

Dialogues on Whiteness, Leisure and (Anti)Racism

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Abstract

This essay offers one response to recent calls for leisure studies scholars to more effectively integrate race into their analyses. Drawing from interdisciplinary scholarship within ethnic studies, cultural studies, and gender/women's studies the article initiates a broader dialogue about the possibilities and dangers of analyzing whiteness within leisure contexts. The article outlines several studies that demonstrate ways in which whiteness operates to advantage white hegemony. It suggests how the concepts of power evasiveness, normalization and intersectionality might be applied to leisure settings and concludes with a discussion of some problems associated with the study of whiteness. The ultimate aim of the essay is to provoke further dialogue as a step toward documenting and overturning inequitable social arrangements in the movement toward justice.

KEYWORDS: Whiteness, leisure, race, normalization, intersectionality, power evasiveness

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship within ethnic studies, communication studies, cultural studies, critical legal studies and gender/women's studies (among others) has generated increased scholarly interest in interrogating the workings of whiteness in a variety of sites including sport and leisure. Originally presented as the George Butler Lecture in the Leisure Research Symposium at the 2008 National Recreation and Park Association Congress and Convention, this article highlights existing interdisciplinary cultural studies, critical race theory, and feminist scholarship. The goal of such engagement is to generate wider and more sustained dialogues about both the problems and possibilities of wrestling with whiteness. In that spirit, the ideas offered here were first presented at the Leisure Research Symposium in Baltimore, MD. At that time three colleagues—Nina Roberts, Kimberly Shinew and Corey Johnson—responded to and critiqued the points also made here.

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This exchange can additionally be understood as an attempt to answer recent calls (Hylton, 2005; Kivel, 2005; Shinew, Stodolska, Floyd, Hibbler, Allison, Johnson, & Santos, 2006; Floyd, 2007; Floyd, Bocarro & Thompson, 2008) for leisure studies scholars to better incorporate race into their analyses, and expand theoretical and methodological boundaries to more adequately address the salience of race within 21st- century leisure contexts. Indeed Floyd, Bocarro and Thompson's (2008) recent review of the scholarship on race and ethnicity within five leisure studies journals—*Leisure Science*, *Leisure Studies*, *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, and *Loisir et Societe*—found that between the journals' inceptions and 2005, a mere 4.5 % (150 of 3,369) of the articles featured race or ethnicity as a central focus. Compared to broader disciplinary trends, within these five journals "research on race and ethnicity in leisure remains limited relative to the literature as a whole" (Floyd, Bocarro & Thompson, 2008, p. 2). Floyd (2007) additionally suggests that there also appears to be a shift away from analyses that center race and racism toward less controversial studies that focus on ethnicity and cultural differences within leisure and recreational settings. This shift is in contrast to the scholarship on sport, which has pursued a much more "race-centered agenda" (Floyd, 2007, p. 250).

Suffice it to say, despite evidence of under-representation and critiques of existing scholarship, there is, of course, a body of scholarship that does interrogate the significance of race within leisure and recreational settings, and especially when leisure is understood in its broadest sense (Freysinger & Harris, 2006). Several useful overviews document the contributions of this scholarship (Floyd, 1998; Freysinger & Harris, 2006; Shinew, Stodolska, Floyd, Hibbler, Allison, Johnson, & Santos, 2006; Floyd, 2007; Floyd, Bocarro & Thompson, 2008). These overviews include Freysinger and Harris' (2006) trajectory of how race and ethnicity have been historically conceived and realized in leisure scholarship as representing four specific and yet overlapping foci. These themes move from the early invisibility of race in leisure research to specific scholarship that focuses on racial differences as constraining within leisure settings to writings which conceive of leisure as sites of opportunity and expressiveness—including opportunities for people of color to resist, challenge and transform the existing racial order. The final theme represents the "perceptions of racial difference/distinctiveness as a form of leisure" (p. 261) suggesting that race often serves as fodder for fantasy, pleasure and also discontent. Pleasure is often experienced via identifications with those similarly raced; however, people of color are psychologically and materially adversely affected when repeatedly confronted with demeaning and stereotypical racial representations.

Taken as a whole this leisure scholarship on race concurs with a wealth of social scientific evidence, which suggests that race still matters in everyday life as measured in the contested, but still inequitable distributions of opportunities, rewards and psychological security. And yet, given the fluidity of race relations as well as insights offered through a variety of critical theoretical and methodological perspectives from the interdisciplinary "fields" which I am most familiar—cultural studies, gender/women's studies and ethnic studies—there is more work to be done. To effectively build upon existing leisure scholarship, Floyd advocates for a greater infusion of critical and interdisciplinary perspectives to provide "more critical analysis of how race impacts leisure experiences and practices" in order to intervene in these processes in an effort to create a more equitable and just world (Floyd, 2007, p. 250).

There are numerous ways and means to expand existing scholarship to critically analyze the specific ideologies and practices, which both reinforce and resist inequitable social relationship in regards to leisure and race. For example, some scholars have argued the need for leisure and recreation researchers to more fully engage with critical race theory (Hylton, 2005; Freysinger & Harris, 2006), intersections of race, gender, sexuality and/or class

(Shinew, Floyd, McGuire & Noe, 1995; Carrington, 1998) and critiques of whiteness (Watson & Scranton, 2001; Long & Hylton, 2002; Kviel, 2005; Freysinger & Harris, 2006). While frequently incorporating ideas from critical race theory and theories of intersectionality this later focus on whiteness is also important in placing attention not only on the effects of racism upon people of color, but on the knowledges and practices that largely privilege whites. Toni Morrison (1992, p. 90) has eloquently delimited this central aim of whiteness criticism as attempts to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served.”

