CHAPTER 4

Recognizing Race in LGBTQ Psychology: Power, Privilege and Complicity

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INTRODUCTION

Recognize (def.)

1. to know again; perceive to be identical with something previously known
2. to perceive as existing or true
3. to acknowledge formally as existing or as entitled to consideration
4. to acknowledge acquaintance with

(Macquarie Concise Dictionary, 1998)

As psychological researchers and practitioners, the vast majority of our work is concerned with words. Most researchers spend considerable time elaborating the concepts and justifying the terms that inform their work, and a broad range of psychological therapies focus on language. In this spirit, I begin this chapter by providing definitions of three key terms I use throughout this chapter. First, I use the word ‘recognize’ to demonstrate some of the complex ways in which race works in LGBTQ psychology. More specifically, I seek to elaborate how whiteness and white race privilege are often ignored in LGBTQ psychological research due to it being predominantly based on the experiences of white, middle-class individuals. As the definition quoted above suggests, to ‘recognize’ race is to see something that is already there, and to acknowledge something that we already have a relation to – something that is in need of attention (in particular, from those of us who identify as white and who often do not ‘see’ our race).

The second word in need of definition is ‘race’. Critical race and whiteness studies draw attention to the fact that even though race is no longer considered a ‘biological truth’, it persists in defining our experiences. Race continues to warrant attention from researchers and practitioners – it is not going to ‘go away’ simply because we recognize its oppressive histories. This suggests that race as a concept must be continually subjected to critical analyses. These analyses should consider how race structures subjectivities and legitimizes
categories of difference. Looking at how oppression and privilege are interconnected, and how they are played out within research on LGBTQ individuals is the best starting place for ‘recognizing race in LGBTQ psychology’.

The final term to be defined is the acronym ‘LGBTQ’. The term LGBTQ is widely used, but with little attendant focus on the experiences of bisexual people, transgendered people, or people who identify as queer (the present volume being a rare exception). The result is that their experiences remain marginalized, but this marginalization is disguised by the LGBTQ label. With this in mind, I use the acronym LGBTQ to highlight the need to widen our focus when researching the experiences of people marginalized on the basis of their sexual and gender identifications. At the same time, however, it would be glib to claim that this chapter adequately accounts for the experiences of all people marginalized in relation to race, sexuality and gender. Due to the limited nature of the data I analyse (as described below), this chapter focuses predominantly on the experiences of lesbians and gay men, with some focus on the experiences of bisexual people. No appropriate data were located on transgendered or queer identified individuals, but this is not to say that issues of race, privilege and oppression are not relevant to these groups. The issues raised in this chapter apply to the experiences of all individuals living in a society that privileges racialized differences, irrespective of sexual orientation (Riggs, 2004a, 2004b).

In order to more closely examine racialized practices in LGBTQ psychology, I provide an analysis of ten journal articles focusing on intersections of race, ethnicity, culture and sexuality. From these articles I draw out some of the dominant discourses that render invisible the race of white LGBTQ individuals. These discourses include the assumption that: (1) only ‘racial minorities’ are influenced by ethnicity/race; (2) ‘ethnic minority’ groups are ‘all the same’; (3) ethnicity is a ‘benign variable’ that can be factored out in psychological research; and (4) a generic (white) model can be applied universally to all LGBTQ individuals, regardless of cultural differences. I suggest that these discourses together work to maintain a focus on the racialized other, the result being that white LGBTQ individuals are seen as not ‘having race’. Although it is problematic to focus on people positioned as non-white, this is necessary in order to highlight the ways in which race is constructed in LGBTQ psychological research. As Wong (1994, p. 136) suggests, ‘only by sketching out the silhouettes of “Blackness” situated at the perimeters will “whiteness” be dragged out into the foreground’. My purpose in this chapter is not to analyse the phenomenon of the ‘token racial diversity chapter’ (akin to Kitzinger’s [1996] analysis of the ‘token lesbian chapter’). While it may well be the case that many texts on LGBTQ individuals do provide an isolated chapter on the experiences of non-white LGBTQ individuals, it is nonetheless the case that all of the chapters in any such text are framed around race – whether the word ‘race’ appears or not.

In the final major section of this chapter, I outline some of the possibilities for change for research on LGBT individuals. I emphasize a need to engage more thoroughly with Indigenous/lesbian feminist/African American theorists (amongst others) who have challenged the ethnocentrism of psychological research. This work engenders a focus on the multiple interactions of privilege and oppression, rather than solely on the axis of sexuality. This is not to suggest that we should do away with ‘LGBTQ studies’, but rather that it is important to engage with the ways in which identities intersect with one another. White LGBTQ psychologists need to more adequately engage with and understand their privilege in order to contribute to social action and the destabilization of heteronormative practices.
In this first section I elaborate an understanding of psychological knowledge that emphasizes its location within ongoing histories of privilege and oppression. In particular, I draw attention to the normative assumptions of race that inhere in psychological knowledge. I also challenge white LGBTQ psychologists to examine the frameworks and implicit assumptions that they bring to their work.

