have been the most read
- **"Sexism:** women as existing only in relation to men; women as female relatives" (p. 150)
- Passivity is only a masculine virtue when men are justifying sexism
- Intentions aren't enough when it comes to ending sexism and racism
- "Disciplinary fatalism: the assumption that we can only reproduce the lines that are before us" (p. 150)
 - It will be this way --> it is this way
- Good intentions + bad feelings
 - The histories of racism & sexism: I feel bad so I mean well
 - Feminist messages received as shaming/moralizing
- "The genealogy remains the same despite or even through the extension of an invitation to somebody who is not part of that genealogy. Inviting those who are not white to insert themselves into whiteness can be how whiteness is reinserted" (p. 151)
 - Also meant to keep people (cis white men especially) comfortable
- "Sexism: how women are introduced only to be passed over" (p. 152)
- Many are invested in not seeing/acknowledging racism/sexism
- Hearing racism or sexism as an accusation is a way to dismiss racism/sexism
- Systems work because they obscure themselves
- Distribution of labor reproduces sexism and racism

Conclusion: The Master's Residence

- She returns here to the Grimm story of the willful girl and Lorde's "master's house"
 - Walls keep the master's residence standing
 - Those who have been "given residence" don't even notice the walls until we push against them

PART III: Living the Consequences

- This section explores the consequences of being a feminist
 - How can we handle mockery and other hostile responses
- Almost like a [koan](#): We need feminism to handle what is directed toward us as feminists
 - **"Feminism: what we need to handle the consequences of being feminist"** (p. 162)
 - We can become worn out, worn down, but can also find energy and resources to keep going
- The next three chapters deal with [fragility](#) specifically, but in different ways
 - Histories can bring us to feminism but can also leave us fragile

Chapter 7: Fragile Connections

- This chapter explores the thread of fragility connecting things deemed breakable
- Shattering [against walls] is a cost of our fragility
- Fragility = the “wear and tear of living a feminist life” (p. 163)
- Survival takes effort
- When speaking of “feeling depleted” Ahmed is talking about a material and embodied phenomenon of not having energy to continue
- Double entendre: wearing (like clothing, like whiteness) and wearying (like being made weary by something (like whiteness))
 - How do we protect ourselves from being worn down?

Fragile Things

- Willfulness correlated to “scenes of breakage” (p. 164)
 - Examples from George Eliot novels
 - Willfulness as an archive of shared experience
 - Can be catching/contagious/a chain reaction
 - Can be a stopping device
- “Clumsiness might provide us with a queer ethics. Such an ethics attends to the bumpiness of living with difference, so often experienced as a difference in time; being too slow or too fast, out of time” (p. 166)
 - Equality = a bumpy ride

Fragile Relationships

- Fragile = breakable
- Gender fatalism, racial fatalism, queer fatalism
- “in a mixed [race] relationship, one whose legitimacy is already insecure, a breakup acquires a certain meaning: a breakup becomes what we were heading for right from the beginning” (p. 168) — more fatalism
- Pressure on queers to make their relationships work—they can take this on as a project because a queer life is presumed to be unhappy (need to prove that being queer=being happy)
- Politics is what happens to you (us)
- Fragility connected to doubt, self-doubt, lack of confidence, wavering will, questioning oneself
- Sometimes connections that matter can only be sustained by giving up something else that matters (like our values)
 - “A feminist politics of fragility might be based not only on how to survive³ what we come up against but how to enable relationships to endure that can easily be threatened by what we come up against” (p. 172)
- Anger can be misdirected
 - But as feminist killjoys we do NOT aspire to “mature” out of being angry
- Feminists lives are not linear

- Things can wind us up without us letting ourselves get wound up (this is a positive example of maturing) — taking more time, making room for yourself — wiggle room
- Struggling to NOT fulfill an expectation can enact that expectation
- Confirmation bias is ordinary — not hearing because you think you know
- Feminism & activism involve recognizing that we can also be the problem (example: transphobic feminists)