And yet, reversing the analytic gaze is not without problems and challenges. These problems and challenges range from disagreements about what whiteness exactly entails to debates over whether whiteness is even an analytically useful concept (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Indeed divergent political, disciplinary, epistemological and ontological assumptions have lead scholars, writers and activists to variously conceive of whiteness as—for example, an identity, an ideology, a standpoint—while debates continue over whether these various usages actually obscure contemporary racial inequalities and discourses.

In light of these tensions, concerns and debates, offering a definitive account of how analyses of whiteness might be best practiced by leisure scholars would be an undesirable if not impossible task. Instead, my aim here is more modest with the intent of offering one point of entry into broader discussions by highlighting some of the potential contributions and dangers of writings about whiteness. Toward this end I begin by crafting a short narrative, which discusses some writings on race and whiteness as social and political constructions. I next suggest particular ways in which whiteness operates in the broader culture. Throughout this latter discussion I briefly outline related studies and suggest how specific ideas from these investigations might be usefully applied to leisure settings. This paper concludes with a discussion of some problems associated with the study of whiteness. The goal of this final section is not to simply outline limitations, but in doing so to suggest the need for continuous dialogue in (re)theorizing contemporary racial formations and inequalities as a step in the movement toward justice.

It should be additionally noted that while citing scholars who write both within and outside of North America contexts, this paper mostly draws examples from United States cultural, sport and leisure practices. Given the divergent histories and contextually specific manifestations of race, racism and (post)colonialism throughout the globe, this discussion is thus most likely to be salient in regard to racialization and racial formations within the US imaginary.¹

The Power of Race and Whiteness

Far from a recent academic object of study, many contemporary accounts point to the early 20th-century writings of black sociologist W.E. B. DuBois including the *Souls of Black Folks* (1903), *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1936) and a lesser known essay, *The Souls of White Folk* (initially published in 1910 and then revised and republished in 1920) as

¹ Omi and Winant (1986) define racialization as the historically contingent and ideological “extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group” (p. 64). Closely related to this notion is the term racial formation, or “the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings” (p. 61). Several commentators note that the recent proliferation of writings about whiteness largely emanate from the United States and are thus critical of attempts to apply this body of knowledge wholesale to other distinctive racial formations and racialization processes across the globe. There is a growing body of scholarship that does recognize the global and local particularity of whiteness in spaces beyond the US. For more information on the movement to critique whiteness in a variety of postcolonial and international contexts, see López (2005) and Levine-Rasky (2002).

providing key insights for future analysis of whiteness (Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 1999; Dyson, 2004; Rabaka, 2006; Twine & Gallagher, 2008). For example, in the initial version of the *Souls of White Folk*, DuBois characterized the shift from de jure to de facto forms of segregation as “the new religion of whiteness” (DuBois as cited in Rabaka, 2006, p. 3). Twine and Gallagher (2008, p. 4) place similar ideas in a broader historical context noting that critiques of white power have “been central to intellectual projects of US black scholars for more than a century” and suggest that the insights of DuBois in particular originated the “first wave” of whiteness criticism.

Since the 1990’s there has been an expansion in scholarly writings about whiteness which builds on this legacy in a variety of ways including the use of a notion that DuBois is thought to have first implied: race is a social construction. Social constructionist views challenge commonsense notions of race as a biologically based marker of natural difference to instead suggest that race is a human creation eminently tied to inequitable social relations. Historical analysis has provided important insights in this regard demonstrating that race is a modern invention whose meaning and significance varies by time and place (Omi & Winant, 1986). For example, Omi and Winant (1986) note that European colonizers questioned whether or not the indigenous peoples they “encountered” in the “New World” were members of a different and presumably inferior stock of humanity. Religious debates over whether or not God had created one (monogenesis) or many (polygenesis) species of humanity and whether or not the native peoples had redeemable souls were later accompanied by 18th- and 19th-century scientific theories, which classified and ranked bodies.

An 1800 visit by French scientists to Africa, Tasmania, and Australia to observe and classify aboriginal peoples, helps mark the ascendance of biological theories of “race,” indebted to comparative global analyses of anatomies, customs and languages (McWhorter, 2005). Similar and subsequent classification systems assumed that visible external differences in skin color, temperament, and phenotype reflected inherent differences in levels of sophistication, civilization and development with white bodies ranked at the top (Omi & Winant, 1986; McWhorter, 2005).

As Robyn Wiegman (1995, p. 31) additionally observes early biological views did not simply produce the erroneous notion of race “as an inherently biological feature,” but also helped to produce the notion of the superiority of white bodies, especially white male bodies due to a much deeper seemingly “inherent and incontrovertible difference of which skin was only the most visible indication.” Wiegman concludes that amongst competing views, biological and anatomical myths about hierarchical “interior structure of human bodies thus extrapolated in both broader and more distinct terms the parameters of white supremacy, giving it a logic lodged” not in inequitable social relations, but “fully in the body” (p. 31). “Race” is thus conceived as an effect of power or subjectivization—the continuous production of raced subjects—seeking to maintain boundaries between socially created and hierarchical categories of bodies (Wiegman, 1995; McWhorter, 2005).

