The Specter of Whiteness

By

Celine-Marie-Marie Pascale, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology
Battelle-Tompkins Hall, T-14
American University
4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016

Phone: 202-885-2524 (w)
301-588-1824 (h)
Fax: 202-885-2477

Pascale@american.edu

Words: 6,264 (including references and endnotes)

May 15, 2006

Abstract

The value of research that draws from both ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis has been criticized by some and encouraged by others. However, the focus of these debates has been largely theoretical since very little, if any, research exists applies both frameworks to a single set of empirical data. In this article, I draw from ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis to examine commonsense knowledge about whiteness and white racial identities. In order to get at that which most broadly passes as matters of commonsense in the United States, my research design includes both interviews and analysis of primetime television shows. I make two sets of concurrent arguments, one that regards the production of whiteness as a kind of normalcy against which race and racialization is made meaningful and another concerned with the analytical power derived by combining ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis. I illustrate local practices for interrupting hegemonic reproductions of whiteness and conclude with methodological considerations.

Introduction

Those who have suffered at the boot heel of white racism have long established

critiques of whiteness; most recently Hortense Spillers, Cherrie Moraga, Angela Davis,

Gloria Anzaldúa, and Akasha Hull have been among scholars and activists of color who

have kept white racism and white privilege in the forefront of social critique long before

Critical Whiteness Studies emerged in the Social Sciences. The epistemological ground

of contemporary critical whiteness studies (cf., Bonilla-Silva 2003; Foley 1997;

Frankenberg 1993, 1997; hooks 1992; Ignatiev 1995; Lipsitz 1998; Perry 2004; Roediger

2002; Ware 1992; Wellman 1993) is a social constructionist framework that engages both

racial formation theory and critical race theory. While the work of critical white studies

is to disrupt the unmarked status of whiteness, the results have been uneven, at times

serving to re-center and re-privilege the lives and perspectives of white people. However,

by and large, Critical Whiteness Studies has made important contributions to the on-

going critiques of whiteness. Across disciplines, abundant literature provides rich

analyses of the social, historical, legal, and economic processes through which a white racial identity has been constructed and important critiques of the inseparability of whiteness from strategies of racial dominance. More recently, scholars have begun to deconstruct whiteness as a practice rather than a characteristic (cf., Aanerud 2003; Chabram-Dernersesian 2003; Muraleedharan 2003) giving rise to the distinction between "being white" and "whiteness" as something that is achieved.

In this article, I examine practices through which whiteness is produced as a routine matter of daily life. Existing literature provides an understanding of how the unmarked nature of whiteness produces and maintains white racial dominance, yet we have little understanding of the more nuanced practices through which whiteness is produced as unmarked. Exactly how does whiteness gain meaning, not as a racial category, *per se,* but rather as a kind of 'normalcy,' an invisible center from which 'difference' can be measured? How does commonsense knowledge lead to practices that make whiteness both invisible *and* culturally meaningful? What gives whiteness, as a generally unmarked category, interpretative stability? I take up these and other questions in this article; throughout I use the term 'discourse' to refer to 'clusters of ideas, images and practices' that provide frameworks for understanding what knowledge is useful, relevant, and true in any given context (Hall 1997).[1]

Analytical Framework

Shared Elements in Differing Levels of Analysis

Precisely because of the enormous contributions of ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis, it is possible to see the importance of studying local practices and broader cultural discourses. The limits of ethnomethodology and

poststructural discourse analysis also point to the impossibility of fully locating the productive force of language exclusively in either one. If individuals exert maximum agency through talk, we exert least in language. In immediate social situations, participants in talk determine the *utterance*s, but more sustained and basic social connections determine these deeper layers of language (Volosinov 1973). This article does not attempt to synthesize the fields of ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis but draws strategically from each paradigm to produce a fuller understanding of local practices and cultural processes. [2]

Fundamentally, ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis, each regard language as a constitutive force that produces social realities, rather than as a transparent vehicle for communication. Broadly speaking, both ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis decenter the subject—that is, they conceptualize subjects as constituted, rather than as pre-existing, stable entities. And, both deny an empirical epistemology in which the meaning of a cultural text simply has to be read, in order to be understood. Ethnomethodology exposes the practical reasoning subsumed in everyday practices, while poststructural discourse analysis reveals the cultural processes through which this reasoning is invented and subsumed.

Ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis both examine—at different levels—how socially meaningful and apparently objective social worlds produced are produced through language. As a consequence, both interpretive frameworks examine various productions of commonsense knowledge. To understand the production of commonsense knowledge, we do not need to know what is actually "true," —what "really" is the case—we need only to know what is *accountable* as true (Handel

1982). For example, although the movement of the sun across the sky is not factually true, it is accountable as true. In any given interaction or representation, some things must pass without remark, must simply be understood. In this sense, commonsense knowledge is a saturation of cultural knowledge, which because of its very mundane obviousness, passes without notice or remark. It is not just that we have learned to see the sun move—very violent political, religious and scientific struggles are submerged in what passes for commonsense in talk about sun rises and sunsets. The apparent clarity of commonsense is the effect of hegemonic discourses that conceal not only distortion and error, but also relations of power.

Routine knowledge must be produced at every turn in order for it to be unremarkable—a matter of commonsense. Because taken-for-granted knowledge is a saturation of cultural knowledge embodied in local practices, it is critically important to push the boundaries of any single research paradigm in order to secure the perspective and vocabulary necessary to understand the production of what broadly passes as commonsense knowledge. This study is built upon the principles of inductive analysis. The method is most definitely, sociological—even as it tests the boundaries of what counts as sociological by drawing from interpretative strategies that stand outside the usual frames of reference. [3]

Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology is the study of "commonsense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find

themselves" (Heritage 1984: 4). In ethnomethodological analyses, the object of inquiry is always an embedded set of assumptions regarding the nature of objects and events. Consequently this article is not a technically- or linguistically-oriented study of speech or texts that is characteristic of conversation analysis. Rather, the analytical focus attends to the unspoken knowledge upon which interviewees and media reflexively rely in order to produce the appearance of an apparently objective social world.

In daily life, people rarely say *exactly* what they mean; therefore, I use the "documentary method" of analysis, which treats appearances as "documents" that point to underlying patterns (Garfinkle 1967: 78). The appearances are then "interpreted on the basis of 'what is known' about the underlying pattern" (Garfinkle 1967: 78). The appearances and the underlying patterns are reflexively related. This interpretative practice is quite different from analyses based on standard analytic induction, as well as from other forms of discourse analysis, which use observations of what is said as a kind of evidence about the world. The point of documentary analysis is to explore the tacit knowledge underlying what is said.

To the best of my ability, I engaged in the ethnomethodological practice of "analytical bracketing," in order to understand everyday "realities" as products and resources. I consistently attempted to adopt an attitude of "ethnomethodological indifference," that compels one to abstain from all judgments about the adequacy, value, and importance of members' accounts (see Garfinkel and Sacks 1970). However any such goal is necessarily comprised because one is always implicated in the production of the material to be analyzed as well as in the analysis. Indeed, it would seem impossible to write an analysis that is fully engaged and completely self-reflexive. The question, of

course, is one of degree. Unable to escape such limitations, it becomes necessary to weigh the messy incompleteness of such efforts against the insights that such attempts can produce. There is no utopian place to stand outside of presuppositions that form commonsense knowledge; and in this sense, the text is always caught within the dilemma of its own premise, unable to fully escape the weight of its own commonsense knowledge. To varying degrees, such troubles accompany all research and await the critical insights of readers.

Poststructural Discourse Analysis

       I draw from poststructural discourse analysis to situate analyses of local contexts within a broader cultural context. Like ethnomethodology, poststructural discourse analysis does not purport to offer a description of phenomenon "as they are" but rather how they have been produced to appear as they do—although the concern here regards broader aspects of language. I draw from Foucault's concepts of discourse and genealogy to examine the cultural/historical knowledge that comprises tacit knowledge in local practices. Discourses establish frames of intelligibility through a series of processes and relationships; consequently discursive analyses examine the procedures through which the frames of intelligibility are produced (Foucault 1972). Discursive practices produce characteristic ways of *seeing* by drawing boundaries that define what we see and fail to see, what we accept and contest (Patai 1991). Smith (1999) aptly called discourses "canons of relevance and validity." Hence a study of discourses provides important resources for understanding tacit knowledge in relation to the production of cultural knowledge and power.

