Abstract

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as an identity-conscious intervention within critical legal studies and has subsequently developed an interdisciplinary presence. We draw upon CRT perspectives to articulate five core ideas for a Critical Race Psychology (CRP). CRT perspectives (1) approach racism as a systemic force embedded in everyday society (rather than a problem of individual bias); (2) illuminate how ideologies of neoliberal individualism (e.g., merit, choice) often reflect and reproduce racial domination; (3) identify interest convergence as the typical source of broad-based support for reparative action; (4) emphasize possessive investment in privileged identities and identity-infused realities that reproduce racial domination; and (5) propose practices of counter-storytelling to reveal and contest identity-infused bases of everyday society. In summary, we propose a CRP that consider race not as one domain (among many) for psychological investigation but instead as a conceptual lens through which to analyze all of psychological science.

Toward a Critical Race Psychology

The 5th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2001) included a chapter on “Expressing Ideas and Reducing Bias in Language” that provides guidance on the use of non-offensive language when writing about race and ethnicity. For example, the guidelines note that authors should eschew such ethnocentric and offensive terms as Negro or Oriental and instead use more conventional terms like Black/African American or Asian/Asian American. More illuminating was what the passage failed to say. Although the section spanned three pages, it maintained a noteworthy silence regarding appropriate terms for referring to the people who have historically dominated US society—that is, people of European descent whom we will refer to as White Americans.

This passage is just one example of the larger construction of race and racism that informs present-day psychological science. Implicit in this passage is the idea that race and ethnicity apply only to certain “others” who acquire racialized subjectivity primarily by virtue of deviation from a raceless White American or European norm (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Morawski, 2004). More generally, such passages reflect the idea that race and racism are somewhat marginal phenomena that are relevant for understanding only a few aspects of psychological functioning and social reality. From this perspective, events or research are not race-relevant unless there are special circumstances, such as the inclusion of racial and ethnic minority participants that give it racial character.

Against this background of inattention to racial power in psychological science, we draw upon theoretical perspectives of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in law (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000) and education (e.g., Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the words of an authoritative text,
The [CRT] movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective…. [CRT] questions the very foundations of the liberal order. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; pp. 2–3; emphasis added)

According to one authoritative account (Crenshaw, 1995a), CRT perspectives grew out of frustration among scholars from historically oppressed racial minority groups regarding an inattention to racial power in critical theory and critical legal studies. According to this account, the prevailing tendency in these fields was to regard race or identity consciousness as a form of essentialism or particularization that threatened solidarity of critical movements. In response, proponents of CRT argued that even these critical, politically progressive formations had unacknowledged foundations in White identity concerns that constrained its utility as a tool for analyzing oppression. Whereas critical theorists looked to racial minority scholars to inform a critical theory of race, these scholars saw the need for a Critical Race Theory: a framework that was not simply the application of White-washed critical theory to a subset of phenomena with obvious connections to race relations but instead viewed the entirety of social science phenomena from an analytic lens that highlighted racial power.

We propose that the time is ripe to promote a similar analysis in psychological science. Instead of viewing racist power as a particular domain for investigation via psychological scientific tools, CRT approaches suggest that one take racial power as a conceptual lens through which to analyze phenomena and conduct psychological science. Among other implications, a CRP challenges psychologists to reveal how institutions and practices in society at large, including such politically liberal and highly educated spaces as psychological science, both bear traces of and function to reproduce racial power.

Intersections of CRT with Psychological Science

Synergistic foundations

Although we know of no explicit attempts to articulate a CRT perspective within psychological science, there are several perspectives that provide synergistic foundations for this endeavor. Just as CRT drew upon traditions of critical legal studies, our articulation of a CRP draws upon critical psychology. In the words of one famous formulation (Parker, 1999), the elements that define critical psychology include the following: systematic examinations of how some varieties of psychological action and experience are privileged; insights on how all varieties of psychology are sociocultural and historical constructions; articulations of the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice; and exploration of the way everyday ‘ordinary psychology’ structures academic and professional work and its basis for resistance to contemporary disciplinary practices. Critical psychology initiatives are cognizant of the ways in which mainstream psychology operates within particular cultural paradigms and elaborates theoretical positions that provide avenues for social change.

