

THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES: REWRITING “RACE IN ORGANIZATIONS”

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This article analyzes how race has been studied in organization scholarship and demonstrates how our approaches to the study of race reflect and reify particular historical and social meanings of race. It is argued that the production of knowledge about race must be understood within a racial ideology embedded in a Eurocentric view of the world. Finally, a “re-vision” of the very concept of race and its historical and political meaning is suggested for rewriting “race” as a necessary and productive analytical category for theorizing about organizations.

“Now, is not that magnificent?” said both the worthy officials. “Will your Majesty deign to note the beauty of the patterns and the colors?” And they pointed to the bare loom for they supposed that all the rest could certainly see the stuff. “What’s the meaning of this?” thought the Emperor. “I can’t see a thing! This is terrible! Am I stupid? Am I not fit to be Emperor? That would be the most frightful thing that could befall me.” “Oh, it’s very pretty, it has my all highest-approval!” said he, nodding complacently and gazing on the empty loom: of course, he wouldn’t say he could see nothing. The whole of the suite he had with him looked and looked, but got no more out of that than the rest. However, they said, as the Emperor said: “Oh, it’s very pretty!” And they advised him to put on this splendid new stuff for the first time, on the occasion of a great procession which was to take place shortly . . .

So the Emperor walked in the procession under the beautiful canopy, and everybody in the streets and at the windows said: “Lord! How splendid the Emperor’s new clothes are. What a lovely train he has to his coat! What a beautiful fit it is!” Nobody wanted to be detected seeing nothing: that would mean that he was no good at his job, or that he was very stupid.

“But he hasn’t got anything on!” said a little child. . . . “Why he hasn’t got anything on!” The whole crowd was shouting at last; and the Emperor’s flesh crept, for it seemed to him they were right. “But all the same,” he thought to himself, “I must go

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through with the procession." So he held himself more proudly than before, and the lords in waiting walked on bearing the train—the train that wasn't there at all. (Excerpt from "The Emperor's New Clothes," by Hans Christian Anderson, 1968: 104–107)

The children's fairy tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," is an excellent allegory for the primary way in which organization scholars have chosen to address race in organizations. For the most part, research has tended to study organization populations as homogeneous entities in which distinctions of race and ethnicity are either "unstated" or considered irrelevant. A perusal of much of our research would lead one to believe that organizations are race neutral (Cox & Nkomo, 1990).

Although the emperor, his court suitors, and his tailors recognize that he is naked, no one will explicitly acknowledge that nakedness. Even as the innocent child proclaims his nakedness, the emperor and his suitors resolutely continue with the procession. Similarly, the silencing of the importance of race in organizations is mostly subterfuge because of the overwhelming role of race and ethnicity in every aspect of society.

Race in the United States has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, one's access to medical care, and even one's sense of identity (Omi & Winant, 1986). Its immediacy is manifested in everyday life experiences and social interactions (Blauner, 1989; Essed, 1991; van Dijk, 1987). Most important, race is one of the major bases of domination in our society and a major means through which the division of labor occurs in organizations (Reich, 1981). As I will argue later, race has been present all along in organizations, even if silenced or suppressed.

One might ask, why use a European fairy tale to call attention to the exclusion of race in the study of organizations? I have purposefully used a Eurocentric parable to signify this problem through parody, in the African-American tradition of what Gates (1988: 82) has called "black signifyin(g)"—the figurative difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning. In this article, the emperor is not simply an emperor but the embodiment of the concept of Western knowledge as both universal and superior and white males as the defining group for studying organizations. The court suitors are the organizational scholars who continue the traditions of ignoring race and ethnicity in their research and excluding other voices. All have a vested interest in continuing the procession and not calling attention to the omissions.

Who then is most likely to call attention to these omissions? As has been the case in other disciplines, it is most likely to be the *other*, the excluded, who is assumed to be childlike and inferior. Even as these other voices point to the omissions and errors and the need for inclusiveness, the dominant group refuses to hear the message and continues with the procession. The real issue for the *others* is getting truly heard, rather than simply "added

on." As noted by Minnich (1990), it is difficult to add new knowledge to anything that has been defined as the whole. The challenge must strike directly at the center of the kingdom and its attendant theoretical foundations.

The purpose of this article then is to analyze how race has been written into the study of organizations in incomplete and inadequate ways. It demonstrates how our approaches to the study of race reflect particular historical and social meanings of race, specifically a racial ideology embedded in a Eurocentric view of the world. This view is evident first in the general exclusion of race when organizational theories are developed and, second, in the theoretical and methodological orientation of the limited body of research on race. Finally, suggestions are made for ways of making race a necessary and productive analytical category for theorizing about organizations. Perspectives are drawn from several disciplines including African-American studies and race and ethnic relations. The intent is not to provide a specific theory of race but to suggest ways of "re-visioning" the study of race in organizations.

ON THE EXCLUSION OF RACE IN THE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Why do we as organizational scholars continue to conceptualize organizations as race neutral? Why has race been silenced in the study of organizations? One way of explaining this exclusion is to examine what Minnich (1990) has called intellectual errors in the production of knowledge. The root error might be labeled faulty generalization or noninclusive universalization. This error occurs when we take a dominant few (white males) as the inclusive group, the norm, and the ideal of humankind (Minnich, 1990). The defining group for specifying the science of organizations has been white males. Only recently have we begun to study the experiences of women in management, and even this body of literature focuses mainly on white women (Nkomo, 1988). We have amassed a great deal of knowledge about the experience of only one group, yet we generalize our theories and concepts to all groups. We do not acknowledge that these universal theories emanate from an inadequate sample and, therefore, there is the possibility that the range of a theory or construct is limited (Cox & Nkomo, 1990).

According to Minnich (1990), faulty generalization leads to a kind of hierarchically invidious monism. Not only are dominant group members the defining group, but they are taken to be the highest category—the best—and all other groups must be defined and judged solely with reference to that hegemonic category (Keto, 1989). Other racial and ethnic groups are relegated to subcategories; their experiences are seen as outside of the mainstream of developing knowledge of organizations.

