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Talking About Race

Shifting the Analytical Paradigm

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This article examines patterns of common-sense knowledge about race to understand how race is made to appear both self-evident and inherently meaningful in daily interactions. It explores a new methodological imaginary by drawing strategically from ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis to examine the histories and the visions of power that rest beneath the surface of common-sense knowledge about race. Because common-sense knowledge links the production of meaning in local contexts to the broader production of cultural knowledge, it provides a key focal point for examining the dialogical relationship between the apparent agency of local practices and the efficacy of cultural discourse. The article concludes with implications for social research and social justice.

Keywords: *race; common sense; discourse analysis; textual analysis*

Scholars and activists have been writing about race for more than 200 years. Yet in the United States, race remains among the social paradoxes of the 21st century. Race is both central and submerged, both “unimportant” and “all consuming,” a social fabrication and a material reality. Although the presence of race exists as a familiar part of our social landscapes, the *meanings* of race remain conflicted and seemingly unrestrained by the demands of logic, proof, or coherence.

The ability of researchers to critique race cannot be separated from the tools we use to examine it. Research on race developed in the social sciences, much as it had in the “natural” sciences, as a legitimated form of knowledge about “the Other” produced by and for those in power (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004). We don’t need to look very hard to find studies of race that articulate more about dominant hierarchies of power than about the people and

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cultures being studied.¹ And it is clear that although W. E. B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells developed analytical strategies that can be understood to form the foundations of contemporary social constructionist analyses of race, much of their research was marginalized in the social construction of what could count as valid scientific knowledge. Racism in social sciences must be understood as having formed the epistemological ground from which we come to know about race (Ladson-Billings, 2003b). Consequently, in order challenge racism in social research, scholars also must challenge the nature of truth and reality that is linked to the epistemologies of social research more generally (Anzuldúa, 1987; Bernal, 2002; Canella & Lincoln, 2004; Denzin, 2002; Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2003a, 2003b; Pillow, 2000; Solóranzo & Yosso, 2002).

In the late 1960s, particularly in sociology, three successive analytical shifts challenged the existing essentialist framework and produced paradigmatic changes to the positivist epistemological foundations of studies about race: social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1994; Roediger, 1991, 1994; Saxton, 1971, 1990; Wellman 1993), and critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1991, 1992; Lopez, 1996; Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Furthermore, ethnomethodology (West & Fenstermaker, 1995, 1999) used an empirical foundation to demonstrate how race categories are produced as interactional accomplishments. Outside of sociology, a fourth epistemological shift, inaugurated by the Cultural Turn, made a radical departure from existing studies on race by examining the discursive construction of race (Appiah, 1985; Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Denzin, 2002; Derrida, 1982; Johnson, 2003; Mirón & Inda, 2000; Pratt, 1985). This article is epistemologically grounded in this later body of literature. To understand the performativity of race is to understand the processes through which racialization must constantly be achieved in interaction to be maintained in legal, economic, educational, and social structures. In effect, performative analyses of race demonstrate how discourse constitutes subjects as the bearers of social structures. Performatives “work” to the extent that their production covers over and naturalizes subjects’ recognition of themselves as a matter of common sense (Pascale, 2007).

Some scholars (Clarke, 2005; Denzin, 2001; Dunn, 1997) have suggested the usefulness of developing analytical strategies that combine poststructural and interactional frameworks, arguing that each in itself provides a partial, and therefore inadequate, analysis. This article takes up exactly this charge and uses standard analytic induction strategically inflected by the interpretive frameworks of ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse

analysis. Throughout, I attempt to develop what Solórzano and Yosso (2002) have called a critical race methodology, not only by foregrounding race in the research process, but also by examining how local practices articulate both a history and a vision of racialized power.

Ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis both examine— at different levels—how socially meaningful and apparently objective social worlds are produced through language. Whereas ethnomethodological analyses of texts and talk generally take the form of conversation analysis, in this article I take up ethnomethodology's broad concerns, such as common-sense knowledge and membership categories (Heritage, 1984; Sharrock & Anderson, 1986). I conduct a close textual analysis that is anchored to ethnomethodology's ontological premise that language is constitutive. I then situate my analysis of local contexts in broader cultural contexts by using poststructural discourse analysis to deconstruct the texts.

