

# Racializing the Discourse of Adult Education

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## ABSTRACT

*Adult education scholarship has been racialized through the lens of Eurocentric theory and research. Theoretical paradigms such as Africentrism struggle to gain academic legitimacy as discourses of transformative learning, critical thinking and self-direction - all grounded in the European Enlightenment tradition of the individual pursuit of rational self-knowledge - hold sway. This article reviews the way that repressive tolerance serves to broaden the field of adult education by including racially based perspectives on adult learning, yet simultaneously ensures that they are always seen as an exotic alternative to what is clearly the mainstream Eurocentric perspective. It reviews the way that discourses of criticality can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the African American lifeworld and explores in detail the work of Lucius T. Outlaw Jr. and Cornel West. Both scholars draw partly from the tradition of European critical theory in their attempts to use its central analytical categories (such as alienation, lifeworld, objectification and hegemony) to understand the African American experience. The piece ends with a consideration of how the dominant Eurocentric perspective in adult education can be critiqued and challenged.*

*Keywords: Adult Education, Africentrism, Critical Theory, Eurocentrism, Repressive Tolerance*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adult education as a field of academic study in the United States has been characterized since its inception by an unproblematized Euro-centrism. Given that the same could be said of almost every other branch of educational theorizing, this is, in a way, unremarkable. Yet in this very unremarkability lies the potency of Euro-centrism. An unproblematized Eurocentrism reflects the racial membership of 'official' knowledge producers in the field (Apple, 2000) and results in an invisible, unaddressed theoretical politics of race (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000). This

politics ensures that the natural theoretical center in the field – the generation of self-directed, critical adult learners in a democratic environment – is “shrouded in whiteness and invisibility” (ibid. p. 148). Implicit to this politics is the belief that all thoughtful adults, if education could somehow free them from distorted perspectives and erroneous reasoning, would agree that the creation of a liberal democracy is a social project to which all reasonable people could subscribe. Race scarcely figures into this vision of rational people engaged in democratic dialogue. In Juanita Johnson-Bailey's (2002) view this 'color-blind' perspective – “a stance

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that does not acknowledge race or that views all racial issues as inconsequential when not expressed as part of any classroom or curriculum equation” (p. 42) – is by far the most dominant in adult education texts.

In the Eurocentric view of teaching and learning processes, and in its vision of the social significance of adult education processes, certain generic understandings of how adults learn, and what constitutes educational progress for adults, have remained prominent. These understandings have been derived from Eurocentric epistemology, which itself is grounded in the Enlightenment’s belief in the ultimate perfectability of people and systems through the systematic application of reason. Privileged in Eurocentrism are “individualism, dualism, a deep belief in the power of objectivity, analytic thinking, and universal truths” (European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2003, p. 127). The Eurocentric ideal thus posits the development of independent, critical thought as the process to which adult educational energies should be devoted. Central to this ideal are notions such as self-directed learning, critical reflection and transformative learning. In the Holy Trinity of Enlightenment rationality Europeans position liberty, equality and fraternity as roughly equal. Consequently, Eurocentrism informs Socialism and Communism as much as it does Capitalism.

In the United States, it is liberty that is privileged above equality and fraternity and this gives Euro-American thought a distinctively anti-Socialist cast. Within the discourse of American adult education, the emphasis on liberty results in the valorization of independent, critical rationality. A critically alert adult, ever skeptical of unsupported knowledge claims and engaged in a constant process of self and social transformation, is deemed to be the most adult of learners in this discourse. The endpoint of development in this discourse is to reach a relatively undifferentiated, generic state of autonomous grace in which adult learners stand apart from society, skillfully detect ideological distortions visited upon them, and devote themselves to self-directed, self-actualization. This is the

tone exhibited in many of the studies surveyed in Taylor’s meta-analyses of transformative learning research (Taylor, 1997, 1998, 2000).

White Euro-Americans within adult educational theory and practice perpetuate an unproblematized Eurocentrism that is, to use Lucis T. Outlaw Jr’s term, racialized (Outlaw, 1996). To Outlaw, racialization is an important, and unavoidable, social fact. It describes the way people’s racial histories and identities inform how they “organize meaningfully, give order to, and thus define and construct the worlds in which we live, our lifeworlds” (Outlaw, 1996, p. 5). Racial identity, ethnicity and gender “are constitutive of the personal and social being of persons ... they make up the historically mediated structural features of human lifeworlds and inform lived experience” (ibid. p. 174). To take a racialized view of something is to view it through the distinctive lens of a racial group’s experience of the world, and to view that experience of racial membership as a positive constitutive element of a person’s identity. Racialism (to be distinguished from racism) is the positive recognition of how his or her lifeworld, positionality and sense of cultural identity comprise a set of pre-conscious filters and assumptions that frame how one’s life is felt and lived. A field of practice is racialized when its dominant conceptualizations, and the mechanisms it has in place for the production and dissemination of knowledge, are grounded in one particular racial group’s experiences (in the case of American adult education, white Euro-Americans) and the forms of thought that flow from these. Moreover, a racialized view is one in which these dominant conceptualizations are judged to rest on positive valuations of the constitutive elements of racial identity. For example, it is the struggle against racism that comprises a crucial element of African American raciality, while the project of creating a liberal democracy is an important part of Euro-American raciality.

In Outlaw’s view raciality is a positive phenomenon and he stresses that “racialism neither is nor need become racism” (1996, p. 8), though keeping the two from conflating is

sometimes a struggle. Racism comprises “sets of beliefs, images and practices that are ‘imbued with negative valuation’ and employed as modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination, and exploitation in order to deny targeted racial or ethnic groups full participation in the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a political community” (ibid. p. 8). Racialism is the positive recognition of how the constitutive features of one’s life world, positionality and sense of historical and cultural identity, comprise a set of preconscious filters and assumptions that frame how life is felt and lived. Racialism’s valuation is positive, not negative, in that it recognizes the contributions and particularities of one’s racial identity. People can celebrate the constitutive elements of their own, and others’ raciality in a way that is imbued with generosity and recognition quite different from the brutal, negative celebration of one’s racism.

Adult education is racialized in that the most frequently cited concepts that purport to define what is distinctive about the field and that comprise its dominant discursive boundaries – andragogy (the learner-centered approach developed by Knowles (1984)), self-direction, critical reflection, transformative learning – are valued positively. Furthermore these concepts are identified mostly with scholarship conducted by White European Americans, European and Commonwealth males. The Eurocentric valorization of rational, autonomous, critical thought endemic to these four discourses is supremely powerful in its unremarkable-ness. Such thought is taken for granted as the natural, cognitive modality to which all adults should clearly aspire. Central to this racialization of adult education is the fact that it is deemed so obvious as to need no justification. Consequently, the racialization of adult education theorizing – the way it is viewed through the lens of Eurocentric Whiteness, with Whiteness regarded as the positively valued, unspoken norm – is rarely commented on.

On those occasions when race does move center stage in the discourses of the field its discussion tends to be framed in terms of enhancing diversity or including minority perspectives.

