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The Neglected Social Psychology of Institutional Racism

Tim J. Berard*
Kent State University

Abstract

Theories of institutional racism and institutionalized discrimination have been remarkably influential in the understanding of continuing racial inequality and contemporary race relations. These theories and related claims have also been criticized as being improperly conceptualized, employing circular reasoning, neglecting nonracial dimensions of inequality, failing to specify causal mechanisms, and employing questionable inferences and attributions. These issues can be illuminated by critically reviewing how theories of institutional racism and institutionalized discrimination handle issues of social psychology. Issues of social psychology are often treated only minimally or implicitly, and often dismissively. This neglect is the root of many concerns about theories of institutional racism and institutionalized discrimination. Increased attention to and employment of scholarship in social psychology can contribute greatly to an understanding of contemporary racial inequality and race relations that advances both academic interests and practical interests in the evaluation and reform of the institutional practices that perpetuate racial inequality.

Institutional racism as a social–psychological problem

At and around the intersection of social psychology and racial/ethnic studies, an imposing and ever-increasing number of authors have tried to keep up with changing patterns and problems of race relations by defining new varieties of racism. The old-fashioned blatant and intentional racism of individual bigotry is said to be dying out or going underground, but is said to be giving way to or transforming into newer, contemporary forms of racism. These newer, contemporary forms of racism have been given many names and refer to a variety of problems in race relations and social policy, but they are generally acknowledged to be more subtle and more obscure in their origin and their processes, covert rather than overt, frequently indirect rather than direct, often unconscious or unwitting rather than intentional. The effects of racism are suggested to remain much the same: denigrating, marginalizing, and oppressive. What has changed is not the social effects attributed to racism, then, but rather the social psychology of racism.

While some authors have suggested that racism has become unconscious or unintentional, other authors have suggested that racism is now located more at the level of social institutions or social systems, rather than at the level of individuals. And these two approaches are often combined – racism is said to be unconscious or unintentional and it is attributed to dominant groups, social institutions or society in general, rather than to individuals. There does seem to be a general consensus in contemporary studies of racism and discrimination that the decline of blatant, overt racism at the level of individuals does not signal the arrival of a color-blind society of equal opportunity and multiculturalism, but rather signals that racism is transforming in ways that call for *new* explanations of *continuing* racial disadvantage. Accounting for these transformations, whether through the study of race relations, or the studies of policy analysis or law, involves a whole host of social–psychological considerations, including intentionality and consciousness, knowledge and belief, attributions of responsibility and blame, and of course social identities and stereotypes.

In all these respects, it is noteworthy that the meaning of racism has been stretched in a radical and quite questionable manner, seeming (but perhaps merely seeming) to depart from the conventional understanding of racism as an attribute of individuals rooted somehow in their beliefs, values, or intentions. Contemporary scholarship defines varieties of racism that are not attributed to individuals but rather to institutions, and that are not defined in terms of attitudes, dispositions, prejudices, or agendas, but rather in terms of negative or unequal *outcomes* for minority groups. While it certainly cannot be denied that many social institutions continue to have disparate and adverse impacts on minority groups, constituting serious social problems, it is perhaps still possible to question whether viable understandings of racism, racial disadvantage, and race relations can do without a social–psychological understanding of the mechanisms that lead to adverse impacts on minority groups and the perceptions and inferences that inform the evaluation of such adverse impacts. Attending to the intersection of social psychology and racism in relevant and recent literature is important not only for illuminating the trajectory of the scholarship in question, but also for offering a critical survey of issues that remain to be addressed and potential lines of development in theory, research, and practice.

The original social psychology: *Black Power* and white power structure

The term institutional racism is attributed to Stokely Carmichael (subsequently known as Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton, who popularized the term in their book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967). It is an explicitly and undeniably ideological and political work, as much political intervention into American race relations as it is a

contribution to the study of American race relations. What is arguably of most interest, in terms of its implicit social psychology, is that the concept of institutional racism was from the beginning a very problematic concept. To whom or to what is institutional racism attributed, specifically? How is institutional racism related to the intentions and considerations of the people staffing or leading the institutions in question? The term institutional racism was destined to become an influential concept in the study of race and race relations, but its original social psychology has been neglected or at least muffled; subsequent authors have treated social–psychological questions very inconsistently, often implicitly, and sometimes not at all.

Black Power begins with a quite reasonable definition of racism: 'By "racism" we mean the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group' (p. 3). Carmichael and Hamilton then differentiate between individual racism and institutional racism, the former attributed to individuals, the latter attributed to 'the total white community' (p. 4) or the 'white power structure' (p. 7). They suggest the meaning and significance of institutional racism by characterizing it as 'less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts' but 'no less destructive of human life' (p. 4). Examples include a variety of problems afflicting African Americans, such as high rates of infant mortality and substandard segregated housing. These problems are typically not caused by overt acts of racism by specific individuals, but are still destructive of African American lives and communities in much the same way, on an even larger scale. By implication, then, institutional racism would be racism attributed to institutions such as healthcare systems and real estate markets, also educational institutions, criminal justice institutions, political and administrative institutions responsible for urban policy, economic policy, social welfare policy, etc. Soon after, they argue that 'institutional racism relies on the active and pervasive operation of antiblack attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group position prevails: whites are "better" than blacks; therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites. This is a racist attitude and it permeates society ...' (p. 5). Two issues, at least, deserve attention as social–psychological themes available in the definitional work outlined above.

First of all, institutional racism is attributed to whites as a group. Carmichael and Hamilton acknowledge that 'there are many centers of power, many different forces making decisions' and that the body politic is pluralistic (p. 7), but they go on to argue that 'American pluralism quickly becomes monolithic on issues of race' (p. 7) and, more pointedly, 'whites frequently see themselves as a monolithic group on racial issues and act accordingly' (p. 9). Although the meaning is clear, and the argument makes perfect sense as an expression of radical black social criticism, this treatment of whites is quite dubious as an empirical claim, and has become increasingly dubious with the passage of time. The idea of a monolithic

white power structure acting as a single, unified agent of repression could easily be objected to as stereotyping, overgeneralizing, and essentializing. But it could also be compared to quite discredited mystical constructs from the early history of social psychology, such as Wundt's notion of 'group mind', a construction treated quite skeptically by academics and one recognized as overly amenable to ethnic nationalism (Kendler 1987, 40–41). It is important to remember, first, that the original exposition of institutionalized racism involves attributing a variety of *social–psychological* attributes to whites as a group, including *purposeful* subordination and social control of blacks, antiblack *attitudes*, and a group *sense* of racial superiority over blacks.

A second issue that deserves the attention of social psychologists is that institutional racism is not only defined by reference to the purposes, attitudes, and beliefs of whites, but also by reference to a variety of social problems afflicting African Americans. These problems are understood as the *effects* of institutional racism, not as wholly constituting institutional racism. Although Carmichael and Hamilton do not define institutional racism solely in terms of its effects, the social–psychological dimension in their account may have been so politically divisive or so empirically inadequate that subsequent authors would define institutional racism more and more in terms of its effects, largely neglecting or fudging questions of causal mechanisms and institutional processes (cf. Feagin and Feagin 1986, 12–13), including vital questions of a social–psychological nature. Although Carmichael and Hamilton did not provide a social–psychological account of institutional racism that had any chance of becoming a consensual understanding, either politically or academically (cf. Hesse 2004, 144) they *did* actually specify a social–psychological underpinning for institutional racism, more so than many subsequent authors, including some academics who criticize the work of Carmichael and Hamilton for an inattention to concept formation (e.g. Smith 1995, 32).