By using the cultural assumptions of common-sense knowledge about race as the focus of my analysis, I locate local practices within broader systems of cultural knowledge. Common sense is a saturation of cultural knowledge that we cannot fail to recognize and which, through its very obviousness, passes without notice. Ideological hegemony operates at the level of common sense—in the assumptions that we make about life and the things we accept as natural.² Common sense leads people to believe that we simply see what is there to be seen. For example, common sense leads us to believe that we simply “see” different races. I argue that the ability of race to appear to be a self-evident feature of daily life, a matter of common sense, speaks to how the history and the politics of race remain deeply submerged, yet easily readable in daily life. The invisible force of power becomes legible at the sites where discursive practices transform history into readable spaces. Because common-sense knowledge links production of meaning in local contexts to the broader production of cultural knowledge, it provides a key focal point for examining the dialogical relationship between the apparent agency of local practices and the efficacy of cultural discourse. There are many forms of common-sense knowledge—it is always culturally specific. I attempted to transcend the specificity of any one group through my data collection.

Methods

This article is based on analysis of 1,600 pages of interview transcript from 23 in-depth interviews with people from Northern and Central

California. (See the appendix for a complete list of interviewees and demographics.) I conducted purposive sampling of Web-based organizations, places of employment, homeless shelters, and occasionally used personal referrals to create a highly diverse group of interviewees. In selecting people to be interviewed, I focused on historically constituted categories of difference and included a cross-section of racial categories. Also included among those I interviewed are lesbians, bisexuals, people who immigrated as children to the United States, and others who were among the first-generation in their families to be born in the United States. I sought a balance of men and women and, in the interests of gender diversity, included transgendered women and men as well. In addition, I sought interviewees from a broad economic range including those who owned nothing more than what they carried with them to those with \$500 million in assets. Ages ranged from 23 to 71; some people were parents, and some were grandparents. Although it was impossible to avoid some categorical overlap among my interviewees (for instance, there are five White men) no two interviewees share categorical similarities across axes of race, class, and gender. I examined common-sense knowledge about race across this diverse group of people to better understand the cultural assumptions about race that cross routine categories of social difference in the U.S. At the end of each interview, I invited the interviewee to select a pseudonym that was consistent with his or her gender and racial identity. Whereas some people in the study elected not to use pseudonyms, most chose names they could easily remember; others—such as Captain Ahab and Cuauhtemoc—chose names with special symbolic significance. I attribute all quotes to these pseudonyms.

Beyond Reason: The Incoherence of Race

All of the people I interviewed talked about race in one of four ways: as a matter of color, nationality, culture, or blood. In this section, I explore the common-sense assumptions that underpin each of these conceptions of race. For instance, when people talked about race as physically visible color, the notion of color relied on taken-for-granted knowledge that initially appeared to be full of apparent contradictions. For example, Zach Mauro, who identified himself as Filipino, put it this way: “Well when I see race, it’s like I see colors. Black . . . it goes from White to nationalities, Spanish, European categories like that and then this way, African.” The way Zach talks about racial categories reflects the visual basis of his racial categorizations (“it’s

like I see colors”), yet beneath the surface of his talk, a common-sense understanding of race enables Zach to place color, nationality, and entire continents on a continuum, as if they are different degrees of the same thing. In addition, because Zach indicated “European” and “African” as racial groups, it seems possible that we can understand Zach’s reference to “Spanish” as marking a slide from “White” to White ethnic nationalities, rather than as a reference to Spain per se. In talk about race as visible “color,” categories such as African, European, and Spanish can *function* as racial categories only to the extent that these populations have had meaningful “color” attributed to them through historical, legal, and political processes of racialization. In this sense, Zach’s characterization of race as color relies on something quite different than simple visual recognition of skin color; inherent in Zach’s assertion of race as color is an unspoken knowledge of which nations, continents, and colors (and perhaps as well which language groups) comprise racially distinct colors of people. In my interviews, although race was talked about as differences in skin color, the logic of race as visible differences in skin color did not rely on color per se—not all differences, or similarities, in color were racialized differences. This is possible because, like all racial markers, color is not the property of bodies—that is, White people do not have white skin any more than Black people have black skin (cf., Frankenberg, 1997; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1991). For example, although Italians are no longer commonly considered a distinct racial group, Emerson Piscopo, an Italian American, mentioned several times during our interview that he did not consider Italians to be White.