Just as scholars developed CRT as an intervention to foreground identity consciousness and race(ism) as a primary category of analysis within critical legal studies, we see a similar value in articulating perspectives of CRP that foreground identity consciousness and race (ism) as a primary category of analysis within critical psychologies. For this purpose, we find synergistic foundations in a variety of psychology perspectives: Multicultural
Counseling (e.g., Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; see Ponterotto et al., 2010), Black Psychology (e.g., White, 1970/1991; see Jones, 2004), Indigenous psychologies (e.g., Enriquez, 1993; Gone, 2011; see Kim & Berry, 1993), whiteness studies (e.g., Green et al., 2007; Riggs, 2004; see also Fine et al., 2004), and critical psychologies of racism (e.g., Hook & Howarth, 2005). These perspectives draw upon identity-conscious knowledge to reveal and counteract manifestations of racism and neocolonialism in society and psychological science.

Our approach to a CRP also draws upon the theoretical traditions of Liberation Psychology (e.g., Martín-Baró, 1994) and Cultural Psychology (e.g., Adams, 2012; Shweder, 1990). The action-oriented perspective of Liberation Psychology draws upon the epistemological perspective of “majority world” or postcolonial contexts to emphasize the need for a psychological endeavor that (a) is oriented toward the needs of marginalized peoples; (b) uses methodologies and ways of knowing aligned with perspectives and social realities of the oppressed; and (c) is critically conscious of its own transformative power (Martín-Baró, 1994). The theoretical perspective of Cultural Psychology emphasizes the mutually constitutive relationship between psychological experience and culture (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2004) and challenges to universalist assumptions that psychological processes are “just natural” (Shweder, 1990). Although conventional approaches to Cultural Psychology have tended to sidestep issues of oppression and domination (cf., Jones, 1991, 1997), our own articulation of this perspective emphasizes two strategies for decolonizing psychological science (Adams & Salter, 2007). The first strategy is to provide a normalizing, context-sensitive account of “other” patterns that mainstream psychological science regards as abnormal. The second strategy is to denaturalize patterns that mainstream psychological science tends to portray as standard. By “turning the analytic lens” (Adams & Salter, 2007) to reveal the positioning of mainstream psychological science in White understandings and desires, a Cultural Psychology perspective can illuminate ways in which psychological science contributes to the reproduction of structured racialized inequality.

A shared focus of these “underground” perspectives (Sellers et al., 1998) is a proposition that mainstream psychology blindly reproduces a particular, racialized worldview of what constitutes “real” human experience. These (often marginalized) voices in psychology advocate an explicit prescription for identity consciousness and a deliberate awareness of racial positioning of the actor and the institution. This prescription is antithetical to the reigning ideology of positivism in psychological science, which holds as a normative standard the myth of the positionless observer who pursues objective truth without the biasing effects of racial or other identity baggage. As we noted previously, this prescription is also at odds with perspectives of critical theory (in psychology and elsewhere) that caution that race consciousness may be susceptible to “false” consciousness – that is, ideological processes that may obscure awareness of “more basic” (e.g., class) oppression, undermine broad solidarity, and thereby create openings for divide-and-rule strategies of domination. In response, identity-conscious perspectives note that calls for broad human solidarity often impose constructions of “humanity” that are not “race-neutral” but instead bear the mark of privileged racial subjectivity. While recognizing the dangers of an exclusive focus on race to the exclusion of other categories (see Crenshaw, 1995b; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), and without essentializing identity or reifying problematic categories, the important contribution of identity-conscious perspectives to the CRP project is to emphasize how claims about race neutrality or denials about the relevance of racism resonate with beliefs and desires of racial power and serve to reproduce racial domination.

In summary, our articulation of a CRP builds on a synergistic foundation of critical voices within the field of psychology. Where it departs from existing accounts is in its adoption of
race and racism as a primary analytic device for considering work across the spectrum of psychological science. In contrast to non-racialized or “underlying mechanism” explanations of identity-based phenomena that one might otherwise discuss as racism or oppression (e.g., outgroup derogation, ingroup favoritism, stigma, or dehumanization), a CRP highlights the central role of race and racism in structuring contemporary human psychology (and the study of psychology).

