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Articulating Identity:

Refining Postcolonial and Whiteness Perspectives on Race within Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

This essay juxtaposes postcolonial and whiteness scholarship to identify gaps and clarify influences on critical race scholarship within communications studies. The essay considers the multiplicity of each perspective and identifies the focus on race and the body as communicative texts as a linkage that unites the three perspectives. How each perspective informs a communicative understanding of race is explored through the constructs of Cartesian dualism (1968), the performance (Goffman, 1959) and the gaze (Lacan, 1977). The essay concludes by suggesting future directions for interrogating race within the communication discipline that considers a multiplicity of identity factors and that considers how white privilege is extended to and assumed by minority individuals.

Articulating Identity:

Refining Postcolonial and Whiteness Perspectives on Race within Communication Studies

Race and difference have become a focus of critical communication studies as the body is increasingly used as a text to read, theorize, and critique systems of oppression and privilege. Such activity is rooted in perspectives offered by postcolonial and whiteness studies. By juxtaposing postcolonial and whiteness perspectives on one can better see the influence of each perspective upon critical communication thought. Additionally the perspectives elaborate one another by individually illustrating gaps in examining race and difference. This essay will highlight the origins, constructs, and gaps of each approach while articulating how each perspective works to inform communication studies' critical perspectives on race.

The Origins of Postcolonial and Whiteness Perspectives

The whiteness and postcolonial perspectives speak not with one voice but instead encompasses a variety of voices and traditions. This discussion is not meant to imply that neither is an exclusive area of study. Gandhi (1999, p.3) argues that postcolonial thought crosses disciplines and both eastern and western thought in a way that, "[...] confounds any uniformity of approach." In addition whiteness studies, some argue should be viewed as extending postcolonial thought (Hyttén and Adkins, 2002) where scholars argue that postcolonial studies has failed to effectively interrogate whiteness (Nakayama, and Krizek, 1995; Supriya, 1999). In a similar way the origins of each perspective are not singular in nature.

Many argue that Said's (1978) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* is the catalyst for postcolonial thought. Gandhi (1999) argues that Said's work came about as post-structuralism and Marxism were challenging structures of privilege. Postcolonial thought includes a broad array of academics and artists whose works examine the experience of

postcolonial life including the impact of colonial oppression. Postcolonial encompasses a need for self-reflection to assess the hybridized nature of the culture and character produced through the colonial undertaking. Looking at structures of oppression such as the colonizer's language and culture requires examining how those structures have infiltrated native structures to create a culture that is neither exclusively colonial nor native. Postcolonial thought examines the identity and society of cultures that have internalized the colonizer culturally or psychologically.

Postcolonialism includes the experience of indigenous populations internationally. Many North American, Pacific Rim, and European nations have history of the genocide, forced assimilation, and/or forced re-education of indigenous peoples. Valenzuela (1999) argues that indigenous Hispanics in the US southwest were colonized through white US-American education systems. The postcolonial experience references a variety of oppressive practices, enacted across a variety of indigenous cultures and contexts, and driven by different colonial motives. Studies of whiteness connect to postcolonial thought by articulating the western, white cultural perspectives that made informed the imperial mindset to colonize foreign peoples and lands.

Whiteness is also a field of studies that encompasses a broad array of scholarship. Many locate whiteness studies as an offshoot of critical race theory which examines the social construction of race and discrimination. W.E.B. Dubois is credited with originating US discourses on the color line (Giroux, 1997 a & b). Other writings examine how legal discourse defines race such as one-drop laws (e.g., a person is black with one drop of black blood) (Banton 2002; Collins, 2000). Critical race theory has influenced different whiteness scholars (Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1995) and articulates issues of segregation the linking of black bodies to specific geographies. Current work on whiteness is frequently done within the frame of critical race theory (Gillborn, 2005; Rogers and Mosley, 2006). Additionally Hytten and Adkins

(2002) argue that whiteness studies originated from postcolonial thought specifically in the call by postcolonial writers for white academics to see their whiteness and explore their privilege. Whatever its origins whiteness studies requires that Whites recognize that white is a color and a race that is inscribed with great privilege and recognize that this privilege must stop.