Traditionally, psychological knowledge has been organized through the broad framework of positivism. This approach assumes that we can directly know or understand the world through the application of appropriate methodological tools (i.e. the scientific method). Positivism provides a relatively benign account of knowledge formation that fails to recognize how our perception of the world is influenced by the surrounding cultural context (Waldegrave, 1998). Furthermore, it fails to appreciate the impact that particular social locations (e.g. in relation to gender, sexuality or race) have on our ability to state our knowledge claims and have them heard and accepted by other people. The discipline of psychology has gradually incorporated qualitative and critical methodologies that challenge the status of positivism. However, positivist/quantitative research continues to hold sway over the ways in which the discipline responds to issues of heterosexism and racism. As I show below, a focus on single axes of oppression (e.g. sexuality), and the failure to explicitly recognize race privilege, is a product not only of quantitative research, but is also evident in qualitative research on the experiences of racially marginalized LGBTQ individuals.

Within psychology, the failure to both recognize the implications of race privilege and question the legitimacy of white forms of knowledge is evident in the desire of white psychologists to measure, describe and ‘know’ the ‘other’. Historically, this has involved such barbaric practices as measuring skull differences ‘between races’, and incarcerating, medicating or silencing those people who do not conform to the white, heterosexual, male, middle-class subject of psychological knowledge (Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett 2000; Smith, 1999). Such practices continue today, for example, through the use of ‘conversion therapies’ to ‘correct’ same-sex orientation (e.g. Nicolosi, 1991), or attempts to ‘prove’ racialized differences in ‘intelligence’ (e.g. Herrnstein & Murray, 1996). Organizations such as the American Psychological Association and British Psychological Society are critical of racism and challenge racial discrimination in their publications. However, discourses of race within psychology continue to provide those convinced of the deviancy of non-white individuals with a means of pathologizing and stigmatizing difference (Terry, 1999).

In her Maori account of practices of oppression, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) outlines how we may understand ‘psychological imperialism’. Smith suggests that one interpretation of the term ‘imperialism’ depicts it as referring to the:

> Enlightenment spirit which signalled the transformation of economic, political and cultural life in Europe. In this wider Enlightenment context, imperialism becomes an integral part of the development of the modern state, of science, of ideas and of the ‘modern’ human person. (p. 22)

Imperialism is a way of thinking about the world based on the values of white people. This includes the assumption that it is possible to understand the world through perception, and that white researchers have the right to do so, even at the expense of the groups under investigation. Smith also suggested that one specific mode of imperialism is colonization:
the imposition of one set of beliefs onto another. Indeed, within a binary framework of self and other (where the former is considered superior to the latter), the colonization of those considered different works to position them as other and ‘naturally’ inferior (Johnson-Riordan, Conway Herron & Johnston, 2002).

The assumptions of imperialism have played out in psychology in the form of a number of methodological and theoretical positions, namely: quantification, universality, acontextualism and individualism. These four positions (amongst many others) are important influences on psychological research and practice, and evidence what Todd and Wade (1995) term ‘psycolonization’. This term describes the ways in which white psychological knowledge has been asserted as truth through a number of different but related claims. The measuring, aggregating and reporting of ‘individual differences’ is thought to represent an ever-growing picture of human experience (what Kitzinger [1987] termed ‘the up the mountain saga’). In premising this picture on white individuals it is presumed to somehow represent a ‘universal picture’, one that is unrelated to particular social or cultural contexts. Finally, this is all achieved through a focus on isolated individuals who are measured as such, rather than as members of complex social systems. This results in the psycolonization of people’s life experiences, by inserting them into a model of humanity that privileges white (heterosexual, middle-class men’s) worldviews (Riggs, 2004a).

This approach to understanding the world is also premised on the notion that the subjectivity of the researcher is irrelevant (Morawski, 1997). As a result, the predominance of white, heterosexual, middle-class researchers means that participants are often marked and labelled (and implicitly rendered ‘problematic or normal’, ‘healthy or unhealthy’), whereas the privileges of white researchers are left unmarked. However, distinctions such as these have long been challenged by those marginalized within psychological research. This has occurred when those who have been positioned as objects of the scientific gaze have resisted this gaze, or have turned this gaze around to examine the researchers (Smith, 1997). It is also important to note that race has always been evident in psychological research; white researchers have just failed to recognize it. Race is an object of psychological knowledge either implicitly (in the unmarked status of white researchers or white subjects) or explicitly (in the measurement of those located as the racialized other). The normative status of whiteness in psychological research is often imported into LGBTQ research. As a result, the logic of positivism and the impact of psycolonization contribute to the marginalization of ‘non-white’ people in LGBT psychology.