This point can be illustrated by examining the use of prefixes in the description of research samples in our work. The prefix "white" is usually suppressed, and it is only other racial groups to which we attach prefixes

(Minnich, 1990). "Race" becomes synonymous with other groups, and whites do not have "race." A study based on a sample of white male managers is unlikely to state that the results may be valid only for that group. More likely than not the term *manager* will be used. The problem is the usurpation of the category *manager* by the dominant group and the lack of awareness that white managers also have race.

Concomitantly, a study that has a minority group sample will rarely be accepted for developing and generalizing organization theory. The results of the study would be viewed as valid only for that group with minimal or little relevance for organization knowledge. Thus, instead of race being an analytical category critical to the fundamental understanding of organizations, it is marginalized. Unless the study is explicitly about race (e.g., affirmative action or bias in performance ratings) or has a minority-group sample, it is not included as an important variable, even when contextual factors may indicate otherwise.

The faulty generalization error stems mainly from bias in science. The practices of science reflect the values and concerns of dominant societal groups (Harding, 1986). The concepts and approaches used in Western academia help to maintain the political and intellectual superiority of Western cultures and people (Joseph, Reddy, & Searle-Chatterjee, 1990). Kuhn (1962) argued that problem selection and the search for explanations by scholars are influenced by the social and political conditions of the times. To the extent that white males have dominated the production of knowledge, their values and concerns are predominant. The study of race is an especially sensitive issue because scholars must not only be aware of how prevailing societal race relations influence their approach to the study of race but they must also understand the effects of their own racial identity and experiences on their work (Alderfer, 1982).

The tendency toward faulty generalization is further explained by the adherence to the assumption, embedded in Western philosophy from Socrates to the Enlightenment, that there is one ultimate objective truth and the scholar's mission is to search for that truth. This truth cannot come from other non-Western views of knowledge (Keto, 1989). Hence, there is a relationship between the desire for universal theories and the suppression of the experience of others. Researchers who ignore the influence of race in understanding organizations may reflect a veiled hope that, indeed, management theories and constructs are universal. Once there is acceptance of the idea that the major theories and concepts of the field of management do not address all groups, the holding of and search for universal theories is undermined.

It is illusory to think that other views are socially located while one's own are not. We cannot avoid the implicit influence of the scholar's perspective and values in the theories we develop (Morgan, 1983). The research questions that are asked and not asked and the chosen methodology of research on race in organizations parallel the dominant theoretical, political, and social meanings of race.

THEORETICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RESEARCH ON RACE

Before race can be re-visioned as an analytical category in the formulation of organization theory, a first step is to understand the historical and theoretical foundations of research on race and its influence on the ways in which we have studied race in organizations.

According to Omi and Winant (1986), the meaning, transformation, and significance of racial theories are shaped by actual existing race relations in any given historical period. Blanton (1987) added that within any given historical period, a particular racial theory is dominant, despite the existence of competing paradigms. The dominant racial theory provides society with a framework for understanding race relations and serves as a guide for research with implications for the kinds of questions scholars address. The dominant racial paradigm in the field of race and ethnic studies for the last half century has been that of ethnicity (Blanton, 1987; Omi & Winant, 1986; Thompson, 1989).

The Ethnicity Paradigm

The basic premises and assumptions of this paradigm are reflected in much of the research and writing in the management literature. Ethnicity-based theory emerged in the 1920s as a challenge to biological and social Darwinian conceptions of race (Blanton, 1987). Sociological concepts primarily replaced biological ones, and racial and ethnic forms of identification and social organizations were viewed as "unnatural" (Thompson, 1989). Becoming predominant by World War II, the ethnic paradigm has shaped academic research about race and guided policy formation (Omi & Winant, 1986). Despite serious challenges from alternative paradigms during the 1970s and 1980s, the rise of neoconservatism in the United States has led to a resurgence of ethnicity theory in a new guise, which has been labeled the *new ethnicity* (Omi & Winant, 1986; Steinberg, 1981; Thompson, 1989).

Ethnicity theorists' main empirical reference point was the study of immigration and the social patterns and experiences of European immigrants (Omi & Winant, 1986). Dominated by two recurrent oppositional themes, assimilation versus cultural pluralism, ethnicity theory was focused on the incorporation and separation of ethnic minorities, the nature of ethnic identity, and the impact of ethnicity on life experiences (Omi & Winant, 1986). One of the earliest explications of assimilationism appeared in Park's 1939 essay, "The Nature of Race Relations" (Park, 1950/1939). Park focused on the problem of European migration and what he called *culture contact*. Park's famous *race relations cycle* became the basis for further development of assimilation theory (e.g., Gordon, 1964). Park argued that this cycle "which takes the form of contacts, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible" (Park, 1950/1939: 150). Despite Park's (1950/1939) acknowledgment that it was possible that a par-

ticular stage might be prolonged, assimilation was viewed as the most logical and natural antidote for racism and ethnocentrism. The widespread view of assimilation as a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the mentality, sentiments, and attitudes of dominant groups led to the well-known *melting pot* concept (Omi & Winant, 1986). For example, much of the early research on management was developed during a period of widespread European immigration to the United States. The new immigrants, urban white workers, particularly the Irish and people from Eastern Europe, were often degraded as "children" and "savage" and as being more interested in seeking lower rather than higher pleasures (Takai, 1979: 127). These early factory workers were scolded for their idleness and their lack of punctuality and industry (Gutman, 1977: 20). The theme of assimilation pervaded efforts by industrial capitalists to teach these workers the requisite attitudinal and work ethic skills needed to perform industrial jobs.