Yet how does one recognize and disrupt white privilege? One approach, not without critics, is the New Abolitionist/Race Traitor movement believes that the purpose of studying whiteness is to abolish it and it urges whites to sabotage their whiteness (Ignatiev, 1997). Alternately Applebaum (2000) argues that whites should share their white privilege with non-white peoples to disrupt the power of whiteness. Whiteness studies then focuses on identifying practices of white privilege in everyday life it so that privilege can be catalogued, undone, unlearned, and/or stopped (Carter, 1997; Nakayama and Martin, 1995; Warren 2001 a & b). The goals of this approach range from disowning or rejecting whiteness, making it visible in everyday life, and finding ways to embody whiteness differently.

Postcolonial and whiteness perspectives interconnect in ways that are relevant to communication studies. Both perspectives aim understand the meanings race and cultural distinctions have for individuals, groups, and upon communicative exchange. Where they focus in interrogating race and culture is where we see differences emerge. One way to examine the differences is by the examining how each constructs differences of race and culture. This essay will consider three such constructs: (1) Postcolonial studies' adaptation of the Cartesian (Descartes, 1968) mind-body dichotomy, whiteness studies use of performative theories (Butler, 1993; Goffman, 1959) and finally how both perspectives have adapted Lacan's (1977) concept of the gaze to interrogate perceptions of race and culture.

Three Popular Constructs of Racial Difference

The Mind-Body Dichotomy

Descartes (1968) mind-body dichotomy holds that the body is divisible into its constitutive parts but that the mind is not. Postcolonial writers adapt Descartes' (1968) dichotomy to explain how the colonial relationship situated whites and natives. In the postcolonial dichotomy white represents the mind and logic as perceiving natives as physical and illogical bodies requiring domination and control. Mohanram (1999, p. 15) cites claims of a "European Universal Subject" in colonial discourse. Such claims position white colonials as mobile, transportable, and logical versus the native person who is fixed to physical place and illogical. Such thinking allowed Imperial nations to justify colonization as imposing logic and order on what they perceived to be illogical and underdeveloped people.

The postcolonial mind-body dichotomy leaves the dimensions of the white body undeveloped. Whiteness and film scholar Dyer (1997, p. 6) describes experiencing his white body as "tightness, with self-control, self-consciousness, mind over body" when dancing amongst black bodies. Dyer's (1997) comments suggest an experience of the white body that is informed by Cartesian thought. Yet Dyer (1997) also seems to suggest this white-black physical difference is a reality while postcolonial is suspect of such distinctions. Postcolonial writer Fanon (1967, p. 129) cites a frustrated friend who states, "When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the man of colour ... for a little human sustenance."

This dichotomy conflates whiteness with the mind suggests a rational, logical, and absent white body. The colonial perspective views the mind's control over the white body as preferable to the body acting on its own physical impulses. The colonial perspective seeks to restrain, regulate, and/or educate the native body. The problem, Mohanram (1999) notes, is that the

dichotomy believes that the white mind can develop but the black body cannot. This dichotomy negates native subjectivity by making natives physical bodies and thus objects that can be owned by the colonizer. Banton (2002, p. 25) notes that despite all the differences inherent in the colonial relationship that it was “complexion that came above all to serve as the sign of where a person belonged in the new social order.” The black body became an object owned by this new social order. The dichotomy is a hierarchy but also separation of subject from object.

One consequence of communicating about the native/black body as a physical object is that natives become hyper-sexualized (Mohanram, 1999) in the white imagination as sexually endowed (Dyer, 1997) and/or sexually violent (Fanon, 1967). Such myths reinforced colonizer’s resolve to control and restrict native bodies. This consequence surfaces in white, female colonists’ preoccupation with saving the native woman (Gandhi, 1999; Mohanram, 1999; Trinh, 1986/1987 a & b). Colonial women perceived native man to be violent, oppressive tyrants and the native woman to be ignorant of their own oppression thus requiring the help of enlightened white, western women. This paternalistic thinking ignores native women’s strong cultural allegiances and views native culture as physically oppressive and needing western intervention.