**DATA**

The papers analysed in the following section were located through database searches (Academic Search Elite, Expanded Academic ASAP, Medline and PsycInfo) using combinations of key terms such as: race, culture, ethnicity, multiculturalism, white, black, African, Asian, Latin, Native, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, psychology. Relatively few matches were retrieved for any of these combinations (approximately 50 articles in total), and the vast majority of the matches retrieved did not appear in psychological journals or texts (10 psychology-related articles were found in total), and where thus not of relevance to the present research. Finally, using the 10 psychology-related articles that I had found via database searches I was able to identify five further articles from their reference lists – 10 of the 15 papers were selected for detailed analysis. I examined the
ways in which these papers constructed race, and the mention they made of whiteness and white race privilege in particular, using insights from critical race and whiteness studies (e.g. Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Riggs & Selby, 2003; Wong, 1994). Four predominant themes emerged from repeated readings of the literature. These were:

1. A focus on non-white people as ‘having race’ (white people were often not racialized or even named as ‘white’).
2. The presumption that all non-white racial groups experience racism and other forms of oppression in the same way (this presumption effectively ignores how privilege and oppression operate differentially, and suggests that all people within any one racial group experience race in the same way).
3. The notion that race could be ‘factored out’; that race could be treated as a benign variable with little explanatory power.
4. The assumption that a white model of subjectivity (in the form of psychological measures or theories) could be adequately used to understand the experiences of non-white LGBTQ individuals.

Of the literature surveyed, the 10 papers analysed here are representative of these four themes, and of the majority of research on the experiences of non-white LGBT individuals in the discipline of psychology. Table 4.1 provides a brief summary of the articles analysed. Only a few of the articles engaged with issues of race privilege and problematized whiteness. It is important to note that the vast majority of the research reviewed here (and the broader literature surveyed for the analysis) represents an important contribution to understanding the experiences of non-white LGBT individuals. The following analysis is not intended to undermine the research per se, but to explore some of the implications of the ways in which race is represented in the articles.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACE IN LGBT PSYCHOLOGY

Only ‘Other People’ Have Race

In this first theme, ‘ethnicity/race’ is understood as an important factor in research on non-white people. The implication is that white people ‘don’t have race’: that race is only of relevance when the group being researched are explicitly seen as ‘having race’. Of course, all LGBTQ psychology research looks at race – those of us living in western societies are racialized in varying ways, and this is evident in what we write, the research we conduct and the lives we live. I am not being dismissive of the importance of looking at and listening to the experiences of racism and oppression experienced by those people positioned as racialized others. However, solely doing this ignores how race (and, more specifically, racism) works both for and against: it privileges and oppresses (Fine, 1997; Riggs & Selby, 2003).

An example of this theme appears in Dube and Savin-Williams’s (1999) research on ‘ethnic sexual minority male youths’. In their literature review they outline the factors

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1 I use the terms ‘ethnicity/race’ because they are used interchangeably in the papers examined here. This is problematic because the terms ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ are conceptually distinct, and their use achieves differing rhetorical outcomes (Jackson, 1998).
under examination in their research (e.g. ‘adjustment to sexual identity’, ‘internalized homophobia’ and ‘integration of sexual and ethnic identities’). The discussion of each of the factors elaborates the ‘factor’ itself and then its impact on ‘ethnic sexual minority youth’. The implication is that while all youth are affected by these factors, only ‘ethnic sexual minority youths’ are burdened by the added impact of ethnicity. This is evident in the statement that: ‘ethnic minority youths face greater barriers in adjusting to their sexual identity because this identity must be integrated with and accepted in the context of an ethnic identity’ (p. 1390). The suggestion is that only ‘ethnic minority youths . . . adjust to their sexual identity . . . in the context of an ethnic identity’. Ethnicity is not seen to be a salient context for ethnic majority youth, nor is it something that must be ‘integrated’. This statement discounts the fact that all youths ‘have’ an ethnic identity, and that this works in conjunction with other aspects of identity (such as gender or sexuality) to privilege or oppress the young person. A similar example is provided by Rosario, Schrimshaw and Hunter (2004) in their research on ‘ethnic/racial differences in the coming out process of lesbian, gay and bisexual youths’. Much like Dube and Savin-Williams (1999), Rosario and her colleagues begin by outlining previous research on ‘LGB sexual identity

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<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consolacion, Russell &amp; Sue (2004)</td>
<td>An examination of the associations between ‘multiple minority status’ (race/ethnicity and sexual attraction) and mental health. Focusing on the experiences of marginalized youth, this study compared the experiences of white adolescents with those of Hispanic/Latino and African American adolescents.</td>
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<td>Dube &amp; Savin-Williams (1999)</td>
<td>An examination of ‘how ethnicity influences sexual identity development’. This research compared the experiences of young males who identified as both bisexual/gay and African American, Latino, Asian American/Pacific Islander or white.</td>
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<td>Rosario, Schrimshaw &amp; Hunter (2004)</td>
<td>This study focused on young lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and compared the coming-out experiences of ‘white, black and Latino’ youth.</td>
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<td>Whitam, Daskalos, Sobolewski &amp; Padilla (1998)</td>
<td>This research examined the ‘emergence of lesbian sexuality and identity cross-culturally’ in Brazil, Peru, the Philippines and the United States of America.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mashburn, Peterson, Bakeman, Miller &amp; Clark (2004)</td>
<td>A study exploring the ‘influence of demographic characteristics on HIV testing among young African American MSM’.</td>
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formation’, and then state that: ‘for ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals, the coming-out process may be complicated by cultural factors that operate to retard or arrest the process’ (p. 216). This suggests that only ‘ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals . . . [experience] cultural factors’ (p. 216): White LGB individuals are free to enjoy a ‘coming-out process’ that is not ‘retard[ed] or arrest[ed]’. As can be seen from this short extract, not only are ‘ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals’ positioned as solely affected by race, but race also works to potentially render their coming out experiences as pathological (i.e., ‘retarded or arrested’). In contrast to this is the implicit statement that majority group (white) LGB individuals can experience a ‘race-free’ coming out process.