Celine-Marie: Tell me about Italians not being White.

Emerson: Um, well, most of us have that olive dark skin [half laugh] dark skin.

Celine-Marie: Uh huh

Emerson: You know, I see White as being a really, as, as being, being really White, you know. Like somebody who’s not um of your, from European—like dark skin—I’m talking about dark skin, dark eyes, dark hair. I don’t see them as being White [laughing] you know. I don’t mean it in uh, you know, like it’s a bad thing, or necessarily a good thing, it’s just, it’s . . .

Emerson talks about race as skin tone; and, even as he asserts a racial distinction, he attempts to render that distinction meaningless (“I don’t mean it in uh, you know, like it’s a bad thing, or necessarily a good thing”). In Emerson’s talk, race emerges as matter of color, which is noteworthy and nuanced, but also substantively meaningless. It is this tension that points

to an unspoken/unspeakable importance of race. In addition, Emerson, by today's most common racial categories, appears to be White. However, as an Italian-American he is "not White" by his own definition and arguably by his own history.

The apparent cleavage between Emerson's identity and subjectivity carries potentially substantial consequences in terms of political and social alliances. Historically, Italians in the United States were considered racially distinct from "Whites." In the early 19th century, Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants faced exclusion in terms of housing and employment because they occupied an ambiguous position in relation to Whiteness (Roediger, 1994). However, they did not face antimiscegenation laws, restrictions on land ownership, citizenship, and immigration as did Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese immigrants. Nor did Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants experience the horrors of conquest and enslavement as did Mexicans, Africans, and Native Peoples. Hence Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants were not included in the institutionalization of non-White racial categories produced through conquest, enslavement, and through the refusal of citizenship, legal protection, and voting rights (Delgado, 1989; Harris, 1993; Winant, 1994). So although stories of exclusion may linger in family and community histories, for people like Emerson, today they are systematically held accountable for a White identity by institutions and in social interactions. If it seems unlikely that institutions hold people accountable for hegemonic productions of Whiteness, consider the expression *White trash* as a sign of cultural failure—the failure of White people to attain the property, wealth, and social standing that is both the legacy and the goal of Whiteness.³ Whiteness is structural, not personal; however, the function of discourse is to constitute subjects as the bearers of social structures. In my interviews, understandings of race as "color" relied more on tacit knowledge about social histories than gradations of skin tone.

The racializing history of conquest produces racial and legal discourses that also enable nationality to mark other people who have equally apparently White skin tone as not White (cf. Omi & Winant, 1994). For instance, if Mexicans are White by contemporary standards of skin color, they have not been White by legal or dominant discursive standards in the United States. In academia, the analytic distinction between race and ethnicity speaks to just these kinds of circumstances. However, in my interviews, people consistently referred to Italians as an ethnic group, but to Mexicans as a *racial* group. The people I interviewed only talked about *ethnicity* when referring to people whose countries of origin were already commonly understood as

White—hence the expression *ethnic whites*, which has no counterpart in daily usage, although it certainly could.