Broadly speaking, a genealogical analysis attempts to identify how relations of power constitute domains of subjects and objects. In this paper I make use of genealogy to explore the relations of power/knowledge articulated through the constitution of white subjects.[4] Poststructural discourse analysis provides a means to analyze how discourses enable and constrain the conditions that constitute the sayable; and, to examine the production and circulation of knowledge/power, through which discourses constitute the subject positions that persons come to inhabit (Butler 1997a, 1997b, 1999; Foucault 1970, 1977,1978).

Data Collection

The peculiarity of common sense is that it imposes obviousness—that, which we cannot fail to recognize. And, it is this production of obviousness that I examine in interviews and television shows. Routine knowledge must be produced at every turn in order for it to be unremarkable—a matter of commonsense. A dependable analysis of commonsense must reveal how interpretative repertoires are deeply rooted to a particular culture and hence requires a highly diverse body of data capable of revealing relationships between individual and cultural practices. My research design includes interviews and television shows, which allows me to examine the simultaneous production of taken-for-granted knowledge in multiple locations. In this sense, the use of television and interview data is a "piling" of evidence that produces multiple observations of a single subject (Ragin et al. 2003). The data collection for this article is based on the logic and method of analytic induction that is typically used in qualitative research, but

the analysis is inflected by the interpretative paradigms ethnomethodology and poststructural discourse analysis.

Interviews

I conducted purposive sampling in Northern and Central California of websites, places of employment, homeless shelters, and 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 Jews and ethnic whites, lesbians, bisexuals, people who immigrated as children to the United States, and others who were among 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 persons.[5] 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 dollars in assets. Ages ranged from 23 to 71; some people were parents, and some were grandparents. In all, I conducted 23 in-depth interviews that generated 1600 pages of transcript. While 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. The number of interviewees is intended to get at that which most broadly passes as matters of commonsense by ensuring diversity across social categories of difference. 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. I attribute all quotes to these pseudonyms.

Television Shows

My data collection of U.S. television shows began with intensive viewing of the fall 1999 season of U.S. primetime shows on ABC, NBC, and CBS. Given my analytical interest in commonsense knowledge, my methodological strategies were guided by shows which most widely available: most adult TV viewing occurs during the evening and the major networks are most widely available. If it seems that "everybody" in the United States has cable, consider that cable networks develop programming for relatively smaller and more specific audiences. The examples of channels featuring sports, children's programming and history come immediately to mind. Evidence of U.S. cable's smaller audience size can be found in ratings; advertiser ratings for commercial network programs tend to be nearly three or four times larger than for cable (Communications 2006). In order to minimize the importance of genre-specific conventions, from the fall 1999 season, I selected three genres of programming with differences in style, content, and market audience: news magazines, situation comedies, and dramas. I then selected three shows from each genre. [6] In all, I examined 180 hours of primetime television shows. Television, unlike film, shows repeat over and again through various forms of syndication. Consider that the 1999 opening season for *Judging Amy*, which I analyze in this article, was re-run on TNT in 2005, is available on DVD, and can be downloaded online. Further, TV series are now being converted to files that can be downloaded on iPods. In this sense, television shows come to inhabit our daily lives, remaining directly available to us long after the initial airing. The repetition of TV shows in various formats reiterates the repetitions that occur within the shows themselves. Moreover, media

provide, and draw upon, cultural resources for more than immediate audiences. In the process of forging common grounds for communication with others, our conversations, and our thinking, are shaped by both by the media that we actively engage and by the media others engage. As members of a language community, we have no option but to use those articulations, which are part of our culture and thus are understood by others. Hence television is itself an excellent site for examining the cultural saturation of commonsense knowledge.

Who, Me? White People and Racial Identity

Although all of my interviewees talked about race as self-evident, people who identified themselves as white in my interview exit form all appeared to be uncomfortable when talking about race during the interview. For example, Ashley Worthington explained race this way:

> Umm I have um [long pause] well I don't know. And I think that's a particularly white way of asking what, er—responding to that cuz I don't really know what, I mean I think maybe I do because it's, it's , it's dealing a lot with a …with a…[short pause] with a cultural difference that I that I only have a very, very limited knowledge of, I think. I mean, I think as much as I TRY to be sensitive to things and uh and uh traditions and all these other things, I think I have a very limited knowledge of it. And um, even with my, my consciousness —er…er, my consciousness raised, I just I still think I have a very, very limited knowledge of what race is.[7]