Subsequent confusion about the social psychology of institutional racism

Many examples can be cited of subsequent authors who define or treat institutional racism in terms of the negative *effects* of institutions on minorities, neglecting, or explicitly dismissing social–psychological questions about the intentions, the beliefs, and the concerns of those individuals who do the work of the institutions in question and who formulate policies and priorities in these institutions. Knowles and Prewitt, in their book *Institutional Racism in America* (1969, 4; cf. 14), write that they 'ask not what the motive of the individuals might be; rather we look at the consequences of the institutions they have created'. Blauner, famous for analyzing domestic race relations in terms of internal colonialism, similarly defines institutional racism in terms of its exclusionary effects (1972, 185),

although this position is seemingly at odds with his observation that racism has subjective concomitants as well as objective manifestations (1972, 10). The definition of institutional racism in terms of its effects seems also to be too crude for Blauner when he turns his attention to the position of white faculty on matters of race within the university. In this context, he writes, '... if racism is to be a useful concept for understanding oppression and social change in America, it cannot be used as a magical catchphrase to be applied mechanically to every situation without analyzing its specifics' (1972, 259). While some may dismiss this as a case of special pleading, another response would be to question the implication that other social institutions do not require the careful analysis that Blauner recommends for universities.

Murphy and Choi define institutionalized discrimination as discrimination occurring 'through the everyday operation of institutions', emphasizing how and where it has its effect, but failing to mention in their definition that racism and discrimination are understood as intentional, even if the intentions may be buried and difficult to prove (1997, 89). Smith defines institutional racism in terms of effects such as racial subordination, and uses the term extensively, despite the fact that he objects to this understanding of institutional racism on both conceptual and operational grounds. Smith gives multiple examples where a backwards inference from adverse impact to institutional racism would be unfounded. Examples are cultural or behavioral differences between 'racial' groups that could lead to racial inequality without institutional racism, and class or market forces that lead to racial inequality without institutional racism (Smith 1995, 34).

Walker, Spohn, and DeLone, in a very successful textbook on minorities and criminal justice, display the great potential for similar treatments of discrimination to become disseminated in such a form that could obscure the understanding of racism and discrimination and possibly even generate frustration or resentment at intellectual contortions in critical race scholarship. In their textbook, they define institutionalized discrimination as 'racial and ethnic disparities in outcomes that are the result of the application of racially neutral factors ...' (2007, 19). The connection to racism is implied two pages later in a second, different version of the definition, but the connection is subtle, is expressed in inaccessible language, and the meaning is further obscured when institutionalized discrimination is conflated with *disparate impact*. Disparate impact is a legal term that refers to the *effects* of a policy or practice on a minority group, without specifying racism or discrimination in the purposes or the processes that lead to the disparate impact. Such conflation again obscures the racist or discriminatory element in institutional racism or institutionalized discrimination.

Cashmore, in the entry in his *Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations* (1996, 169–72), also defines institutional racism largely in terms of its effects, writing at one point that the concept 'places no relevance on

intention, but centers only on results'. He acknowledges that the term institutional racism is conceptually problematic, and has been criticized for 'blurring the distinction between the material and ideological', and for committing a category mistake by attributing racism to institutions without specifying whether or how racism might be grounded at the level of individuals. Cashmore nevertheless sees the term institutional racism as useful: it 'has demonstrated practical value in highlighting the need for positive, continuous action ...' Yang also acknowledges the imprecision and ambiguity of such expansive treatments of racism, but also defines institutional racism in terms of results and praises the concept as an important advancement (2000, 145). Other authors who define institutional racism or one type of it in terms of adverse impact on a minority group, rather than by reference to any social–psychological phenomena, include Friedman (1975), Haas (1992), and Le Blanc (2003), among many others.

Racism and discrimination as mindful phenomena

Obviously institutional racism and institutional discrimination are critical terms, but what is needed is more critical attention to how they are conceptualized and defined. Issues of concept formation and definition may not be empirical, and may be tangential to purposes of social criticism, but they are essential, and this has been recognized in the study of race and the study of social psychology and by scholars interested in the intersection of the two (e.g. Barrett and George 2005, 37; Blumer 1969, 171–82; Leach 2005). Racism has always been understood by reference to some type of social–psychological foundation, whether in terms of ideology, bias or prejudice, anxiety or fear, hatred or antipathy, or self-interested white privilege. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines racism as a *theory*, and defines the older term racialism as founded on a *belief* (cf. Banton and Miles 1996). Although early understandings of racism did not conceive of racism as *merely* psychological, as subsequent theories of racism as individual bigotry might have implied, and although early scholarship discussed racism in the context of political and institutional developments such as fascism (e.g. Hirschfeld 1938), it remains true that racism was consistently understood along the lines of an ideology or a doctrine. The original formulation of institutional racism by Carmichael and Hamilton was no exception, even if arguments about institutional racism emphasize the wide *scope* and corrosive *effects* of racism over the more elusive and controversial social–psychological foundations of racism. Even when questions of social psychology are treated dismissively, there are often pivotal claims or assumptions of a social–psychological nature, as when Bonilla-Silva notes in passing that he treats 'the views of actors as corresponding to their systemic location' (2003, 8), in what amounts to a reductionist, structuralist, and deterministic reference to social–psychological issues.

Discrimination also refers essentially to a mindful phenomenon. It refers necessarily to judgment, to the activity of drawing or acting on distinctions, whether discriminating between black and white or between pinot noir and Chianti. This is even true for Robert Merton's seminal category of 'nonprejudiced discriminators', those who discriminate without being prejudiced, for example, due to social pressure or economic considerations. The mindful nature and social–psychological basis of racism and discrimination are built into these concepts as essential elements of their logic and pragmatics, defining what they mean and constraining how they can be sensibly, justifiably attributed. As noted by Edwards and Potter (1995), the words we employ in accounting for situations carry important implications for causal explanations and for attributions to persons; if these implications are not understood and addressed clearly, the analysis necessarily suffers.

Following in this vein, it makes sense to raise the question of racism when blacks have higher infant mortality rates than whites (Carmichael and Hamilton), but not when blacks are afflicted disproportionately with sickle-cell anemia. It makes sense to raise the issue of racism when evaluating the inadequate government response to Hurricane Katrina, but it does not make sense to raise the issue of racism when understanding the trajectory of the hurricane, which resulted in heavy damage to many African American communities. Sickle-cell anemia and Hurricane Katrina cannot be understood as racist or discriminatory, although in both cases, we can talk about disparate impact by race. The reason they cannot be understood as racist or discriminatory is that there can be no social psychology to such blood disorders or weather disturbances. Where there is no social psychology possible, there can be no racism. Conversely, where racism is attributed, there must be a social–psychological basis implied, even if it is not directly claimed and not easily demonstrated.

The basic fact that it makes sense (it is intelligible, plausible) to suspect racism of human institutions such as the US healthcare system or the US Federal Emergency Management Agency is premised on the fact that they are led and staffed by human beings, who have beliefs and concerns, who make judgments, and engage in mindful and meaningful action. It is the social–psychological basis of human institutions that makes it possible for institutions and their effects to be understood as racist. Those who use the term institutional racism, however, are frequently responsible for obscuring, neglecting, or even denying the importance of understanding institutions in terms of human thought and action.

The human, meaningful nature of institutions and institutional work adds an important dimension to their study that is not present in the study of physiological pathologies or weather disturbances. This human dimension is neglected whenever racism is simply inferred from, or even treated as identical with, disparate impact on minorities. Many of those who use the term institutional racism rely on unstated presumptions

about the social–psychological basis of racism, while treating genuine and important social–psychological questions as naïve or insensitive to new forms of racism. Actually, the concerns about new concepts and theories of racism have often been raised most insightfully and incisively by those who care to make critical scholarship on racism more coherent and compelling.