U.S. history shows not the defense of a White state but creation of a state through Whiteness (Lopez, 1996; Lowe, 1996). The “basic law of citizenship, that a person born here is a citizen here, did not include all racial minorities until 1940” (Lopez, 1996, p. 41). Common sense naturalizes complex historical relations of power by making racialized differences appear to be self-evident—a matter that requires no thought. Yet to the extent that racial distinctions require no thought, the production of race continues to slide in ways that are fraught with contradictions. Notions of race as color and nationality collide for people who may be recognized as White based on skin color but who come from a nation that has been produced through U.S. discourse as something other than White. I use the following excerpt, in which Cuauhtemoc talked about his experience with race as a child, as an exemplar of how the production of race slides:

Cuauhtemoc: And so when I would go to Mexico to visit my grandparents and family and cousins. Uhm, you know, they—they kinda—it bothered them a little bit that I didn’t know how to speak Spanish. I understood everything, but I couldn’t speak it so they were like, “Oh here comes the pinche pocho again, the guy from the Norte,” you know, up north. You know, dadadada doesn’t know how to speak Spanish. They were like, “You’re not Mexican you’re a little White boy.”

Celine-Marie: Ouch.

Cuauhtemoc: Yeah, but when I would come back home—I considered the States my home—I would get criticized uh, you know, by Anglo people, “Oh look at this Mexican kid.” So being born here and being a Latino, being a Mexican—of Mexican heritage—it was really hard. It was really confusing. So I was really, really confused. I didn’t know who I was or really—I knew who my parents were and I knew what the United States was, but who was *I*?

Cuauhtemoc was born in the United States to Mexican parents who worked in the agricultural fields of California. In this excerpt, it becomes clear that his parental heritage, cultural heritage, language, and skin color were not enough to secure a stable identity. How people characterized Cuauhtemoc’s racial identity slipped between White and Mexican depending on the hegemonic racial discourse of where he was at the time—and the racial identity of the people making the characterization.⁴ Whereas his family in Mexico characterized him as White because he did not speak Spanish

(and perhaps because he lived in the United States), in the United States, people characterized him as Mexican. Yet this slippage was never kind or innocent. The disciplinary process of racialization forced Cuauhtemoc to live in the liminal space of Anzaldúa's (1987, p. 37) *Atzlan*: "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary." Within the borderland of Chicano/Chicana discourse, the term *pocho* (half-breed) is understood to target "gringo-ized Mexicans" who live in the United States (Chabram-Dernersesian 1997).

In his seminal essay on the topic, "Pochos, the Different Mexicans," Arturo Madrid-Barela proposes that "it [*pocho*] was not an affectionate apodo (nickname). To be a *pocho* was only slightly worse than being a *pinche gringo*. . . . Our accommodations to American society were *traiciones* (betrayals) in their eyes, *era agringarse*" (it was to become White; cited in Chabram-Dernersesian, 1997, p. 145).

The performativity of whiteness may be most obvious in charges like these of "becoming White" leveled at people of color (cf. Alexander, 2004). "Becoming White" does not refer to *passing* as White so much as an apparent failure of some form of racial authenticity. In this sense, the slur *pocho* is a disciplinary mechanism that negotiates the process of racialization in relation to contemporary social, economic, and national conditions. If Cuauhtemoc's family teased him harshly ("Oh here comes the *pinche pocho* again, the guy from the Norte" and "you're a little White boy"), in the United States, Cuauhtemoc understood being called Mexican as an indictment itself ("I would get criticized uh, you know, by Anglo people 'oh look at this Mexican kid.'"). The ability of nationality to stand in for racial categories makes it possible for the characterization *Mexican* to function as a racial slur in itself. This left Cuauhtemoc with little room to claim with pride any sense of a collective identity—racial or national. As a child, he struggled to make his identity reliably recognizable within and across social, political, and historical fields. Cuauhtemoc framed his struggle over identity in terms of language, nationality, and color. The difficulties of racial categorization and identity emerge again as Cuauhtemoc talks about himself ("So being born here and being a Latino, being a Mexican—of Mexican heritage).