Applications of psychological science in Critical Race Theory

Rather than articulations of a CRT perspective in psychological science, the more typical intersection of these perspectives has been appropriation of psychological scientific research within CRT. A noteworthy example is the perspective of Critical Race Realism (CRR), which draws upon empirical psychological research to challenge conventional thinking within legal studies (Parks et al., 2008). A particularly fruitful domain for application of this perspective has been anti-discrimination law. Legal scholars have drawn upon social psychological research to challenge narrow conceptions of discrimination that limit the reach of anti-discrimination law by requiring proof of deliberate, differential treatment motivated by racial antipathy that the actor intentionally designs to produce harmful outcomes (Krieger, 2004; Swim et al., 2003). Instead, psychologists have documented the pervasive occurrence of discrimination without conscious awareness by people who strive to live in a non-discriminatory fashion in accordance with unprejudiced identities that they sincerely endorse (e.g., Devine, 1989; Dovidio, 1997; Fazio et al., 1995). An influential perspective of CRR referred to these automatic expressions of implicit bias as a “Trojan horse of racism” (Kang, 2005) – a reference to the ways in which these insidious forms of bias resemble a malicious computer virus – and proposed that anti-discrimination remedies change to reflect awareness of these biases.

As experimentally trained social psychologists, we take a small measure of vicarious pride in the knowledge that empirical research in psychological science can contribute to CRT objectives in the field of law. At the same time, we question whether the intellectual perspectives associated with the research resonate with the broader CRT framework. CRR acknowledges the historical contributions of science to the subordination of entire peoples (Kang, 2005) but nonetheless tends to elevate scientific research as a sort of higher truth. Certainly, one can draw upon such research to challenge the legal conventions that constitute racial power. However, the uncritical appropriation of such research can constitute another “Trojan horse of racism” – truer to the original sense of the phrase – in which the “gift” of scientific research comes with dangerous ideological baggage that undermines the project of racial justice. To cite an example that we elaborate in the next section, psychological scientific work on racism typically reflects the “prejudice problematic” (Weatherell & Potter, 1992; see Dixon & Levine, 2012; White, 1970/1991; Henriques, 1984; Leach, 2002; Wright & Lubensky, 2008): an atomistic focus on individual bias that deflects attention away from the analysis of racial privilege that is central to a CRT analysis.

Core Directions for a Critical Race Psychology

As we have noted, one can find compatible ideas for a CRP within psychology departments (see Adams & Salter, 2011). Still, psychologists are more likely to encounter CRT analyses if they work in schools of education. A classic articulation of CRT within education theory and research is the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who proposed five core ideas
or tenets of a CRT analysis (see also Delgado & Stefanic, 2000). We draw upon their discussion of CRT in education to discuss initial directions for the development of a CRP.

The systemic character of racism

Conventional understandings in mainstream US society imply an atomistic construction of racism: that is, as isolated acts of ignorant hostility by prejudiced actors who bear an almost abnormal antipathy toward racialized targets (Doane, 2006). Likewise, conventional accounts in mainstream psychological science have tended to approach racism from the perspective of a “prejudice problematic” (Dixon & Levine, 2012; Weatherell & Potter, 1992) that treats racism synonymously with prejudice (biased feelings or affect), bigotry (intolerance or hatred toward those with differing beliefs), and stereotyping (biased thoughts and beliefs) or flawed generalizations. Critical legal scholars have noted how this focus constitutes a “perpetrator perspective” on racism (Freeman, 1978): one that is focused on culpability (or not) of racist actors rather than targets’ experience of racist harm.