Fragile Shelters

- “When walls are not revealed it can appear as if we are shattering ourselves” (p. 175)
- It’s hard to build anything when the grounds are not our own
- Feminist shelters are fragile
 - Women’s Studies as a fragile dwelling because we are building it on a foundation we also want to destroy
- You have less time to do things inside the building when you are constantly working on the building itself
- Fighting for existence shapes encounters between people
 - Many feminist spaces are still racist
 - WOC are seen as interrupting when they bring up race
 - Talking about racism in feminist spaces can be killing feminist happiness
- Lorde & hooks teach us how being hurt can be a way to make it about oneself (see [White Tears](#))
- People don’t want to use difficult words like racism because of their potential to break connections

Fragile Bodies

- Fragility derives from fraction — breaking into pieces
- Ahmed suggests a new orientation to the idea of breaking, one that values broken things and especially broken bodies
- Breaking can cause a gain, not just loss
 - Segways into talking about disability politics
 - Able-bodied privilege means not even to think about disability
- Clumsiness as crip/queer ethics — we need to make a world that is not just made for able-bodied people
- Bodies can be walls
 - Your body can stop you
 - A body can “go on strike” by getting in our way (our own way)
- Broken arm as queer kin to the willful arm
- Disabled people are seen as in the way because they are bad for morale

Conclusion: The Fragments Assemble

- A queer crip army = joining forces of those who are bad for morale
- The words crip and queer have a negative charge but because of this they have potential
 - They are willful words

- Make people wince — making people wince is a way to shake things up
- There is nothing more willful than refusing to be aspirational
 - Refusal to appear to be whole, to cover what is missing, to hide disability
- “Those who have to harden to survive can hurt each other by what they have to do to be” (p. 185) — this is referencing Lorde
 - Hardness for Lorde is how we live WITH fragility
- **Feminism: on the way to becoming something else** (p. 186)

Chapter 8: Feminist Snap

- This chapter is Ahmed thinking about breaking points as places we want to reach
 - Breaking points can be good or bad
- Background as orienting devices—where we have been but also where we could go (revisiting the idea of paths from Ch. 2)
 - Inheritance
 - Refusing an inheritance is a breaking point
- Breaking points = feminist snaps
- There is a politics to damage, to where damage is located

Snapful

- Three films from the 1980s that Ahmed says are feminist are discussed in this chapter:
 - [A Question of Silence \(1982\)](#)
 - [9 to 5 \(1980\)](#)
 - [Born in Flames \(1983\)](#)
- She wants to think through snap as a verb (see p. 188 for lots of meanings of the word)
 - Snaps are sensational (what do they sound like? What is its speed? etc.)
- Resilience is a way of taking more [pressure/oppression]
- A snap is a reaction but it is often interpreted as a [violent] action
- **“Feminism: it has bite; she bites”** (p. 190)
- **“Feminism: a history of willful tongues”** (p. 191)
- **“Feminism: that which infects a body with a desire to speak in ways other than how you have been commanded to speak”** (p. 191)
- Feminist killjoys live/work in contact zones
 - Reminder that the feminisist killjoy only appears once she’s been rubbed the wrong way
 - Thinking of feminist histroy as a history of “snappy women”
 - Example of [Jane Eyre](#)
 - Willful tongues
- Snap as alternative genealogy
 - In traditional genealogy, a snap can be the end of a line (like when a woman doesn't have children)
 - A feminist snap here can mean beginning again/anew

Snap the Bond

- Bonds can sustain or get in the way of living a feminist life
- Two ways to experience relief from pressure:
 - Succumbing to pressure to go or be a certain way (ch. 2)
 - Snapping a bond
- Snaps can be seen as violence or even self-violence because they can be interpreted as cutting oneself off from a connection — but sometimes that is helpful to us, not harmful
 - Discussion of the idea of “cruel optimism” (p. 195)
- Ahmed says we should always be asking ourselves how to live (not to assume we have it figured out)
- Returns to a discussion of the word/concept *happiness*
 - Positive/good connotations (moral)
 - How did happiness lose its [hap](#)? (happen, perhaps, happenstance)
 - Finding purpose once you’re already wandering— a queer path, a “hap walk” (p. 197)
 - We can proceed without the assumption that there is a correct direction to go in
- A feminist life becomes about keeping open the question “how should we live?”
- Antifeminists often position feminists as self-harming
- We cannot give up bonds without giving up part of ourself or part of our history
- Snap as feminist pedagogy = snaps signaling that it is (or has become) too much to bear or sustain
- Snapping is not always planned but it does always involve conscious resistance
 - Resigning sounds passive but it can be active resistance (refusal to reproduce what came before/continues now)
- Snapping can be optimistic in that it does not worry about the future