Feminist scholars who write about whiteness have worked to correct the misconception that gender oppression is solely a native or black woman’s issue. McIntosh (1995) argues that the systematic unearned privilege of whites, including feminists, parallels that which is exercised by white men over women. McIntosh (1995) wants white western feminists to realize that they uphold structures of white privilege just as they reject structures of male privilege. The postcolonial mind-body dichotomy is also juxtaposed to the nature-culture dichotomy in which women in western cultures are characterized as nature (e.g., as fertile bodies or domesticity) in

contrast to men as culture (e.g., thought, public life) (Supriya, 1999). The implication of this dichotomy is the same as logical male as culture is intended to rule illogical nature or woman.

Shome (1999) argues that colonization pervades all aspects of social organization including educational institutions so that even after formal colonization has ended the structures remain and continue the colonizing mission. Shome points to different uniforms (e.g., school, Girl Scout) are extensions of the colonial period's aim to regulate native bodies. The word *uniform* generally communicates sameness. The paradox of colonial uniforms is that one does not become one and the same with the colonizer by donning the colonial uniform but instead is marked as different, and less than, in the colonizer. The uniforms do not erase the native body completely but foregrounding the colonizer's culture, language, and social structure as the standard against which cultures are measured. Uniforms connote the colonizer's desire to build a version of the homeland literally upon native backs.

hooks (1999) points not to uniforms but to uniformity of thought. hooks (1999) argues that the mind-body split manifests in education when students' frustration, emotion, passion, and desire are met with the neutral logic and calm rationality. hooks (1999) argues that this negates the individual experience of the physical dimensions of knowing. The classroom that only accommodates minds works to the exclusion of all bodies especially non-white color when knowledge of oppression and discrimination has physical dimensions.

The postcolonial mind-body dichotomy prompts whiteness studies because by focusing on whites' obsession with the native body the white body remains to somewhat unarticulated (Supriya, 1999). A colleague speaking about society's obsession with weight once noted, "Our minds are always on our bodies." The postcolonial mind-body dichotomy reifies that white minds are not on white bodies but on black bodies. It could be argued that only when the

dominant white culture marks the body as different (e.g., as overweight, disabled, old) do whites become mindful of white bodies. This selective mindfulness no doubt misses white skin privilege. Perhaps prompted by postcolonial thought, whiteness scholarship in the subsequent section, asks what is missed when white minds do not reflect on the meaning of white bodies.

The Performative

Performance describes activities are carried out by individuals that in front of and to influence social observers (Goffman, 1959). By applying the performance frame to social life Goffman (1959) elaborates how identity or character is socially constructed through social utterance and action. Communication and rhetoric scholars have used performance to theorize sexual and racial identity. Butler (1990, 1993) defines the performative as compulsory, stylized, and repetitive acts that work socially to inscribe identity upon the body. Whiteness studies seek to consider how whiteness is normalized and made invisible (Warren 2001 a & b).

McIntosh (1995, p. 189) argues that white privilege provides, "[...] an invisible knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides [...]" White privilege is invisible because, just as gender is not marked until performed outside of the heterosexual norm (Butler, 1990); race is not noted until it is performed differently from the white norm. The invisibility of whiteness and white privilege to many people is what makes it difficult to name and thus to disrupt. Whiteness is of specific interest to Communication because whiteness and white skin are codes for communicating cultural meanings and because whiteness is also given it's meaning through the communication (Johnson, 1999) including performance as communication.

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) catalogue six communication strategies that hide whiteness and white skin privilege which can also be considered performative actions. The first of these is straightforward and is the association of white skin, whiteness, with power. The second approach

is to speak of whiteness in the negative; that is to speak of whiteness as a lack or absence of race or ethnicity. Thirdly science is used to naturalize whiteness to obscure that it is a race. The fourth strategy conflates whiteness with nationality not race. For instance, Martin and Davis (2001) note how intercultural communication research will speak of Americans as a homogenous subject group. The fifth strategy is when whites claiming colorblindness. For example, Warren (2001 a) found his performance studies students would claim colorblindness when performing about issues of racial identity. The final and sixth strategy involves claiming European origins to avoid claiming whiteness. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) argue that whiteness is not essential but instead changes when and how it is communicated about. This echoes Hall's (1996) argument that race is a floating signifier that is contingent on a specific context, culture, and time to give it meaning. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) argue that postcolonial studies can be shortsighted by treating whiteness as an essence. Similarly Supriya (1999, p. 130) argues that while other racial identities are theorized by postcolonial thought whiteness, "[...] is under theorized if not theorized as a monolithic category." As to why this gap exists one could consider different reasons. Hytten and Adkins (2002) argue that postcolonial studies have issued a challenge to white academics to investigate and theorize their own whiteness. It seems that it could be the invisible nature of whiteness, as this survey of whiteness studies illustrates, that allows it to evade the scrutiny of postcolonial thought.