Neglected and fleeting clarifications of institutional racism

A very noteworthy counterexample to the tendency to avoid social–psychological issues in the discussion of institutional racism is provided by Feagin and Feagin in their book *Discrimination American Style: Institutional Racism and Sexism* (1986, 2nd edn). They note, for example, that previous conceptions of institutional racism or discrimination were fuzzy concepts, 'implying that individuals are somehow not relevant' (p. 19). They warn against the fallacy of reification in assessing organizational practices, observing (quite correctly) that 'the "bottom line" in all types of discrimination is someone actually doing something to someone else' (p. 25). Although recognizing the importance of studying the negative effects of institutions on minority groups, they lament 'just how little research has actually been done, and is being done, on the character and day-to-day operation of the mechanisms of race and sex discrimination' (p. 166).

Feagin and Feagin provide what is arguably the most sophisticated and most tenable link between the negative racial effects of institutions and the social–psychological phenomena located, ultimately, at the level of the individuals who lead and staff the institutions and do the institutional work that results in negative effects on minorities. They distinguish between two types of institutionalized discrimination, a direct form and an indirect form. The direct form 'refers to organizationally-prescribed or community-prescribed actions which have an intentionally differential and negative impact on members of subordinate groups' (p. 30). In this form, the *intentionality* of the harm to minorities supplies a social–psychological basis for attributing discrimination to institutions.

The indirect form of institutionalized discrimination, on the other hand, is defined with reference to

> practices having a negative and differential impact on minorities and women even though the organizationally prescribed or community prescribed norms or regulations guiding those actions were established, and are carried out, with no prejudice or no intent to harm lying immediately behind them. On their face and in their intent, the norms and resulting practices appear fair or at least neutral. (Feagin and Feagin 1986, 31)

Although in indirect institutionalized discrimination there is no prejudice or intent to harm lying *immediately* behind the institutional actions that harm minorities, Feagin and Feagin provide that indirect institutionalized

discrimination is linked, albeit indirectly, to intentional discrimination *in other institutions* or in an institution's *past*. The two types of indirect institutional discrimination are therefore termed 'side-effect discrimination' and 'past-in-present discrimination' (Feagin and Feagin 1986, 31–32; cf. Le Blanc 2003, 43). Although the connection between the social–psychological basis of discrimination and the effects of discrimination are tenuous and indirect, mediated by institutional interactions or institutional histories, Feagin and Feagin do draw a connection and, therefore, do provide a coherent if arguable social–psychological basis for attributing racism and discrimination to institutions, even when there is no intent to discriminate. This dimension of their analysis was perhaps too subtle or too complicated to become a widely respected and adopted contribution to the literature.

Regrettably, Feagin and Feagin decrease the clarity of their contribution by defining discrimination by reference to its negative *impacts* on minorities, without reference to any social–psychological dimension or considerations, whether direct or indirect (see, for example, 1986, 1, 20–21). Also regrettably, Joe Feagin's subsequent work, like the work of other scholars, can often be faulted for leaving behind the conceptual clarity expressed in Feagin and Feagin's discussion of institutional racism (1986). His *Systemic Racism*, for example, is right to criticize obscure discussions of white agency (2006, 5), and right to criticize (again) the scholarly neglect of the mechanisms by which racism expresses itself in contemporary society (2006, 35), but seemingly fails to address the racist nature of systemic racism as well as he addressed the racist nature of institutional racism 20 years before. His ambitious discussion of a 'white racial frame' is very helpful in drawing attention to the mindful and cultural dimensions of racism, but in applying this frame to whites generally he has to fall back on attributions of social–psychological traits that are collectivistic or unconscious, or both. Such attributions may raise more problems than they resolve.

A more recent clarification of institutional racism is offered in a fleeting comment by Hesse, who distinguishes between *intentionalist* and *consequentialist* accounts of institutional racism, the distinction being whether the racism is attributed on the basis of intentions or on the basis of consequences (2004, 132). Unfortunately, Hesse does not seem to appreciate that if racism comprises a racial doctrine with racial theories, that is, an *ideology*, as he suggests (2004, 133), then attributions of racism on the basis of the racial *consequences* of a practice or a policy are rather indirect and questionable inferences. Consequentialist accounts of institutional racism are much farther removed from the type of social–psychological understanding that could establish the *racist* element of institutional racism. Despite these reservations, the distinction between intentionalist and consequentialist accounts is another noteworthy move in the right direction.

Surveying the contemporary understanding of institutional racism

More recent literature on institutional racism carries along some of the earlier insights and contentions, but leaves a considerable amount behind as well. The divisive language of Carmichael and Hamilton, including their references to the white power structure, is often left behind without comment, even though it is this aspect of their argument that specified the *agents* and the *intentions* behind institutional racism. The distinctions provided by Feagin and Feagin, between direct and indirect institutional discrimination, and within the latter, between side-effect discrimination and present-in-past discrimination, have also been widely neglected, especially the latter concepts.

What has become the conventional understanding of institutional racism is in some senses a lowest common denominator between earlier contributions, emphasizing that minorities continue to be disadvantaged in a number of institutional spheres (cf. Smith 1995, 34), but neglecting to specify how racial disadvantages are linked or might be linked to racism as a social–psychological phenomenon. The racism part of institutional racism has largely become an unquestioned claim or inference, made by critics who can display little interest in or patience for social–psychological questions about institutional staff or leaders, their intentions, their beliefs, their knowledge, their concerns, their identities, or their work. The individual and interactional basis of institutions and institutional processes is understood very simplistically in terms of the assumed 'whiteness' of the institutions and the effects of the institutions on minorities, as if everything else were irrelevant or could be inferred from those two racial considerations. Such analysis may meet the standards of social criticism and political rhetoric, rightfully drawing critical attention to serious social problems and rightfully attributing significant responsibility to 'white' social institutions (cf. Hacker 1992, 22), but this analysis is obviously lacking with respect to empirical scholarship and with respect to policy analysis. Many more social scientists and policy analysts should be asking about how institutional effects are related to the attitudes, beliefs, priorities, and considerations of the people who make the decisions that in the aggregate constitute the problem of institutional disparate impact on minorities, the problem that is so often referred to as institutional racism.

Implications for understanding other new racisms

The types of racism identified in various literatures have multiplied greatly since the 1960s, and the above concerns about institutional racism apply in whole or in part to several other new racisms, including color-blind racism, racism without racists, *laissez-faire* racism, modern and symbolic racisms, and silent racism.

Carr discusses the US constitutional principle of 'color blindness' as a new type of racism (1997). For the same reasons that the term color-blind racism itself may strike one as counterintuitive or worse, the reasoning involved requires more attention than is provided. It would be much more accessible and sensible if racism were discussed as one possible *motive* (among many) for advocating color-blind policies. In such cases, color blindness would serve as an ideological pretext for a *color-conscious* neglect of minority concerns (cf. Bonilla-Silva 2003, 7; Brown et al. 2003, 193–222). 'Color blindness' and racism can be related in such a fashion, as a cover and a motive, but only in a contingent manner, not necessarily or inherently or universally, as Carr suggests. Color blindness can simply refer to what is suggested in the term, and that would seemingly be a good reference point for more critical analysis that might address the self-interested, rhetorical abuses of 'color blindness'. The nature of the claimed connection between racism and color blindness needs to be addressed much more clearly and consistently, and again there is the liability that racism may be attributed on the basis of a questionable inference, with no direct knowledge of or interest in why specific people might be advocating for color-blind policies on specific issues at specific times.