Rosario et al. also imply that ‘only Other people have race’ when discussing their results: ‘once again, the ethnic/racial groups did not differ on the developmental mile-stones . . .’ (p. 224). Here they are referring to the ‘Black and Latino youths’ in their study – those marked as being ‘ethnic/racial groups’ – effectively dismissing the race of their white participants. The focus on ‘developmental milestones’ also does little to challenge the ways in which white norms for development are used as a measure for non-white young people (Burman, 1994; Riggs, 2006a). The assumption of a normative white model of development imposes on marginalized young LGBTQ people an account of development that ignores their experiences of oppression.

In a similar way to that of Dube and Savin-Williams (1999) and Rosario et al. (2004), Smith (1997) proposed that ‘culture’ only impacts on non-white people in relation to the ‘coming out process’. She suggested that:

Another way to approach coming out and cultural diversity would be to focus on coming out and cultural identity as individual processes that a person moves through in his or her development. That is, the two would be treated as separate developmental processes, with sexual orientation apart from who a person is as a cultural being . . . [Previous research] specifies specific variables such as time and reason for immigration, language, acculturation, and assimilation as some of the relevant cultural factors in the lives of immigrant lesbians . . . These approaches suggest that many cultural variables affect the lives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people of color. (p. 284)

It appears automatic for Smith to move from suggesting that ‘coming out and cultural identity [are] individual processes’ to an exploration of the experiences of ‘immigrant lesbians’. This move is premised on the positioning of culture as an attribute primarily associated with ‘lesbian, gay, and bisexual people of color’. This ignores the fact that all LGBTQ people ‘have culture’, and that white LGBTQ people may benefit from their membership of a particular cultural group. Also, this extract from Smith echoes the extract from Dube and Savin-Williams (1999), with regard to the presumption that culture and sexuality are usefully separable. This ignores the ways in which sexual identities are shaped in the context of particular cultures, and the inseparability of sexuality from culture.

Finally, the theme ‘only Other people have race’ was identified in the work of Mashburn et al. (2004), in which they explore some of the forces that impact on risk behaviours for African American men who have sex with men (MSM). They suggest that: ‘Empowerment, sense of community, interpersonal attachments, resources, and culture are active forces that compel risk behaviors, and they especially may be useful for understanding risk behaviors of non-Caucasian MSM’ (p. 49). The notion that ‘active forces’ such as ‘culture, empowerment and sense of community’ will be helpful for understanding the ‘risk behaviors of non-Caucasian MSM’ is premised on the notion that ‘culture’ primarily
impacts on or is useful to non-white people. This draws on a set of cultural stereotypes (which I outline in the second theme) that depict non-white people as always already benefiting from ‘community and culture’. Although community support is often central to combating oppression, this discursive practice minimizes the ways in which white people also benefit from the support provided by the ‘resources, community and empowerment’ that come from being a member of a dominant group.

The theme ‘only Other people have race’ maintains racialized hierarchies within LGBTQ psychology research. By focusing on race as the ‘cage of the other’ (Hage, 1998) such research effectively blames those positioned as racialized others for their experiences of racism. If race is understood to be intrinsic only to ‘minority group members’, the implication is that such groups are at fault for their racialized (and thus oppressed) status. By focusing on the racialized other, LGBTQ psychology reinforces the normative status of whiteness in psychological research and does little to challenge white hegemony. As I now show, this ignorance of white race privilege is also played out in constructions of ‘ethnic minorities’ as homogenous others.

Ethnic Minority Groups Are ‘All The Same’

The second theme relies on an assumption of out-group homogeneity – that all people who are not white experience race and racism in much the same way. It also presumes that non-white cultures are internally homogenous – that all people who identify with a particular culture are the same. The outcome of such assumptions is that little attention is paid to the specificities of racial oppression and the specificity of the concept of race itself. It is important to recognize the effects of racism, but it is not useful to categorize all people who are oppressed by racism as the same. One example of this is the vastly different experiences of racism between African American and Native American people. Each group (and the members within each group) experience racism differently because of a range of relationships to colonization, slavery and dispossession. To describe these experiences as all the same is to ignore how some groups may experience privilege at the expense of others’ oppression.

Assumptions of homogeneity are played out in a number of ways in research on ethnicity/race and sexuality. In the first instance, one ethnic minority group is assumed to be substitutable for another. For example, Siegel and Epstein (1996) report in their research on HIV status and ethnicity that: ‘We extended the findings [on HIV-infected Hispanic men] by showing that another minority group, African-American men, also reported higher ratings on cumulated severity of hassles than Caucasian men’ (p. 310). By this logic, researchers who examine the experiences of one ethnic minority group may simplistically map their findings across to another ‘similar’ group, in order to compare them. (It is also worth nothing here that both groups [Hispanic and African-American men] are being compared to ‘Caucasian’ men – as I discuss below, this assumes that white people represent the norm from which other groups of people differ). This logic effectively dismisses the incommensurable differences that shape the lives of Hispanic and African-American men living in the USA. As a result, LGBTQ psychological research that employs

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2 Again, I use this term as it predominates in the literature analysed here.
this framework assumes a form of universality underpinning the experiences of people positioned as racialized others (Wong, 1994).