From its inception, then, the human invention of race was never merely a matter of religious doctrine, description and/or objective scientific verifiability, but instead fraught with ideological assumptions with important consequences for the treatment afforded “dominant” and “subordinate” racial groups. Commonsense ideas about racial difference generated from racial classification systems were used by whites to justify European colonial expansion as allegedly necessary to “civilize” bodies of color in Africa, Asia and locally. In the US as well as in other places across the globe, “the expropriation of property, the denial of political rights, the introduction of slavery, and other forms of coercive labor as well as outright extermination” all presupposed the superiority of white bodies in contrast to the apparently inferiority of racialized “others”—especially indigenous and African bodies (Omi & Winant, 1986, p.

58). These insights suggest that such systematic racism is “not just about the construction of racial images, attitudes and identities. It is even more centrally about the creation, development and maintenance of white privilege, economic wealth and sociopolitical power for over four centuries” (Feagin, 2000, p. 1).

The advent of 20th-century civil rights and anti-colonial movements, globalization, expanded migration, as well as the contemporary proliferation and flexibility of new racial categories and identifications are both significant and instructive. They demonstrate that the contours, effects and meanings of race and racism—while persistently imbedded within regimes of power—are continuously open to contestation, struggle and change. Much as with feminist and neo-Marxist perspectives, academic advocates for this position typically eschew positivist and post-positivist claims to objectivity and value neutrality. Instead they advocate for scholarship, which theorizes the material processes whereby racial discourses create racial identifications, which in turn attempt to maintain and normalize inequitable social conditions (Kivel, 2005). Hylton (2005) suggests that such critical scholarship is additionally invested with a “political agenda of challenge, change and transformation” which can “contribute to the ability of sport and leisure communities to critically reexamine how ‘race’ and racialized processes and formations are incorporated in their theory and practice” (Hylton, 2005, p. 94).

According to the assumptions of critical race theorists, contemporary analyses of whiteness focus on the institutional discourses and exclusionary practices seeking social, cultural, economic and psychic advantage for those bodies racially marked as white. Analytic attention thus centers on “the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality and privilege rather than disadvantage” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236). And while analytic scrutiny is explicitly placed upon attempts to secure white dominance, normativity and privilege, critical perspectives acknowledge that such practices are especially significant in that they most often also negatively impact people of color via subordination, marginality and disadvantage.

Read from this perspective, whiteness is “a dynamic of cultural production and interrelation” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 260) which performs differently in diverse global, national and local contexts. To conceive of “whiteness as a performative social interrelation reveals that whiteness is not a stable object of study, nor a stagnant identity, but a fluid set of” knowledges and “practices that simultaneously produce identifications with and are imperfectly reiterated by bodies, especially ‘white’ bodies with important consequences for life, opportunity, and psychic security” (McDonald, 2005, p. 250). The active, elastic and adaptable character of whiteness means that rather than simply describing what whiteness is, it is more useful to explain what whiteness does (Gabriel, 1998).

Thinking Through Whiteness

Numerous scholars, writers and activists have theorized and analyzed the various contexts and ways in which whiteness has and continues to operate (Frankenburg, 1993; Gabriel, 1999; Levine-Rasky, 2002; Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dyson, 2004; Winnubst, 2006; Owen, 2007; Garner, 2007; Twine & Gallagher, 2008).² Three persistent, overlapping themes or tactics conceptualize whiteness as working through: color and power evasiveness; normalization; and intersectionality. Below I discuss each of these themes in greater detail,

² Several authors conceive of and name these tactics differently. For example, Dyson (2004) conceives of whiteness as: “domination; ethnic cohesion and instrument of nation making; proxy for an absent blackness it helped to limit and distort; whiteness as the false victim of white power.” Garner (2007) characterizes whiteness as: “terror and supremacy; a kind of absence; values, norms and cultural capital; and contingent hierarchies.”

offer examples from relevant studies to better elaborate on a given tactic and suggest how these themes might be applied in leisure studies. Toward this end, the examples offered here are not meant to be prescriptive and exhaustive; but, suggestive and provocative of scrutiny, revision and/or rejection in any future quest to describe the various roles leisure plays in bolstering or diminishing the power of whiteness.

It is additionally important to note that while these three themes are frequently cited: they are not definitive as there are innumerable ways in which whiteness performs; these are not always and everywhere relevant given diverse histories both locally and globally; they do not function in the same ways in every context; and, the workings of these themes/tactics are fraught with ambiguities and contradictions, and frequently articulate with other strategies as well. Taken as a whole these caveats reveal a central paradox: That while the functioning of whiteness relies upon mythological notions of homogenized bodies imagined as “races,” these varied and shifting themes/tactics further illustrates that whiteness should not be conceived in narrow, essentialist ways (Gabriel, 1998).

Whiteness as Color and Power Evasiveness

In a much cited work, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) analyzes 30 white women’s ideas about the impact of race in their lives. In her interviews Frankenberg found three competing framings—sometimes all expressed in the same interview—which she argues are akin to historical shifts in public understandings of race in the United States: racial essentialism, color and power evasiveness, and racial cognizance.