Beneath Cuauhtemoc's talk about his childhood is knowledge about historically shaped communities, alliances, oppositions, appropriations, and exploitations through which race was, and is, produced. The desire to mark "difference" is an apparatus of knowledge/power that "fixes" identity. However, race is an unstable complex of meanings, consistently anchored

to the enunciative power of those who are marking difference. Racial identity may be an intensely personal matter, but racialization is a profoundly social, political, and historical process. “A racial subject, in order to be itself, has to undergo some kind of process that would turn it into itself” (Miron & Inda, 2000, p. 103). To the extent that racial identities are shaped by categorizations based on social histories, no one is ever entirely in control of their racial identity. And, to the extent that such processes shape our identities, all identity is a form of “passing”—the performance of an internalized identification.⁵

In addition to talking about race as color, to the people I interviewed race also referred to race as culture. Consider an excerpt from my interview with Captain Ahab, who was born in Canada and raised in the United States. His childhood transition between the two countries has held lasting trauma for him and, at age 53, Captain Ahab characterized himself “foremost as an immigrant.” He talked about race this way:

Captain Ahab: When I think of race, I generally think of ethnic background.

Celine-Marie: What is that, ethnic background?

Captain Ahab: The culture from which the individual has emerged. The culture in which they grew up which may or may not be defined geographically.

Celine-Marie: Mmmhm. Do you have a racial or ethnic identity?

Captain Ahab: Uh a I regard myself as Caucasian.

Celine-Marie: What does that mean to you?

Captain Ahab: It means coming from essentially White northern European stock.

Given that Captain Ahab talks about racial/ethnic identity as cultural, one would expect him to characterize himself by some cultural identity, perhaps a national identity. And, given the distinction that he makes between culture and geography, it also seems reasonable to think he might identify himself as belonging to White culture. Despite his characterization of race as ethnicity/culture, he describes himself in biological terms, “as Caucasian.” Captain Ahab’s use of “White northern European *stock*” reinforces a sense of racial groups as recognizably distinct “breeds” of people. Consequently, it seems that—although Ahab characterizes “race” as ethnicity (i.e., culture)—this characterization is tied to older, biological conceptions of physical difference.

People who would never talk about race as a biological phenomenon can be quite comfortable characterizing race as culture—something apparently

quite different from biology. Yet it is the very way that older notions of biological races work through related discourses of nation that enables people to talk about race as culture. Cultural essentialism comes to replace biological essentialism. This is the insidiousness of race. Discursive formations are composed not only of chains of inference but also of points of contradiction or what Foucault (1972) called “points of diffraction.” Apparent incompatibilities constitute the raw materials of the discursive formation—as points of dispersion, they expand base of the discursive formation.

In my interviews, the only people to talk about race as a matter of blood were Native Americans—and it came up in each of those three interviews. For example, Rudy Rosales, who identified himself as American Indian, came to the interview with what he called his “pedigree”—a genealogy that traced his family lineage back hundreds of years. He referred to his pedigree as he expressed concerns about authenticity that came from the proliferation of non-Native people who appropriate aspects of Native American cultural heritage:

I wish people would say, [claps] “OK you’re Native American Indian . . . do you have any kind of proof of that Indian part?” And that way we’d get rid of a lot of riff raff. . . . And that way the people that don’t have proof would sit there with their tongues hangin’ out of their mouth and I would sit there goin’ here’s my proof. You know, I’ve done my homework. You know, now you guys don’t have it? I’m not gonna hold it against them—but you know at least I’ve proven who *I* am, you know. And if you guys have to—or not HAVE to—but you guys SHOULD acknowledge ME before you acknowledge any of these people because I have, and they’re as—the way I felt—if they’re as proud of their heritage as I am, they’d do this.⁶

Rudy talks about Native American identity as something that requires authentication—“proof.” For Rudy, racial identity requires the legitimating force of his ancestry, his bloodline; this proof not only renders his identity an “authentic” one, it also promises to “get rid of the riff raff”—the people who claim to be Native American but who are not. Although Rudy goes on to insist that he will not “hold it against” people who cannot produce proof of their racial identity, he appeals to the authority of non-Native people to do exactly that; indeed, White people in the United States have been in the very business of “authenticating” Native American identities through blood quanta for nearly two centuries. In particular, I understand the tensions Rudy articulates through notions of “proof” and “pedigree” as part of a larger context in which competition for authenticity is fostered by the

Federal government's policy toward Native American entitlements. In a world in which race is apparently self-evident, Rudy has been working for years to gain Federal recognition for his tribal nation—for their racial identity—which the Federal government continues to measure using “tribal blood quantum.”