Non-white perspectives become represented as the exotic other, the alien tradition of different racial experience that is added on to the White center. Thus, race is “a marker for ‘other’ and not for Whites” (Manglitz, 2003, p. 127). As Sue Shore (2001) comments, the desire to make the Other visible “often involves legitimizing from the center a space in which the Other can speak, where the Other gets to operate or be visible, only because of the largesse of the center” (p. 51). Supposedly emancipatory initiatives to widen the field’s discourse are experienced as condescending, patronizing attempts by the White center to empower the margins - when empowerment cannot be given, only claimed. A good example of this is the “add-difference-and-stir approach” that Johnson-Bailey (2002, p. 43) contends characterizes most adult education textbooks published in the last decade. In her words, “authors trivialize the significance of race in their authored or edited texts by adding a final chapter that pertains to minority concerns. These chapters are usually offered to placate the concerns of politically conscious publishers or readers to whom they would not want to appear exclusionary” (p. 43). In this sense an afterthought chapter or two on race comprises a perfect example of what Herbert Marcuse (1965) called repressive tolerance.

Acknowledging that concepts and practices are racialized is not to say that they should be rejected by members of racial groups that have not produced them. For example, although he identifies himself as an American philosopher of African descent, Outlaw himself does not abandon European critical theory. Instead he reinterprets it to serve the particular racial interests of African Americans. Examining the racialization of adult education means rather that adult education scholars should be much more intentional in their efforts to trace the racial framing of the field’s dominant discourse. Part of this effort involves de-centering adult education by “shifting the stated or implied center or voice of discourse away from the previously unquestioned dominant, male, Eurocentric subject” (Hemphill, 2001, p. 20).

It seems to me that several fruitful directions present themselves for racializing the discourse of adult education; that is, for examining the racial framing of the field's dominant epistemology and for examining how concepts central to the field can be re-interpreted from a non-White perspective. One is the exploration of an Africentric paradigm in which adult education practice is re-conceptualized in terms of African cultural values (Colin 1994, Sheared, 1994). Another is the application of critical race theory to the field (Peterson, 1999; Ianinska, Wright, & Rocco, 2003). As a White male author I wish to explore two particular responses in which a White person can racialize adult education theory and practice. The first of these explores how the idea of learning to think and act critically, a central concept of adult education derived from Eurocentric thought, can be reinterpreted in the interests of a group other than White Euro-Americans. I began this effort in another journal (Brookfield, 2003) and this article gives me a chance to extend this initial analysis. Second, the history of Whiteness scholarship offers an opening to the field's intellectual gatekeepers and theoretical power brokers (most of whom are White) to engage in some critique from within; however, such efforts are fraught with contradiction.

## **2. CONSIDERATIONS ON RACIALIZING ADULT EDUCATION: ON REPRESSIVE TOLERANCE**

My own positionality as an English male, and more specifically my own racial membership as white, is an important element to acknowledge in this paper. I have learned from years of teaching alongside Scipio Colin III that I must be very explicit in acknowledging that I cannot be an Africentric theorist whose being, identity and practice spring from African values, sensibilities and traditions. I can appreciate the accuracy and explanatory power of something like W.E. B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness. In so doing I can reflect on how being both Afri-

can and American means that one is "always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1969, p. 45). While this may illuminate what some of my learners and colleagues are experiencing I can have no real understanding of what it means. As a White Englishman I have no experiential, visceral access to the philosophy born of struggle that comprises the central dimension of African American thought. My skin pigmentation, White privilege and collusion in racism places me irrevocably and irretrievably outside the Africentric paradigm. I can learn from, and honor, this scholarship. I can be grateful for the way such scholarship questions and reformulates aspects of critical theory, or the way it shatters (in a helpful way) my own understandings and practices. But I can never claim to work as an Africentric adult educator. No matter how much I wish to honor this tradition, my racial membership precludes me making such a claim. In the words of a provocative volume, it is problematic to be *Teaching What You're Not* (Mayberry, 1996).

Well-intentioned attempts by White academics to celebrate non-white intellectual traditions can easily sour till they reek of benign colonialism and false empathy. As critical race theorists remind us "false empathy plays out mainly through caring relationships in which members of the dominant White society believe they identify with members of communities of color" (Duncan, 2002, p. 91). White adult educators who empathize with students and colleagues of color in no way enter their worlds. Even attempts to deconstruct one's White privilege in front of colleagues and students can sometimes serve, paradoxically, to emphasize that privilege. In Shore's (2001) words "it is too easy for sympathetic self-effacement to become another trick for quiet dominance" (p. 51). By not speaking in classes where students and colleagues of color are in the majority, Whites' silence only draws attention to them. Others in the room are left wondering what White faculty 'really' think, whether their silence indicates

disapproval or approval, or whether it is perhaps a form of surveillance.

There is also the problem that White attempts to broaden the range of adult educational discourses can perversely serve to underscore the implicit legitimacy of Eurocentrism. This is what Marcuse (1965) calls repressive tolerance. Repressive tolerance ensures that an apparent embrace of a different perspective serves only to neuter that same perspective. In one of the essays within critical theory that is truly unsettling to contemporary adult education sensibilities, Marcuse argues that an ever-widening tolerance of diverse epistemologies and traditions always ends up legitimizing an unfair status quo. He mistrusts educators' instinctive preference for presenting students with a diversity of perspectives and then letting them make up their minds about which makes most sense to them. To Marcuse such tolerance is repressive, not liberating. Broadening the perspectives we review (for example, including a module on "The Africentric Paradigm" in a course on "How Adults Learn") makes us feel like we are giving equal weight to radical or alternative ideas, when in fact placing them alongside mainstream ones always dilutes their oppositional qualities. Repressive tolerance ensures that adults believe they live in an open society and learn in an open classroom characterized by freedom of speech and expression while in reality their freedom is being constricted further and further.

Repressive tolerance essentially it ensures the continued marginality of minority views by placing them in close, comparative association with dominant ones. As long as the dominant, mainstream perspective is included as one of several possible options for study its presence inevitably overshadows the minority ones which will always be perceived as alternatives but never as the natural center to which one should turn. Irrespective of the educator's viewpoint (which may be strongly opposed to dominant ideology) the mere inclusion of that ideology as one option ensures its continued dominance. This is because the mainstream ideology has so seeped into our 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977) that it operates at a preconscious

level shaping our responses to alternatives that are proposed to it.

One reason repressive tolerance works so well is because it masks its repression behind the façade of open, even-handedness. Alternative ideas are not banned or even censored. Critical texts are published and critical messages circulated. Previously subjugated knowledges and perspectives (Africentrism or Queer Theory for example) are inserted into the curriculum. The defenders of the status quo can point to the existence of dissenting voices (such as Marcuse's) as evidence of the open society we inhabit, and the active tolerance of a wide spectrum of ideologies. But the framing of meaning accomplished by hegemony is all. Sometimes the meaning of radical texts is diluted by the fact that the texts themselves are hard to get, or incredibly expensive. More likely the radical meanings are neutered because our previous ideological conditioning means they are subtly framed as the expressions of obviously weird minority opinion.

The contemporary discourse of diversity, of opening up the field of adult education to diverse voices, perspectives and traditions, can be analyzed quite effectively using the idea of repressive tolerance. Marcuse alerts us to the possibility that this apparent broadening of voices can actually reinforce the ideology of White supremacy that it purports to undercut. By widening curriculum to include a variety of traditions we appear to be celebrating all positions. But the history of White supremacy, and the way that language and structures of feeling frame whiteness as the natural, inevitable conceptual center, means that the newly included voices, sensibilities and traditions are always positioned as the exotic other. Adult educators can soothe their consciences by believing progress is being made towards racial inclusivity and cultural equity, and can feel they have played their small but important part in the struggle. But as long as these subjugated traditions are considered alongside the dominant ideology, repressive tolerance ensures they will always be subtly marginalized as exotic, quaint, other than the natural center.