Similarly, the notion of racism without racists, which has been articulated most prominently with reference to color-blind racism by Bonilla-Silva (2003), employs a term that is catchy but that potentially confuses the analysis of racism. Like color-blind racism, which is used to refer to an ideology that is not really color-blind, the term racism without racists is used to refer to a form of racism that is inevitably perpetuated by people, who therefore become describable as racists. These would be the same racists who are mysteriously, ironically missing in references to racism without racists. The ironic use of counterintuitive terms such as these, where the irony is often not explicit (especially for wider audiences), is another expression of the neglect of central social–psychological questions. Rather than discussing or engaging social–psychological themes, there can be undeveloped, undefended assumptions or inferences that racism can be attributed to whites across the board, without regard to and often in direct opposition to whatever whites may say and do with respect to race and race relations.

In Bonilla-Silva's earlier article *Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation* (1996), he acknowledges that racism is an ideology, which of course suggests that questions of belief and values are central to racism. This acknowledgment was obscured, however, by Bonilla-Silva's emphasis on rethinking racism in terms of social structure, as opposed to 'idealist' understandings of racism. While the relations between racism and social structure are quite important, and properly emphasized, there is an exaggerated sense of innovation here that again confuses the literature. Previous scholarship on racism is implied to be much more homogenous and idealist than it is, and what Bonilla-Silva offers here is not a structural

rethinking of racism, as it might seem, but rather a structural approach to race relations and racial phenomena more generally. It is important to distinguish between work that conceptually revises the definition of racism in a structural direction (as much institutional racism literature attempts to do), and work that theoretically or empirically relates racism to structural concerns without conflating them. Unfortunately Bonilla-Silva's article *Rethinking Racism* could appear to be doing the former while serving us in the latter capacity.

Bobo has offered the term *laissez-faire* (or free market) racism to refer to structural inequalities related to institutions such as political and market institutions that are 'putatively nondiscriminatory' but that nevertheless produce or reproduce racial inequality and segregation (Bobo et al. 1997, 41). If one reads carefully, the notion of *laissez-faire* racism is discussed in terms of a variety of social–psychological phenomena that could justify calling this problem a type of racism, social–psychological phenomena such as 'ideology', 'negative racial attitudes' (p. 15), 'persistent negative stereotyping' (p. 16), 'informal racial bias' (p. 17), 'notions of black cultural inferiority' (p. 20), and a sense of racial entitlement and threat (p. 22). However, and despite the fact that Bobo et al. explicitly raise the quite important and rare question of whether racism is an appropriate term for their topic, it is left unclear whether such social–psychological underpinnings are understood to be defining aspects of *laissez-faire* racism. Bobo et al. seem to acknowledge that the causes of continuing racial disadvantage and inequality cannot simply be reduced to discrimination (p. 20), yet, they seem to refer to such continuing disadvantage and inequality and segregation as proof of racism or even as racism itself. Bobo et al. explicitly acknowledge that 'there are inevitable connections between economic and political structures, on the one hand, and patterns of individual thought and action, on the other hand', but the link between these two levels of analysis, including between racial disadvantage and racism, is not clearly formulated. Even when Bobo and associates directly raise the question of whether racism is the appropriate term for understanding the topic of their work, the question is not answered directly. Instead, there is a conflation of racism with analytically distinct phenomena such as racial domination, sliding from a social–psychological phenomenon of a particular nature to a macro-social phenomenon with an unspecified social–psychological basis (Bobo and Smith 1998, 188–90).

Two more of the new racisms are symbolic racism (e.g. Kinder and Sears 1981) and modern racism (e.g. McConahay 1986), often discussed together and often treated as equivalent or largely overlapping. Neither involve old-fashioned racism, on the one hand, but both involve an opposition to certain policies or politics or candidates perceived (at least by those who attribute modern or symbolic racism) as advancing minority interests, such as affirmative action, integrative school busing plans, minority candidates, etc. While the original formulations may have defined these

new racisms with reference to social–psychological components such as antiblack affect (Kinder and Sears 1981, 416), it appears that as these concepts were operationalized in research questionnaires or disseminated in other ways the clarity of the original formulations, including the defining roles of social–psychological attributes, may have suffered. Hence, some have questioned whether racism can be inferred from opposition to certain policies favored by blacks or liberals, noting that opposition may be rooted not in racial animus but in traditional values (Roth 1994, 62–65), or lack of political sophistication about macrostructural matters (Gomez and Wilson 2006). C. Wright Mills would have termed the latter an undeveloped sociological imagination, rather than racism, and there is a distinction to be drawn. Carr objects that arguments of symbolic racism can involve circular reasoning, in which racism is simultaneously cause and effect, similar to concerns raised about institutional racism (1997, 155; cf. Jeffers and Hoggett 1995; Pilkington 2003, 87; Wight 2003, 712). This type of reasoning can be seen as more rhetorical than scientific or empirical, not subject to verification or falsification by evidence (cf. Miles 1989, 56). Whatever may be said for the primary sources of such concepts, it does appear that modern racism and symbolic racism are liable to be attributed to people based on their opposition to certain policies or politicians, without always considering whether the inference of racism is compelling or even sound.

Another new racism is silent racism, a term offered by Trepagnier (2006) to refer to the cognitive underpinning of everyday racism (Essed 1991), which refers to the routine actions of whites that perpetuate racial inequality, again with an emphasis on *effects* that makes inferences of racism much more tenuous and problematic. The work of Trepagnier, like the work of Essed to which it refers, treats racism as not only routine, but endemic among whites. Trepagnier claims, for example, that silent racism 'inhabits the minds of all white Americans' (2006, 21). Trepagnier's concept of silent racism, developed specifically in the context of analyzing racism among 'well-meaning' whites, emphasizes the *effects* of white behavior by contrast with their intentions, suggesting that the behavior has a practical relevance (2006, 131), which intentions, by implication, do not. This of course is reminiscent of many contributions on institutional racism, which Trepagnier draws upon.

Trepagnier's work deserves mention here especially because she criticizes the scholarship on institutional racism as failing to bridge the 'micro–macro gap', that is, failing to explain 'how the action of individuals produces societal patterns of racial inequality' (2006, 63). Drawing on Giddens's structuration theory and selected publications of Bourdieu, Trepagnier attempts to delineate the link that needs to be delineated between macro and micro, between institutional racism and the individual action which it is necessarily founded upon. While the attempt is noteworthy and tries to incorporate potentially relevant theories linking social structure to

human action and agency, Trepagnier ultimately fails to offer a serious treatment of 'micro-phenomena', and instead offers a quite structuralist view of racism with a correspondingly superficial, stereotypical, and consequently dismissive treatment of agency. The proposed bridge between the macro and the micro is rather lopsided, in that individuals are understood as largely ignorant of their roles in reproducing inequality, by which view their actions are rather scripted in terms of the macro-social dynamics of oppression.

In this respect, Trepagnier follows Bourdieu and makes her own work vulnerable to the same criticisms that have been leveled at Bourdieu's work, criticisms that she recounts seemingly without serious consideration (2006, 76). Trepagnier's analysis can be faulted on other fronts for *failing* to follow Bourdieu, for example failing to treat socioeconomic class distinctions as a central dimension of inequality (cf. Miles 1989, 54–57), and failing to acknowledge the many different ways that social space can be divided up into groups (Bourdieu 1991), of which race is only one. That race is one principle of social division among many is an insight that is especially problematic for any theory that interprets social disadvantage or exclusion solely in terms of race and racism, without addressing other relevant issues. These include other types of inequality, the many types of correlations between different types of inequality, and the varying relevance of different types of social identity and social division in specific domains and at specific times.

Wight, who also draws on Bourdieu, provides a more nuanced effort with respect to institutional racism and the agent-structure problem, but is again excessively structuralist. He dismisses methodological individualism as a type of ideology (Wight 2003), instead of taking up the challenge to specify how social phenomena such as racism are ultimately, necessarily, grounded in the practices and beliefs of individuals.