Although “blood” once held mythic abilities (e.g., nobility, courage, and virtue), racism centers notions of blood on degeneracy (Foucault, 1980). Because the notion of blood as race carries both of these meanings, Rudy is able to turn the very discourse used against Native Americans (and other racialized groups) back on the society that requires him to produce his “pedigree.” Although the discourses of blood quanta and authenticity were generated as a means of domination, interviews with Native American people illustrate how oppressive power can be redeployed—how power circulates as a force that both constrains and constitutes the very possibilities of volition.

Discourse about authenticity regarding Native Americans not only calls up blood quanta but also the legal sanctions against interracial marriages intended to preserve some “blood lines” and the genocidal efforts to destroy others. Although the struggle for authenticity emerged in my research with respect to Native American experience, it is a struggle that marginalized people frequently face in different ways. For example, although the “one drop rule” has been enough to make one legally Black in the U.S., “authentic Blackness” has always been contested within Black communities as well as White (Johnson, 2003, p. 4). The struggle for authenticity is both possible and relentless precisely because there is no “real,” no race that resides in bodies. There is a politics to be struggled for in the representation and invocation of authenticity, which is both a means to resist, and an extension of, domination itself.

Contexts and Power

The “self-evident” nature of race is evidence that race *has* meaning, rather than that it has any *particular* meaning shared by all people. Common sense secures the social, historical, political, and economic spaces that give race its materiality by producing race as a matter that requires no thought—which leads people to believe they simply *see* race. This imposition of obviousness renders routine decisions about racial characterizations unnecessary. The ability for race to appear to be self-evident speaks

to how the history and the politics of race remain deeply submerged, yet easily readable, in daily life. In this sense, power is exercised through the recognition of race as well as through the possible meanings of race. At this level of analysis, the category of race is itself an expression of racism.⁷ To be “raced” is to be subjected to a set of regulations that formulate one’s place in society (past, present, and future). In this sense, “race” is never benign; it is a measure of social distances between people. Even if these distances carry no fixed meaning, the fact that such distances continue to be both marked and intelligible is testimony to the power of language to preserve histories. The moral ontology of race is sequestered within the very ability to recognize racial difference, regardless of the ground on which difference is named.

It is impossible to separate the apparent presence of race from historical discourses about race—however it is very easy, particularly in studies of local contexts, to misread the ways in which submerged cultural discourses transform, travel, and emerge at various places and times. Common sense naturalizes complex historical productions of power in ways that appear to be self-evident and which can be used without conscious thought—categories only need to be “recognized.” To the extent that the presence of race is naturalized as a matter of common sense, it is freed from the demands of coherence. Although common sense leads us to expect race to be visually recognizable, it also leads us to accept that race can be a matter of nationality. Although common sense tells us we can identify race based on skin color, the same skin tones can be racialized differently. And, if common sense reifies race as a life-long identity, it is a reification subject to change and negotiation for many. The incoherence of race as a social category has led scholars (cf. Gilroy, 2000) to envision a utopian “end of race” as the illogical basis of race is exposed. However, the usefulness of race has never depended on logic. In daily life, it appears that talk about race is part of a “debased discourse [that] doesn’t care whether the terms of ‘othering’ are logical or not” (Lubiano, 1992, p. 342). In analyses of race that focus only on local contexts, the various ways of conceptualizing race as culture, color, blood, and nation appear to be incongruous, if not contradictory. However, I want to argue these contradictions are fundamental to the stability of race, and less contradictory than they might seem. To more fully understand these apparent contradictions, it is necessary to challenge the boundaries of theory and method that characterize social research. It is essential to develop a new research imaginary from which to begin to think about race (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004).