The only way to promote real tolerance – liberating or discriminating tolerance in Marcuse’s terms – is to deny learners the chance to consider mainstream perspectives as one possibility among many. Instead of exposing people to a smorgasbord of mainstream and radical perspectives, Marcuse urges educators to practice true tolerance by allowing students exposure only to alternative views and dissenting traditions. The logic of liberating or discriminating tolerance would require an immersion only in a racial or cultural tradition that diverged radically from mainstream ideology; for example, an adult education graduate program that allowed only the consideration of Africentric ideas and perspectives. The logic of repressive tolerance holds that as long as Africentrism is considered as one of many possible perspectives, including Eurocentrism, it will always be positioned as the marginal alternative to the White supremacist center.

Marcuse’s position is hard for many adult educators to accept. Surely, they argue, it is possible to include dominant ideology and mainstream perspectives in a course but to subject these to a thorough, radical critique? Marcuse warns against what he sees as this naivete. No matter how critically dominant ideology is analyzed its mere inclusion will always overshadow any radical analysis. An interesting adult educational case study of this reality is Cale’s analysis of his attempt to work critically and democratically in an adult Freshman composition class teaching writing through the analysis of race, class and gender in contemporary America (Cale, 2001; Cale & Huber, 2001). Cale draws on Marcuse to illustrate the danger of providing an array of philosophical and ideological perspectives and assuming that these have rough parity in students’ eyes. Hence, despite his giving lectures critiquing the concept of meritocracy and outlining capitalism’s deliberate creation of an underclass, Cale notes that “once I allowed the ‘common sense’ of the dominant ideology to be voiced, nothing could disarm it” (Cale & Huber, 2001, p. 16). It did not matter that a disproportionately large amount of time was spent in criticism of this ideology.

As long as Cale allowed his White students (the majority in the class) to voice their own opinions regarding racism – opinions based on their own experiences as adults – the focus was continually shifted away from White privilege and toward discussions of reverse discrimination and Black ‘problems’. Cale refreshingly and courageously admits that his past efforts to work democratically by respecting all voices and encouraging the equal participation of all learners “has in many cases actually helped to silence some of my students, to reinforce the dominance of the status quo, and to diminish my own ability to combat racism, sexism, and classism” *ibid.*). He concludes that his use of ‘democratic’ discussion achieved little effect other than to provide “opportunities for students to attack and silence oppositional thinkers, including myself” (*ibid.*, p. 17).

It is important to note that Marcuse’s analysis dealt with the exclusion of Socialist and anti-capitalist perspectives from the liberal curriculum of higher education not with the exclusion of racially-based perspectives. However, he supported the Black Power movement as a “far more subversive universe of discourse” (1969, p. 35) than the Hippie movement. The Black Panther and communist activist Angela Davis was a student of Marcuse’s at Brandeis and then the University of California-San Diego. In an interview with George Yancy she tells of asking Marcuse to be the first to enter the registrar’s office at UC-San Diego when the students wished to mount an occupation by breaking and entering. This was an act that meant they could well be arrested and charged with breaking, entering and trespassing. As she recalls “Without a moment’s hesitation, Herbert Marcuse agreed: ‘Of course I’ll do it.’ There was no question in his mind. At that time he was about seventy-five years old. He was the first person to walk into the registrar’s office” (Davis, 1998, p. 317).

In the language of Black militants, particularly their claiming of soul – “in its essence lily-white ever since Plato” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 36) - and their declaration that ‘Black is beautiful’, Marcuse detected “the ingression of the

aesthetic into the political” (p. 36). Black Power represented “a systematic linguistic rebellion, which smashes the ideological context in which the words are employed and defined, and places them in the opposite context – negation of the established one. Thus, the blacks ‘take over’ some of the most sublime and sublimated concepts of Western civilization, desublimates them and redefine them” (p. 35). To emerging African-American scholars of the time such as Lucius T. Outlaw Jr (1996, p. xxvii), Marcuse’s work was an entry point into critical theory that connected it to Black Nationalist critiques of White supremacy.

### 3. RE-FRAMING CRITICALITY IN ADULT EDUCATION DISCOURSE

My first attempt to racialize adult education discourse focuses on the philosophical tradition of critical theory, arguably the most influential discourse within contemporary adult educational theorizing. Critical theory interpreted via Habermas frames the extensive work conducted by Mezirow and others in transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) currently the most celebrated idea in adult educational theory. Transformative learning is the body of theoretical work that has led to the greatest number of replicatory studies since Tough’s (1979) work on adult learning projects ushered in three decades of empirical study of adult self-directed learning (Taylor, 1997, 1998, 2000; Cranton, 1994, 1996, 1997). The concept of critically reflective practice, recently positioned as the conceptual core of the millennial *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson & Hayes, 2000), is also grounded in critical theory’s focus on identifying power and contesting hegemony. Critical positions drawn from critical theory and associated with Gramsci, Marcuse, and Foucault frame how a critically reflective practice of adult education is conceived (Brookfield, 2000). However, as Outlaw (1983b) and West (1993c) point out, critical theory as represented by Marx, Gramsci,

Marcuse, Fromm, Habermas, Foucault and others largely omits racial analysis and “tacitly assumes that racism is rooted in the rise of modern capitalism” (West, 1993c, p. 262).

Regarding the pivotal role of critical reflection in adult education, several African American scholars have urged the reframing of this idea in a racialized way. Johnson-Bailey (2002) suggests that “adult education’s current embrace of critical reflection is a promising direction” (p. 45) but that it must incorporate into its discourse an explicit focus on race. Smith and Colin (2001) advocate that those who espouse a critically reflective paradigm of adult education need to understand the presence and impact of racist practices in adult education. In their view it is the inclusion of the experiences of what Colin (1994) calls African American scholars “that will result in a true critically reflective practice” (p. 66) in the field. In a similar vein, Sheared and Sissel (2001) end their volume on making space for excluded voices and perspectives in adult education by concluding that “the only way we can begin to make space for ‘Others’ as well as those of us in the academy, is to engage in critical, reflective, dialogue” (p. 327) concerning the absence of discourses of race, gender, sexual orientation, ageism and ableism. Of course, drawing on Marcuse’s analysis of repressive tolerance discussed earlier would mean that such a dialogue should be conducted *without* an analysis of mainstream texts and perspectives – a perplexing task for many critical scholars. After all, one of the most familiar critical methodologies (drawn from media studies) is critical content analysis in which mainstream work is reviewed for what is omitted or dismissed.

In this section I explore two attempts to racialize criticality in adult education drawing on the work of Lucius T. Outlaw Jr. and Cornel West. Both thinkers look explicitly to critical theory but reinterpret its contributions from a racialized African American perspective. Since critical theory is such an influential theoretical discourse within adult education, these efforts have considerable relevance for efforts to racialize adult education theorizing. These theorists

believe that concepts prominent in the critical tradition have a utility in furthering the interests of African Americans, but that to accomplish this these ideas must be viewed through, and fundamentally changed by, the prism of African Americans' experience of racism. Utilizing their work we can start to examine how race intersects with those learning tasks of adulthood – challenging ideology, overcoming alienation, contesting hegemony, and unmasking power – that are the focus of critical theory.