A second example of the assumed sameness of individuals from differing marginalized racial groups appears in the work of Parks, Hughes and Matthews (2004). Their research, which looks at intersections of racial and sexual identities, uses a reductive understanding of race, wherein it is considered to be useful to group together non-white people. They suggest that their: ‘Analysis of data focused on two sets of comparisons: (a) African American with Latina women and (b) lesbians of color (African American and Latina) with White lesbians’ (pp. 245–246). Here African and Latina women are grouped together under the heading ‘lesbians of color’. Wong (1994) critiques the category ‘lesbians of color’ for ignoring the specificities of experience of African American and Latina women (for example), and, when used by (typically white) researchers, for ignoring the complex histories that inform the use of the term by African American and Latina women themselves. The use of ‘lesbians of color’ in ‘cross-cultural research’ is a form of appropriation, where the language used by non-white people is co-opted into the explanatory categories of white researchers.

LGBTQ psychological research also presumes that all people ‘within’ a culture experience the world in the same way. I have done this by suggesting that all white people are privileged, however, this suggestion achieves somewhat different rhetorical effects. The former suggestion uses ‘culture’ as a tool to stereotype and legitimate prejudice, whereas my suggestion makes generalizations in order to demonstrate a point about privilege and its relationship to oppression (see also Wong, 1994). Examples of overgeneralizations about marginalized cultures include ‘all lesbians are man haters’ or ‘African-American culture is matriarchal’. Examples such as these promote a uniform depiction of these two cultures and communities that elides some of the reasons why aspects of these statements may well be true (e.g. that some lesbians may justifiably ‘hate men’, or that some African-American households may be matriarchal). These depictions also mask political underpinnings (e.g. that some lesbians may choose separatism in order to challenge or reject patriarchy, or that some African-American households may be shaped through matriarchy as a result of histories of slavery and oppression). Assumptions of homogeneity do little to examine the intersections of privilege and oppression, and instead reinforce the very stereotypes that warrant racialized (and sexualized) hierarchies.

An example of this is evident in the research of Quadagno et al. (1998) on ‘ethnic differences in sexual decision making’. Although they acknowledge in their results section that the ‘Hispanic’ women in their study were a heterogeneous group, they devote considerable space in their introduction to outlining Hispanic culture (in the singular form). For example, ‘Hispanic culture reinforces gender roles and promotes male dominance in a relationship . . . Sex is considered a private issue in Hispanic culture, and sexual topics are not usually discussed’ (p. 58). My argument is not that these claims are untrue in general; rather, I query making such statements, particularly if they do not pertain per se to the experiences of the women in the study. These generalizations are used as a form of ‘stick culture’ against which to contrast more clearly the heterogeneous experiences of the women reported in the study. This may be a relatively common rhetorical ploy in writing up research reports (indeed, in this chapter I have used the most obvious examples of the four themes identified in order to make my point), but in papers on marginalized ethnic groups broad sweeping statements that reinforce stereotypical views held about non-white cultures are not useful (Walker, 2003). As Wong (1994, p. 141) suggests, ‘by
limiting culture within such clean coherent groups, it is difficult to analyze the zones of difference within and between cultures’.

The theme ‘ethnic minority groups are all the same’ elides the differences that shape experiences of culture and race, according to a person’s location within particular social and historical contexts. It does so by promoting the view that non-white people are uniformly oppressed. Constructions of self and other are reliant on the imposition of one particular worldview onto a wide range of people: Assumptions of across (and within) culture homogeneity are another form of psycolonization. Additionally, as Carby (1992) suggests, a focus on difference as a matter of individual identity fails to adequately recognize how categories of difference work to legitimate unequal social relations. Research on the experiences of LGBTQ people classified as non-white can therefore serve to normalize the dominance of white LGBTQ experiences. The effects of assuming homogeneity are also played out in the analytic presumption that ethnicity/race is a variable that can be controlled for, as I elaborate in the following section.

**Ethnicity/Race As A ‘Benign Variable’**

The construction of ethnicity/race as a variable that can be controlled for in order to account for individual differences forms the basis of the third theme. This construction assumes a form of universality, where ‘ethnicity’ is thought to affect people in a general way. The treatment of ethnicity/race as a variable in psychological research dehistoricizes the effects of ethnicity/race and reduces the visibility of the race of white people. If ethnicity is seen as a ‘benign variable’ – as something that can be ‘objectively measured’ and accounted for – then the violence that is often enacted in the name of ethnic/racial difference becomes sidelined to the main work of psychological research: accounting for difference. As a result, the experiences of people as they relate to ethnicity/race are in effect equalized. Claims to a ‘level playing field’ have been used to counter claims of discrimination and calls for affirmative action strategies (Riggs, 2004a).