Pincus takes up the idea of institutional racism but objects that the term racism is often used imprecisely (1994, 83). He tries to get around this by speaking of institutional discrimination and structural discrimination, but these seem indistinguishable from varieties of institutional racism. The difference between racism and discrimination may be significant in some contexts, but both imply pejorative social–psychological attributes (whether ideologies, intents, judgments, etc.), hence, neither can be demonstrated by backwards inference from adverse impacts or racial disproportions.

The same general type of reservations applies to a range of notions such as racism as result (e.g. Yang 2000, 145) and racist outcomes (Wight 2003, 713) and discriminatory effect (e.g. Marger 2005, 278; Smith 1995, 53) and discriminatory consequence (e.g. Newman 2007, 182), and discrimination by default (Wang 2006). All of these concepts seem to refer to new phenomena in society, when they may also be understood as terminological novelties plastered over a confused mass of

unresolved and largely unaddressed questions about what racism is, how it can be observed or inferred, and the kind of presuppositions and implications involved in attributions of racism. A wide variety of factors and processes, other than racism or in conjunction with racism to various degrees, can lead to institutional disparate impact by race. Without better knowledge of how racial disparities are produced, including an understanding of the relevance of nonracial characteristics (such as wealth and income) which are correlated with race, we are really not in a good position, scientifically speaking, to be making inferences or claims about how institutional results, outcomes, effects, or consequences are, or are not, related to racism.

Similar concerns apply to most versions of indirect racism or indirect discrimination, in that it is very debatable whether these should be understood as types of racism or racial discrimination, as the terms imply. The phenomena often referred to as indirect racism or indirect discrimination are types of racial disparate impacts resulting from the operation of nonracial criteria. Calling them racist, of whatever variety, is generally misleading because it will be heard as implying something about the social psychology of institutional work and workers (cf. Wight 2003, 710), which is neither true nor intended, according to many formulations of institutional racism. As one moves from direct racism to indirect racism, one also seems to be moving away from the grounds for making attributions of racism, a point rarely addressed in the literature.

What this discussion suggests is that the understanding of contemporary racism at the 'macro-level', involving social institutions and social systems, has been largely divorced from the understanding of racism at the 'micro-level' of individuals, beliefs, intentions, actions, and social interaction. In what is perhaps best understood as skepticism or cynicism about the self-reports of contemporary whites concerning their own attitudes and roles in race relations (cf. Brown et al. 2003, 4), which is an understandable starting point, the entire 'micro-realm' is liable to be dismissed or treated in a reductionist manner. The realm of real people and real social interaction can be treated as merely the location in which macro-social racial hierarchies are reproduced, regardless of what people have to say about who they are, what they do and why they do it. In certain respects, then, the arguments for institutional racism parallel the deterministic and reductionist arguments of instrumental Marxists, substituting a racial structuralism for an economic one, and continuing to treat issues of consciousness, agency, and culture as derivative and epiphenomenal. In effect, the perpetrators of institutional racism are dementalized, with their consciousness amounting to no more than preexisting, collective racial dispositions (cf. Kozak et al. 2006). Instrumental Marxism, it may be noted, provided an easy foil for the development of more cultural and more complex accounts of contemporary economic inequalities, their legitimation through ideologies, and their reproduction.

Now certainly people's statements about their attitudes and their actions can at times be biased, misleading, or even misinformed. The proper response by social scientists, though, would seemingly be to develop scholarship, such as social–psychological scholarship, which is neither so simplistic as to trust all communications as neutral reports or valid scientific claims, nor so simplistic as to dismiss all white speech about institutions and institutional work as ideological reflections of predetermined structural positions in a crudely dichotomous racial hierarchy (cf. Trepagnier 2006, 20). What is needed is scholarship that takes seriously questions of social structure and questions of social psychology as they become mutually relevant and mutually informative (cf. Leach 2005, 442), rather than scholarship in which social psychology is merely a determined stage in a causal process that begins and ends somewhere else.

Surveying social–psychological resources for understanding institutional racism

Thus far, the literature on institutional racism and related new racisms has been discussed, and although it is sensible to address this literature in terms of its implicit theories of social psychology or lack thereof, another important question is what has been done and what is being done in social psychology that is relevant for addressing issues of institutional racism, especially with reference to contributions that have yet to influence the scholarship on institutional racism. The following references and remarks are not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive in any manner, but illustrative of different works in social psychology and related fields that could be brought to bear on many of the new racisms.

The attribution of racism to *institutions* rather than individuals is far from an established topic of social–psychological research. Many social psychologists are interested in phenomena such as racism, prejudice, authoritarianism, etc., but these are often understood as individual psychological traits, related to individuals' attitudes, dispositions, personalities, etc. Social psychologists interested in race have certainly addressed racial groups, but have generally neglected the study of macro-social institutions in the context of relations between majority/dominant and minority racial groups.

Although institutions are social collectivities *constituted* by individuals who have psychological attributes, there are many psychological traits that cannot be attributed to institutions without engaging in fallacious reasoning or category mistakes. If certain dispositions, attitudes, or beliefs are characteristic of an institution's leadership, or its membership, then these psychological traits may under certain circumstances be sensibly and understandably attributed to the institution (cf. Coulter 2001), for example, the Nazi party was anti-Semitic, the Southern Poverty Law Center deplores hate crimes. But in such cases, the attribution of a psychological trait or

state to an institution ultimately refers to the beliefs and purposeful actions of its individual leaders or members. These claims about institutions would not be made without at least the suspicion that these psychological traits or states were attributable to individuals associated with these institutions. Institutional racism at times might refer simply to the racism of individuals within institutions, but such connections are often not clear, and many treatments of institutional racism explicitly *avoid* attributing racism to individuals within the institutions. What we have then amounts to racism without racists, discrimination without discriminators, purposeful actions without purposive actors. To call racism institutional rather than individual may come with advantages such as calling attention to the scope of racism and the reproduction of racial inequalities, or avoiding *ad hominem* arguments, but in another sense, it removes the discussion of racism away from the micro-sociological foundations and mechanisms of institutional impacts and their evaluation. It is here that social psychology becomes especially relevant.

If the social–psychological basis of institutional racism cannot be understood by investigating the psychological traits of social institutions, what is left is to understand the social–psychological basis of institutional racism at the level of individuals. This is the necessary consequence of recognizing that institutions are constituted by individuals, the work of institutions is the work of those individuals, and institutions are evaluated by individuals as well.

Two types of individuals can be seen as especially important in addressing institutional racism: the individuals within the institutions whose work results in adverse impacts for minorities, and the minorities who are adversely impacted (and various people who might speak on their behalf). With respect to minorities who are adversely impacted by institutions, the *perception* and *attribution* of racism and discrimination fall within the domain of social–psychological research and theory. With respect to the individuals whose work leads to adverse impact on minorities, a primary question of a social–psychological nature revolves around their social identities. Are these individuals best understood as members or agents of a white power structure, whose work is basically an expression of racism? Or are their identities and their work practices better understood in other, often nonracial terms, such as in terms of their professional identities and the professional criteria informing their work, or perhaps in terms of unprofessional but nonracial motives, such as sexism, antipathy to the poor, or corruption? The discussion to follow will revolve around these two sets of issues: how institutions are liable to be understood by many outsiders, including many minorities, in the context of group relations and group inequality, and whether these issues of group relations and group inequalities are the most relevant for understanding the identities, traits, and decisions of individuals within the institutions.