Other early proponents of assimilation theory included Myrdal (1944) and Gordon (1964). Gunnar Myrdal's classic work, *The American Dilemma*, called into question the contradiction between continued discrimination against African-Americans and the democratic ideals of equality and justice espoused in U.S. society. Both Myrdal's and Gordon's works attempted to extend ethnicity theory, which has been largely derived from the experience of European immigrants, to the situation of African-Americans (Thompson, 1989). It was assumed that the experience of racial minorities could be theorized in much the same way as the experience of ethnic immigrants. Thus, race in the United States was largely reduced to a question of integration and assimilation of racial minorities into the mainstream of a consensus-based society (van den Berghe, 1967). Within the assimilation framework, legal remedies like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were viewed as necessary for removing barriers so that racial minorities would encounter the same conditions as white ethnics (Omi & Winant, 1986; Thompson, 1989). However, preferential treatment remedies like affirmative action were not supported (Glazer, 1987; Gordon, 1964). Blauner (1972: 2) pointed out that research on racial minorities (i.e., African-Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans) from the ethnicity perspective was premised on several assumptions: (a) racial groups were not viewed as central or persistent elements of society; (b) racism and racial oppression were ultimately reducible to other causal determinants—usually economic or psychological; and (c) there were no essential long-term differences between the experience of racial minorities and the European ethnic groups that immigrated to the United States.

Research on race emanating from the ethnic-based paradigm centered on questions of why racial minorities were not becoming incorporated or assimilated into mainstream society. Or directly stated, "What obstructs assimilation?" Much of this research was devoted to problems of prejudice and discrimination and grew out of social psychological approaches to the study of intergroup relations (Oudenhoven & Willemse,

1989). It was based on the belief that relations between dominant group members and racial minorities resulted from prejudiced attitudes of individuals. For example, Merton (1949) argued that discrimination might be practiced by unprejudiced people who were afraid not to conform to the prejudices of others. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford (1950: 8) studied the relationship between prejudice and personality. He argued that prejudiced persons differed from tolerant persons in central personality traits—specifically, that they exhibited authoritarian personalities. Allport (1954) suggested that there was a direct link between prejudiced people and discriminatory acts. Unlike Adorno et al. (1950), Allport (1954) did not view prejudice as an aberrant cognitive distortion. Allport argued that prejudice was a natural extension of normal cognitive processes (Pettigrew, 1979). Thus, prejudice and discrimination were mainly reduced to either an individual aberration or faulty generalization (Henriques, 1984). Adorno's and Allport's emphasis on prejudice as an attitude also found widespread acceptance because of its amenability to quantification and statistical measurement (Henriques, 1984).

This traditional stress on the expressive function of prejudice by individuals is still manifested in much of contemporary social psychology research on race (Oudenhoven & Willemsen, 1989). For example, dominant contemporary social psychology theories for explaining prejudice include social identity or social categorization theory, social attribution theory, and the contact hypothesis (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986).

The phenomenological approach of social identity or social categorization theory postulates that an individual's identity depends to a large extent on social group memberships where individuals seek positive social identity (Tajfel, 1969, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). The evaluation of one's own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics. This mechanism is basic to the evaluation of one's social identity. These comparisons involve perceptual accentuation of similarities of people belonging to the same group and differences between people belonging to a different social group or category (Tajfel, 1981). Accordingly, if categorization is in terms of a racial or an ethnic criterion, then it is likely that this process is responsible in part for the prejudices found in the judgment of people belonging to different groups. Tajfel (1981) stressed the influence of the social factors of status, power, and material interdependence in the categorization process.

Social attribution theory or intergroup attribution theory refers to "how members of different social groups explain the behavior and social condition of members of their own group (ingroup) and other social groups (out-groups)" (Hewstone, 1989: 25). In this case, research emphasis is placed on explaining the behavior of individuals who act as members or representatives of social groups. An important explanatory concept in this theory is the fundamental attribution error—the phenomenon that one tends to explain the behavior of others by internal factors rather than situational factors

(Oudenhoven & Willemse, 1989). The extreme manifestation of social attribution is what Pettigrew has called the ultimate attribution error—"a systematic patterning of intergroup misattributions shaped in part by prejudice" (Pettigrew, 1979: 464). On the one hand, when blacks or other minority group members behave in a manner perceived to be negative, majority group members, especially those who are prejudiced, are likely to attribute this behavior to the personal character of the group (Pettigrew, 1979). On the other hand, prejudiced majority group members can explain away behavior that is seen as positive by attributing it to (a) the exceptional, special-case individual who is contrasted with his or her group; (b) luck or special advantage, which is viewed as unfair; (c) high motivation and effort, which is ultimately unsustainable; or (d) a manipulated situational context (Pettigrew, 1979: 469). Therefore, the ingroup (majority group) can still hold negative assessments of the outgroup (minority group), despite contrary evidence.

Finally, a third social psychology theory used to explain prejudice is the contact hypothesis. This is best understood as a solution to intergroup conflict which posits that positive contacts between ingroups and outgroups will reduce prejudice (Wilder, 1986). The success of contact is contingent upon the favorability of the interaction, especially the ingroup's perception of the interaction. Proponents of this theory underscore the important role of structuring the situation to promote cooperation rather than competition (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). A major assumption underlying the contact hypothesis is that frequent positive contact between groups will minimize the information-processing errors (e.g., stereotyping) by ingroup members.

Although social psychologists like Tajfel argued that the major contribution of their work was its focus on the group rather than on individuals, making it more social and progressive, a close reading reveals it also ultimately relies on individual cognitive processing to explain prejudice and discrimination (Henriques, 1984). The results of Tajfel's minimal intergroup laboratory experiments led him to conclude that the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups (i.e., social categorization *per se*) is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favoring the ingroup. In other words, ingroup bias is a natural feature of intergroup relations. Therefore, if groups have no real bases for conflict, then discrimination lies in failures in the mechanism of individual cognition (Henriques, 1984).

Additionally, the primary solution offered by these social psychological approaches—the contact hypothesis—falls within the assimilation approach through the assumption that the reduction of the salience of group boundaries will improve intergroup interaction (Oudenhoven & Willemse, 1989).