### 3.1. Turning to the African American Lifeworld

Lucius T. Outlaw Jr's insistence on the need for a hermeneutics of the African American lifeworld is an attempt to develop a racialized critical theory focused on behalf of African Americans. Outlaw is consistently explicit about the influence of critical theory (especially Marcuse, Horkheimer, & Habermas) on his work. He also acknowledges how Foucault's elaboration of disciplinary power "supports some of the criticisms of 'Eurocentric' intellectual endeavors advanced in African-American studies" (Outlaw, 1996, p. 101). Mostly, though, Outlaw is concerned with Habermas' preoccupation with the need to defend the lifeworld - the background rules, assumptions and common sense understandings that structure how we perceive the world and how we communicate that perception to those around us - from attacks by capital and state power. For Outlaw, the project of defending the lifeworld must be refocused through the lens of African American interests. He positions himself as a philosopher of African descent who shares critical theory's conception of philosophy as a tool for social change. To Outlaw "the vocation of philosophizing...is to share in the refinement and perpetuation of critical intelligence as a practice of life" (1996, p. 29) with this practice leading to "life expressed as qualitatively-progressively-different" (ibid.). To live philosophically is to "live life conditioned primarily by the activity of critical, dialectical thinking" (ibid. p. 30). To live as a Black philosopher is to be "guided by

the interest (i.e. the value commitment) to serve the emancipatory efforts of people of African descent" (1983a, p. 66) while realizing this also entails the widespread "revolutionary transformation of the American order" (ibid. p. 66).

Doing philosophy within the particularities of the African American experience will, in Outlaw's view, help reveal the true needs, interests, values and contributions of African Americans. He argues that philosophizing in the interests of Black people will help develop a distinctive Black philosophical identity based on an awareness of Black intellectual traditions. Outlaw argues that one way to develop a philosophy that will serve African Americans' interests by helping them achieve a critical understanding of their situation is to combine Black Nationalism and critical theory. He believes that the critical resources of both traditions are necessary to clarifying African Americans' real needs and the means by which these might be met.

Why is critical theory an important partner to Black Nationalism? To Outlaw, critical theory "seeks to cut through the veil of socially unnecessary domination by socially unnecessary systems of authority and control via the praxis of critical reflection" (1983a, p. 72). As such, it provides one useful starting point "within which we people of African descent (and others) can assess our situation and achieve clarity regarding which concrete historical possibilities are in our best interest" (ibid. p. 83). However, if critical theory is to be a useful partner in a fusion with Black Nationalism, however, it must incorporate an analysis of racism, and how this might be challenged, into its workings.

How might a racialized interpretation of critical theory serve the interests of people of African descent? Here Outlaw draws explicitly on Habermas' concept of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987). Particularly, he argues that critical theory's most useful contribution is to elaborate the contours and constitutive elements of the African American lifeworld. Whereas Habermas is concerned chiefly with the colonization of the lifeworld by the exchange dynamic of capitalism and the logistics of bureaucratic rationality and state power, Outlaw's focus is on

its invasion by the dynamics of racist ideology (Outlaw, 1983a). When the African American life-world is distorted by White supremacist ideology then its members are hampered in their understanding of their current situation and future possibilities. An emancipatory philosophical project is to illuminate the African American life-world in a way that reveals racial identity as a positive constitutive element, rather than as a source of shame or internalized self-loathing. A racialized turn to the lifeworld would explore “the lived experiences of persons within racial/ethnic groups for whom raciality and ethnicity is a fundamental and positive element of their identity” (Outlaw, 1983b, p. 177). Outlaw commits himself as a philosopher to understanding and communicating “the life-world of African-American people, in all of its ambiguities, complexities, contradictions, and clarities; to our concrete life-praxis, in search of our distinct orientation” (1983a, p. 66).

What elements comprise this life-world? Outlaw looks to the different forms of expression produced by efforts to communicate the history of African American struggle. These include African folk tales, religious practices, political language and practices, music, poetry, art and the language of common currency. As concrete expressions of the African American lifeworld these elements, in Outlaw’s view, contain fundamental meanings and orientations that serve as a guide to a program of political reconstruction serving African American interests. Reclaiming these meanings and orientations from a lifeworld distorted by white supremacy “will provide understandings of the historically conditioned concerns of black people (and) provide the clarified historical grounds for the orientation of present and future philosophical and practical activities in the interest of African-American people” (Outlaw, 1983a, p. 66). As the contours of African Americans’ response to racism are drawn, this will lead to “increased self-transparency – a broadening and intensification of our personal and collective self-understanding” (ibid. p. 69), which for Outlaw is “a condition necessary for restructuring present and future projects” (ibid.). A hermeneutics of the African

American lifeworld will also help in “the restoration and repair of broken communication among the various groupings of our people” (Outlaw, 1996, p. 30).

This reclamation of the contours of the African American lifeworld represents a project for critical reflection very different from most adult educational work in this area. Instead of reflection being the individual adult’s uncovering of assumptions informing her experience, critical reflection here has as its focus the reclamation and rescue of a life-world from the distortions of racist ideology. Learning to be critically reflective in this instance contributes to the building of identity and political purpose amongst members of African American communities and becomes an important element in learning anti-racist perspectives and practices. Learning to understand and appreciate the cultural and epistemological topography of the African American lifeworld represents an adult education curriculum that is explicitly geared to the furtherance of African American interests. Although such a curriculum might seem to be sectional it will, in Outlaw’s opinion, ultimately serve the broader social good of all groups and communities since “many of the more fundamental needs of black people are shared by many others” (Outlaw, 1996, p. 29).

### 3.2. A Racialized Engagement with the Critical Tradition

Learning to understand and dismantle racist power structures as part of a broader movement of social transformation is an adult educational project that is also endorsed by Cornel West, perhaps the most prominent of contemporary critical African American intellectuals. Like Outlaw, West draws strongly on critical theory, though unlike Outlaw he turns away from Habermas whom he regards as a liberal democrat privileging a middle class form of dialog and neglecting hard class analysis. In West’s opinion Habermas has only a “tenuous relation to Marxism”. Habermas’ work mostly serves to provide “an innocuous badge of radicalism ... a kind of opium for some of the American

left-academic intelligentsia” (West, 1983b, p. 88). The figures in the critical tradition most consistently acknowledged by West are Marx, Foucault and Gramsci, all of whom in his view have much to contribute to keeping the hope of a revolutionary future alive in the African American community.

West defines himself as “an American Democratic Socialist of African descent” (1991, p. xi) in his introduction to *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, thereby signaling his intent to use critical theory in the interests of African Americans. In *Prophesy Deliverance* (1982) he proclaims his “abiding allegiance to progressive Marxist social analysis and political praxis” (p. 12), an allegiance that informs his understanding of the struggle for black freedom as “a struggle that is a species of a radical democratic project that empowers and enhances the wretched of the earth” (West, 1993a, p. x). West’s own role in this struggle is as “first and foremost an intellectual freedom fighter” (ibid. p. 87) who works as a critical organic catalyst; “a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints and methods – yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling sub-cultures of criticism” (West, 1993b, p. 27). This Gramscian-influenced model of intellectual activism links oppositional work within the academy “with political activity in grass-roots organizations, pre-party formations, or progressive associations intent on bringing together potential agents of social change” (ibid. p. 103). At the core of West’s intellectual vocation is his “profound commitment to what I call a prophetic vision and practice primarily based on a distinctly black tragic sense of life” (ibid. p. x). This vision and practice is premised on “the love ethic of Christian faith – the most absurd and alluring mode of being in the world – that enables me to live a life of hope against hope” (ibid. p. xi).