It is impossible to separate the apparent presence of race from the historical production of race; however, it is very easy, particularly in studies of local contexts, to misread the ways in which submerged cultural discourses transform, travel, and emerge at various places and times. This is what makes conceptions of race appear to be incoherent and contradictory. Hence, the politics of difference requires a return to the analytical tensions between material and discursive analyses of race to rethink ways to confront the effects of racism without reifying race. The materiality of lived experience gives rise to identity-based politics, which regard “difference” in pragmatic terms of social experience, opportunity, status, language, and culture. In short, identity politics assumes sameness within categories of difference (Blacks, women, etc.) and difference across categories that are held to have very wide repercussion in society. Thus, identity-based politics assume an essentialism that can be historical, cultural, or biological. Theories of intersectionality complicate and challenge aspects of this essentialism but cannot escape its burden because they remain tethered to same epistemology of the subject. Theories of social construction and essentialism do not exist in opposition to each other. Rather, biological essentialism is rearticulated through social constructions based on culture and history. Yet, to argue for alliances based on shared interests (cf. Guinier & Torres, 2002) belies the fact that interests are formed in relationship to subject positions

often to such an extent that interest and identity comes to seem interchangeable (as in “women’s issues” or “the black agenda”). In such cases, the interest stands in for the identity in public discourse, and the latter appears not as an active and *interactive* agent of political life, but as an entrenched and inert position. (Adams, 2002, p. 9).

Poststructural discourse analysis offers an understanding of difference as strategic and positional, and of identity as mobile and performative. Within this analytical frame, a social justice agenda seeks to disrupt the vernacular moral order by rupturing the broad binaries of racial categories, such as purity/pollution, through which race is reproduced, to disrupt the repetition of race and racism. The effects of race are real, but it is a mistake to locate the materiality of race in bodies. As soon as one questions the material unity of race, one is left not with “bodies” that have experiences but with a complex field of discourses rooted to relations of appropriation and exploitation. Discourses are not imaginary relations; they inscribe and are inscribed by the materiality of social, institutional and cultural practices. The discourse

of common-sense produces the apparently self-evident nature of race that comes to symbolize not only a history but also a vision of power.

The conundrum is this: collective interests of racialized groups are both real and important, but equality is impossible if we continue to reify the architecture of race through which inequality is produced. I want to make an argument for alliances through a politics of disidentification that subverts hegemonic power by making visible what hegemonic discourse conceals. I am suggesting a strategic enterprise that calls for exposing the production of race on a daily level by confronting what appears to be obvious—learning to see that which common sense actively works to conceal.

The power of common sense about race is broadly cultural and discursive even as it is locally produced, transformed and challenged through specific practices. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to attribute the vast power of language exclusively to discourse. It is in local contexts and local practices that discourses gain their materiality. And, it is in local contexts, in the “everydayness” of living, that the possibility of agency and the potential for change exists. Consequently, studies of agency must be grounded in local, material contexts. Analytically then, schisms between theories of discourse and studies of talk in local contexts serve dominant interests because they dislocate understandings of knowledge/power from understandings of agency.

We need new methods, not just to interpret the world differently, but that they may enable us to legitimately ask different kinds of questions about the world. It is not just that social change is a slow process, but that there are limits on the amount and kind of change that can be produced within the current scientific paradigms. If our research is to take us to a future that is different from the past, we must push the boundaries established as valid by past research. “The power and pull of a paradigm is more than a simple methodological orientation. It is a means by which to grasp reality and give it meaning and predictability” (Ray Rist in Ladson-Billings, 2003a, p. 413). If we accept that all knowledge is socially constructed and historically situated, we must question the adequacy of social research paradigms to develop a vision for social organizing in a post-civil rights era. As we witness the erosion of civil rights, an increase in poverty, and the strategic political appointments including Alberto Gonzales, Condoleeza Rice, Elaine Chao, and Janice Rogers Brown, the echo “my color, but not my kind” is a reverberating disavowal of the Bush administration’s agenda. It is a disavowal that demands the creation of different understandings of race and a different sort of social justice movement.