The New Ethnicity

During the mid-1970s, the ethnic-based paradigm was reformulated (Thompson, 1989). The upheavals during the Civil Rights movement of the

1960s and the urban riots of the 1970s underscored the fact that for African-Americans assimilation into dominant society was less than forthcoming. The major failure of assimilationists to explain the lack of African-American assimilation spawned a new paradigm, which has been called the new ethnicity (Steinberg, 1981; Thompson, 1989; Yinger, 1986). The new in new ethnicity is not so much a significant shift in theory as an attempt by assimilationists to explain the enduring nature of racial stratification (Thompson, 1989). According to Thompson (1989: 91), this paradigm is based on two interrelated positions: (a) that ethnic and racial criteria have become major forms of group-based sociopolitical behavior because of the changing nature of industrial society and (b) that ethnic and racial groups ought to maintain their separate boundaries and seek their separate interests provided such interests recognize and respect the multitude of other, different ethnic interests (i.e., the cultural pluralism creed). The popular origins of the new ethnicity lie in the revival of the ethnic consciousness of white ethnics in response to the perceived preferential treatment of racial minority groups (Steinberg, 1981).

The theoretical dilemma that existed within the new ethnicity paradigm was how to explain the persistence of racial and ethnic stratification. Two different explanations have been offered. One explanation is that the persistence of racial and ethnic stratification reflects biological tendencies and that people, by nature, have a basic, primordial need for group identification. This explanation is grounded in sociobiology and primordialism. In his more recent work, entitled *Human Nature, Class and Ethnicity*, Gordon (1978), one of the major early proponents of assimilation theory, emphasized the importance of understanding human nature (i.e., biological predisposition) and its interaction with the social and cultural environment. Gordon (1978: 74) wrote, "Some observers, including myself, . . . have begun to wonder whether there are not biological constants or propensities in human behavior which fall short of the instinct category but which predispose the actor to certain kinds of behavior." In a similar vein, van den Berghe (1981: 80) theorized that ethnic and racial sentiments are extensions of kinship sentiments and, as such, express the sociobiological principle of inclusive fitness. In his analysis, van den Berghe (1981) argued that genetic predisposition for kin selection causes people to behave in racist and ethnocentric ways. Accordingly, racism and discrimination in society and culture were viewed as the sum of individually motivated behaviors that were rooted in genetic predisposition. **According to this essentialist explanation, racial and ethnic stratification are viewed as an almost permanent and inevitable part of human society.**

The alternate explanation rejects biological criteria and relies upon social psychological theories that attribute the failure of minority group assimilation to improper attitudes of majority group members or the lack of self-reliance on the part of minorities (Thompson, 1989). The common denominator for all of these explanations is that they stress some essential property of individuals.

Problems With the Ethnic Paradigm

There are several problems with the ethnic-based paradigm and its so-called new form for producing knowledge for understanding race in organizations. In this paradigm, the dualistic oppositional categories of assimilation versus pluralism are emphasized as the solution to questions of discrimination and racism (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Omi & Winant, 1986; Thompson, 1989).

Assimilationism is basically individualistic in its ontology, and in this case, race is largely conceptualized as a problem of prejudiced attitudes or personal and cultural inadequacies of racial and ethnic groups (Thompson, 1989). The fact that certain groups have not been successfully assimilated is not due to the structure of U.S. society and institutions but to psychological or personality characteristics of both whites and minorities (Henriques, 1984; Thompson, 1989). Assimilation is conceptualized as a one-way process that requires non-European, non-English-speaking groups to change to fit the dominant culture (Feagin, 1987). Consequently, researchers have tended to focus on other groups as having race, and questions of "why aren't they like us, or how can they become like us?" dominate. Herein lies one of the major deficiencies in the very premise of the assimilation approach. Inequality is accepted as a natural feature of U.S. society or any other complex social structure and, therefore, inequality itself is a "nonissue" and not part of the analysis (Thompson, 1989: 85).

Assimilation represents an inadequate model for understanding racial hierarchy in organizations. Its best answer to why racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in higher level positions in organizations would lie in social psychological explanations, which emphasize cognitive causes of prejudice and discrimination. Sole emphasis on microlevel or individualistic remedies are unlikely to affect existing social and power relations in organizations. Billig (1985) noted that the emphasis placed upon explaining cognitive biases by social categorization theory and other cognitive theories winds up confirming the status quo in the sense that changing the cognitions of individuals is often viewed as less amenable to intervention. Users of the individual-focused social psychology approaches are silent on the sociohistorical dynamics of the capitalist system in creating and maintaining inequality in organizations. Such explanations detract from issues of power and domination in racial dynamics and reflect a failure to analyze both the historically specific experience of racial minorities in U.S. society and the influence that this history has had on their status in organizations (Foner & Lewis, 1982; Takai, 1979).

Furthermore, assimilation within the ethnic paradigm often leads to a "blame-the-victim" explanation of why certain groups have not been assimilated as successfully as other groups (Omi & Winant, 1986). According to Thompson (1989), one of the less explicit assumptions of the ethnic paradigm is the acceptance of the neoclassical view of the very nature of a capitalist economy. In this view, individual opportunity is widely available,

and the kind of job one has is a function of choice and skill level. People who fail are seen as making bad choices or not exhibiting the appropriate character traits (Sowell, 1975). Minority group members who do not succeed have abnormal cultural patterns or other deficiencies.

The essentialist element of this argument often results in tautological explanations of success whereby a minority group that has not been subjected to the social and historical conditions of another group is seen as a "good group," which has been successfully assimilated. For example, the contemporary view of Asian Americans as the model minority reinforces the notion that only "good groups," whose members do the right thing, become assimilated. Successful achievement and mobility reflect a group's willingness and ability to accept the norms and values of the majority group.