In their work on ‘sexual identity formation’, Quadagno and colleagues (1998) suggest that: ‘when a limited number of factors are controlled, ethnic differences diminish to a large degree’ (p. 74). This claim is premised on an earlier statement that: ‘Numerous factors other than ethnicity, including marital status, age, and education, have been shown to influence sexual activities’ (p. 59). Together, these two statements demonstrate the assumption that ethnicity is a ‘factor’ that can be isolated and accounted for, rather than something that influences experiences in multiple ways. To suggest that ‘factors other than ethnicity . . . influence sexual activities’ is to promote the idea that ethnicity only influences sexual activities as ethnicity, rather than as a more generalized effect that influences how people may have differential access to (for example) marital status and education, as a result of their ethnicity. This is not to suggest a hierarchical ranking of subject positions, in which ethnicity is ‘more influential’ than other aspects of a person’s subjectivity. Rather, the point is that subjectivity cannot be separated into individual factors. Ethnicity is always present in the ‘limited number of factors’ (p. 74) and there is little use in claiming to be able to ‘diminish’ ethnic differences. The fact that controlling for these variables reduces the effect of ethnicity in the statistical sense is not problematic, but the interpretation that ‘factors other than ethnicity . . . influence sexual activities’ (p. 59) is.
Rosario and her colleagues (2004) make this claim more strongly in their suggestion that: ‘These nonsignificant findings suggest that sexual identity formation is not significantly influenced by cultural factors’ (p. 225). To claim that ‘sexual identity formation is not significantly influenced by cultural factors’ is to take a very narrow reading of culture. Indeed, it dismisses entirely the fact that non-heterosexually identified people form a range of specific cultures of our own – ‘sexual identities’ that are done in a context of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer communities are intimately related to that particular community/culture. By extension, all sexual identities are formed in a relationship to a wide range of cultures, none of which can be accounted for by attempting to control for cultural differences.

The assumption that ethnicity is a benign variable that can be isolated in LGBTQ research promotes a positivist interpretation of the experiences of LGBTQ individuals. The assumptions of universality, acontextualism, individualism and quantification all discount the wide range of influences that constructions of ethnicity have. Such assumptions encourage people to ‘choose which oppression is the greatest’, rather than looking at the interplays between differing subject positions. This essentialist model of identity politics fractures the experiences of people who experience multiple oppressions. As Harris (1995, p. 255) suggests:

The result of essentialism is to reduce the lives of people who experience multiple forms of oppression to addition problems: ‘racism + sexism = straight black women's experience’, or ‘racism + sexism + homophobia = black lesbian experience’. Thus, in an essentialist world, black women's experiences will always be forcibly fragmented before being subjected to analysis, as those who are ‘only interested in race’ and those who are ‘only interested in gender’ take their separate slices of our lives.

Employing ethnicity/race as a variable in psychological research holds the potential for enacting considerable violence on the experience of non-white people. Attempting to account for ethnic/racial difference masks the effects of privilege based on ethnicity/race. As I show in the final section, accounting for ethnic/racial difference through a model of ‘individual identity’ normalizes a white model of subjectivity by promoting the belief that sameness equals whiteness.

Generic Models of Subjectivity

As the title suggests, this final theme draws attention to the belief that a ‘one size fits all’ model can be used to understand the experiences of all LGBTQ individuals, regardless of ethnicity/race. This model takes a number of different (but related) forms in research on sexuality and race. The first is the use of measures normed on white populations to understand the experiences of people from non-white cultures. For example, Dube and Savin-Williams (1999) use the Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin (1948) sexual orientation scale to assess the experiences of the ‘ethnic sexual-minority youths’ in their study. Similarly, Consolacion, Russell and Sue (2004) use the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1965) to measure the mental health status of the ‘multiple minority youths’ in their study, and Rosario et al. (2004) use the Marlowe-Crowne (1960) social desirability scale to look at ‘ethnic/racial difference in the coming-out process’. None of these measures were adapted specifically to cater for the experiences of ‘ethnic minority individuals’, nor do the articles mention the cultural specificity of the measures. This use of a generic model of subjectivity
supposes that non-white individuals can (and should) be measured against a white norm (cf., Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994).

Peterson, Folkman and Bakeman (1996) do acknowledge the cultural specificity of their measure for ‘coping’, but persist in using the measure as the basis for their research (because it has been validated elsewhere). They suggest that:

Differences in appraisal and coping may be associated with cultural difference in value beliefs and life experiences. With respect to validity, it is possible that the Ways of Coping, which was developed with a white, middle-class suburban sample, is not valid for use with an urban African American sample. However, a recent study of the validity of the Ways of Coping in an urban socioeconomically diverse African American samples provides support for the use of this measure in the current study (p. 475).

This fails to recognize that many psychological measures have been normed on specific populations (before being applied to other populations). The outcome is that a semblance of validity is achieved (Dudgeon et al., 2000). Such measures reflect participants’ knowledge of the dominant culture, rather than their ‘fit’ with the norms of the dominant group. The use of such measures does little to challenge the normative status of particular forms of knowledge, or to recognize the experiences and theories of marginalized group members.