Ideas she characterizes as representing racial essentialism—a founding mythology of white supremacy that posits people of color as biological inferior to whites—appear infrequently in the women’s narratives of race. Since biological theories of “minority” racial inferiority no longer hold ascendancy in the post-civil rights era, the women’s responses most often drew upon more contemporary, dominant ways of understanding race. Frankenberg describes these understandings as color and power evasiveness, one element of which constitutes the belief in meritocracy or that “we are all the same under the skin; that culturally we are converging; that materially we have the same life chances in U.S. society; and that...any failure to achieve is therefore the fault of people of color themselves” (p. 14).³

This ideology helps to fuel the belief that race does not shape the lives of white women, and that only people of color are raced. Frankenberg’s initial attempts to secure white women as study participants to discuss race is instructive in this regard as she was met with an array of defensive responses ranging from confusion, to denials of the inquiry’s relevance, to silence and discomfort. Comparable reactions are common. For example, in Shinew, Glover and Parry’s (2004) investigation of interactions among blacks and whites in community gardens, the white participants also responded in similar ways when asked by researchers if they felt connected to their race. In short, where blacks easily answered the question as feeling strongly connected, many whites seemed confused and frustrated by such inquiry, failed to see its relevance and intimated that “race does not matter.”

According to Frankenberg, the final framing, race cognizance, is a narrative more likely articulated by people of color and traceable to ideas generated from the antiracist, nationalist and cultural renewal movements of Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native Americans during the

³ Frankenberg prefers the term color and power evasiveness in contrast to the more commonly known phrase, color blindness for two reasons. First, the former terminology suggests white avoidance, while the latter suggests that whites are incapable of engaging and challenging racism and white dominance. Secondly, Frankenberg wishes to avoid the use of disability metaphors in characterizing white power.

1960s and 1970s. It appreciates the distinctive contours of cultures, values, aesthetics, etc. while simultaneously acknowledging the historical, social, economic and political contexts, which help to produce such differences. A few of the white women in this study used this framework producing a continuum of comments and theories about white complicity with racism.

In contrast to race cognizance, color evasiveness claims to “not see” race serve as a form of “polite” race talk and this discourse was frequently used by the white women to distance themselves from any perceived association with essentialist racism. A central assumption from within this paradigm was that to “see race” was to be racist and thus “bad” and conversely to not notice or discuss race was “good.” This uncritical appeal to sameness posits whites as innocent bystanders to racial relations and subsequently dovetails into power evasiveness by failing to acknowledge institutional inequality and the differences that race makes (Frankenberg, 1993).

Doane (2003) makes a comparable argument suggesting that white claims to “not see race” and that “race does not matter,” is fraught with contradiction. While presumably offering a moral call to equality in treating all the same, this understanding actually serves to define race as an “illegitimate topic for conversation” (p. 13). Since race is thought to be irrelevant anyone interjecting race into discussions is thought to be complaining, or seeking special treatment for people of color. Arguments for structural redress by people of color are thus defined as illegitimate. Meaningful conversations and changes are additionally muted in that whites typically embrace individualism and don’t see themselves as raced or enjoying advantages. Such a worldview helps maintain white hegemony. And the fact that some of the women in Frankenberg’s study invoked two or more common racial discourses additionally implies that the maintenance of white hegemony is not a uniform process, but instead fraught with innumerable ambiguities, contradictions and modes of resistance.

There is sport and leisure scholarship that has begun to wrestle with similar questions, concerns and contradictions. For example, in their study of grassroots football (soccer) clubs in the United Kingdom, Long and Hylton (2002) asked football secretaries to complete a survey about “minority” involvement in their clubs. Responses to an open-ended question about how the secretaries self-identified in regards to race and ethnicity drew predictable results (e.g. white, Caucasian, black, etc.) along with several disclaimers including: “not a problem for our team; not prejudice; I have been brought up to treat all races equally; very social and treat everybody the same” (p. 92). Others characterized themselves as “human beings,” still others noted “colour does not come into it [football]” (p. 92). While some of the responses aligned within contemporary understandings of racial categorizations, others infer white neutrality, universality and innocence. The language of equality, sameness and prejudice additionally suggests that if racism exists at all, it is a matter of biased individual attitudes and personal behavior.

As a public discourse, power and color evasiveness are not just limited to conversations; rather, they are insinuated throughout the culture. King and Springwood’s (2001) analysis of the representational politics of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Hall of Champions and the National College Football Hall of Fame demonstrates this point. Although racial difference is central to college sports, both representational spaces “dematerialize it, excise it, and otherwise dismiss its continued” political significance (p. 20). Central to this process are celebratory narratives of achievement, personal perseverance and individual sporting greatness, especially as performed by white athletes, which mask practices of conflict and stratification.

For example, the museums do not engage the historical “prominence of Native American athletes, nor the conditions under which they excelled in and later all but disappeared

from intercollegiate athletics” (p. 25). Within the College Football Hall of Fame race only appears to have impacted sport recently and visually the integration of college football is devoid of historical context and presented as a progressive, conflict-free intervention. The College Football Hall of Fame displays evade “the details of historical struggle, terror and frustration that surely characterized the experiences of African American students who began playing on previously all-white teams” (p. 26). The result is a metaphoric and literal “white out” where racial inequality and white complicity is erased from these representational spaces.