Supriya's (1999) argument begs the question; it is the responsibility postcolonial theorists to further theorize whiteness? Is it the invisibility of whiteness or is it a challenge to whites to examine their own privilege? Whiteness is clearly not totally hidden from the postcolonial consciousness. Collins (2000) argues that former black house slaves, by being outsiders within, were able to observe their white masters and this provided them an intimate understanding of

whiteness. Perhaps it is more imperative for the postcolonial perspective to give subjectivity to the black/native body that was negated and objectified under colonialism than to theorize whiteness when making such connections would most benefit white academics.

It is important to return to the point that race is not fixed or essential (Hall, 1996; Nakayama and Krizek, 1995). Examples of this point illustrate the arbitrary nature of race as a signifier. To explore whiteness as a racial category requires recognizing that in earlier times whiteness was given different meanings that excluded groups that today are generally considered white. At one time in US history white skinned Jewish-Americans (Applebaum, 2000), Irish-Americans (Ignatiev, 1996), and other European groups (e.g., Italian, Polish) (Brodin, 1999) were not considered white. Imahori (2002) similarly notes the arbitrary nature of race as a signifier by noting how as a Japanese-American that he is given white skin privilege. Tankei (2005) argues predominant ethnically Japanese majority exercise something akin to white privilege over the small percentage of ethnic minorities that live in Japan. These examples belie the arbitrary nature of race as a communicative symbol that is inscribed and re-inscribed with meaning through communicative activity.

In keeping with Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) sixth strategy my family, when asked to specify race, claims European ancestry rather than speaking of our French roots. One of my cousins strongly reflects this French background with her dark skin, hair and eyes. Within the context of our extended family, who all lived in close relation to one another, we never questioned my cousin's whiteness even though she so obviously in complexion from her immediate family. Sometimes a non-family member would question my cousin's coloring and the family would assert that "she is very French looking" but at the same time not claim French or other roots. My cousin's actions contributed to the performance. She would bleach her hair

and wear light foundations. We went to the beach as a family she would reside under an umbrella because the oft spoken family assumption that she “did not need any more color.” Such actions and talk allowed and required me to only to see and to think of my cousin as white.

Years later I came upon pictures of my cousin’s wedding in our family album. An Aboriginal Canadian couple dressed in traditional wedding costumes stared back at me from one photo as I casually flipped through the photos looking for my cousin. It took me a moment to realize that this was my cousin and her Aboriginal Canadian husband. The moment allowed me to realize the whitening effect of my family’s communication and her personal rituals. I became aware of my own and my family’s whiteness at that point especially how important it was to the family that my cousin be white. Now family members talk about my cousin’s striking complexion, high cheekbones, and dark eyes and this is due to the fact that her race is not fixed but contingent upon her new context as the matriarch of a multiracial family.

My cousin’s story highlights the performative element of identity. Her daily, repeated, and stylized beauty rituals worked in concert with the content of family declarations allowed her a white identity that was largely unchallenged by other white people. Some performative/social constructions of whiteness urge whites to claim those non-white aspects of their identity to disrupt their white privilege in a similar way to my cousin’s example. Applebaum (2000, p. 8) cites the work of the New Abolitionist Movement that urges whites to become “reverse Oreo cookies” and to undermine the authority of their white skin. Encompassed within this approach are daily disclaimers that foreground our non-white identity and actions that are meant to undermine or subvert our white skin privilege. The work is meant to brown the population to the eventual destruction of whiteness.

The New Abolitionist approach is widely criticized. Specifically Warren (2001 b) questions whether we can performatively undo whiteness and its ensuing privilege. In one sense Warren (2001 b) questions whether we have the agency to effect a change in how skin is viewed as our intent in performance may not foretell how a performative is read. My cousin's story would seem to support the view that we can perform a different race over the skin color we possess. I think it is clear that my cousin's performatives of whiteness is being unanimously supported by a system (i.e., the family) whose interests (i.e., appearing to have white-European roots) are best served by supporting her claim to white. The discursive/social system that surrounds the performative can influence how it is read. The implication is clear when we apply the postcolonial dichotomy. Within the dichotomy the colonizing powers' economic interests were best supported by society's belief in the native as non-white and thus as less than a person. Talking about natives in this way supported and even urged colonizing as a mission. In addition my cousin's skin, as the product of racial hybridity, was much easier to reinscribe as white than would a much darker complexion person be turned white.