The theoretical alternative to assimilation, cultural pluralism, supposedly allows for the possibility that groups do not assimilate but remain distinct in terms of cultural identity. However, similar to users of assimilation theory, proponents of cultural pluralism still maintain the existence of an allegedly "normal" (understood to mean superior) majority culture, to which other groups are juxtaposed (Omi & Winant, 1986). Further, they suggest that separation of racial and ethnic groups is natural and immutable. Steinberg (1981) pointed out that cultural pluralism is not a viable option in a society where inequality exists because true cultural pluralism would be based on equality among different groups. In the words of Henriques (1984: 63), "It is a case of putting the ideal cart before the real horse."

Unfortunately, cultural pluralism has often been superficially interpreted as an opportunity to celebrate difference (Yinger, 1986). For example, the influence of this school of thought is reflected in the nascent "managing diversity" discourse appearing in management literature (Thomas, 1990). Yet underlying some work in this area are assumptions like, "Minority workers are less likely to have had satisfactory schooling and training. They may have language, attitude, and cultural problems that prevent them from taking advantage of the jobs that will exist" (Johnston & Packer, 1987: xxvi).

THE WRITING OF RACE IN THE ORGANIZATION LITERATURE

The influence of the ethnic paradigm and its assumptions are reflected in much of the extant research on race found in the organization literature. Thus, not surprisingly, when management researchers have studied race, much of the research is narrowly focused, ahistorical, and decontextualized; in this research, race is mainly treated as a demographic variable. In their review of 20 journals during the period 1965–1989, Cox and Nkomo (1990) identified 201 articles focusing on race. They reported a notable decline in this type of research during the 1980s. For the most part, the topics and approaches in these articles reproduced the standard organization literature with emphasis on five content areas: affirmative action/equal employment opportunity; staffing, including test validation; job satisfaction; job attitudes and motivation; and performance evaluation.

Research designs were dominated by comparative studies of black and white workers to the neglect of other racial and ethnic groups (Cox & Nkomo, 1990). Within these studies, race was treated mainly as a demographic variable whereby blacks and whites were compared on a standard organizational theory or concept. Studies in the area of job satisfaction typically compared job satisfaction levels of black and white workers (e.g., Jones, James, Bruni, & Sell, 1977; Konar, 1981; Milutinovich & Tsaklanganos, 1978; Moch, 1980; Slocum & Strawser, 1972; Veechio, 1980; Weaver, 1978). Results in this area were largely inconsistent—some studies reported that white employees were more satisfied than black employees, and other studies reported the opposite effect. Although a few of these studies attempted to identify the factors that contributed to differences in levels of satisfaction (e.g., Konar, 1981), in general, the research provides little insight into the complexity of the psychological, organizational, and societal variables that may account for such findings. Often, the results appear to be tautological. For example, to explain their finding that whites were more satisfied with their jobs and that whites associated overall satisfaction more closely with promotion than nonwhites, O'Reilly and Roberts (1973) concluded that whites and nonwhites approach their jobs with different frames of reference.

One of the pervasive questions found within all topics was: "Does discrimination exist?" In this research, emphasis was placed on searching for objective and quantifiable evidence of racial discrimination. For example, a majority of the early articles in the area of affirmative action/equal employment opportunity were focused on whether or not discrimination existed in the occupational distribution of jobs (e.g., Franklin, 1968; Kovarshy, 1964; Northrop, 1969; Taylor, 1968). Representative questions included: To what extent are blacks overrepresented in lower socioeconomic jobs? (Franklin, 1968); Where are blacks employed within the aerospace industry? (Northrop, 1969); and Is there discrimination within the governmental apprentice training program? (Kovarshy, 1964). In the area of staffing, research was focused on discrimination and bias in recruitment and selection outcomes for blacks and whites in organizations (e.g., Brown & Ford, 1977; Newman, 1978; Newman & Krzytofiak, 1979; Stone & Stone, 1987; Terpstra & Larsen, 1980). Typically, explanations were centered on the stereotyping of minority groups.

Over the years, a number of studies have been used to examine bias in performance ratings and evaluation. The level of activity in this area is evidenced by the existence of three comprehensive literature reviews on the subject (Dipboye, 1985; Kraiger & Ford, 1985; Landy & Farr, 1980). According to some studies, ratees received significantly higher ratings from evaluators of their own race (e.g., Schmitt & Lappin, 1980), whereas other studies failed to support the existence of significant race effects on performance evaluation (Mobley, 1982). Still other studies reported results that indicated a complex interaction between the race of the ratee and his or her performance (Hamner, Kim, Baird, & Biogness, 1974). In their 1985 meta-analysis,

Kraig and Ford concluded that ratees tend to receive higher ratings from raters of the same race and that these effects were more pronounced in field studies than in laboratory ratings. Only a handful of researchers explored the processes underlying differences (Cox & Nkomo, 1986; Dipboye, 1985; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). Most often the explanations were based on a social psychology perspective with an emphasis on rater bias, including stereotyping and perceptual error in information processing.

The other prototypical question underlying much of this literature was: Do racial and ethnic minorities have what it takes to succeed in organizations? or more concisely, Why aren't they like us? Illustrative of this theme are studies that were conducted regarding job attitudes, motivation, and affirmative action. A common question in the research on job attitudes was: Do blacks have different attitudes toward their jobs and work environment than whites? (Alper, 1975; Gavin & Ewen, 1974). Several studies were focused on race differences in motivation (e.g., Bhagat, 1979; Bankart, 1972; Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1982; Greenhaus & Gavin, 1972; Miner, 1977; Watson & Barone, 1976). An unstated assumption in much of this research might be labeled the deficit hypothesis—whether or not minorities possessed the necessary motivational profile and values needed by organizations. Bhagat (1979) created a model to explain how black ethnic values coupled with negative job experiences have prevented a large majority of the black population from identifying strongly with the work ethic. The approach used in these studies included using a well-known theory of motivation and comparing scores of black employees to white employees. In the few studies that addressed the behavioral dimensions of affirmative action, authors emphasized the assimilation of minorities into organizations. Typical questions included: What changes are needed to assimilate the hard-core black into organizations? (Domm & Stafford, 1972) and Can the Afro-American be an effective executive? (Goode, 1970).