The pauses, stammers, and sputters that are typically removed from interview transcripts to make them easier to read are central to conveying Ashley's palpable discomfort. She begins by linking her ignorance about race to whiteness ("I think that's a particularly white way of asking what, er—responding") and seems to imply that only

11

white people would *not* know about race. When Ashley says "I TRY to be sensitive to things" and refers to being a person who has had her "consciousness raised" she makes herself recognizable as someone who, although ignorant, has made an effort (arguably a well-intentioned effort) to learn about race. Underlying Ashley's talk about having a very limited knowledge of race, despite her best efforts, is an understanding of race as something that unknown *others* possess. Whiteness emerges in her talk as an un-raced position from which things about race can be learned. And in this sense, she links together her ignorance about race, her good intentions to learn about race, and a kind of innocence, in that she appears not to be implicated in matters of race.

I asked everyone I interviewed if she or he had a racial identity. Only white people responded with questions such as: "Who, me?" or "Me, personally?" Given that there were only two people present in each interview, each of us recognizably white, I had to consider these questions more rhetorical than substantive. They do not refer to a confusion regarding about whom I was asking, but rather to the fact that I was asking at all. While this might be understood as an expression of the self-evident nature of race, it was also congruent with general levels of disinterest and confusion that white people demonstrated regarding their racial identities. Whiteness—for white people—appeared to have no meaning as a race category. For instance only people, who identified themselves as white, talked about their race category as a matter of forms and boxes. Consider this exemplar from Lue Lani:

> Every form you fill out now is asking you this question all the time. And when it asks you, it tells you—are you white, are Mexican, are you this, are you that? And you have to go down and it's sort of like, I think we're imprinting it upon ourselves that there IS, gee I'm over here in this one.

By talking about racial identity as something produced by a form, Lue Lani both constructs, and relies upon, a sense of race as unimportant or irrelevant to her daily life. If her characterization that we are "imprinting" race upon ourselves resists the reification of race, her characterization "gee I'm over here in this one" also serves to minimize the importance of racialized identities. In this excerpt race is stripped both of historical significance and also of current political, social, and economic importance.

Since it might seem that only a white person could claim to take her racial identity from a form, it is also important to remind oneself of the importance of U.S. census categories in creating racialized identities. Racial categories such as quadroons and octoroons no longer circulate in public discourse, although they once were reified as social identities, in part, through the U.S. census. Indeed this history has been at the center of contemporary debates regarding the politics of the U.S. census. The politics and practices of race categorizations are complex.

When Betty Sakurai, who identified herself as Japanese-American, talked about her racial identity, whiteness posed a blank space. Betty characterized her mother as white and her father as Japanese. She talked at length about family rituals and customs that she enjoys that come from the Japanese side of her family but said "from my mom's side there wasn't, we didn't have a lot of cultural things at all."[8] She concluded:

> I don't know, its just I—I LOVE the fact that I am half ANYTHING, you know.
> I think whatever it was, I would totally embrace it and want to learn more and
> more about it and I—I just I love it.

Although Betty identifies herself as biracial, she talked about 'Japanese' as a racial category but not 'white' ("I LOVE the fact that I am half ANYTHING").

Whiteness—her mother's side of the family— is the blank space that allows Betty to be "half anything." Whiteness emerges as the space against which racial categories gain meaning and visibility. In hegemonic U.S. culture, whiteness comes to stand as the "ordinary" way of being human. Since discourse constitutes subjugated subjectivities by marking 'difference' from an unspoken hegemonic center, the visible processes that mark or name what they point to always constitute subjects as 'others.' This excerpt demonstrates one way that local practice can produce the invisibility of whiteness while maintaining whiteness as a hegemonic "center" —from which all distances are measured by marked categories (cf., Frankenberg 1997). Betty's celebration of being "half anything" also extends the disciplinary power of whiteness.

In U.S. television, as in interviews, representational practices also produced whiteness as the daily context on which 'racial issues' may be overlaid. For example, in *Judging Amy,* Bruce Van Axel works as a court services officer for Judge Amy Gray. He is a black man whose most significant speaking parts, in the 1999 season, were attempts to educate Amy, a white woman, about race. In these conversations, Amy takes shelter in idealism while Bruce informs her with restrained anger about 'reality.' For example:

> Amy: Maybe I am idealistic enough to hope that we will have a society where race isn't the bottom line.
> Bruce: Until you have a child come home and tell you she was called a nigger you can't understand how impossible that is [11/12/99].