These analyses of “white talk” and public spaces suggest further questions that might be more widely investigated to compliment existing scholarship. Such an inquiry into color and power evasiveness seems particularly relevant given commonsense notions of leisure as freely chosen, voluntary activities presumably outside of political influence. One entry point to further investigate color and power evasiveness is via building upon existing scholarship that documents the centrality of racism and discrimination in experiences of leisure and everyday pastimes for people of color. This also includes “their engagement in more organized and planned recreation as well as the programming and policy implications of such” (Freysinger & Harris, 2006, p. 258).

In following Morrison’s (1992) charge to hone analytic attention on whiteness, inquiries might include such research questions as: To what extent are essentialist, and color and power evasive strategies articulated by white leisure participants, and/or administrators? Are similar understandings articulated via implementation of programming and policies of a given leisure provider, organization or public space (e.g. youth sport league, outdoor recreation, theater, library, etc.)? What other narratives are produced and are these related to shifting public discourses on race? What are the effects of these discourses on leisure experiences and participation by people of color and whites? What about organizations, such as the YWCA, which feature a stated commitment to ending racism—do policies and programming, reflect race cognizance discourse? Do representational practices including the marketing of public leisure spaces such as museums or parks utilize color and power evasive strategies? If so what ideological work do these representations do? How do people of color make sense of color and power evasive strategies related to leisure spaces? What are some of the strategies used by people of color to resist and challenge these forms of white power? Is race cognizance articulated in “white talk” or representational spaces? How might white race cognizance and racial justice be more broadly facilitated in leisure sites?

Whiteness as Normalization

While Frankenberg’s work demonstrates that white power and privilege are not apparent or visible to many whites, others additionally suggest that whiteness frequently masquerades as a universal norm (Gabriel, 1998). Dyer (1997, p. 3) captures the character of this tactic in suggesting that, “white people create the dominant images of the world and don’t quite see that they thus construct the world in their image” (p. 9). That is, despite challenges, contradictions and locales of resistance, frequently this tactic attempts to ensure that whatever is associated with “white” is imagined as natural, normal, and/or inevitable. While not always explicitly named as preferable, these associations do serve as a standard reference point against which all sorts of aesthetic, political, cultural and moral judgments are made. These include judgments about beauty, goodness, and rationality. Global, colonial and neocolonial relations exercised via technology and militarization have additionally helped to facilitate this form of normalization through Western dualistic thinking. Within this framework, white subjectivities, particularly white male subjectivities, are ideologically aligned

with the culturally valued characteristics of order, civilization, and rationality in contrast to representations of racialized “others,” marked as “deviant” and imagined as chaotic, primitive and carnal (Garner, 2007). Such a process not only serves to reinforce culturally created boundaries, which stigmatize the “other,” but also bolster white “normality.”

A recent ethnographic study (Bosse, 2007) of ballroom dance in a small Midwestern town reveals that leisure spaces are not immune to this particular form of normalization. Historically, forms such as modern ballroom dance with roots in European aristocracy typically have served as the aesthetic standard in contrast to other, presumably less sophisticated forms. Narratives articulated by Midwest dancers and dancing instructors from a variety of racial backgrounds, frequently reinforced “modern” ballroom dance as rational, refined and beautiful in contrast to the seemingly more physically primitive, carnal and exoticness of Latin dance. In doing so these dance narratives also reify racialized Cartesian mind-body dualism of “the rational mind and irrational body” (p. 41), a practice that naturalizes and supports white privilege. That this narrative was articulated by a racially diverse group of dancers reveals that whiteness is not only performed by white bodies. Just as importantly, this commonsense reaffirmation and normalization of binary and inequitable racial categories is not limited to this particular form of leisure. “Similar conceptual frameworks also structure practices in local political organizations, academic institutions, and corporate contexts, ultimately aiding in the naturalization of these categories as performed on the dance floor” (Bosse, 2007, p. 43).

A related normalizing practice can be found in the imagining of the nation. In particular, Morrison (1992, p. 47) captures the racialized character of US citizenship observing “American means white and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen.” Thus in contrast to a heterogeneous population with competing needs, dominant conflations of white with model citizenship allows white interests to be presented as ideals, which benefit the entire nation.

This process of normalization is shifting, contradictory and contested as the 2008 election of Barack Obama to the US Presidency reveals. To the extent that the president represents the nation, the elevation of the son of a Kenyan father and white mother from Kansas challenges dominant imaginings of the nation via assertion of black competency, intellect and resolve. And yet throughout the campaign opponents characterized Obama as anti-American mobilizing ethnocentric sentiments by emphasizing his alleged connections to terrorists, Arabs and the Muslim world (King & McDonald, 2008). Many supporters continue to cast Obama as of a figure of racial transcendence as “proof” that anyone can achieve the American Dream, a framework, which fails to fully consider the stratifying effects of current social arrangements. Given these competing discourses and entrenched interests, at the time of this writing, it is unclear the extent to which the elevation of Obama as the first black president will move public policy and institutional practices from their historical complicity in bolstering white hegemony.

Indeed, Doane (2003) outlines the numerous ways in which the US government has and continues to pose as a race-less, benevolent arbitrator of democracy and justice for all while actually protecting white interests and power. Specific examples range from the myriad of regulations and policing practices including treaties and laws restricting Native American autonomy, to strategies which deny, reframe or co-opt African American’s quests for equal treatment. Contemporary US debates and stalled legislation over immigration particularly in regard to Latina/os partially bespeaks a history where whites repeatedly are ideologically held out to be the most fit for citizenship and to lead the nation.