The final theme permeating much of this research was an emphasis on the legal, technical, and mechanical aspects of how organizations could comply with affirmative action and Title VII guidelines. Indeed, the highest concentration of research on race was conducted on the topic of affirmative action (e.g., Hitt & Keats, 1984; Marimont, Maize, Kennedy, & Harley, 1976; Marino, 1980). Some of the authors prescribed mathematical and computer simulation models for effectively implementing affirmative action programs (e.g., Hopkins, 1980; Ledvinka & Hildreth, 1984; Solomon & Messmer, 1980). Effectiveness in this area was most often defined by specifying the technical requirements of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity and fitting those requirements to existing organizational systems. Only a few studies were used to examine the behavioral and social ramifications of affirmative action and equal employment (e.g., Goodman, 1969; Lakin, 1966; Rubin, 1967). A similar emphasis on techniques and mechanics is found in the test validation literature where the issue of differential validity dominated personnel/human resource management research for a number of years (e.g., Bartlett & O'Leary, 1969; Bayroff, 1966; Boehm, 1977; Hunter,

Schmidt, & Hunter, 1979; Schmidt, Pearlman, & Hunter, 1980). In this area there was very little discussion of theory about why researchers expected differential validity to occur among different racial and ethnic groups or why test score differentials persisted (Arvey & Faley, 1988). Little attention was given regarding the roles that educational opportunities and other societal factors play in explaining differences or that "universal knowledge" may not be value free.

Several observations can be drawn from the way race was considered in management studies. Much of the research lies along the prejudice-discrimination axis, with an emphasis on discovering objective evidence of racial discrimination and racial differences in behavior, primarily between blacks and whites. This is consistent with the premises underlying the ethnicity paradigm that race can largely be understood as a problem of prejudiced attitudes or personal and cultural inadequacies of racial minorities. A notable exception was the work of Alderfer, Alderfer, Tucker, and Tucker (1980). Using an intergroup framework that emphasized the interaction of power differences at the group, organizational, and societal levels, they examined the broad issue of *race relations* within an organizational setting.

What is most striking about the management literature is researchers' fixation on searching for differences. Although this fixation may reflect the positivist approach to research adopted by many management scholars, it raises important issues for how race has been conceptualized. When no significant differences were found, authors were likely to conclude that race had no effect. This might be interpreted as an affirmation of the universality of management concepts. Another interpretation, consistent with the theoretical premises of the ethnicity paradigm, is that there really are no differences between racial minority groups and the European immigrants who successfully achieved assimilation. In contrast, when significant behavioral differences were reported, explanations were often focused on inadequate socialization of racial minorities to the norms and requirements for successful accomplishment or prejudice or stereotyping by majority group members. Conspicuously absent from these articles is any suggestion or recognition of the different sociohistorical experience of African-Americans or other racial minorities in the United States. There was little awareness that racial minorities may have something to contribute to organizations or that perhaps race can inform our understanding of organizations in other ways. For the most part, in this literature, race has been considered an issue or a problem. Or race enters the discussion of organizations only when "minority" employees are studied. Aside from Alderfer and his colleagues (1980), there were no researchers in the studies reviewed who examined the meaning of race for majority group members. This omission reflects an unconscious assumption by organizational researchers that majority group members do not have a racial identity and, consequently, it is a "nontopic" for research.

In summary, the questions that addressed race in the organizational literature echo the assumptions and themes of the ethnicity paradigm. Fur-

ther, lest we think that the *managing diversity* discourse represents a new approach, we should be reminded that it may be only as new as the new ethnicity. Our conceptualization of race in organizations has been constrained by these theoretical orientations, and, consequently, a necessary step toward rewriting race is recognizing these influences.

REWRITING RACE INTO THE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONS

To rewrite race, we must not continue the emperor's procession by remaining silent about race or studying it within the narrowly defined ethnicity-based paradigm that has dominated much of our research. First, we must acknowledge that the emperor is indeed naked. Organizations are not race-neutral entities. Race is and has been present in organizations, even if this idea has not been explicitly recognized. Second, rewriting race is not a matter of simply clothing the emperor, but the emperor must be dethroned as the universal, the only reality. We need to revise our understanding of the very concept of race and its historical and political meaning. Only then can race be used as a productive analytical concept for understanding the nature of organizations.

Alternative Frameworks

A useful starting point is to examine alternative theoretical frameworks for understanding the complexity and nature of race. For example, power-conflict theories of race and ethnic relations offer ways to move beyond sole reliance on assimilation models.

Power-conflict approaches to race and ethnicity emphasize issues of economic power, inequalities in access to material resources and labor markets, and the historical development of racism (Bonacich, 1980; Cox, 1948; Reich, 1981). One of the earliest proponents of these approaches (Cox, 1948) argued that racial exploitation and race prejudice developed with the rise of capitalism and nationalism. In Cox's analysis, American colonies imported African slaves to fill a particular labor need and simultaneously incorporated the ideology of racism as a justification of slavery. He contended that the idea of racial inferiority didn't precede the use of minority groups as servile labor but that an ideology of racial inferiority developed to maintain Africans and other racial minorities in a servile status. According to Cox, the racial division of labor into white and black workers hindered any positive contact between the white and black masses. Thus, the persistence of racial stratification in society was not a function of atomistic individuals or cultural deficiencies of minorities but was rooted in the class positions of workers.

Reich's (1981) class-conflict theory of racial inequality attempts to explain the meaning of race within the context of an advanced capitalist system. Like Edwards (1979), Reich (1981) conceptualized the workplace as contested terrain wherein workers and capitalists engage in power struggles over income distribution and material resources. White workers do not

benefit from racial inequality but capitalists do, and the very organization of jobs in the workplace is structured to exploit the existence of racial and other divisions among workers. Racial antagonism among workers inhibits the collective strength of workers and sustains the power of capitalists.