Perceiving and attributing racism to institutions

With respect to issues of perception and attribution, a variety of scholarship can shed light on the liability of institutions to be perceived as discriminatory and to have racism attributed to them. Obviously, one consideration is whether the institutions have disparate, adverse impacts on minorities, but racial disparities and adverse impact do not automatically or necessarily lead to perceptions of discrimination. Racial disparities are often understood as the unintentional effects of decisions made on the basis of nonracial criteria or nonracial constraints, such as employers making personnel decisions on the basis of educational degrees or seniority, college admissions officers making admission decisions based on standardized test scores, police officers arresting people who violate the law, and lawyers refusing to provide services to those unable to pay for them. All of these institutional practices are subject to varying degrees of scrutiny with respect to racial impacts, but whether they amount to racism is clearly subject to multiple, divergent interpretations. Other issues besides disparate impact, issues of a social–psychological nature, must be addressed to understand how adverse impact or unequal outcomes might be perceived as sufficient grounds for inferring racism, or even perceived as racism itself.

White power structure and social–psychological issues in group perception

Increasingly, social psychology has acknowledged the importance of lay theories of intergroup relations and intergroup conflict. These lay theories are influential (Cargile et al. 2006), and they can be influential in very detrimental ways, including the facilitation of negative attributions (Levy et al. 2006). This interest in lay theories of group relations and conflict should be integrated with the literature on related questions of how groups and their characteristics are perceived and understood. A significant literature now exists addressing overlapping questions of group entitativity (the degree to which a group is thought to be a real, coherent, coordinated *entity*), and essentialism and natural kindness (both generally referring to belief in shared and inherent group characteristics, i.e., characteristics that are *essential* and *natural* to all group members). This literature often also draws explicit connections to such issues as attributions to groups and stereotypes about groups (one large collection of contributions is Yzerbyt et al. 2004). The original theory of a unified white power structure, and the implicit continuation of such an understanding about the operation of social institutions in a predominantly white society, clearly lend themselves to being examined in light of such considerations. Theories of institutional racism commonly offer or imply a view of the majority or dominant white group that is both essentializing, emphasizing common racial identities, traits, and privileges, and suggestive of a high degree of group

entitativity, such as coordinated action across a variety of social institutions leading to the reproduction of a racial hierarchy.

Some have suggested that groups perceived as highly entitative 'tend to be perceived in the same way individuals are' (Yzerbyt et al. 2001, 142), a point that is rather remarkable when concepts like racism, more conventionally applied to individuals, are applied to groups or institutions. Essentialism in the perception of groups can have a parallel effect, in that group membership can be used as the basis for making dispositional inferences to individuals, which inferences can be used to account for regularities in behavior without reference to situational details and constraints (2001, 151). Similar points have been made with respect to beliefs in group entitativity. Beliefs in group entitativity are suggested to prompt a search for similarities within a group and to prompt differentiation between groups, in a manner opposed to the consideration of situational factors, thus, leading to overattribution biases, group attribution errors, and stereotyping (Rydell et al. 2007, 556–57; Yzerby et al. 1998). Others have noted that essentializing and highly entitative assumptions about groups facilitate inferential and inductive reasoning such as the reasoning associated with attributing collective dispositions to group members, or understanding individuals' identities by means of a particular group membership (Haslam et al. 2006).

Although perceptions of group entitativity and essence are in an important respect about the groups in question, the way that observers make sense of and speak of these groups is also a fundamental part of the phenomena of group relations (see, for example, Kashima 2004). As expressed by Yzerbyt et al., 'the machinery that allows us to create similarity is every bit as impressive as the processes that give us access to the similarities of the world' (2001, 152). This is especially important in that observers of race relations face an implicit choice whether to emphasize historical continuities or historical transformations. Essentialist theories of racial identity, particularly as applied to whites, can be understood as resources for portraying contemporary race relations as a continuation of old problems in new forms (cf. Haslam et al. 2006, 72), rather than new problems in new times calling for new explanations.

Harm, inferences of intent, and attributions of racism

Although there are many respectable conceptual, scientific, and legal reasons not to automatically infer an intent to harm merely from the observation of harm, as is implied by many critics of institutional racism, it is also worth considering that many people can understand harm as a relevant or even adequate ground for inferring and attributing intent. This type of issue relates to differences between types of reasoning, arguably including differences between commonsense or lay reasoning, on the one hand, and specialized forms of reasoning such as social scientific or legal

reasoning. Commonsense reasoning may be more likely to reason in a holistic manner from a harmful effect to an intentional harm, compared to some specialized or professional styles of reasoning, which may be more likely to draw distinctions and to be more critical or skeptical about drawing inferences (cf. Rettig 1990, 1–13). It is important to understand that what constitutes sufficient evidence for attributing intent or responsibility is a matter of social judgment and cultural convention, and that conventions can vary across groups and cultures in ways that will not be understood without study (e.g. Hill and Irvine 1993). More specifically, different styles of reasoning, from commonsense reasoning to social scientific reasoning to legal reasoning, and many varieties thereof, will handle in different manners the question: 'how much – or how little – are we entitled to infer from the lack of information?' (Gaskins 1992, 2).

One series of experiments has related some of these questions directly to issues of prejudice and discrimination, in the context of gender relations, but addressing research on race as well. Swim et al. (2003) report on the basis of experimental research with American undergraduate students that harm does influence judgments of discrimination and prejudice. Perhaps most relevant in this context, they report that 'knowledge of an actor's intent to discriminate played a central role in judgments of prejudice and discrimination' (2003, 956), and that when information about intent is uncertain, 'harm plays an important role by influencing judgments of the behavior, which in turn influence judgments of the actor' (2003, 957). Speaking less empirically but in the same vein, Friedman writes: 'folk wisdom decrees that if the outcome is bad, then it must have been caused by bad men' (1975, 384). This is consistent with insights from membership categorization analysis that suggest that characterizations of actions, traits, contexts, and identities can be mutually or reflexively constitutive (see, for example, Hester and Eglin 1997), contrary to conventional approaches that see identity as a fixed property independent from situational factors.

Coming to conclusions of discrimination and prejudice on the basis of harm, without clearer or more direct information about intent, may well be a specific instance of what Garfinkel, in reporting the findings of a social–psychological experiment, called the 'documentary method of interpretation'. This method of interpretation involves the understanding of appearances and specific details by means of a search for and perception of an underlying pattern, even when there may be no underlying pattern (1967, 76–103). Garfinkel saw this method of interpretation not only as a feature of commonsense reasoning, but also as a feature of much sociological analysis. He writes: 'sociological inquiries are carried out under common sense auspices *at the points where decisions about the correspondence between observed appearances and intended events are being made*' (1967, 100). The institutional racism argument may, in this respect, satisfy sociological conventions of evidence especially where these conventions overlap with commonsense reasoning, even if the argument often involves

the perception or claim of an underlying pattern of racism where such an underlying pattern is inferred rather than observed. On the other hand, sociologists especially should be interested in more direct understanding of how and why inequalities are reproduced, and laypeople concerned with institutional outcomes may also be quite interested in questions of process, as suggested by work on the social psychology of procedural justice (especially Lind and Tyler 1988).

Related issues have been addressed in the literatures on attributions and motives, and especially where these overlap: the attribution of motives. Ashworth writes that 'motive-attribution serves the purpose of "plastering over a crack" in one's understanding of the other's perception of the situation' (1979, 150). He notes as disappointing, even scandalous, that social psychology tends to be divided among 'sociologically and psychologically oriented people' with the result that 'the literature on causal attribution [traced to Fritz Heider 1958] and on vocabularies of motive [traced to C. Wright Mills 1940; Blum and McHugh 1971] contains few if any cross-references' (Ashworth 1979, 151). It is unfortunate that this division persists into the twenty-first century. The divided isolation of different traditions that each address the importance and the characteristics of lay reasoning about causes and motives greatly facilitates continuing neglect of issues of perception, inferential reasoning, and attributions of causes or motives. The neglect of these issues in the literature on the new racisms is a clear case in point.