In these self-designated identities – democratic socialist, intellectual freedom fighter, critical organic catalyst, radical Christian – we can see West’s celebrated refusal to remain bounded by traditional categorizations. As

commentaries on West have noted his eclecticism has led to criticisms of superficiality and dilettantism, of touching on a concept here, alluding to an intellectual tradition there, with no deep articulation of these traditions (Yancy, 2001; Wood, 2000). My belief is that West’s eclecticism is a principled eclecticism and a strength of his work as a connected, engaged organic intellectual. His eclecticism is principled because it is deployed in support of his overarching project to keep activist hope alive. West ranges far and wide in his studies because he wishes to indicate the support for social transformation implicit in so many different intellectual traditions. He draws enthusiastically on any insights, from any source, that suggest ways of making democracy a reality in the United States. This breadth is a strength because it allows him to speak to a wide array of constituencies and enclaves and work to unite them in common cause by showing them their points of connection and interest.

In *Prophesy Deliverance* (1982) West proposes a blending of Marxism with Black theology, to him the single most important source of philosophical energy for African American activism. Black theology and Marxism both employ a methodology of unmasking falsehood, but in his opinion “Black theologians barely mention the wealth, power and influence of multinational corporations” (West, 1982, p. 113). Neither do they make the link between “the way in which the racist interpretations of the gospel they reject encourage and support the capitalist system of production, its grossly unequal distribution of wealth, and its closely connected political arrangements” (ibid. p. 113). Inserting a Marxist element into Black theology would connect Black oppression in capitalist America to Black and Brown oppression in the Third World.

As a way of illuminating the interconnected nature of racial and class oppression West also calls for a “Marxist influenced genealogical materialist analysis of racism” (1993b, p. 268) that would probe the logic of White supremacy through a “micro-institutional (or localized) analysis of the mechanisms that promote and

contest these logics in the everyday lives of people” (ibid. p. 268). Such an analysis would explore “the ways in which self-images and self-identities are shaped, and the impact of alien, degrading cultural styles, aesthetic ideals, psychosexual sensibilities and linguistic gestures upon peoples of color” (ibid. p. 268). Concurrent with this micro-institutional analysis would go a macro-structural exploration of “class exploitation, state repression and bureaucratic domination, including resistance against these modes, in the lives of people of color” (ibid. p. 268).

This emphasis on a genealogical analysis of racist practices in everyday life demonstrates West’s acknowledgment of another major figure in the critical tradition, Michel Foucault. West presents Foucault’s perspective as a way to illuminate how the power of racist ideology is made manifest in daily conversations, gestures, rituals and interactions. By fusing Foucault’s ideas with a neo-Marxist analysis “Foucault’s viewpoint can be creatively transformed and rendered fruitful for a genealogy of modern racism, in both its ideational and material forms” (West, 1983, p. 58). This genealogy of racism would not just analyze the way dominant discourse inaugurated the category of race and excluded positive notions of Black beauty, culture and character from its discursive field. It would also “put forward an Afro-American counter discourse, in all its complexity and diversity, to the modern European racist discourse” (ibid.). Such a discourse would “exercise and evaluate how the Afro-American response promotes or precludes a revolutionary future” (ibid.). In *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989) West does criticize Foucault for his surreptitious ascription of agency to discourses, disciplines and techniques (1989, p. 225) but overall he acknowledges that the particular philosophical stance of prophetic pragmatism “promotes genealogical materialist modes of analysis similar in many respects to those of Foucault” (ibid. p. 223).

Finally, West peppers his works with approving references to Gramsci, describing himself as a Gramscian Marxist and calling

Gramsci “the most penetrating Marxist theorist of culture in this century” (West, 1982, p. 118). Explaining his affinity to Gramsci he writes “my particular stand within the Marxist tradition is linked primarily to that of Gramsci, which always places stress on historical specificity, on concrete circumstances and situations” (1998, p. 41). Just as he claims Foucault’s work reflects the spirit of prophetic pragmatism, so he believes that “prophetic pragmatism is inspired by the example of Antonio Gramsci (who) exemplifies the critical spirit and oppositional sentiments of prophetic pragmatism” (West, 1989, p. 230). West is drawn to Gramsci’s (and later Raymond Williams (1977)) idea that hegemony is always contested and open to being undermined by specific actions taken in specific situations. He is drawn also to Gramsci’s emphasis on cultural products—theater, the popular press, novels—as sites of counter-hegemony (although Gramsci himself did not employ this concept). In particular, West refers, repeatedly and explicitly, to Gramsci’s idea of the organic intellectual as serving as a useful descriptor both for his own work and for the work of critical Black intellectuals in general.

This situating of philosophy in everyday practices and struggles is a defining feature of the organic intellectual. In *Keeping Faith* (1993b) West reframes the concept slightly as that of the critical organic catalyst, “a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints and methods – yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling sub-cultures of criticism” (p. 27). In his view Black intellectuals should function as organic intellectuals. They should be scholar-activists who are grounded in the experiences and struggles of the African American community while being informed by the wisdom of allies outside that racial group. Such allies include activists of color, feminists, lesbians and gays, black churches, ecological movements and rank and file labor caucuses, and black nationalists.

As organic intellectuals, African American philosophers have specific adult educational responsibilities in West’s view. In a Foucaultian

vein, they must “articulate a new ‘regime of truth’ linked to, yet not confined by, indigenous institutional practices permeated by the kinetic orality and emotional physicality, the rhythmic syncopation, the protean improvisation and the religious, rhetorical and antiphonal repetition of African-American life” (1983, p. 82). West’s willingness to assist (as in the case of Bill Bradley and Ralph Nader) and generate (as with Al Sharpton) Presidential campaigns, his production of a CD (*Sketches of My Culture* (2001)), and his appearance in the film *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), are some of the more publicized examples of his own living out of the role of an organic intellectual.

Although West does not write directly to the adult education community he is working in a way that most activist adult educators would recognize. He locates much of the most valuable adult educational work within social movements, an emphasis that explains his stress on the need for adult educators to behave as organic intellectuals. However, while Gramsci stressed the need for such intellectuals to come directly from the dispossessed class, West seems to suggest it is possible for sympathetic allies of a different class to work in this way, perhaps by committing Freire’s class suicide (Freire, 1970). This is a highly contentious claim that would probably be disputed by such Gramsci scholars as Holst (2002) and Allman (2001).

West also turns away from an exclusively Africentric analysis arguing that Euro-American traditions, critical theory in particular, can be critically appropriated to serve the interests of African Americans. This is very similar to the critical appropriation of dominant culture that Mayo (1998) argues is a central element in Gramsci’s work. In line with bell hooks (1989) and Angela Davis (1974) West believes that the African American lifeworld cannot be understood without an analysis of the way capitalism induces a state of alienation based on race as well as class. If adults are to understand how dominant ideology has forged their worldview, and structured their life chances, West believes it is necessary for them to study the intersection of capitalism and racism.