In vivid contrast to the standard construction of racism as individual bias, a first tenet of a CRT analysis is a conception of racism as a systemic force embedded in the enduring structure of society (e.g., Bell, 2000). Resonating with a cultural–psychological emphasis on mutual constitution of mind and world, this perspective locates the foundations of racism not in hearts and minds of biased individuals but instead in ecological structures of racism inscribed in everyday worlds that continually tune (and reflect) racist subjectivity (Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008; Feagin, 2006). In contrast to the implications of standard approaches that limit the problem of racism to a few deviant individuals or situations, a CRP perspective suggests that racism is a descriptively normal feature that continues to infuse everyday interactions in present-day American society. The corresponding implication is that the solution to the problem of racism requires more than simple prejudice reduction, multicultural tolerance training, or changing hearts and minds. Instead, the solution to problems of racism requires dismantling the systems of privilege and corresponding ways of being that, although ostensibly neutral, bear the imprint of dominant-group understandings and systematically serve the interest of continued domination.

White-washing race and laundering inequality

Atomistic conceptions of racism have a foundation in broader conceptions of self and society that locate action and experience in isolated individuals abstracted from social context. As such, these conceptions of racism resonate with other discourses of neoliberal individualism – including such concepts as freedom (from government interference), meritocracy, choice, or abstract reasoning and related ideals of identity-neutral perception – that inform both mainstream society and psychological science. A CRP analysis emphasizes that these manifestations of neoliberal individualist subjectivity are not “just natural” or available for all humanity but instead reflect the particular experience of people – most prototypically, propertied White men – whose identity positions (and socioeconomic correlates) afford them the experience of abstraction from context (e.g., Kraus et al., 2012).

Manifestations of neoliberal individualism not only reflect White American understandings but also serve White American interests and desires. Accordingly, a second tenet of a CRP analysis is that discourses of neoliberal individualism act as tools for laundering, White-washing (Brown et al., 2003), or otherwise obscuring evidence of racism in American society. As such, discourses of neoliberal individualism constitute what Mills (1997) has referred to as “epistemologies of
ignorance”: practices of knowing that afford possibilities of not knowing about troublesome facts that might otherwise be obvious. Although they masquerade as colorblind or race-neutral ideologies, discourses of merit, choice, and the scientific prescription for identity-neutral perception constitute epistemologies of ignorance that obscure knowledge about the operation of racism in everyday society. From this perspective, the scientific prescription for identity-blind analysis – with the suggestion that one leave one's identity at the laboratory door – does not produce more objective observation. Instead, this prescription is productive of ignorance to the extent that it renders invisible the racialized character of standard accounts.

As a tool to counteract epistemologies of ignorance, a CRP advocates identity-conscious forms of inquiry that draw upon marginalized perspectives to reveal the extent to which conventional scientific wisdom reflects and promotes interests of domination. We propose that consciousness about marginalized perspectives raises awareness about epistemological diversity and thereby challenges investigators to consider the ways in which their own identity positions afford some understandings and constrain alternative understandings. In other words, the point is to elevate identity-conscious forms of inquiry as epistemological tools that are as indispensable for an intellectually rigorous, psychological science as the critical orientation that psychological scientists apply to issues of experimental design and quantitative reasoning.

Interest convergence

A noteworthy manifestation of neoliberal individualism is “colorblind” ideology: that is, the idea that one should make decisions and observations without regard to race or racial processes. In the contemporary, “post-racial” context, perspectives of CRT argue that colorblind ideology serves as a tool for the production of ignorance (Crenshaw, 2011). Indeed, despite its representation as an identity-neutral strategy, research suggests that colorblind ideology reflects the understandings and promotes the interests of people who occupy positions of dominance (e.g., Knowles et al., 2009). Consistent with this idea that colorblind ideology reflects dominant-group understandings, White Americans tend to prefer an explicit emphasis on characteristics of “people without regard to race” over explicit forms of race consciousness. Consistent with the idea that colorblind ideology promotes dominant-group interests, the promotion of colorblind ideology reproduces White privilege. Institutionalization of colorblind ideology adversely affects productivity and threatens the identity safety of minority students (e.g., Plaut et al., 2009; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). In a workplace context, White American coworkers’ endorsement of colorblind ideology negatively predicts Black American coworkers’ psychological engagement (Plaut et al., 2009). More generally, colorblind ideology promotes denial of racism, such that people perceive less racism and indicate less support for anti-racist policy when colorblind ideology is salient than when it is not salient.