These and other power-conflict theories attempt to analyze race within the relations of capitalists' production without reducing it to an epiphenomenon (Thompson, 1989; Wilhelm, 1983).

Thus, if applied to organizational analysis, power-conflict theories would focus our attention on understanding how organizations have become racially constructed, the power relations that sustain racial divisions and racial domination, and the important role of capitalist modes of production in maintaining these divisions.

Omi and Winant's (1986) racial-formation theory represents another alternative formulation of race. They argued that race is preeminently a sociohistorical concept whose meanings and categories are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. They noted, for example, that in the United States with the consolidation of racial slavery, a racially based understanding of society was set in motion, which resulted in the shaping of a specific racial identity for both slaves and European settlers. Africans with specific ethnic identities became simply "black," and European settlers previously identified as Christian or English and free became "white" (Omi & Winant, 1986: 64).

Race occupies a central position in our understanding of social relations, and in their theory, Omi and Winant (1986: 66) distinguish between two levels of social relations: micro and macro. At the microlevel, race is a matter of individuality, of the formation of identity. The ways we understand ourselves, our experiences, our interactions with others, and our day-to-day activities are all shaped by racial meanings and racial awareness. At the macrolevel, race is a matter of collectivity, of the formation of social structures. These authors conceived of social structures as a series of economic, political, and cultural/ideological sites, which represented a region of social life with a coherent set of constitutive social relations. For example, at the economic level, the very definition of labor and the allocation of jobs among workers have been dependent on race as an organizing principle. Consequently, in this case, the racial order is organized and enforced by the continuity and interaction between the microlevel and macrolevel of social relations. Racial discrimination within the economic structure has consequences for individual identity at the microlevel.

The term *racial formation* in Omi and Winant's (1986: 61) model refers to the process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories and the subsequent process through which these categories are, in turn, shaped by racial meanings. Accordingly, the meaning of race is defined and contested throughout society, in both collective action and personal practice. In the process, racial categories themselves are formed, transformed, destroyed, and reformed. These authors caution not only against the tendency to view race as an

essence (i.e., as something fixed or objective) but also against the tendency to view race as a mere illusion that will disappear with the correct social order.

Similarly, Essed (1991) argued that because race is an organizing principle of many social relations, the fundamental social relations of society are racialized relations. She conceptualized race as both an ideological and a social construction with structural expressions. Using cross-cultural empirical data, Essed (1991) developed a theory of everyday racism, which attempts to build upon both the micro and macro perspectives of race and ethnicity. Essed defined *everyday racism* as "a process in which (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations" (1991: 52). The three main practices are marginalization (a form of oppression), containment (a form of repression), and problematization (ideological constructions legitimizing exclusion through hierarchical organization of difference). The integration of racism into everyday situations through these practices activates and reproduces underlying power relations.

Omi and Winant's (1986) theory of racial formation and Essed's (1991) theory of everyday racism emphasize the instability of race as a natural category and the impossibility of maintaining the essentialist position about race that sustains the ethnicity paradigm. At the same time, these theories help in understanding the reproduction of race from its historical to contemporary site in particular forms that occupy every part of society. They suggest that we have left out an important analytical concept for understanding organizations and that if race forms the core of individual, social, and institutional life in the United States, then we need explicit theories of race and ethnicity to overcome this omission.

Other theoretical approaches that have race at the center can be found in the literature and research in African-American and African studies, Asian studies, and Chicano/Latino studies. This literature can also provide a focus for developing theoretical content specifically about race and can help us to ask different questions than those that stem solely from the ethnicity paradigm.

For example, African-American and African studies, or Black studies, are ideologically and philosophically distinct from European social scientific theory because in them Africa is viewed as the genesis and foundation of knowledge and study of black people (Anderson, 1990). *Black studies* has been defined as "an analysis of the factors and conditions which have affected the economic, political, psychological, and legal status of African-Americans as well as the African in the Diaspora from the social reality of their own experience" (Gordon, 1978: 231). The early work of Black studies scholars called attention to the exclusion of the culture and experience of blacks from textbooks and curricula of educational institutions (Karenga,

1984). Despite this exclusion from mainstream academia, a great deal of scholarly work had been previously produced and generated about the experience of black people (e.g., Bennett, 1966; Diop, 1955; Du Bois, 1961; Fanon, 1963). Initial goals of Black studies were to add to the body of knowledge about blacks within the various disciplines. Taylor (1990) noted that most early attempts failed to move theory substantially beyond the extant paradigms of mainstream social science and research centered around relabeling familiar concepts and adapting existing research strategies.

A second strand of Black studies emerged that has been devoted to a critical assessment of traditional social science paradigms and the systematic articulation of a "black perspective," from which the development of new theories and alternative interpretation of the black community and its relation to the larger society could be advanced (e.g., Cheek, 1987; Gates, 1985; Kershaw, 1990). An effort was made to move away from the "pathological behavior" model of the black community. These strands have appeared as black psychology and black sociology, and they can be found in many other social science disciplines.

For example, within black psychology the attempt has been to build conceptual models to organize, explain, and understand the psychosocial behavior of African-Americans. These models are based on the primary dimensions of an African-American world view instead of the traditional psychology concerned mainly with categorization, mental measurement, and the establishment of norms (Azibo, 1990; Guthrie, 1976; White, 1984). Cross (1978) and others (e.g., Parham, 1989) have developed a model of racial identity for African-Americans. The model describes a process of psychological Nigrescence that hypothesizes the kinds of changes that occur in the racial identity of African-Americans at various points in the life cycle. Research addressing specific applications of Nigrescence theories can be found in the areas of value orientations (Carter & Helms, 1987) and self-actualization (Parham & Helms, 1985). More recently, research has been focused on models of white racial identity (Helms, 1990). Another useful concept for understanding the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities that has been widely used is *biculturalism* (Bell, 1990), or what Du Bois (1961) called *double consciousness*. Users of this concept recognize that African-Americans have both Afrocentric and Eurocentric elements of culture and racial identity.