Assumptions of a generic model were also evident in the use of terms that may be specific to white cultures. For example, in their research on ‘lesbian sexuality’, Whitam, Daskalos, Sobolewski and Padilla (1998) use the term ‘lesbian’ to describe women from four different cultural groups (Brazilian, Peruvian, Phillipina and ‘American’), even though they acknowledge that the word ‘lesbian’ (or a translation of it) was not typically used by the women from countries other than the USA who identified as same-sex attracted. This is explicit both in the use of the word ‘lesbian’ in the title of their paper, and in the statement that: ‘lesbians are not a unique creation of Western European societies, but probably a universal aspect of human sexual orientational arrangements’ (p. 32). This claim to universality supposes not simply that same-sex attraction is something experienced across cultures, but that ‘lesbians’ exist across cultures. This term has a wide range of meaning within white cultures. To think that it would have the same set of meanings (or any meaning at all) across cultures is to impose a white interpretation of subjectivity onto the experiences of all same-sex attracted women.

The words that we use carry sets of meanings that implicate us in practices and histories of oppression and privilege (cf., Brauner, 2000). The assumption of a generic term serves the interests of the white majority, rather than paying attention to non-white people’s experiences of sexuality. Obviously this is a result of a desire to make ‘cross-cultural comparisons’. My question here is: how do such comparisons contribute to meaningful interventions into practices of privilege and oppression, and on whose terms is such research conducted?

In the following section I elaborate some of these concerns by looking at research that has been conducted by Indigenous/lesbian feminist/African American theorists who have sought to challenge the hegemony of whiteness within academic research.

**INTERPLAYS OF PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION**

In this final section of the chapter I draw together some of the ways in which LGBTQ psychologists may more adequately engage with issues of privilege and oppression. I draw
o n  th e  th eo re ti c al  an d  pe rs o n al  ins i gh ts  th a t  h a v e  bee n  e l a bo ra te d  b y  gr o u p s  o f  peo p l e
oppressed by white heteropatriarchy. This extremely rich literature has often been given
limited attention in psychological research. However, its capacity to demonstrate issues
of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination is an essential tool for challenging
interplays of privilege and oppression, particularly in colonial nations. From this literature
I take two main foci: the complexities and multiplicities of privilege and oppression, and
the need to reconceptualize subjectivity in the face of these complexities. These two foci
may help to engender a more reflexive engagement with race and sexuality in LGBTQ
psychological research.

Examining the interplays of privilege and oppression requires a willingness to under-
stand how people who experience oppression primarily as a result of sexual orientation
(for example) may well in turn be involved in practices of oppression in relation to groups
of people who differ from them in regards to race, gender, ethnicity or class (hooks, 1981).
This may be as implicit as the privilege that white LGBTQ individuals experience, or as
explicit as knowingly refusing to address race privilege or to support the rights of groups
other than our own. Looking at experiences of oppression should entail looking at experi-
ences of privilege – how are they overlaid, and how may our privileges outweigh our
experiences of oppression (and vice versa)?

Croteau, Talbot, Lance and Evans (2002) suggest that oppression and privilege are often
mediated by visibility: a person’s ability to ‘pass’, or to not mention their ‘difference’
from the white, heterosexual, middle-class norm is a form of privilege. This is not to dis-
count the fact that being forced to ‘pass’ as a heterosexual person (for example) is oppres-
sive. Rather, issues of oppression and privilege are intimately related to power and
choice – the ability to choose particular framings of ourselves (albeit from a limited range
of options) that allow us to access privilege. The ‘visibility’ of non-white people (in con-
trast to the presumed invisibility of white people, for white people) effectively denies
this choice.

This point about visibility draws attention to the problematic notion that ‘experiences
of oppression are universal’. Simply because some of us may experience oppression as a
result of sexual orientation only does not mean that these experiences are anything like
those of someone who experiences racialized oppression (or perhaps racialized and sexu-
alized oppression, to name but two). Privilege is a social fact that changes in degrees: as
Carla Trujillo (1997) suggests (writing as someone who identifies as Latina), ‘the fact that
I can be an out lesbian and not formally persecuted by the U.S. government is a privilege’
(p. 271). Privilege is relative. Though it is true that lesbians experience forms of persecu-
tion within the USA (i.e. little access to adoption rights, marriage rights, maternity
payment for supporting partners, etc.), this is a radically different experience from those
women who identify as same-sex attracted in countries outside the USA, who experience
far more extreme forms of persecution or disavowal. Rather than aggregating experiences
and reporting them en masse, it may instead be more important to look at the ways
in which oppressions work both independently from and simultaneously with one
another (hooks, 1981). This brings me to the second focus of this section: the need to
reconceptualize subjectivity in order to better understand the operations of privilege and
oppression.