How might such understandings be promoted? Unlike many in the critical adult education tradition West does not pin his hope on a Freirean style form of conscientization. Again, in line with Gramsci himself, West argues for a range of appropriate educational methodologies, with particular choices being determined by particular contexts. This brings us to West’s engagement with the literature of American pragmatism and the way this shapes his methodological openness.

#### **4. PROPOSING A RADICAL CONTINGENCY: WEST’S CRITICAL PRAGMATISM**

To critical theorists and Africentrists alike, one of the most challenging (and, to many, perplexing) aspect of West’s thought is his constant attempt to integrate the philosophical spirit of pragmatism into his project for African American reconstruction. This fusion is not to everyone’s taste. After all, pragmatists do not usually describe themselves as organic intellectuals or freedom fighters. But West is very consistent in declaring his “affinity to a philosophical version of American pragmatism” (1982, p. 12) alongside his recognition of Marxism. Despite pragmatism’s avoidance of racial analysis, its contributions to African American thought are “enormous” in West’s view (1982, p. 21). Concerning pragmatism he writes that “through its historicist orientation, for example, Afro-American thought can avoid both absolutist dogmatism and paralysis in action” (ibid.). For West “pragmatism provides an American context for Afro-American thought, a context that imparts to it both a shape and a heritage of philosophical legitimacy” (ibid.).

West makes his case by citing across his writing two distinctive contributions pragmatism can make in building an African American praxis. First, he reads Emerson, James and Dewey as spokespersons for a morally grounded philosophical tradition tied to the creation of a true democracy. In his major book on the subject West speaks of pragmatism’s “unashamedly

moral emphasis” (1989, p. 4) and its “yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plight” (ibid.). He locates its impulse in “a plebian radicalism that fuels an anti-patrician rebelliousness for the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy” (ibid. p. 5). Pragmatism “tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action” (ibid.), particularly action taken to promote “the flowering and flourishing of individuality under conditions of democracy” (1993a, p. 32). Pragmatism does not support action for action’s sake. Although it puts “a premium on human will, human power and human action” (ibid. p. 37) it is neither vulgar practicality nor unprincipled opportunism. In an unconscious echo of another pragmatically inclined intellectual activist—the adult educator Eduard Lindeman – West sees pragmatism as directed towards furthering the democratic way of life (coincidentally the title of one of Lindeman’s last books (Smith & Lindeman, 1951). To West pragmatism is “preoccupied with ... the democratic way of life” (West, 1993a, p. 31), that is, with creating a society of “unique selves acting in and through participatory communities (in) an open, risk-ridden future” (ibid. p. 43).

Its self-critical strain is a second argument West adduces in support of his advocacy of pragmatism. He particularly admires Dewey’s belief that philosophizing requires the constant critical analysis of assumptions. Although West works outside the adult education discourse community, his emphasis on the importance of critical analysis is framed in terms very familiar to adult education scholars preoccupied with critical reflection and transformative learning. Thus, a pragmatic orientation “constantly questions the tacit assumptions of earlier interpretations of the past. It scrutinizes the norms these interpretations endorse, the solutions they offer, and the self-images they foster” (1982, p. 20). To pragmatists (as to critically reflective adult educators) “norms, premises and procedures ... are never immune to revision” (ibid.). Pragmatism is defined by its “calling into question any form of dogmatism” and its belief in a form of fallibilism in which “every claim is open to revi-

sion” (1993a, p. 43). It is not to be confused with an anti-theoretical stance, or with the idea that anything goes depending on context. Instead, “it subtly incorporates an experimental temper within theory-laden descriptions of problematic situations (for instance, social and cultural crises)” (West, 1993b, p. 137).

This anti-foundational strain of pragmatism, in which experimentation and problem-solving run strong, is fused with West’s religious beliefs, and his commitment to critical theory, to produce a new variant of pragmatism – prophetic pragmatism. Prophetic pragmatism is West’s unique blend of Judeo-Christian traditions, European critical theory, American pragmatism and Black theology, a blend that to him best fits the fight against the nihilism and cynicism he sees as destroying both the African American community and the broader society. In its religious affiliations prophetic pragmatism draws on “traditions of Judaism and Christianity that promote courageous resistance against, and relentless critiques of, injustice and social misery” (ibid. p. 139). In Biblical fashion these traditions “help keep alive collective memories of moral (that is anti-idolatrous) struggle and non-market values” (ibid.). From critical theory prophetic pragmatism incorporates that tradition’s micro-structural and macro-structural analyses of the dynamics of oppression embedded in the works of Marx, Gramsci and Foucault. Prophetic thought and Marxism “both focus on the plight of the exploited, oppressed, and degraded peoples of the world, their relative powerlessness and possible empowerment” (West, 1982, p. 107).

From American pragmatism its prophetic variant draws the spirit of self-criticism and the pursuit of the democratic way of life. Hence, “critical temper as a way of struggle and democratic faith as a way of life are the twin pillars of prophetic pragmatism” (West 1993b, p. 140). Here the anti-foundational willingness of Dewey to experiment with multiple approaches to realizing democracy is harnessed to the project of combating racist ideology and practices. Finally, from Black theology prophetic pragmatism draws the desire “to

bestow dignity, grandeur and tragedy upon the denigrated lives of ordinary black people and to promote improvisational life-strategies of love and joy in black life-worlds of radical and brutish contingency” (ibid. p. xii). Like critical theory, Black theology begins with negation, in this case “negating white interpretations of the gospel” (West, 1982, p. 108), the necessary precursor to “transforming past understandings of the gospel into new ones” (ibid. p. 109). It also shares with critical theory a desire “to link some notion of liberation to the future conditions of the downtrodden” (ibid. p. 108). However, because of the lack of class analysis in Black theology West views it as insufficient to be a stand-alone tool for the furtherance of African American interests.

Prophetic pragmatism provides a justification for a critically reflective practice of adult education emphasizing openness, flexibility and contingency in the pursuit of democratic change. In West’s words the “critical temper” of prophetic pragmatism “promotes a full-fledged experimental disposition that highlights the provisional, tentative and revisable character of our visions, analyses and actions” (West, 1993b, p. 140). In adult educational terms, possessing a critical temper means avoiding a slavish adherence to a particular methodology, whether this be andragogical, self-directed, transformative or didactic. It means that continuously researching the different contexts in which adults are learning, whether these be adult basic education programs, community action groups, organizational teams or higher education classrooms, becomes an imperative of good practice. A critically reflective stance towards adult education practice, like a prophetically pragmatic one, abandons any premature commitment to one approach, no matter how liberatory this might appear. Instead there is a principled methodological eclecticism, a readiness to experiment with any and all approaches in the pursuit of emancipatory learning. This is particularly the case with adult education initiatives that see themselves as anti-racist (Hayes & Colin, 1994).

The methodological eclecticism of prophetic pragmatism can be called principled for two reasons. First, it eschews any pretence that adult education lacks a socio-political dimension and acknowledges instead that practice is driven by moral and political impulses: in West’s case by the furtherance of African American interests, the fight against racist ideology and the democratic transformation of society. A prophetically pragmatic approach (and, by implication, a critically reflective form of adult education) “begins with social structural analyses” and “makes explicit its moral and political aims” (West, 1993b, p. 23). Such an approach is unashamedly “partisan, partial, engaged and crisis-centered” (ibid. p. 23). Yet, combined with its openly acknowledged intent of changing minds, practices and structures, prophetic pragmatism “always keeps open a skeptical eye to avoid dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations or rigid conclusions” (ibid. p. 23). Its solicitation of critiques of its aims and procedures is a defining feature of its internal logic.