Within the discipline of history, scholars researching African-American experiences have sought to correct the theoretical and methodological errors that questioned the historical actuality of African societies (Davidson, 1991; Rodney, 1974) and the nature and effect of slavery upon African-Americans. By examining slave narratives, songs, and other historical documents, scholars in the field have offered re-visions that characterize slaves as more than empty vessels who were acted upon, shaped, and dominated by their European American enslavers (Blassingame, 1979; White, 1984). Slaves had cultural, psychological, and technical resources from their African heritage that not only contributed to the development of the United

States but also helped them to resist the devastation of slavery. Revisiting the early history of African-American and other minority workers and their exclusion from skilled industrial jobs in organizations also can inform our understanding of their present status (Foner & Lewis, 1982; Takai, 1979).

A third strand of research has developed, which calls attention to the need for theoretical development and construction of ideas toward building a new social science (Taylor, 1990). The aim of such research is to move beyond explanations of black institutional life and behavior toward theoretical formulations that build upon a more expansive lens. That is, how would social science concepts differ if we used race as a core analytical concept? What concepts and constructs have been omitted? Other areas of development include analyses that examine the intersection of race with gender and class (e.g., Hill-Collins, 1990; King, 1988; Wilson, 1984).

Implications of Alternative Frameworks

Although I have expanded upon African-American studies as a body of knowledge from which management studies can draw, analogous work can be found for other racial groups. My purpose is not to suggest the replacement of Eurocentric theories with Afrocentric or Asian-centered ones. Yes, these approaches do imply efforts toward accounting for the absence of or any reference to perspectives from other groups in understanding organizations; they also imply that we not view racial minorities solely as deviants or problems in the study of organizations. Yet, such changes do not simply mean adding on studies of these groups. The major point is that we re-vision the very way we "see" organizations. Clearly, the specific historical context of race should be considered in the development and use of concepts. A ready example can be found in Thomas's (1989) study of mentoring in organizations. He explicitly draws on the historical impact of social taboos from our legacy of slavery in order to understand the dynamics of present-day cross-race mentoring relationships. Finally, new approaches would suggest different questions about race in organizations. Table 1 contains a comparison of the questions that have emanated from the ethnicity paradigm and the kinds of questions supported from the alternative theoretical frameworks and bodies of literature discussed in this section.

Rewriting race also suggests recognizing the limitations of positivist research methods. Research strategies determine the kinds of knowledge produced, and a realistic view of the research process encourages us to use these strategies in different ways (Morgan, 1983). A majority of the organizational studies mentioned in this article relied upon comparative designs in which race was categorized as a two-level variable (i.e., black and white). There are two basic problems with this approach. First, comparative designs too often adopt a position of cultural monism that assumes equivalence of groups across race (Azibo, 1990). In such a case, meaningful and valid interpretations of any observed differences are hindered. An awareness of the appropriate use of emic (within culture) and etic (cross-culture)

TABLE 1
Asked and Unasked Questions About Race

Research Questions From Ethnicity Paradigm
Does discrimination exist in recruitment, selection, etc.?
Can the Afro-American be an effective executive?
Do blacks identify with the traditional American work ethic?
Do blacks' and whites' problem-solving styles differ?
How can blacks/minorities be assimilated into organizations?
How can organizations manage diversity?
How can organizations comply with equal employment opportunity/affirmative action requirements?
Do blacks and whites have the same job expectations?
Are there different levels of motivation between black and white employees?
Is there racial bias in performance ratings?
What is the role of stereotyping in job bias?
Does differential test validity exist?
Silenced Research Questions From Alternative Paradigms
How are societal race relations reproduced in the workplace?
How did white males come to dominant management positions?
To what extent is race built into the definition of a "manager"?
What are the implications of racial identity for organization theories based on individual identity?
How does racial identity affect organizational experiences?
How does the racial identity of white employees influence their status and interaction with other groups?
Why, despite national policies like affirmative action, does inequality still exist in the workplace?
Are assimilation and managing diversity the only two means of removing racial inequality in the workplace?
How do organizational processes contribute to the maintenance of racial domination and stratification?
Are white male-dominated organizations also built on underlying assumptions about gender and class?
What are the patterns of relationships among different racial minorities in organizations?

approaches is critical (Triandis, 1972). Azibo (1990) noted that researchers must seek a balance between the assumption that cultures can best be understood in their own terms and the desire to establish universal theories of human behavior. Research efforts in this direction can be found in the works of Marin and Triandis, 1985; Triandis, Marín, Lisanki, and Betancourt, 1984; and Cox, Lobel, and McLeod, 1991.

Second, categorization of subjects is an essentialist view of race as a discrete, demographic variable that can be objectively observed and measured. Reconceptualizing race not as a simple property of individuals but as an integral dynamic of organizations implies a move toward phenomenological and historical research methods that would contribute toward building theories and knowledge about both how race is produced and how it is a core feature of organizations.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that we should not continue our silence about race, and when we do study it, that we expand our approaches beyond the ethnicity-based paradigm that has implicitly dominated much of our research. This expansion would allow race to become a productive analytical category used in understanding organizations. What does it mean to use race as an analytical category? This use suggests a view of organizations as made up of *race relations* played out in power struggles, which includes the realization that "race" is not a stable category. Then, not only would we not conduct research on "race in organizations" the way we have done it in the past, but we would also need to rethink the very nature of organizations.

Finally, it is important to point out that race is just one part of a more complicated web of socially constructed elements of identity formation such as gender and class. Race, gender, and class can form interlocking bases of domination in social relations (Hill-Collins, 1990; Spelman, 1988). Although each part may be manifested in its own peculiar and distinct way, the common factor is domination based on notions of inferiority and superiority. To the extent that each system reinforces and reproduces the other, an analysis of organizations cannot exclude the importance of these significant elements of identity. Indeed, the challenge before us becomes much more complex than simply clothing the emperor!

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