An example from postcolonial India shows how whiteness performatives do not necessarily confer whiteness upon the native body. Sometimes the performative and not the desired identity is what is foregrounded. For instance, postcolonial India's enchantment with the culture and accoutrements of England has been well documented in scholarship and dramatized in fiction. When this enchantment influences the bodily performative of Indian nationals it becomes a type of colonial imitation that Bhabha (1994) has called mimicry. Bhabha (1994) suggests that such mimicry is partial because of excess or slippage. For instance, the native body is not made to disappear as is the case with wearing the colonial uniform. The colonizer sees the slippage of such mimicry beneath colonial appropriations of the mother country. The effect

Bhabha (1994, p. 415) notes is one of ambivalence or “almost the same, *but not quite*” that has achieved only a resemblance of the white English. A further irony in such performance is that it assumes that the white English identity can be fixed, essentialized, and appropriated.

Warren’s (2001 b) other critique of New Abolitionism rightly questions whether these performatives have the support of communities of color. Not only do such performatives work to erase the color line but they are an appropriation of another’s culture (Warren, 2001 b). Attempts to disown white privilege might be seen as whites attempting to appropriate racial minority’s oppression by shifting focus to white issues. Further, the history of oppression that comes with black skin cannot be recreated within the abolitionist performance frame leaves me to question what actually is achieved by abolitionists assertions of their disrupted whiteness? In addition a disrupted performance of whiteness requires social observers that are willing to read the performance in the desired way and this cannot be guaranteed.

The reluctance of whiteness scholars to support the New Abolitionist approach speaks to the disagreement about what remediation strategies best serve the cause of whiteness. As I have previously cited, some scholars argue that whiteness is not sufficiently theorized. Others claim that we have theorized sufficiently and we need to focus on translating our understanding of whiteness into equitable and just practices (Warren, 1999). Some like Hytten and Adkins (2001) and Applebaum (2000) say that we should work with communities of color to help to help us in doing this. By turning to this communities of color for help in managing white privilege are whiteness scholars risking being accused of shirking their responsibility?

I do not claim to have an answer to any of these dilemmas. This essay privileges the perspective that there is no pure, fixed, or essential identity that one can claim. This means that whiteness scholars will never likely have claims to a white identity that is uncomplicated by a

history of oppression. Similarly postcolonial scholars cannot claim to a pure pre-colonial native culture untouched by the colonial influence. Perhaps the call by some in whiteness and critical race studies is to engage a performative that will allow whiteness to be inscribed with more equitable and enlightened meanings in the future. In this way there is recuperative value for the white identity in the performative construction of identity.

The Gaze

The concept of the gaze comes to us by way of psychoanalytic theory. More specifically applications of psychoanalytic theory describe the politics of looking taking place both within society. Lacan's (1977) gaze exists beyond the surface appearance and signals a lack that speaks to the subject's castration anxiety. Lacan (1977, p. 73) notes, "In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze." In critical academic parlance the term generally connotes a look, or mode of looking, that signifies something or comes of a particular perspective and how that perspective is invested or divested of power. For instance, feminist film scholar Mulvey (1975) revitalized work on the gaze by positing that the popular Hollywood film is shot from the perspective of and for the pleasure of male gaze. In other words she argues that Hollywood cinema divests the female subject of her power and as such constitutes a male fantasy. One of the results of this gaze was a tradition of positioning the Hollywood leading lady as a fetish object to escape the castration threat she could pose to the male gaze. Whiteness scholar Dyer (1997) argues for that popular film has a white gaze that fetishizes the black body.

This is of course a scant outline of the gaze but it provides a sufficient knowledge of how the gaze operates from a perspective of power to both privilege and suppress. I foreground the

traditions of psychoanalysis and film in my definition of the gaze because these fields have largely shaped the literature I draw upon for this essay. The gaze is foregrounded as it appears in the postcolonial writings of Fanon (1967), a psychologist, and in hooks (1996) writings on the white, male and the black oppositional gazes in film. I will look at how the lens of the gaze has been used by these multiple perspectives encompassing the postcolonial and whiteness to explain the experience of the body both of self and of other.