The case of colorblind ideology highlights a third tenet of a CRP analysis, which proposes that broad support for civil rights and racial justice emerges only when it aligns with interests of White Americans (e.g., Bell, 1980). The classic articulation of this “interest convergence” hypothesis is Derrick Bell’s analysis of the Brown v Board of Education (1954) decision, for which he argued that the motivating concern was not so much protecting rights of Black Americans as it was a Cold War propaganda strategy. The case of colorblind ideology represents an even darker version of this idea in which mainstream society not only appropriates discourse of Civil Rights – for example, King’s call to judge people not on the color of their skin but on the content of their character – but also does so in ways that are antithetical to the Civil Rights movement and serve to reproduce racial domination.
One can also identify similar issues with multicultural ideology, which many analyses treat as the “opposite” of colorblind ideology. In particular, discussions of multicultural understanding and tolerance of diversity can be detrimental to the cause of racial justice to the extent that they emphasize celebratory appreciation of racial or cultural others. As in the opening example of the APA Style Guide, discussions of multiculturalism and diversity can reproduce a construction of White identity as a race-less or culture-less standard. When these discussions fail to illuminate the White-washed ecologies of racism and the possessive investment that White Americans have in constructions of reality that afford them privilege, they constitute epistemologies of ignorance that serve interests of ongoing racial domination.1

On a more optimistic note, the idea of interest convergence does suggest directions for action. In particular, it suggests that attention to the dynamics of White identity privilege and the White-washed character of mainstream society can provide people with the knowledge that they need to effectively resist the systematic reproduction of racist realities. Of course, White people must also be willing to disinvest in constructions of reality that afford them privilege, and it may be difficult to convince them that doing so is in their own interest. Indeed, this may be the issue with mainstream approaches that frame anti-racist action as something that one does on behalf of oppressed others. That is, disinvestment in the illegitimate privileges of Whiteness may require that people do so “not out of sympathy for someone else but out of a sense of self-respect and simple justice” (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 23). Consistent with this idea, situations that confer a sense of moral adequacy tend to neutralize identity-defensive motivations for self-enhancement and render White Americans more willing to admit the extent of racism and injustice in American society (Adams et al., 2006).

White identity as possessive investment

Opposition to identity-conscious analyses often takes the form of arguments about applying the lens of race and racism to otherwise identity-neutral domains. This experience of psychological science as an identity-neutral domain is possible because of the extent to which mainstream American society and psychological science naturalize whiteness. As in the example of the APA style manual, research in psychological science has a default presumption of racelessness – such that one need not mention race – unless the sample includes racial or ethnic minorities (Cundiff, 2012). This practice not only elevates whiteness to the status of human standard, against which responses of racialized others constitute deviations that require explanation (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001), but also elevates studies of White folks to the status of basic research on general human properties (rather than merely “applied” research that considers the moderating effect of race on these basic qualities). In an important sense, then, conventional practice in mainstream psychological science affords White possession of the category “human” in the same way that mainstream representations afford White ownership of the category “American” (e.g., Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos et al., 2010).

Drawing on observations such as these, a fourth tenet of a CRP analysis holds that White identity (and its cultural manifestations) is a profitable possession that brings benefits to the bearer (e.g., Harris, 1995). The White-washed character of mainstream institutions and conventional scientific wisdom is not accidental; rather, its emergence and persistence reflect a “possessive investment in whiteness”. One expression of investment in White-washed realities is in preferential reproduction of certain cultural-psychological forms rather than others. For example, our research on the cultural psychology of Black History Month displays indicates...
that White Americans prefer representations of history that emphasize individual triumph and celebration of diversity rather than representations of history that emphasize the Civil Rights movement to overcome barriers of systemic racism (Salter & Adams, 2013).