Collective Snap

- To hear snaps one must slow down
- “We listen for the sounds of the costs of becoming attuned to the requirements of patriarchy” (p. 200)
- Silence functions as a wall but feminist ears can hear past it
- Laughter can be willful, rebellious
- **Feminism: when we refuse to get used to it** (p. 206)
- Does our sense of being responsible for men stop us from starting over?
- Sexual harassment is material
- Collective snap can lead to connections between feminists but also vice versa
- Impatience — as feminists we are often told to be patient and if we are impatient, we are seen as snatching away our own future that would have come about if only we’d been patient (of course, that is a lie)
 - We must not wait!
 - No one should be asked to wait in our feminist revolution

- Feminist snap is required to raise the sound of protest to the story (the Grimm story mentioned earlier, which here Ahmed zooms out to show how it is also a story of the state [nation state] and state repression/oppression)
- Vigil related to vigilante
 - Mourning the wrong body (e.g. [SAY HER NAME](#))
 - So much violence is invisible — we fight to make it visible (knowable.)

Conclusion: Snap to It

- Feminist revolt is seen as intending to cause mayhem, even though it's not
 - It does maybe cause mayhem, but that is not its purpose
- Snap as will, as feminist fate, hopefulness, feminist communication system
- Feminist snap is collective labor and is necessary
 - It's what is necessary to bring things to the surface, as a situation "that should not be patiently endured, as a situation that demands our collective impatience" (p. 211)
- [Sisters Uncut](#)
 - Intersections are exhausting, frustrating and painful
 - Sisters have the right to self-identify
 - Sisterhood is snap

Chapter 9: Lesbian Feminism

- Ahmed wrote this chapter because she is convinced we must revive [lesbian feminism](#) (also known as radical feminism)
- She identifies its main critiques (that led to it becoming passe) as separating lived life from political struggle and Ahmed wants to reunite these two things, which she does not see as separate
 - Ahmed disagrees in that to her, when we struggle for our life, we struggle against the larger structure

Heterogender as Wall

- There is a lot of baggage in the connection between "feminist" and "lesbian" (to be one you are or must be the other, for example)
- Ahmed writes as a feminist and as a lesbian and says that being a lesbian is how she lives a feminist life
- Life as data collection; Ahmed does not distinguish between theory and lived experience
- A flow is an obstruction if it's not going in the direction you want to go
- traffic /flow becomes a wall —> Heterogender becomes a wall
- Queer experience can mean not appearing because you're not appearing in an expected way
 - Queer bodies turned into spectacles
 - For lesbians it's particularly bad because men in general get more attention and respect (the unequal distribution of attention)
 - Gender is at stake here

- Women are relative (as in, men's relations, as in, not universal)
- Ahmed identifies compulsory heterosexuality as citing men— back to the idea of crisis of citation)
- Men are at the head of tables — a table full of women is a body without a head
- Small actions accumulate over time — they can become a wall — they chip away at us (us here being lesbian feminists in particular)

An Ordinary Battle

- Ordinariness can be lost when one has to fight to be ordinary
- Film discussed: [If These Walls Could Talk 2 \(2000\)](#)
- Family (not friends) are seen as the only valuable relationships
 - This has many implications, only one of which is that lesbians dismissed as friends are not recognized as important to each other
- Heterosexuality is an elaborate support system (like class is)
 - Queer people must create their own support systems
- Queer spaces provide wiggle room