Second, a prophetically pragmatic approach is principled because it shares with a critically reflective orientation a commitment to the collective creation of knowledge. Prophetic pragmatism conceives of knowledge as developed “within the conceptual framework of intersubjective communal inquiry” (West, 1982, p. 21) in which “knowledge claims are secured by the social practices of a community of inquirers” (ibid.). As such, prophetic pragmatism exhibits a direct connection to one of the strongest traditions in the adult educational field, that of community-based, dialogically inclined, groups of activists and citizens working collaboratively to examine their experiences and practices with a view to transforming society in democratic directions. This is the tradition of Lindeman, Horton and Freire and, in Gyant’s (2002) view, also that of Alain Locke, the first African American President of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. It ascribes an explicit social purpose to adult education, and frames adult educational practice as an analog of the

very participatory democracy it is intending to bring about. It privileges collaborative dialog over individual analysis and fights any tendency to the privatization of knowledge.

What can adult educators of all racial identities take from West's, and Outlaw's, analyses? First, and foremost, both writers urge that adult educators acknowledge the way the field is racialized. This does not necessarily mean abandoning constructs drawn from Eurocentrism – after all, Outlaw and West themselves locate much of their within the Frankfurt School of critical theory and Marxist scholarship generally. Marx, Gramsci, Foucault and Habermas are hardly celebrated for their detailed analysis of racism yet Outlaw and West find their analyses indispensable (though insufficient). But while racializing adult education does not mean the wholesale abandoning of Eurocentric traditions, it does, by implication, open the field up to a diversity of racially based analyses. Racializing adult education means deconstructing its prevailing Eurocentric practices and opening discourse to include philosophies, research approaches and classroom or community practices that reflect other racial traditions. The Africentric paradigm explored by Colin (1988, 1994, 2002) and her co-authors (Colin & Guy, 1998; Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Hayes & Colin, 1994) constitutes one such important effort.

Interpreted through Outlaw and West's eyes a central curricular focus of adult education becomes the understanding how racist ideology and dynamics become accepted as unremarkable by the majority. As both writers acknowledge, critical theory can inform this task in important ways. Gramsci's concept of hegemony – the process by which people embrace ideas and practices that are harmful to them and that maintain an inequitable, racist system – is clearly relevant. As Gramscian-inclined analyses of schooling in the United Kingdom (Willis, 1981) and United States (Foley, 1990) make clear, even when people learn to recognize their oppression hegemony is flexible enough to divert resistance (such as

a rejection of middle class, White values) into ideological self-damnation.

West in particular explores a pragmatically inclined approach toward critical adult education. An important element in this is the building of alliances across race and class, with intellectuals from more privileged positions working in the interests of the disenfranchised. West strongly emphasizes the collective nature of transformative processes, whether these are concerned with learners transforming their consciousness, educators transforming their classrooms, or citizens transforming their communities. He believes that people need each other to make any significant change in the world and that activist adult educators must work in concert with allies drawn from a range of social locations. Like Angela Davis, West's position suggests strong support for the methodology of team teaching as being well suited to the project of helping adults penetrate dominant racist ideology. Team teaching properly conceived and implemented (that is, teaching in which teachers plan processes together, are present for all instruction whether or not they are leading the activity, and debrief their work collectively) models a strong commitment to collective learning for adult students. Of course team teaching itself is not without its own inherent contradictions, particularly when imbalances of power and status (real or perceived) exist amongst team members. If we accept Marcuse's admonitions regarding the ever-present danger of repressive tolerance, or Foucault's analysis of how superficially democratic or apparently collaborative practices can be experienced by learners as reconfigurations of oppression, then it is clear that the practice of team-teaching risks confirming the very inequities and injustices it purports to challenge. In my experience a good general rule is that in multi-racial adult teaching teams White faculty should speak last and least. On those occasions when White faculty do assume the lead teacher role, the non-white faculty should make it clear to learners that this is a team decision and that the White faculty member has been asked to assume temporary

authority at the specific request of the faculty of color in the team.

## 5. CRITIQUING EUROCENTRISM AND WHITE EPISTEMOLOGY

Racializing adult education requires much more than the consideration of African-centered epistemology, Latino critical theory, or the study of culturally different ways of knowing. It also requires the identification and critique of Whiteness as the conceptual core of the field. As Shore (2001) argues, adult education scholarship positions whiteness “unquestioningly as the invisible norm, a norm that appears to have no tangible effects on pedagogy” (p. 43). In adult education generic White understandings of adult learning operate as a regime of truth, in Foucault’s (1980) terms. The White archetype of the successful adult learner is one who takes control over her learning, who focuses on using learning to solve discrete problems, who experiences an incremental development of critical acuity, and who sees lifelong learning as a constant project of self and social transformation.

Because Whites have not had the experience of racism as the central reality of their lives, the neutral, power-free zones they create within adult education classrooms are assumed to be benevolent. White adult educators sometimes take to themselves – consciously or unconsciously – the responsibility to create a safe haven or hate-free speech community. In so doing their power to define and control dominant speech norms is implicitly underscored. As Barlas and others (2000) point out, White supremacist consciousness “takes for granted the legitimacy of having white norms and values dominant society. That this consciousness is often invisible to those who hold it strengthens it as a force for hegemony” (p. 26). Particularly problematic is White adult educators denunciation of racism as the justification for operating a color-blind classroom in which race will not be judged as an important factor in determining who should

speak, or used to belittle the contributions of certain learners.

An important first step in racializing adult education discourse is to identify Whiteness as an ideology – a humanly constructed set of beliefs and practices that are promoted as the natural order of life and therefore serve to reproduce the current system. Ideology always contains an implicit epistemology – a set of understandings and conventions that govern how we determine what counts as true and knowable. In adult education, as many have already argued, ideology and epistemology are White (Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Colin 1994; Johnson-Bailey, 2002; Johnson-Bailey, Tisdell & Cervero, 1994; Jeria, 1999; Manglitz, 2003; Manglitz & Hann, 2002; Peterson, 1999). The central generic understandings of what count as ‘normal’, predictable adult learning activities (self-directed learning, transformative learning, critical reflection) and adult educational processes (andragogy, democratic negotiation) are drawn from Enlightenment rationality’s emphasis on the rational, self-propelled individual searching for wisdom. The contemporary literature enshrining these norms is largely produced by White Americans or Europeans steeped in Eurocentrism.

Colin and Preciphs (1991) observe that in graduate courses in the field “nonwhite racial groups in the United States are rarely mentioned as the creators of concepts or ideas, or as producers of curricula” (p. 65) leading students to conclude either that these groups are intellectually deficient, or that their involvement has been deliberately downplayed. To Elizabeth Peterson (1999) the official curriculum of adult education represents a White supremacist master script that “deletes or distorts the stories of African Americans” (p. 86) while maintaining that we are all bound by our common experience of immigration. Manglitz and Hann (2002) declare that “adult education has been and continues to be complicit in the effort to ensure Eurocentric hegemony” (p. 255) primarily through its dismissal of non-Eurocentric ways of knowing and doing, and they cite as a prime example of this the foregrounding of critical reflection in

the 2000 edition of the decennial *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson & Hayes, 2000). In Manglit and Hann's view the *Handbook* "has long functioned as a guidebook or exemplar of discourse for the field ... by foregrounding critical reflection as one way that practitioners and researchers can examine and make explicit the theoretical frames that guide their work, the authors constructed a handbook that privileges theory development and implementation based on a predominantly Eurocentric paradigm" (ibid. p. 255).