The gaze is increasingly positioned as white and male with the power to determine the configuration of the popular gaze. A central focus of Fanon's (1967) work implicates the white gaze, specifically, how this white gaze, indicative of a white, male perspective, shapes the black man's identity and experience of his own body. Fanon (1967) explains that a black man experiences his body through the gaze of the white man because he is rendered black in relation to whiteness. This experience of having white children in France react to Fanon's presence in public as a black man with fear and hysteria allowed the psychologist to posit his subjectivity in triplicate: in one sense his body occupies physical space, upon recognition by whites his body is displaced as he moves toward the condition of other, and finally he is further removed as evanescent other as his body is represented not by its physical exigencies but as a marked image within the white gaze. The effect Fanon (1967) notes is as a black male he assumes the white gaze as he becomes aware of his being experienced from without through his black body.

In earlier writing Fanon (1965) applies his knowledge of the gaze to the Algerian experience of colonialism. Specifically he documents the experience of Algeria in its violent opposition to French colonial occupation. One point of contention in the ensuing war was the body covering garb and veil assumed by traditional Algerian women. Fanon (1965) suggests that it unnerved the white, male colonizer to be able to be seen by Algerian women but not to be able

to see them or in particular to know their bodies. The implication is the colonizer is not able to displace the castration anxiety he experiences in the presence of the Algerian woman by making her a fetish object because she is hidden. In this way the Algerian woman seemingly avoids the control of white male gaze and having to see her body from the perspective of the white gaze.

To return to the Algerian example as the French, male colonizers intensified their efforts to unveil Algerian women, under the premise of advancement for women the veil acquired a strategic role in the conflict as veiled women were allowed for a while to invisibly, and anonymously circumvent French colonial surveillance to support the colonial resistance movement. Fanon (1965) has tried to argue that the assuming of the veil was a liberating move for Algerian women and people. Postcolonial feminists note that Fanon's veil argument is not so simply stated and have trimmed his claims. Trinh (1986/1987, p. 5) argues, "If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out, or more precisely, on how and where women see dominance. Fanon (1965) makes the mistake of fixing dominance in the gaze of the colonizing white male without recognizing the power of the native male gaze to constrain women's bodies within Algerian culture. Fanon's (1965) reification of dominance and oppression in the white male gaze but turning that gaze back on itself reveals the uncertain nature of that dominant white position.

The postcolonial dichotomy is premised on the colonizer's perceiving the black/native as a physical body but if the body is hidden from view then this subverts this objectification and thus a basis of the colonial system. Lacan's (1977) concept of gaze as indicative of castration anxiety could explain why the black body is framed as it is within the postcolonial dichotomy. Simply, when the white gaze foregrounds the physicality of the black body it is to displace its own bodily anxiety in subjugating another. In addition by applying Fanon (1967) the gaze is

shown to displace the body from physicality to an image. This take the native from subject to evanescent image-object; native as object is a key element of the postcolonial dichotomy. A white colonizer's fears of sexual inadequacy, physical weakness, or a lack of control are displaced by his gaze so that he sees the black body as a grotesque spectacle of physical excess. In comparison to this spectacle the white colonizer is able to normalize his body and allay his fears that the native other will castrate him. So though the white male gaze may make a physical image out of the black body the implications of that gaze suggest that the white colonizer has an inadequate or incomplete experience of his own white body.

Though this reading demystifies the power invested in the white body and the white male gaze the fact remains that for non-whites being met by the white gaze can be a terrifying experience. hooks (1995) details the experience of walking through the white section of town to get to her grandmother's house as a young child. She describes feeling the weight of the white gaze upon her black body from seemingly empty porches and windows. For hooks (1995) whiteness is the omnipresent gaze that threatens to bear down upon her vulnerable black body. There is little recourse for blacks caught in the white gaze because hooks (1995) notes the black prohibition against looking back at whites, a legacy of slavery, endures to some extent.