A Willfulness Archive

- This refers to an archive of what lesbian feminists come up against — what they must be willful in order to chip away at (the heteropatriarchy)
- Sexism and homophobia are often ironic and even playful — that doesn't make them fun
- “Lesbian feminism: the actualization of a potential we have to make things” (p. 223)
- The history of women is impossible to detangle from the history of wives (the word itself deriving from wife and also women being in relation to men and *for* men)
 - Therefore to create a world for women we need to transform what being women means
 - Calls into question whether lesbians are women in the historical sense (if they are, they are definitely willful)
- The lesbian figure might inherit too much of the idea of queerness (as in, there's nothing more queer than a woman with another woman)
- **“Lesbian feminism: how we revolt; how we become revolting”** (p. 224)
- The lesbian herself as a feminist snap (a breaking point) embodying the collective rage of women
- Becoming lesbian means redirecting energy away from primary relationships with men
- Dykes are frightening lesbians because they aren't afraid of militancy
- Becoming women in a new way requires a reorientation (reorienting away from men as primary validators)
 - Ahmed means that she wants women to stop identifying with male culture; to withdraw energy away from men
 - She warns that this will be pathologized as a hatred of men (this is why lesbians are seen as man-haters)
- The sex-gender system is restrictive and coercive
- We must not reduce willfulness to individualism

- This is not what we mean by willfulness, and it's a way to dismiss willfulness (by misinterpreting what we mean)
- White lesbian feminists weren't always welcoming lesbian feminists of color
 - There were brown lesbians throughout history, even if they were not seen
- Writing as something wilful, alive, vital, connection, bleeding, the physicality of the book and the connection with its writer or with the story or the characters
 - The erotic, love
 - Poetry
 - Audre Lorde & Cherrie Moraga
- "To stand against what is, we make room for what is not. Or even: we are for what is not" (p. 231)
 - Ahmed hopes she has shown that lesbian feminist world building is ordinary— it is sitting around kitchen tables, it is writing, it is in ordinary conversation
 - We can be warmed by the work even if/when we wish it weren't so much work
 - We build shelters; we become each other's' building blocks
- The vitality of lesbian feminism is a resource for the present
- Universities remain men's studies, therefore the time for women's studies is not over

Conclusion: Intersectionality is Army

- Lesbian feminism = willful carpentry
 - Butch arms are strong
 - Arms can be gendering assignments
- Passing (or not) is often traumatic
- "The arm can be the fleshy site of a disagreement" (p. 233)
 - The wayward arm = a call to arms
- Many women throughout history (and now) have had to insist on being women before they were allowed to be part of feminism (black women, trans women, etc.)
- Being anti trans is anti women; we must drown anti trans voices out, raising our voices, our voices becoming our arms

Conclusion 1: A Killjoy Survival Kit

- It can feel like being a feminist is making life harder for oneself
- What we learn from our experiences can be used to survive the experiences
- Survival here means continuing on living, but also continuing to keep our commitments
 - Survival can mean keeping hope alive
 - Survival can mean protest
 - Survival is a political struggle
 - Feminism needs feminists in order to survive, and we need each other to survive
 - Feminists also need feminism to survive
 - Some of us more than others have to be inventive to survive

- To be a feminist means we must do this work, which means we must find a way to share the burden of the work so we can all keep going; survival is thus a shared feminist project
- We each make our own survival kits but we can peer into others' for ideas and inspiration and to learn about them
- The point of the kit is not only what is it in, but its very existence
- Privilege = a buffer zone, reduced vulnerability
- Privilege ≠ invulnerable
- We want to avoid making feminist self-care into a neoliberal ideal of individual resilience
 - Audre Lorde helps us distinguish between self-care as political act and self-care as selfish (turning away from politics): self-care is not about happiness, but rather about *finding a way to continue existing in a world that makes it difficult to exist*
 - This is VERY OFTEN misinterpreted and misappropriated when people and brands speak of and market “self-care”
 - This is why self-care is unnecessary for the top of the hierarchy (typically white, cis, hetero men) — the world takes care of them, so they do not need to take care of themselves
 - You have to affirm some lives when the world says they do no matter (see [#blacklivesmatter](#))
 - “In directing our care toward ourselves, we are redirecting care away from its proper objects; we are not caring for the bodies deemed worth caring about. And that is why in queer, feminist, and antiracist work, self-care is about the creation of community...We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday, and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other” (p. 240)
- Racial capitalism = an unequal distribution of bodily vulnerabilities
 - The more precarious one is, the more support one needs, but the less one has
 - Fragility can be an effort to hold on, which can be militant
 - Racism as an attack on the body
 - One's body feeling like it has turned on you— this is why self-care is preservation, not indulgence