Appendix Interviewees

Name	Age	Sex	Education	Self-identifies	Employment	Appx. Income	Appx. Assets
Captain Ahab	53	M	MA/JD	Caucasian	Attorney	\$200,000	\$500,000
Charles Adams	49	M	HS	White	None/homeless	0	None
Marisol Alegria	62	F	BS	Hispanic	Franchise owner	\$250,000	\$10,000,000
Peter Alford	45	M	BA	African American	Letter carrier	\$100,000	\$500,000
Brady	56	M	JD	White	Attorney	\$250,000	\$5,000,000
Charlie Chin	56	M	MBA	Chinese American	Land & business developer	\$200,000	\$10,000,000
Cuautemhuc	24	M	Junior HS	Mexican	Retail clerk	\$15,000	None
Lorraine Doe	45	F	MA	American Indian	Counselor/tribal administrator	\$200,000	\$500,000,000
Nikki Drew	42	F	2 years college	White	None/homeless	0	None
Lana Jacobs	59	F	Junior college	Black	Artist	\$100,000	\$1,000,000
Zach Mauro	47	M	AA	Filipino	Package driver	\$60,000	\$250,000
Lue Lani	71	F	College	White	Real estate (sales)	\$40,000	\$500,000
Sherry Moss	57	F	Junior HS	White	None/homeless	0	None
Polard Parker	50	M	BA	White	Real estate (developer)	\$500,000	\$100,000,000
Emerson Piscopo	33	F-M	2 years college	Italian/Caucasian	Stylist/colorist	\$45,000	(Unclear)
Lucy Rogers	43	F	DC	Latina	Chiropractor	\$80,000	\$250,000
Rudy Rosales	53	M	HS	American Indian	Retired laborer	\$40,000	None
Betty Sukarai	23	F	BA	Japanese American	Teller/loan officer	\$30,000	\$100,000
Ann-Marie Sayers	51	F	—	Native American	Tribal Chair/ (foundation) director	\$50,000	There is no value placed on Indian Canyon
Anglico Simon	30	M	HS/EMT	Caucasian	Delivery driver	\$50,000	None
Roberta Washington	65	F	HS	Negro	Cashier	\$10,000	None
Ashley Worthington	30	M-F	BA	White/ Caucasian	Web designer/marketer	\$60,000	None
Brownie Wu	68	F	Some college	Chinese American	Retail clerk	\$90,000	\$500,000

Notes

1. "That Gobineau excluded the peoples of the Americas, the Indian subcontinent, East and South Asia, and Oceania (those living outside of the European imagination) reflects social and political decisions, not scientific ones" (Ladson-Billings, 2003a, p. 400-401).

2. Hegemony is never a permanent state of affairs, and never uncontested. Hall (1980) writes that "hegemony is always the temporary mastery of a particular theater of struggle. It marks a shift in the dispositions of contending forces in a field of struggle and the articulation of that field into a tendency. Such tendencies do not immediately 'profit' a ruling class or a fraction of capital, but they create the conditions whereby society and the state may be conformed in a larger sense to certain formative national-historical tasks. Thus the particular outcomes always depend on the balance in the relations of force in any theater of struggle and reform. . . . Its effect is to show how cultural questions can be linked in a non-reductionist manner, to other levels: it enables us to think of societies as complex formations, necessarily contradictory, always historically specific" (p. 36).

3. Critical legal scholars have argued that Whiteness should be viewed as a form of property, which is recognized and upheld by courts and society as such (Bell, 1988, Delgado, 1989, Harris, 1993). Whiteness has been a "prerequisite to the exercise of enforceable property rights" (Harris, 1993, p. 1724).

4. It is important to note that this kind of slippage in the production of race is possible only with respect to people with light skin tones.

5. Importantly, the difference between a Black subject passing as White and a White subject passing as White is not an essential difference, but a structural difference that demonstrates that "passing involves the re-staging of a fractured history of identifications that constitute the limits" of a subject's mobility (Ahmed, 1999, p. 93).

6. I use all capital letters in transcript excerpts to indicate spoken emphasis.

7. Although the term *race* is itself racist (cf., Memmi 2000) if we stop here, racism loses its specificities—we lose the ability to distinguish among a variety of forms and expressions of racism.

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