## 6. EUROCENTRISM IN ADULT EDUCATION: MANIFESTATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In what ways does Eurocentrism manifest itself? One is in the prevalence of generic modes of conceptualization and analysis. As Johnson-Bailey (2002) argues, "in adult education, teaching and learning has existed as a generic concept for the past fifty years: all teachers and learners are the same" (p. 43). Concepts of positionality, of racial identity or cultural context, are generally bypassed. The meaning of being White, Native American, Hispanic, Asian, African American and so on is lost when adult educators insist on "proceeding with generic praxis, literature and discourses" (p. 40). Eurocentrism also underlies the deficit perspective frequently applied to non-White adult learners. In Jorge Jeria's (1999) view this perspective is particularly glaring as applied to Hispanics. He writes "what is offered as education to the Hispanic population is training in a language in which they are asked to reproduce cultural symbols that teachers of adults think they don't have – in other words, they are working from a deficit" (p. 58). The knowledge that people produce in the struggle to maintain a separate cultural identity is devalued. As Bernal (2002) points out "the Eurocentric perspective has for too long viewed the experiential knowledge of students of color as a deficit or ignored it all together" (p. 121).

A third manifestation of adult education's unproblematic Eurocentrism is its underscoring of the racial make up of the profession where White Euro-Americans function as the producers of official knowledge. Colin's (1994) analysis of graduate adult education contends that "Eurocentric norms and perceptions dominate the academic environment, and this dominance is reflected in the criteria that are used for hiring and admissions" (p. 54). African American (to use Colin's formulation) students are successful in matriculation to the extent to which they demonstrate "the degree of their commitment to the Eurocentric worldview, value system, and modes of behavior" (ibid. p. 54). Tenure and promotion of African American faculty is based on "the perpetuation of this ideology in the classroom and in their own research. As such, African American faculty are expected to trade their cultural reality for reappointment and truth for tenure" (p. 54). Furthermore, those African American faculty who are successful are treated by White faculty as there by the grace of affirmative action. Colin ends her analysis by declaring that "acceptance of the Eurocentric worldview excludes the sociocultural and intellectual histories and life experiences of African Americans. It physically and cognitively locks them out, but it locks others in" (p. 59).

Fourthly, Eurocentrism as an intellectual representation of Whiteness produces a distinctive epistemology of adult learning. This emphasizes certain learner characteristics and learning processes – self-directed learning, critical reflection, transformative learning, andragogy – that are proposed as universal. The andragogical focus on learning as problem-solving, the stress on the individual crafting of learner-controlled, self-directed learning projects, and the celebration of an unproblematic sharing of experience in a setting implicitly deemed to be neutral, all serve to underscore a universalized empirical understanding of how adults actually learn. Cultural traditions and racial identities that emphasize different characteristics and understandings, such as refusing to view learning as a process separate from community processes, are positioned either

as deviant (implying a need for correction) or celebrated as exotic (implying a standing apart from the obvious, central norm). Both of these positionings, of course, only serve to underscore the legitimacy of the White center.

Questioning the positioning of White epistemology as the theoretical norm in adult education has important implications for the generation of knowledge in the field. The practices governing the way official knowledge is produced in adult education academic discourse communities (university departments, journals, research conferences, graduate programs, book publishers) resolutely affirm the inherent superiority of the rationally-driven, intellectual lone wolf. This notion of the self-contained intellectual engaged in an individual, single-minded pursuit of truth is the intellectual embodiment of Eurocentric rationality. Its conventions ensure that dissertations are written (or rather credited to) one person. Under its influence journal articles, conference papers and books that are single authored carry far more weight when appointment, promotion and tenure decisions are made, than do co- or multi-authored pieces. The disclosure of self, particularly the discussion of how one's White racial identity frames one's research, is either actively discouraged or seen as daringly exotic. Individual professors, publishers and researchers may question and even ignore these practices, but the system consistently underscores their validity and normality. This is particularly evident in graduate programs where adult education researchers and theoreticians acquire an implicit sense of what 'properly' conducted research looks like. Very rarely do we see multiple-authored dissertations exploring the effects of racial differences among team members who themselves are exploring racial matters (see, for example Hammond, Gregg, & Frison, 1999), multiple-authored conference papers examining race that are published under a group or collective name (see, for example, the European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2002), or dissertations where the discussion of how one's racial identity as White shapes research protocols, interpretations and findings is viewed

as an important theoretical activity (see for example, Anderson, 2002).

Challenging White epistemology also calls into question the archetype of good adult educational practice – a democratically run group of voluntary learners sharing stories and experiences in a celebratory way under the benevolent gaze of a neutral facilitator who respectfully refuses to impose his or her agenda. The circle of adults sharing experiences is perhaps the apogee of Whiteness in the field. As I have written elsewhere (Brookfield, 1995) the circle has always held a particular democratic resonance for me. Until a decade or so ago (I began teaching adults in 1970) I took great pride in the inherently democratic, respectful messages that I believed the circle clearly conveyed to my learners. Shore (2001) has strongly argued, however, that settings for adult learning such as the circle “assume it is possible to leave the effects of racial formation in the corridor, beyond the classroom walls. Thus, we can forget for a moment that we are White while never forgetting that Others are not” (p. 49). The circle only feels like a welcoming, neutral setting to those “who can comfortably comply with the rules of small groups” such as “the requirement to confess to total strangers (or) to engage in critical thinking while at the same time suppressing emotion, contradictions, and moments of incommensurability” (ibid. p. 49). More insidiously, stories of oppression and racism are often reframed as heroic narrative of White alliance-building, so that “themes of the Other's oppression and struggle are lost in White needs to reframe narratives of colonialism as stories of helping” (ibid. p. 49). As Shore concludes “in such settings the power of Whiteness to shape issues such as authority, expertise, competence, power-knowledge, and what counts as real experience are central to the myth of neutral facilitation” (ibid p. 49).

The role of the adult educator as neutral convener is further critiqued by Baptiste (2000) who provocatively argues that adult educators of any color cannot help but impose their agendas and preferences on learners. In his view a case can be made for arguing that this is precisely

what should – rather than should not – happen. Newman (1994), too, maintains that adult educators have a responsibility to push an agenda of naming the enemy. But the White epistemology of neutral facilitation grounded in a respect for all viewpoints where all contributions have merit and all are equally deserving of consideration, implicitly condemns the pursuit of an explicit agenda. This makes it more difficult for White adult educators to challenge their own, and their students', Whiteness for fear of being seen as partisan and impositional. In this paradigm a White adult educator who openly and vigorously proclaimed her intent to explore and fight the way White epistemology maintained racism would be viewed as disrespectful at best, partisan at worst. Such an agenda would only be allowed in this paradigm if it sprang from the expressed desires of group members. But if the majority of a group is White, and if these adult learners see their Whiteness as a non-issue because they think of themselves as benevolent to all races, there is no alternative but for the adult educator to propose an agenda that flies in the face of learner's desires. This is what Marcuse (1965) calls the practice of liberating (as opposed to repressive) tolerance. Examining the presence and effects of Whiteness in adult education practice cannot help but expose the myth of neutral, non-impositional, adult educators.

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