1. Item 1: Books

- Words pick us up when we are down
- Feminist books propel us, teach us, kick us
- Wherever you go, bring them with you

2. Item 2: Things

- Happy objects
- Reminders of our connections, shared struggles, shared lives

3. Item 3: Tools

- Means to an end
- How we extend our reach and find our communities

4. Item 4: Time

- Time off from being a killjoy is necessary if we are to persist in being killjoys
- 5. Item 5: Life**
 - Being present, enjoying nature and pets and food
 - Letting life in, in all its contingencies
- 6. Item 6: Permission Notes**
 - You can choose your battles, but sometimes battles choose you
 - There is only so much you can do
 - You can leave
 - You can grieve
 - Take “sick days”
 - Be willful in your not willingness
- 7. Item 7: Other Killjoys**
 - This is not about your community, but about finding others who truly understand your experience because they share it
 - This helps us remember too that we can be part of the problem or just plain wrong sometimes
 - Not about being on the same side, but about remaining vigilant
- 8. Item 8: Humor**
 - Laughter can lighten the load
 - We can laugh at the absurdity of it all
 - To laugh at something makes it more real and magnified, but it can also reduce its power over us
- 9. Item 9: Feelings**
 - Emotions are a resource we can draw on
 - Emotions stir things up
 - Sometimes we don’t know what an emotion is even as we are experiencing it
 - It is ok to be sad and angry!
- 10. Item 10: Bodies**
 - We can feel down, we can be worn down
 - Bodies must be nourished and fed; they (we) are vulnerable and we must listen to them
 - Movement can affirm our bodies
 - Eroticism— finding joy in being a killjoy
 - Feminist diet = nourished by feminism
 - Killjoys are not joyless; it is ok to experience joy! (But don’t aspire to joyfulness)

And Finally: A Killjoy Survival Kit

- We are our own survival kits
- The project is ongoing
- Manifestos can also go in our kits
- To write your won feminist manifesto, you must first read other [feminist manifestos](#), which can be fun!

Conclusion 2: A Killjoy Manifesto

- She notes the example of the [SCUM Manifesto](#)
- Manifestos are or can be:
 - Feminist snaps
 - Mission statements/statements of principles
 - Commitments
 - The genre of the killjoy
 - Projects
 - Personal
 - Handles
 - Outstretched hands
- Manifestos are required, Ahmed says, “when a struggle is necessary to give expression to something” (p. 252)
- Literalism as dismissal (p. 253)
- They make manifest—they enact what they call for
- A feminist killjoy as a manifesto
- Makes an appeal but is not appealing (except to killjoys)
- Feminist manifestos expose the violence of the patriarchy; they aim to disrupt/disturb
 - They must be grounded in reality/in an account of what exists (inequalities)
- Feminists call for the end of the system that “makes men” and that is often (mis)understood as wanting to kill men which makes men intent on killing feminism
 - In reality we want to end “white men” the institution (not literally murder the individuals)
- In being against happiness the feminist killjoy is assumed to be against life
- Principles as in “fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a chain of reasoning” but also as first, starting point
 - Living with feminist principles is not smooth nor easy; we bump into the world because it is not in accordance with our feminist principles

Ahmed's Killjoy Manifesto

1. **Principle 1:** I am not willing to make happiness my cause.
 - Being unwilling to do something just to make someone happy or keep the peace
2. **Principle 2:** I am willing to cause unhappiness.
3. **Principle 3:** I am willing to support others who are willing to cause unhappiness.
4. **Principle 4:** I am not willing to laugh at jokes designed to cause offence.
5. **Principle 5:** I am not willing to get over histories that are not over.
6. **Principle 6:** I am not willing to be included if inclusion means being included in a system that is unjust, violent, and unequal.
7. **Principle 7:** I am willing to live a life that is deemed by others as unhappy and I am willing to reject or to widen the scripts available for what counts as a good life.
8. **Principle 8:** I am willing to put the hap back into happiness.

9. **Principle 9:** I am willing to snap any bonds, however precious, when those bonds are damaging myself or others.
10. **Principle 10:** I am willing to participate in a Killjoy Movement.