Other issues of attributions

A variety of other social–psychological work on attributions and related phenomena may suggest useful lines for placing new racisms into broader theoretical contexts and grounding them in further traditions of research. It has been suggested, for example, that people who are disliked may be 'dementalized', with the consequence that their actions may be understood with minimal attention to issues such as their intentions or beliefs (see Kozak et al. 2006). It has been reported that people in positions of power are liable to have their actions interpreted in terms of dispositions rather than constraints, amounting to a type of attribution bias (Overbeck et al. 2006). Research on stereotyping often suggests an 'out-group homogeneity effect' by which members of out-groups are perceived to be more homogenous than are fellow members of in-groups (Yzerbyt et al. 2004). Perceptions of out-group homogeneity, in turn, can facilitate perceptions of the out-group as threatening (Abelson et al. 1998; Wildschut et al. 2004). With respect to the relevance of minority identity, not only is it reported that blacks are more likely than whites to understand the negative treatment of a black worker in terms of racist dispositions (Johnson et al. 2003; Sommers and Norton 2006), but the strength of identification with a minority group has been

reported to influence the degree of suspicion of bias in ambiguous situations (Operario and Fiske 2001).

Other social–psychological research suggests that personal connections or knowledge of a particular issue are subject to divergent evaluations depending on whose they are. Ehrlinger et al. (2005) suggest that people tend to see personal connections to controversial issues as either a source of insight or a source of bias, depending on whether others share their views or not. When others' accounts or judgments diverge from one's own and seem self-serving, their ostensible basis in experience is not nearly so clear or as trustworthy as the experiential basis of one's own positions, and the positions and claims of others are then liable to be discounted in favor of abstract theories that lead to inferences of bias (p. 689). Importantly, this applies both to minorities evaluating the positions of whites, and whites evaluating the positions of minorities, suggesting that opposing views on racial issues are rooted at a deeper level in opposing theories of knowledge, each privileging its own standpoint.

Given that theories of new racisms typically revolve around contestable inferences such as inferences from institutional impact to institutional racism, the basis of these inferences deserves to be addressed in light of scholarship on perceptions and attributions and especially the literature on group perceptions and attributions, referenced above. The statistics of disparate impact are one such basis, and these statistics should be quite central considerations for studies of racial inequality. However, the statistics of disparate impact are subject to multiple and incongruous interpretations, from those who attempt to define disparate impact as racism, to those who suggest that race is a correlate but not a cause of disparate treatment in contemporary institutions. More attention to questions of interpretation and inferential reasoning, in addition to questions of disparate impact, stands to provide a more nuanced and less polarized understanding of contemporary racial inequality.

Alternative social psychologies of institutional identities

The inference from institutional disparate impact on minorities to institutional racism is facilitated above all else by an implicit but regular tendency among theorists of institutional racism to understand the identities and actions of institutional leaders and staff in racial terms, with the assumption (often fair enough) that institutions are predominantly 'white'. This tendency to understand institutional leaders and staff in terms of racial identity is understandable from critical race scholars, but also quite questionable. There are many scholars of inequality, and especially class and gender equality, who recognize the importance of racial inequality but deny that identities and inequalities can be understood by reference only to race. With respect to the literature on institutional racism in particular, Miles is a very noteworthy example (1989). With respect to African

Americans and inequality more generally, Wilson is a famous example (1980). Both note the importance of class identity or position, although this is only one alternative among many for formulating social identity in nonracial terms. More generally, there are many scholars of social identity who recognize that racial and ethnic identities are often quite important, but who deny that identity can be understood adequately in racial/ethnic terms alone. At the most general level, many schools of thought in the social sciences emphasize that individuals are members of multiple groups, or incumbents of multiple social categories. These schools of thought trace back to such diverse origins as the works of Simmel, who observed that the individual is located at the intersection of multiple social circles (1955), Harvey Sacks, founder of conversation analysis and (most relevantly here) membership categorization analysis, and black feminist theory, to mention only a few sources for such insights.

We can briefly identify some contributions from membership categorization analysis, which overlaps importantly with social psychology especially in British scholarship on social identities in talk or discourse (e.g. Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Potter and Wetherell 1987, 126–32). As Antaki and Widdicombe note, 'analysis starts when one realizes that any individual can, of course, sensibly be described under a multitude of categories' (1998, 2). They continue, 'membership of a category is ascribed (or rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times ... as part of the interactional work that constitutes people's lives' (p. 2). This view of identity as involving incumbency in multiple membership categories (e.g. categories of race, gender, age/generation, class, profession, nationality, national ancestry, religion, language, political party, neighborhood, marital status, etc.), has as its corollary that identity is highly complex and that different memberships become relevant to different degrees at different times in different social contexts. This view is therefore inconsistent with the common assumption of much critical scholarship, which often focuses on only *one* variety of social identity (especially class or race or gender) as the *omni-relevant* category for understanding social relations, the assumption being 'that people passively or latently have this or that identity which then causes feelings and actions' (p. 2).

It is worth noting that this insight, that institutional staff can inevitably be characterized in many ways besides racially, provides another potential line of convergence between sociological and psychological varieties of social psychology. Various social psychologists, including Crisp and various associates, have addressed the potential to reduce intergroup bias by emphasizing the fact that individuals belong to multiple categories at once, which may undercut or counteract the influence of bias (e.g. Hall and Crisp 2005). With respect to institutional racism, the implication would be that better understanding and better social relations would result if everyone implicated in the institutional racism debates – those associated

with institutions, the clients or citizens who deal with the institutions, and those who criticize the racial disparate impacts of institutions – would acknowledge that the others' identities can and often should be understood by reference to nonracial categories instead of or in addition to racial categories.

With reference to those real people who staff the institutions to which racism is attributed, an open-minded, empirical approach to understanding their identities at work is to analyze institutional settings and interactions to see which identities become relevant for understanding what they are doing. It should come as no surprise that in institutional settings, institutional identities such as teacher or judge are often the relevant identities for understanding what is occurring. In this way, people's workplace identities can be said to often be aligned with the institutions that they staff (Benwell and Stokoe 2006, 94). While macro-social identities such as racial identities are *occasionally* relevant in many institutions, it is only in rare institutional settings (perhaps affirmative action offices, racial sensitivity courses) that racial identities are among the most relevant for understanding how work is done, and even in such rare settings, many other identities and criteria will inevitably become relevant for understanding the work at hand, predictably including occupational categories and situational roles such as complainant, workshop participant, etc. Studying the actual circumstances of institutional work should provide a quick corrective to any understanding of employees as merely agents of a racial power structure. This is not to deny that some people sometimes work in such a manner.

Certainly, there are practical, commonsense reasons to expect that people who are racist will not regularly make overt displays of racism at work, but on the other hand, good ethnographic or interview research will often reveal just what the theories of institutional racism suggest are the mechanisms for reproducing racial inequalities: the operation of formally neutral categories in such a way as can be seen, in a larger context, to contribute to the perpetuation of racial inequality. Just what these criteria are and how they work, across various institutional settings, should be of great interest both academically and practically. An example would be expressions of concern over the dress and speech of minority job applicants in service occupations, an issue that clearly transcends national borders and affects many different minority groups (see, for example, Edwards 2003, 40–42). But research oriented to understanding how it is that workers understand the issues they face at work may also reveal rather overt racism, such as white police officers directing racial epithets against minority officers with impunity (e.g. Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 69–70).