These issues are part of a longer lineage of US nation-state practices and policies, which

continue to cater to whites. For example, pre- and post- World War II federally backed loan programs designed to promote home ownership were largely denied to people of color and instead overwhelmingly awarded to whites. The redistribution of public money away from the urban core to help spur post-war suburbanization and the resulting “white flight” from urban areas all contributed to the (re)formation and entrenchment of racially segregated spaces (Lipsitz, 1999).

In cities across the country post-war highway construction facilitated transport to newly developed housing locales and leisured enclaves. Amidst contradictions and competing narratives, white middle class suburbia frequently became distinguishable in contrast to the urban core via new patterns of conspicuous consumption centered on lifestyle differentiation and a consumerist body culture. “The most celebrated derivatives of the rigidly class-based fitness movement that enveloped suburban America from the mid-1970s onward include jogging, aerobics and the expanding health and wellness industry” (Andrews, Pitter, Zwick, Ambrose, 2003, p. 207). New youth sport organizations including the proliferation of white-dominated soccer leagues have also emerged from these confluences. They further serve as another marker of suburban distinction ideologically set against the perceived black urban sensibilities of the city and games like basketball (Andrews, Pitter, Zwick, Ambrose, 2003).

These public policy decisions and subsequent actions have additional import in that public funds were shifted away from proposed urban renewal projects toward highway construction and infrastructural enhancement of white suburbia. In many cases such as in Los Angeles, newly constructed highways physically divided African American and/or Latina/o communities. This was the state of affairs even though blacks and Latina/os helped to fund these initiatives through their tax dollars. Those whites whose families initially secured loans denied to people of color continue to receive advantages when real estate prices escalate, suggesting a legacy effect in the creation of additional white wealth. Such normative power offers an added payoff for whites in regards to health and wellbeing (Lipsitz, 1999): To this day in places such as Los Angeles, these dynamics and persistent racialized spaces also mean that whites across the class spectrum are commonly more able to avoid and/or move away from industrial areas resulting in less exposure to environmental hazards and toxins (Pulido, 2000). In sum, these examples all illustrate the ways in which white interests are normalized by state power under the guise of community development.

Now private and public-private partnerships attempt to regenerate post-industrial cities as tourist sites; and yet, the result is often the gentrification and infusion of leisure venues (sport stadia, bars, restaurants) and entertainment events (concerts, festivals, arts) into poor neighborhoods and communities of color. While these communities have challenged this state of affairs, city leaders proclaim that due to decreased federal and local funding, attempts at regeneration are necessary to infuse capital back into the inner core (Smith & Ingham, 2003). Of course this phenomenon extends beyond the US as scholars of globalization can attest. Changing capitalist relations means that locales across the globe are more frequently marketed as playful sites of pleasure. One result of expanded global tourism is the increased visibility of local populations as the “other,” positioned as the object of scrutiny via the white Western tourist gaze (Urry, 1992; Atchinson, 2003).

This brief abstract of ballroom dance, racialized state policies, and global and local tourism begs further questions such as: What specific leisure forms, spaces and histories particularly bolster or challenge white attempts at normalization? Do new emerging leisure practices including new technologies found throughout the Internet interrupt or continue practices of normalization? What specific social, political, historical and economic forces have produced or resisted whiteness as normative in specific leisure spaces both locally and

globally? Are attempts to normalize white interests different in segregated vis-à-vis integrated leisure spaces? How do people of color resist white leisure normativity? How do local peoples invert and subvert the white “tourist gaze”? Given complex global flows and histories, how are white tourists positioned as the “other” in post-colonial locales? What other ways apart from public policy does state-sponsored whiteness impact leisure? How is the nation imagined in specific leisure representations and practices? In what ways do leisure policies globally and locally reflect or challenge the racialized state’s role in promoting white interests? How can leisure policy and practice more widely promote difference outside of the normalization of whiteness?

Whiteness as Intersectionality

A third way whiteness works is through intersectionality. Legal scholar Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1989) first coined “intersectionality” to show that both US legal standards and social justice movements frequently ignore the powerful interacting forces of racism and sexism and narrowly conceive of redress in terms of either race or gender. This singular conceptualization serves to erase the particular inequity experienced by women of color while doing little to investigate both the racial privilege of white women and the gendered advantages enjoyed by men of color. Intersectionality instead recognizes the complex matrices of privilege and subordination operating within and across particular contexts and institutions (Collins, 1990).

Similar intersectional perspectives by feminist of color have theorized the multiple ways people of color are various and differently sexed, raced and classed thus challenging white feminist preoccupation with white women’s experiences as the alleged foundational standpoint of feminism. Instead feminists of color contend that such limited notions merely focus on gender inequality while paradoxically denying “racial difference in order to maintain a coherent narrative of oppression based upon patriarchy” (Gillman, 2007, p. 118).

In contrast to misunderstandings of gender as outside the influence of racial formations, careful intersectional investigation reveals that whiteness colonizes other relations in complicated ways, and frequently in the service of white hegemony. For example, consider mid to late 19th-century notions of womanhood, which idealized the middle-class lady as pious, pure, gentle and domestic. Analyses that merely focus on the gender inequality critique the lady’s enshrinement and containment to the private sphere of the home as wife and mother. But a broader historical context reveals complex racial formations in that amidst the instability wrought by the end of slavery and new waves of immigration, such an idealized image was never simply about gender disadvantage but tied to a historically specific articulation of whiteness and heteronormativity. White middle class women were thus also venerated by white social commentators as central to the future of the white nation for their alleged superior morality and ability to produce racially pure, strong and healthy offspring. In this way, the white nuclear family, under the command of white women, was implicated in particular social relations as the ideological antidote to the alleged inferior stock of newly freed blacks and Irish immigrants (McDonald, 2002).