My starting point for this reconceptualization is the suggestion that white LGBTQ
psychology researchers need to engage more adequately on a theoretical level with those
researchers who have challenged our epistemic authority (hooks, 1981). It is far too easy
(and unthreatening) to simply employ the research of non-white scholars as a form of moral authority in order to demonstrate our claim to be ‘engaging with our privilege’ (Moreton-Robinson, pers comm, September 2004). Instead, what is required is a critical engagement with the theories of those scholars who challenge white models of subjectivity, and create a space to elaborate understandings of privilege and oppression grounded in the multiplicities of everyday life.

bell hooks (1989) is one such scholar who has confronted white women’s feminism (for example) with its complicity in racist practices. hooks suggests that the use of concepts such as ‘identity politics’ to gain access to rights may do very little to challenge the individualistic and essentialist understandings of subjectivity that have been used to justify the oppression of marginalized racial, sexual and gender minority groups (cf., Riggs & Riggs, 2004). Such concepts rely on an understanding of subjectivity that reifies these points of difference as a priori facts, rather than as socially constructed markers of difference that are used to legitimate the status quo. hooks suggests that slogans such as ‘the personal is political’ only serve to reduce issues of inequality and oppression to the personal – to internalized difference rather than challenging it and its connections to privilege (see also Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993, for a white lesbian feminist analysis of how such individualism serves to blame lesbians for their experiences of discrimination).

In contrast to this, we may understand subjectivity as an intersubjective practice that is shaped through our ever-changing relations to multiple subject positions, dependent on our context. Rather than reducing experience down to one particular point, or expecting people to choose ‘which subject position oppresses them most’, we should examine the interplays between the subject positions that we inhabit, and through which we are located in a relationship to privilege and oppression (Mama, 1995). By looking at how we came to be who we are through our relationships to other people (oppressive or otherwise), it may be possible to examine more thoroughly sites of dominance and how they actively attempt to produce their other (e.g. heterosexuality and the production of the deviant other). (See Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993, for more on this, and Wong, 1994, in relation to whiteness and racism.)

This need to examine sites of dominance is particularly compelling for white researchers examining issues of race and sexuality within LGBTQ psychology. This calls for not a focus on white people per se (as in yet more research that examines the lives of white people), but a critical examination of how white subjectivities are constituted through networks of power that bestow unearned privilege at the expense (or oppression) of non-white groups (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). This approach refuses to legitimate the hegemony of whiteness, and instead examines exactly how this hegemony came about, and how it implicates all white people (regardless of sexuality) in practices of privilege and oppression (Riggs, 2006b). This entails analysing how power works to both limit and make possible various subject positions, and the implications of this for researching the lives of LGBTQ individuals. It is not sufficient to simply look at how heterosexual hegemony shapes our lives as LGBTQ individuals, regardless of race. We must also look at how heterosexual hegemony is shaped in a relationship with other modes of dominance, for example, racism, classism and imperialism more broadly (what Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 2004, has referred to as ‘the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty’).
CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this chapter I have argued that LGBTQ psychologists need to look at how race is done, rather than simply measuring racialized differences (a practice that, in effect, reifies racialized categories without concurrently examining their relationship to privilege and oppression). By looking at four examples of how issues of race are managed within LGBTQ psychological research, I have demonstrated that such research identifies race as it pertains to those who are raced-as-other – it does not pay sufficient attention to the race of the white people, nor to white people’s unearned privileges.

Those of us who identify as white need to ask questions such as: ‘who is our research useful to?’ and ‘whose purposes does it serve?’ (Smith, 1999). We need to consider how our research justifies practices of oppression and how the psychological method itself – particularly, universalism, acontextualism, individualism and quantification – is implicated in practices of oppression. This is often also the result of the presumption that ‘objective research’ can be moral and value free. Yet, researchers bring a range of cultural assumptions to their work. There is a need to be more transparent about the moral assumptions that we make in our work and to privilege accounts of morality that challenge the norms of white heteropatriarchy (cf, Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993). As such, LGBTQ psychology will become more than a simple ‘add-on’ to the discipline of psychology: it will become a field that takes as central the experiences of LGBTQ individuals, and which challenges the normative assumptions of all forms of psychology, LGBTQ or otherwise (Kitzinger & Coyle, 2002).

There is a direct contradiction between a desire to challenge racism and race privilege and the tenets of psychological research. While it is of course possible to examine racism (or heterosexism) within the context of psychology, such examinations are often limited by their reliance on particular white understandings of subjectivity and science. This does not mean abandoning psychology altogether. Although it has and continues to be deployed as a means of oppression, it also wields considerable rhetorical power in regards to rights. As Clarke (2001, p. 157) suggests, what is required is a ‘“multiplicity of perspectives” on LGBT psychology, rather than a hegemony of positivist-empiricism’. An approach that values a ‘multiplicity of perspectives’ requires us to question which ‘perspectives’ are valued over others in the context of western cultures, and the ways in which the voices of marginalized racial groups are often depicted as ‘mere perspectives’ (Nicoll, 2000).

Finally, I draw attention to the potential that LGBTQ psychology may hold for challenging the self/other binaries that underpin constructions of racialized and sexualized difference. The normative status of white people in LGBTQ psychological research leads to the exclusion of non-white people. The invisibility of whiteness (to white people) is dependent on the visibility of those raced as other, whether through stereotypical depictions or the presumption of a ‘natural difference’ between the two. I am not suggesting that we should aim towards a utopian vision of ‘racelessness’ – this would only serve to deny the ongoing histories of oppression based on racialized differences and the fallacy of white invisibility. Rather, by looking at the interplays of privilege and oppression, we can more closely examine how whiteness is always already implicated in the networks of power that inform racialized practices. As a consequence, we may challenge the a priori status of white privilege as a site always under contestation.
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