Significantly, the only racial slur to be used on the show in this season was expressed through the show's only apparently black character.[9] For Judge Amy Gray, as for the white people I interviewed, *ignorance* about race is made to stand as a claim to a kind of innocence, which in this case is related to idealism. Amy doesn't have to see, and appears to be not implicated, in the disparity between what she and what Bruce each

14

experience as ordinary. In addition, this excerpt illustrates how people who are not recognizably white become carriers of that which is not ordinary or innocent—that which is raced. The disciplinary power of whiteness in television was exercised both through its invisibility and through its ability to impose a kind of compulsory visibility on those who are 'not white.'

In U.S. television shows, the concerns, interests, and needs of white people appeared as a kind of 'normalcy' against which racialized lives became 'different.' In TV drama (*Family Law, Judging Amy,* and *The Practice*) and situation comedies (*Ladies Man* and *Frasier*) whiteness functioned as an unmarked 'condition of normalcy.' Whiteness was produced as a "normal" or ordinary way of being, both through the overwhelming presence of white people and through the way that whiteness consistently passed without remark. Only *The Hughley's* —a comedy about a black family in a predominantly white neighborhood—produced whiteness as a marked category, and I will explore this in a subsequent section. From the other eight shows, there are no examples to offer of persons being categorized as white, by themselves or others.

In addition, the apparent normalcy of whiteness on network TV was produced by casting apparently white actors as characters with speaking roles while casting actors who appear to be "of color" in non-speaking roles that were incidental to scenes—much like props that comprise a background for the storylines. Consider that in *Frasier*, two black characters appeared in the 1999 season: a TV news anchorwoman, who appeared on Frasier's TV set, and a woman waiting tables in the café he frequented.

Whiteness functioned as both a routine and privileged subject position. For instance, across all nine shows, apparently white people were never represented in ways

that associated them with chronic poverty, discrimination, or daily drudgery. The only apparently white people who appeared to experience any degree of economic hardship were senior citizens seeking cheaper prescription medications in Canada in a *60 Minutes* (10/17/99) news segment.[10] Similarly, across eight shows, whiteness was produced through the saturation of opportunities; the success of hard work; the adequacy of good intentions; the comfort of having police; and the confidence that one's best effort will be good enough. For example, in *Judging Amy,* the character of Vincent Gray is a "struggling" writer who wins the Pushcart Prize for fiction, and obtains a book contract from a large publisher. Although he suffers great existential angst because, he meets with significant professional success at every turn. Whiteness was a saturation of privilege that formed the background—not the focus—of TV shows.

The power of whiteness—for white people—works through virtue of its invisibility, through the ability of commonsense to efface the presence and meaning of white racial identities and to produce all other racial identities as apparently inherently meaningful—even if the meanings of those racialized identities is unclear or contradictory. Whiteness gains interpretative stability because its meanings are anchored to a former biological notion of race—the commonsense notion that whiteness is what one *sees.* By reifying 'difference' while simultaneously denying it's importance, discursive practices promote pluralism that leaves race and racism intact. Indeed, the racism of white liberalism functions through practices that withhold 'ordinariness' from people who are 'not white' (Memmi 2000). This denial of ordinariness is a cornerstone of liberal racism—I say liberal racism because it operates at a level of assumption, rather

than at the level of belief or intention. By denying ordinariness to people of color,

hegemonic commonsense knowledge produces a racialized vernacular moral order.

Yes, You: A Counter-hegemonic Production of Whiteness

Of the nine TV shows I studied, only *The Hughley's*, a comedy about a black

family living in a predominantly white neighborhood, treated whiteness as a marked

category. In *The Hughley's,* whiteness was marked with reference to historicized,

racialized conflict. For instance, at Halloween [10/26/99] Darryl and his brother Milsap

invite Dave (Darryl's white neighbor) to go out with them. Dave thanks Darryl and

Milsap for the invitation, and Darryl responds: "I had to invite you cause two black guys

sneaking around the neighborhood ain't gonna fly unless there's a white guy to vouch for

them." Here, as whiteness loses its 'unmarked' status—its 'naturalness'— it also loses

its innocence. In black imagination, whiteness is often a representation—not of

innocence—but of terror (hooks 1992)*.* The historical cultural meaning that produced

whiteness must, to some extent, be part of the enunciation that makes whiteness visible if

such enunciations are to avoid re-inscribing white supremacy. To make whiteness

politically visible is to reveal its coercive force (Roediger 1994).