Whether one finds ostensibly race-neutral procedures that inadvertently result in adverse impact on minorities, or one finds overt racism that creates hostile work environments, still there should be great interest in

understanding how work is structured in terms of policies, criteria, procedures, stereotypes, etc., that might help account for disparities in institutional outcomes. The observation of the end results, in the form of racial disparities, does not mark the end of research, rather it marks the beginning of a new type of research, involving the qualitative investigation of the routine institutional practices and institutional reasoning that lead to institutional results (cf. Mehan 1984). It is crucial to address the experiences and perceptions of the institutional agents, not only of the people at the 'receiving end' of the institutions (FitzGerald 1993, 57–58).

A thorough examination of issues referred to as institutional racism would, therefore, encompass not only structural inequalities but also how structural inequalities are related to such phenomena as the discretionary decision-making of institutional staff (Jeffers and Hoggett 1995). As suggested in a respected textbook on policy analysis, 'to oversimplify or ignore the relevant agents' understandings can render the empirical premises of policy arguments unsound and lead to ineffective policy' (Paris and Reynolds 1983, 180). Our ideas about the causes of disparate treatment by race inevitably influence the type of remedial measures that may be attempted, and these remedial measures can have unintended and unwelcome consequences if we do not understand the considerations that lead to the problems and subsequently the type of reaction that attempted remedies may provoke (cf. Wight 2003, 707). This bears consideration across a wide variety of institutional domains, and the point has been made with respect to, for example, the prospect of white salesmen avoiding black customers rather than to sell to them under a constraining policy (Ayres 2001, 415), or white parents fleeing urban neighborhoods in the face of school busing (Paris and Reynolds 1983, 180).

The study of racial disadvantage would therefore do well to develop an appreciation of the world of institutional staff and clients as its own interaction order with its own patterns and processes, which will be related to macro-social inequalities in various ways but not merely a location for their reproduction (cf. Goffman 1983). Certainly, the study of work in institutions will at times specify pressures or even standard operating procedures related to the continuing marginalization, neglect or harassment of minorities, but it will also predictably yield a more complex and more useful understanding (see, for example, Lipsky 1971), compared to a critique that looks only at outcomes and looks at outcomes only in terms of race. Ultimately, critical race scholarship will have minimal practical effect unless institutional leaders and staff can be led to take seriously concerns about their role in the reproduction of racial inequalities. That would seem to be most unlikely so long as scholarship on institutional racism treats institutional leaders and staff as, at best, self-righteous and self-deluded puppets of a white power structure, and treats institutional work as involving no skills worth speaking of and no legitimate social functions.

What would be most practical would be to illuminate how people in social institutions can continue to direct and do the work of institutions, related to institutional functions such as educating students, providing healthcare, controlling crime, selling houses, etc., while simultaneously doing less to reproduce racial inequalities. Scholarship on institutional racism has not developed in such a manner as to provide such illumination, choosing to remain on the outside looking out. It is worth noting that much of the institutional racism literature is vulnerable to being criticized in the same terms that conservative racial 'realists' have been criticized: 'they never discuss the ways in which these institutions might be transformed to accommodate or better engage the groups they formerly excluded' (Brown et al. 2003, 19). Increased minority hiring will not address this issue either; contemporary institutions often have significant numbers of minority employees, and it is generally not clear that they do their work any differently from their white counterparts. Understanding how institutions work, and why they produce the outcomes they do, and often despite diversity in staffing, would seem to be required before institutional work can be incisively criticized or successfully transformed.

Social psychology has a variety of important roles to play with respect to providing new attention to institutional processes and the type of inferences often drawn about them. One of these roles is to address the perception of racism and racial discrimination, identifying a variety of social dimensions related to the type of inferences involved in reasoning from minimal knowledge of institutional staff and institutional effects to institutional racism. Another of these roles is to contribute to the understanding of social identity by illustrating the many types of identity that can be relevant to understanding institutional work, above and beyond racial identities, and subsequently to contribute to the understanding of institutional decision-making as a mindful practice with its own institutional and interactional logic (cf. Engestrom and Middleton 1998), rather than as a mere mechanism for camouflaging or justifying reproduction of racial inequality.

Conclusion

Concepts and theories of institutional racism and other related new racisms have been remarkably influential in the understanding of racial disadvantage and race relations in the contemporary world. Their influence has spread across many national contexts, and across disciplinary boundaries and methodological divides (Leach 2005). While these new racisms are widely acknowledged or appreciated for advancing the cause of social criticism, especially by heightening awareness of the continuity and scale of racial inequalities and heightening awareness of the role of ostensibly race-neutral social institutions in perpetuating racial inequalities, these new concepts and theories have also been widely criticized. The criticism

has typically come from scholars who can appreciate the usefulness of these new concepts for drawing attention to central themes of critical race scholarship, but who are concerned that these concepts and theories may obscure other questions that are also very important for understanding continuing racial inequalities. Institutional racism and other new racisms are said to obscure and dismiss such questions as what precisely is going on in institutions on the 'micro-level' that contributes to the perpetuation of racial inequalities on the 'macro-level', and what are the new criteria or grounds for perceiving or attributing racism or discrimination in public institutions, given that by traditional standards of racial prejudice and intentional discrimination there is scant evidence available. If institutional racism is attributed everywhere that disparate impact can be observed, is institutional racism an insight of contemporary race scholarship, or is it better understood as an unfortunate conceptual inflation? (Miles 1989).

For purposes of social criticism, the new racisms may be just what is needed by critical race scholars to draw attention to and condemn continuing racial inequalities, by means of the strong and universally understood language of anti-racism. For some scholarly purposes, however, the theories of new racisms may do much more harm than good. For purposes of understanding the institutional criteria and processes which lead to continuing racial disadvantage, the new racisms do not do anything to encourage such research, and theories of institutional racism in particular may discourage or constrain research and publication on such issues. Neglect or disapproval of social–psychological questions is unfortunate both academically and practically. Such research is vital for understanding how continuing racial disadvantages are, and how they are not, rooted in institutional policy-making and procedures, getting to the micro–macro questions of how and why racial inequalities are produced and reproduced. Such questions are not only academic, related to ambitions for linking macro to micro and specifying causal mechanisms, but also highly practical, of great relevance for purposes of evaluating what can be done and should be done with institutional policies, procedures and personnel to address the issue of racial disadvantage in the worksites where it is being reproduced.

By attending more consistently to questions of a social–psychological nature and drawing on a wider variety of social–psychological scholarship, such as research on the perception of racial groups and their characteristics, research on social identities, and research on institutional decision-making, researchers and theorists will be much better positioned to offer insight on the relations between social institutions, social inequalities, and race relations. One question especially that the literature on institutional racism has raised without adequately addressing is the question of whether racism can be inferred from, and attributed on the basis of, institutional disparate impact on minority groups. The above discussion suggests that this is not only a question of race relations and social structure, but also inevitably about a wide variety of issues in social psychology.

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Short Biography

Tim Berard is an Associate Professor of Justice Studies at Kent State University. His research on inequality and discrimination has addressed issues including racial profiling and discrimination in capital sentencing, among others. His teaching regularly includes a diversity course on minorities in crime and justice. His theoretical work has addressed the relevance of membership categorization practices for understanding the micro-sociological foundations of macro-structural phenomena including inequality and issues in race relations and gender relations. Two recent publications in *Qualitative Sociology Review* have addressed the study of evaluative categories, and advocacy for the inclusion of gender in federal hate crimes legislation. He has also contributed to scholarship on motive attributions and labeling theory. He holds a PhD in sociology from Boston University, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation on accusations and denials of discrimination. As an undergraduate he studied political science at Reed College and the University of Washington.

Note

* Correspondence address: Department of Justice Studies, Kent State University, 113 Bowman Hall, PO Box 5190, Kent, OH 44242, USA. Email: tjberard@alumni.reed.edu.

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