Updated versions of this “good white girl construct” continue to influence contemporary social relations. For example, popular culture is awash with similar images ranging from fairytales and Disney productions of Snow White to iconic religious figures such as Mother Theresa to Hollywood’s stock character of the “girl-next-door.” At one point the public persona of the Women’s National Basketball Association’s (WNBA) Suzie McConnell-Serio was mediated as a modern day, athletic version of “true womanhood.” The 1988 and 1992 Olympic basketball gold medalist was glorified in the media as much for her status as a de-

voted wife and mother of four children as for her WNBA basketball prowess and superior sportsmanship. Media representations of her skilled and selfless playing style, appreciation for her husband's support, and commitment to conservative "family values" all idealize athletic white womanhood as "responsible, concerned and non-threatening" (McDonald, 2002, p. 385). The ideological effects of this persona and similar popular culture representations resemble 19th-century dynamics in idealizing a historically specific vision of whiteness and heteronormativity, this time amidst contemporary challenges brought by the feminist, civil rights and gay movements, and increased immigration by people of color.

The intersection of whiteness with divergent social relations is also apparent in other leisure spaces. A recent ethnographic study of a Philadelphia barbershop quartet club exposes that "male bonding" is never simply about the workings of masculinity (Mook, 2007). While members and their supporters proclaim that barbershop's unique movements and harmonies provide a means to create social harmony in the form of closer bonds and intimacy among men, critical inspection reveals the group's sense of belonging and entitlement function through whiteness. Despite the stated need to reach out to diverse ethnic and racial populations, members of one all-white Philadelphia club, the Sounds of Liberty, assert that stylistic differences in musical tastes and preferences inhibit such efforts. This narrative of binary stylistic differences between the barbershop's neo-Victorian styles and contemporary music like rap, ignores "the myriad of nonmusical factors that might discourage people of color from joining the chapter, including some potentially offensive repertoires, or a lack of strong links between The Sounds of Liberty and communities of color in Philadelphia" (Mock, 2007, p. 476). Such a focus additionally obscures the ideological work performed via assertions that the group's masculine friendships and nostalgic lyrical performances embody authentic community, unity and character in a "city marred by the division and violence embodied in rap and popular music, a distinction they often cast in racial terms" (Mock, 2007, p. 476).

Reading these three examples against each infers that the advantages of whiteness are not shared equally or uniformly—that intersections of class, nation, sexuality, gender and ability articulated within specific contexts all mediate its effects and consequences. Careful mapping of these intersections within leisure spaces, however, should consider DuBois' still relevant claim about the "public and psychological wage" of whiteness. That is, by virtue of living in a white-dominated world, those racialized as "white" are enmeshed in social practices and relations, which grant a measure of respect and status (Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 1999). What needs to more fully undertaken within leisure studies, then is a careful mapping of the multiple ways in "whiteness converges with other social categories that modify and fortify white privilege" (Levine-Rasky, 2002, p. 18).

Importantly, such an intersectional mapping will also challenge some of the ways in which diversity is currently conceptualized and instead expose how whiteness, like other social interrelations, works both through and against binary framings. For example, much of contemporary scholarship on sexuality reifies simplistic notions of a hetero-homo binary, apparently removed from the effects of racial formations and racialization. Queers of color critique has instead insisted upon fresh modes of theorizing capable of recognizing the complex convergences between multiple, shifting relations of power (McDonald, 2006).

One place to witness the elasticity of whiteness in working through and against binary framings is via post-apartheid Cape Town, South Africa's emerging gay leisure spaces. In an effort to appease white "Afrikaner" fears, the new South African constitution of 1996 widely granted rights to an array of minorities including gays and lesbians. Subsequent legal protection reversing prohibitions against same-sex sexuality and then linked to a newly constituted

commercialized youth culture resulted in a variety of effects, including the emergence of new gay entertainment venues within the area of De Waterkant. And yet lingering legacies of apartheid have delineated this space, and like many other spaces, it remains largely inaccessible to bodies historically marked as “colored.” This status coupled with the division of labor and sexism means that DeWaterkant has become an exclusive enclave for wealthy white gay men, the beneficiaries of particular confluences of shifting social relations with whiteness (Visser, 2003). The case of De Waterkant reveals that common scholarly framings of sexuality as simply about gay disadvantage are always complicated by race—just as the effects of whiteness are multifaceted, and mediated via contingent social relations related to capital, class, nation and gender as articulated via particular political, social, historical and economic contexts.

These final points have important implications for how difference is conceived in leisure studies scholarship, suggesting the constant need to revisit conceptual understandings. This in turn will generate fresh question for investigation: For example, to what extent will the incorporation of whiteness into analyses challenge and/or enhance current conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, class and nation? Are current conceptualizations “race-less” or do these conceptualizations recognize the processes of racialization? Of whiteness? What perspectives, theories or knowledge domains (e.g. cultural studies, women’s studies, ethnic studies, queer theory) offer the most promise for the (re)imaging of these conceptualizations? How might the use of matrices of power as a core concept in investigations allow us to see either the modification or the fortification of particular articulations of whiteness in specific leisure spaces? In what ways are narratives of color and power evasiveness complicated via intersectionality in leisure spaces? In what ways is normalization within leisure spaces and practices complicated via intersectionality? What ambiguities and contradictions arise from attention to whiteness and intersectionality?