Consider another episode in which Darryl's grandmother, Hattie Mae, invited

Dave and his family to join her extended family for Thanksgiving dinner [11/5/99].

When Dave and his family arrive, they are the only white characters on the set and their

little boy announces: "Dad says we're gonna be the only white folks for miles and miles."

The camera settles on the Hughley family standing motionless as they stare in shock and

anger until Dave delivers the punchline: "I did NOT however, say that was a bad thing!"

A sound track of laughter accompanies the resuming action. The humor in this scene draws from the child's ability to speak the truth that lays bare the framework of racism, which exceeds his understanding. Consider also how commonsense knowledge provides the central context for the humor of this scene. For instance, the audience needs no explanation of why Dave noted to his family that they were "gonna be the only *white* folks for miles and miles." The Hughley family response of stoney silence demonstrates their emotionally concordant reading this comment. The punchline delivers a laugh because it articulates what the audience believes to be literally true: Dave did not literally say that was a bad thing to be the only white family for miles around because he did not have to. The scene reveals an often-concealed cultural truth: white people's fear of black people and black communities.   The scene raises the ghost of white racism and then renders it impotent —but not meaningless. The meaning of whiteness in *The Hughley's* is produced *in relationship* to the meaning of blackness—both through a shared history that permeates their relationships and through characters' abilities to parlay that history into a different present. In this sense, *The Hughley's* resists dominant discursive practices that white people as both innocent and without race. *The Hughley's* did not represent people of color as being accountable for "explaining" race and racism to whites; nor did it reproduce a racial binary that implicates people of color as "the opposite" of white people—ie., that which is not innocent or ordinary. By making the *meanings* of whiteness visible as the *presence* of whiteness, *The Hughley's* produced a counter-hegemonic discourse through which a cultural transformation of race could become possible.

Conclusion

For white people, commonsense knowledge 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. In this sense, the invisible force of power becomes legible at the sites where discursive practices transform history into readable spaces.

Using ethnomethodological and poststructural analytical tools to analyze commonsense knowledge about whiteness illustrates how local practices *enonciate* relationships to the historical world through broader systems of language and discourse. All classification is generative in that it produces both meanings and order—hence, classification must also be understood as a system of power, but not inherently so. While systems of classification distinguish between this and that, say between a ball and an apple, social contexts provide the means for interpreting or ranking the importance of each category (Hall 1997). The ball may be more important on a playground, the apple more important in the grocery bag. The relative importance of sexuality, gender, race, and class as social categories—as systems of classification—depends upon, *not only* their use in a particular context, but their repetition over time in *multiple* local contexts. Hence to understand the importance of race as a system of classification, it is important to recognize that the same patterns of commonsense knowledge repeated within and across interviews and television shows. The *repetition* of local contexts—in which objects are constituted repeatedly through a hierarchical ranking—leads to power relations that extend beyond any individual context.

Local contexts can never, in themselves, adequately account for relations of power; and, discursive contexts, can never, in themselves, adequately account for practices that sustain, reproduce, or resistance those relations. This is why sociology needs analyses that can shift between the theoretical and the empirical, the daily practices that constitute meaning and the conceptual practices that constitute knowledge. To dislocate studies of talk from theories of discourse is to serve hegemonic interests by dislocating analyses of power/knowledge from analyses of agency.

References

Butler, J. (1997a). *Excitable Speech: A politics of the performative.* New York: Routledge.

— (1997b). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

— (1999). On Speech, Race, and Melancholia. In V. Bell (Ed.), *Performativity and Belonging* (pp. 163-173). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Communications, M. o. B. (2006). Cable Networks: Museum of Broadcast Communications.

Foucault, M. (1970). *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences.* New York: Vintage Books.

— (1972). *The Archeology of Knowledge.* New York: Pantheon Books.

— (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison.* New York: Vintage Books.

— (1978). *The History of Sexuality.* New York: Vintage Books.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White women, race matters.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Garfinkel, H., & Sacks, H. (1970). On formal structure and practical actions. In J. McKinney & E. Tiraykian (Eds.), *Theoretical Sociology: Perspectives and Development* (pp. 338-366). New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts

Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 1-74). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Handel, W. (1982). *Ethnomethodology: How People Make Sense.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkle and Ethnomethodology.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

hooks, b. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and representation.* Boston: South End Press.