Possessive investment is also evident in the extent to which people are motivated to defend the legitimacy of White-washed constructions of reality. The atomistic constructions of racism that inform scientific wisdom are not simply detached consequences of neoliberal individualist subjectivity. Instead, atomistic constructions of racism reflect identity-defensive motivations that exert pressure on White Americans to define racism “safely” and perceive their relatively privileged position as something other than the illegitimate and objectionable product of ongoing domination (Adams et al., 2006; Lowery et al., 2007). To the extent that identity-conscious perspectives of a CRP challenge White-washed constructions of reality disguised as conventional scientific wisdom, one can anticipate (and therefore better identify) similar forms of defensive resistance to introduction of these perspectives into mainstream psychological science.

Counter-narratives as a foundation for a Liberation Psychology

A fifth core idea of CRP perspectives is an emphasis on counter-storytelling as a tool for revealing and resisting the racialized bases of society and everyday experience (e.g., Delgado, 2000). Although it is certainly possible to use discourses of multiculturalism and diversity in ways that reproduce racial domination, the identity-conscious knowledge associated with racially oppressed communities is an indispensable tool for a psychology of racial justice. Beyond a more context-sensitive understanding of marginalized “others”, the value of such knowledge comes from drawing upon experience of people in oppressed communities as an epistemological tool to reveal the typically obscured racial and cultural positioning of mainstream accounts.2

Although space constraints prevent an extended discussion of this idea, we present an example from our own research on group differences in understandings of racism (Nelson et al., 2013). As we noted in an earlier section, conventional accounts in psychological science reflect a construction of racism as a relatively circumscribed problem of individual bias that resonates with White American beliefs (e.g., individualist conceptions of agency; Markus & Kitayama, 2004) and desires (e.g., to defend the legitimacy of American society). The practical consequence of this perpetrator perspective is to obscure the systemic character of racism – particularly the instantiation of White privilege in “standard” features of mainstream society – and to deflect attempts at anti-racist change toward removing the aberrant barriers that constitute disadvantage rather than dismantling the “standard” constructions of reality that confer privilege.

In contrast, CRP perspectives draw upon the experience of people in racially oppressed groups to propose a more cultural-psychological account of racism as an enduring feature inscribed in everyday worlds. From this perspective, the primary site of racism is not in individual bias but in cultural-psychological products that include celebratory constructions of history and national identity (Salter & Adams, 2013), associations of “American” with White (Devos & Banaji, 2005), atomistic conceptions of racism (Adams, Edkins, et al., 2008), a valorization of choice (Stephens et al., 2009), conceptions of ability and merit (Croizet, 2008, 2011), and other manifestations of neoliberal individualism. Again, these cultural-psychological products reflect domination to the extent that they take particular (White American) understandings and pass them off as natural facts or objective standards. Likewise, these cultural-psychological manifestations reproduce domination to...
the extent that they systematically scaffold, enhance, defend, and legitimize White accumulation at the expense of others. Rather than focus on promoting tolerance and changing prejudiced minds, a CRP analysis draws upon the epistemological perspective of the oppressed to reveal and (eventually) dismantle the structures of privilege that systematically confer racial advantage to White Americans.

Concluding Comments

The discussion of counter-narratives and the epistemological value of marginalized perspectives provides an important opportunity to revisit a point that we made earlier. A common critique of identity-conscious analyses (e.g., analyses that privilege epistemological perspectives of marginalized peoples) is that such views are not free from ideological constraints and can constitute “false consciousness” (cf. Matsuda, 1990). It therefore bears repeating that our purpose is not to claim exclusive access to truth or to replace one set of hegemonic claims to truth with another set. We do not claim that identity-conscious viewpoints – or viewpoints associated with marginalized identities – are necessarily infallible; nor do we deny that these viewpoints, too, reflect ideological processes (e.g., see David & Okazaki, 2006, for a discussion of colonial mentality). Instead, we propose that identity-conscious perspectives like CRP provide a necessary tool for a critical psychology of society and psychological science. At minimum, we consider it a rather non-controversial assertion that people in marginalized communities can offer valuable insights for work on racism and oppression. In response to portrayals of identity consciousness as “false”, Mari Matsuda emphasized the reality and transformative power of such consciousness.