The Trouble with Whiteness (Criticism) and the Promise of Dialogue

In sum, this discussion reveals that far from the domain of individual will and prejudiced attitudes, whiteness is instead a dynamic of social interrelations. The specific examples cited here show that whiteness works through (among many others) contemporary discourses of race, public policy, national imaginings, changing local-global relations, media representations, and shifting legal statutes. Attempts at normalization and linkages with intersections of gender, class, sexuality and nation additionally expose whiteness as contradictory and contingent with respect to time and space. Given these insights, the diverse meanings and forms of leisure—parks and recreation, sport, popular culture, arts, tourism, etc.—all offer important sites to reveal “whiteness as unfrozen, whiteness as ensembles of local phenomena complexly embedded in socioeconomic, sociocultural and psychic interrelations” (Frankenberg, 1997). Within this conceptualization and via leisure, “whiteness emerges as a process, not a ‘thing,’ as plural rather than singular in nature” (Frankenberg, 1997).

And while there certainly is much work to be done to carefully analyze the various ways whiteness is asserted and resisted via leisure practices and contexts, caution should be exercised as well. Indeed Winnubst (2006, p. 9) has characterized similar analyses as “dangerous” given the powerful universalizing and normalizing tendencies of whiteness. This suggests analyses might produce several unintended consequences “from playing into cultural discourses of white supremacy, to uncritically fixing white superiority, to reinscribing whiteness at the center of concern and focus” (Winnubst, 2006, p. 9).

One manifestation of similar concerns frequently expressed in scholarly writings is researchers’ continued conflation of white identity as synonymous with whiteness (Levine-

Rasky, 2000; Anderson, 2003). Andersen (2003) suggests that by “shifting the subject of race from the experiences of disadvantaged groups to white people, whiteness studies risks eclipsing the study of racial power, focusing solely on white identity, and analyzing ‘whiteness’ in the absence of experiences of people of color” (Andersen, 2003, p. 21). Levine-Rasky (2000) is likewise critical of scholarship and pedagogies that place attention on whites in discrete, individualistic ways, devoid of larger systematic concerns, questions and processes of racialization.

This is not simply an academic issue. A focus on white bodies devoid of broader contextualization often locates whiteness and racism within contemporary commonsense notions as merely operating in the beliefs, attitudes, and motivations of those with white skin. Redress thus centers on getting whites to admit and denounce complicity via confessional narratives and further education (Levine-Rasky, 2000). Such understandings in turn carry the baggage of individualism and liberal humanism by erroneously portraying identities as discrete categories of identification and investigation, and “white social actors as authors of social relations rather than inequitably interdependent upon the racialization of others through unjust social and historical processes” (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 277). It is therefore important to emphasize that leisure participants and administrators may be obliviousness to the effects of whiteness, “but they are also inscribed in the racist practices and discourses and histories of their institutions and of the dominant culture in general” (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 277).

Read from this perspective, scholarly attention needs to move away from, the “lie” of race, that is, the commonsense belief that meanings of race are locatable in the body and therefore eradicable via individual will and action. As demonstrated throughout this article, analyses should more productively center on whiteness as a contradictory “shifting location upon complex maps of social, economic and political power” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 264; see also Levine-Rasky, 2000). Such an analytic focus additionally recognizes tensions and contradictions as central to this process.

Recognizing the powerful universalizing and normalizing pull of whiteness additionally suggests the constant need for reflection, dialogue and (re)theorizing. And yet, one tension or “double-bind” suggests that the pull of power evasiveness shapes reflective interactions while dialogue simultaneously offers possibilities for thinking together to create new insights potentially leaving “participants changed by that interaction” (Simpson, 2008, p. 138-139). Given the problems attached to analyses of whiteness one step toward more reflective dialogue is to publicly scrutinize the histories, conditions and institutional arrangements under which scholars currently work (see especially Wiegman, 1999). Some important points have already been raised in this regard including King’s (2005) cautious stance toward the infiltration of whiteness critiques within sport studies given the current conditions and institutional arrangements of the academy. Among these conditions is a proliferation of whites writing about race and whiteness from conventional positions which frequently ignore epistemologies developed by people of color so that “white perspectives and practices (ways of thinking and learning) shape the organization and dissemination of knowledge” (King, 2005, p. 403). This observation is partially a call for greater epistemological inclusion and partially a call for whites to more actively join people of color in working against the processes which produce both white privilege, and racism in the lives of people of color.

As this brief discussion of knowledge production infers, the goal of questioning, dialoguing and (re)theorizing is that subsequent analyses not “reinscribe white hegemony by merely interrogating its subjectivity and particularism, but that we will create new intellectual spaces for relational understanding, and, more importantly racial justice” (Parker Johnson, as cited

in Anderson, 2003, p. 25). In this spirit, I hope that the some of the ideas expressed here will be useful in conversing with previous scholarship, and productive in ensuing dialogues with the ultimate aim of justice within leisure settings and beyond.

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