Memmi, A. (2000). *Racism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Patai, D. (1991). U.S. Academics and Third World Women: Is ethical research possible? In S. B. Glcuk & D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's Words: The feminist practice of oral history* (pp. 137-158). New York: Routledge.

Ragin, C., Nagel, J., & White, P. (2003). General Guidance for Developing Qualitative Research Projects. In C. Ragin, J. Nagel & P. White (Eds.), *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research* (pp. 9-16). Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation.

Roediger, D. (1994). *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on race, politics, and working class history.* New York: Verso.

Smith, D. (1999). *Writing the Social: Critique, theory and investigations.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Volosinov, V. N. (1973). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.* Cambdrige, MA: Harvard University Press.

---

[1] In critical discourse analysis (CDA) the word 'discourse' frequently refers to a formal linguistic system, which regards social competencies formed through conditions or rules

that shape expressions. Whereas for sociologists, 'discourse' generally refers more broadly to language use, although it also frequently refers to language use in conversation. While the analytical terms used by British discourse analysis and CDA appear to have much in common with poststructural discourse analysis, the differences among the ways in which the terms are deployed reflects different ontologies, different conceptions of agency and subjectivity and different analytical foci. Critical discourse analysis draws from sociolinguistics to examine the order and organization of communication to produce analyses of ideologies, power and inequalities. CDA takes up, in addition to linguistic analysis, analytic categories that are not manifest in the transcript under study but nonetheless are argued to provide a broader socio-political context for the interaction. The solid linguistic basis of CDA includes sentence structure, syntax and verb tense and incorporates a broadly Marxist perspective (Fairclough 1992, 1995; Fairclough and Wodak 1997). However, there is no single methodological or theoretical focus to CDA. Indeed CDA analysts mediate between the linguistic and the social by drawing a variety of disciplines including Aristotle and the continental philosophers, as well as Althusser, Barthes, Gramsci, Foucault, Pecheux, Marxism, the Frankfurt school, neo-Marxism, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (including Stuart Hall), deconstruction, and postmodernism.

[2] The historical of these debates about the value of such an endeavor rest beyond the scope this article.

[3] "Because power is located at the level of saying and knowing, it infuses all, not just some, aspects of social life. 'All talk is text' means that all talk promotes a preferred account of the world, one that necessarily disqualifies other accounts. In short, all talk makes a claim—though not all ways of making claims will be equally valued. The implications of this relentlessly politicized vision of social life could not be more radical for the constructionist approach to social problems" (Miller 1993: 353).

[4] Since the coordinates of power are always produced through knowledge, I draw from (Foucault 1980) and refer to power/knowledge or knowledge/power.

[5] Suzanne Kessler (2001) credits Virginia Prince with coining the term 'transgender' in 1979 as a way to describe her decision "to become a woman without changing her genitals."

[6] From seven possible newsmagazines, I selected *60 Minutes, 60 Minutes II,* and *20/20*, because they make some effort to appear as 'objective news'—focusing on consumer exposés, in-depth coverage of current news stories, and human-interest/personality pieces. From an array of 35 half-hour sitcoms, I chose shows that made some aspect of "difference" apparent within an otherwise homogeneous setting: *The Hughleys, Frasier,* and *Ladies' Man.* From the seven legal dramas featured on network primetime, I selected three one-hour shows that included white women and people of color in central parts: *Judging Amy, Family Law,* and *The Practice.*

[7] Throughout, I use ellipses to indicate pauses; ellipses inside of bracket indicate edited material. Capital letters indicate spoken emphasis. Parenthetical comments indicate material inserted into the excerpt for clarification.

[8] Betty's earlier elaboration of what it means to be "half anything" through discussion of food and rituals demonstrates the logic of multiculturalism in which racial difference

enrich white culture through food and arts. This conception of multiculturalism embraces "difference" stripped of history and power.

[9] This style of turning expressions of hate back on those who historically have been victims of that hate is congruent with my other findings such as virulently homophobic remarks being made by the only gay character in TV episode.

[10] This news segment concerned potential regulation of the pharmaceutical industry aimed at reducing the cost of prescription drugs to senior citizens.