[T]he record that reveals that subordinated people do make history, particularly when their political practice gives them a consciousness of their position. Workers claimed the eight-hour day; women claimed suffrage; African-Americans claimed access to public accommodations….This happened not by chance, but by a consciousness of exclusion and demands for inclusion that originated outside the academy. (Matsuda, 1990; p. 8)

However, the impact of a CRP extends far beyond psychological analyses of racism and oppression. More generally, identity-conscious perspectives help to illuminate how racial power infuses other phenomena – for example, merit, choice, emotion, and methods – that mainstream psychological perspectives portray as race-neutral. An important direction for CRP will be to provide analyses of the racially positioned bias of contemporary claims to post-racial or colorblind objectivity in these domains.

In this work, we describe a potential formation of CRP and its roots in CRT, critical psychology, and identity-conscious perspectives, more broadly. We present a set of ideas to facilitate a CRP framework with which psychologists might discuss how race and racism continue to operate in US society. Like other perspectives of critical psychology, we propose that CRP perspectives emphasize an application of intellectual tools in a reflexive manner to examine ways in which the everyday work of psychological science serves to reproduce relations of domination. The potential contribution of CRP perspectives is the application of identity-conscious knowledge – based on the epistemological perspective of people from racially oppressed groups – as a tool to reveal the typically obscured, racial positioning of conventional wisdom in mainstream psychological science. In this way, a CRP analysis represents articulation of an identity-conscious perspective within psychology that foregrounds racial power as a primary category of analysis. In the place of colorblind positivist ideals of a mythical “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986) or a pure science abstracted from
context, a CRP emphasizes a self-critical, identity-conscious, reflexive form of inquiry that illuminates the operation of racial power and ideology in theory, application, and method.

Short Biographies

Phia S. Salter is an assistant professor of Psychology and Africana Studies at Texas A&M University. Her current theoretical and empirical research agenda combines an interest in the sociocultural bases of mind – the idea that foundations of mind reside in cultural context – with an interest in illuminating and deconstructing systems of racism and oppression. She holds a BS in Psychology (with a concentration in Ethnic Studies) from Davidson College and a PhD in Social Psychology from the University of Kansas.

Glenn Adams is an associate professor in the Psychology Department at the University of Kansas and an affiliate of the Kansas African Studies Center. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone before enrolling in the PhD program at Stanford University. His graduate training included 2 years of field research in Ghana, which provided the empirical foundation for his research on cultural-psychological foundations of relationship. His current work builds on this foundation to critique neocolonialism in psychological science and to articulate a postcolonial psychology that heeds Fanon's call for new concepts that facilitate human liberation and development.

Phia Salter presented an earlier version of this work at a Race and Ethnic Studies Institute Workshop at Texas A&M University and received valuable feedback. This work also benefited from generous support that Glenn Adams received during fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.

Endnotes

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1 Also consistent with this observation was the strategy of the 2003 affirmative action amicus brief submitted by the APA to support the University of Michigan. Rather than a means to correct for the historical legacy of injustice and racism, the APA brief instead emphasized the necessity of identity-conscious admissions to ensure diversity in the classroom from which all students – but especially White Americans – can benefit (see Gurin et al., 2008). Although the Court permitted some form of identity-conscious admissions, most observers interpret their decision in more conventional articulations of the identity-convergence hypothesis. Particularly, observers speculate that the most important influence on the decision was an amicus brief from military educators, who argued that identity-conscious admissions were necessary to produce a diverse officer corps and necessary for national defense.

2 This call to adopt the epistemological perspective of people from oppressed groups bears a resemblance to calls within mainstream psychology to integrate the “target's perspective” into investigations of racism (Swim & Stangor, 1998). Consistent with these calls, researchers have devoted attention to (a) how and when target members perceive racism or discrimination (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 2001; Wout, Shih, Jackson, & Sellers, 2009), (b) the psychological consequences of these encounters (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998), and (c) how targets of racism and discrimination cope with such encounters (e.g., Hunter & Lewis, 2004; Jones, 2003; Outten, Schmitt, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009). A CRP requires that work in this area move beyond examinations of a target's experience from mainstream perspectives to a more critical examination of mainstream psychological science from a target's perspective.

References