Though hooks (1996) argues that taking back the gaze by adopting an oppositional gaze can give agency she posits that some in the black community, like the black female spectator, have been so abused by the white male gaze so as to make them skeptical of the agency available through such a practice. Speaking of popular film hooks (1996) argues that Hollywood presents films from the perspective of the white, male gaze and for the pleasure of this same gaze. This gaze does not require the presence of a white filmmaker. Similar to Fanon's (1967) internalization of the white, male gaze hooks (1996) notes that black male filmmakers (e.g.,

Spike Lee) have adopted conventions of the white male gaze specifically when it comes to presenting the black female body as a sexual fetish object needing male control. Instead, hooks (1996) identifies opportunities for blacks to engage the oppositional gaze in foreign, non-Hollywood films that tend to demystify whiteness.

Clearly, more work needs to be done to as the oppositional gaze gains confidence in engaging the white, male gaze in oppositional ways. Non-whites have come to construct identity not through their own gaze but through their black bodies as represented in the white gaze. This represents a colonizing of the gaze that must be overcome with alternate gazes that account for the dominance of whiteness in its attempts to characterize non-whites' experiences through its own privileged perspective. Looking back to respond rather than to mimic demonstrates an agency that could prove empowering and unsettling. I say unsettling because I do not want to suggest that looking back to claim agency is without risks for the subjugated.

Conversely it is enlightening for whiteness studies to realize the myriad of ways that the white body is implicated as both powerless and oppressive in the deployment of the white gaze. The white gaze has been so fixed on the image of the black body because this has allowed it to displace its own shortcomings by reviling the perceived excesses of the black body.

Additionally, the white gaze has achieved such power in the non-white imagination that it does not require the presence of the white body in order for its oppressive presence to be felt.

Examining the gaze through blacks' experience of whiteness demonstrates that whites' everyday practice of looking constitutes an exercise of white skin privilege that can oppress or threaten the non-white subject. Just as whites search for ways to resist or undo the privilege of white skin we must also work to create more equitable practices of looking that allow our white gaze to be met with oppositional force.

Final Considerations

Juxtaposing postcolonial and whiteness perspectives allows for an exploration of the myriad of ways in which the body inscribed, displaced, replaced, and obscured with meaning. Each perspective refines our understanding of the construction of racial identity within the communication discipline. Juxtaposing postcolonial and whiteness perspectives allows the gaps in each to be identified and elaborated. What is less clear is what the ultimate goal of interrogating racial identity will be within communication studies. Is the ultimate goal, as some proponents of whiteness studies suggest, doing away with whiteness as an identity or as some postcolonial proponents propose, to reconcile hybrid identities characterized by contradictions and problematic pasts.

This essay began with the assertion that postcolonial and whiteness theories represented multiple theoretical perspectives a small aspect of which was covered in this essay. This essay concludes by reaffirming the wisdom of this multifaceted approach. By examining the issues of racial identity and the body through the contrasting subjectivities offered by the postcolonial and whiteness approaches a more complete understanding is achieved. The resulting understanding is more complete but by no means exhaustive and drawing upon these perspectives communication scholars must push the boundaries of racial identity to map new terrains while continuing to problematize claims to singular and fixed identities within established structures of power and oppression.

A further opportunity for the development critical communication inquiry into racial identity lies in developing the language that is used to communicate the extent of privilege. This essay illustrates that we must find more sophisticated ways to talk about privilege and oppression. New ways of communicating must recognize that skin color, while perhaps the

predominant mediator of privilege, is not a singular factor in determining the extent of racial privilege. As racial signifiers are redefined and expanded we must not forget that the context in which signifiers operate as being a messy soup of influences that empower and disempower individuals in a myriad of ways.

One caution is that this is not a license for communication scholars to shirk their responsibility to critically interrogate whiteness but rather it is an opportunity to examine how white privilege is conferred in the absence of whiteness. For example following the research of Brodtkin, (1999), Imahori (2002), Tankei (2005) it is worthwhile to develop examine how and when and where white privilege is conferred upon non-whites and, in a nod to postcolonial theory, consider how and if historical factors converse to allow this to happen. For the postcolonial academic within communication studies this could mean increased attention to the fact that identity is a fluid construct that requires that we constantly reevaluate our relationship to the forces of power. I would assert that both perspectives continue to work together not so that they might speak with a single voice but so that they might continue to challenge each other to account for such gaps.

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