'GIVING UP THE GHOST': DISRUPTING THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF
WHITE PRIVILEGE IN ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGY
AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the operations of white privilege within progressive white culture service organizations engaged in anti-racist change efforts. My analysis flows from a critique of two practices pervasive in, but by no means exclusive to, pedagogy: the use of storytelling, and 'moves to innocence'. Among anti-racist, feminist and critical pedagogy theorists there is a significant gap between the level of interest in poststructural ideas and efforts to apply them at an operational level. The particular relevance of this thesis lies in its intended contribution to the bridging of that gap. At the heart of this thesis lies the theoretical tension between the anti-foundational and deconstructive impulses of poststructuralism and the liberationist desire to honour the historical material realities of the oppressed. By reading the concept of 'epistemic privilege' through 'strategic essentialism' I argue the feasibility of a carefully constructed and politically engaged poststructuralism in order to negotiate the material basis for valuing truths from the margins, while recognizing the partiality and power implicatedness of knowledge.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: GROUNDWORK

1.1 THE PROJECT

Pedagogical strategies aimed at revealing and disrupting relations of domination,

particularly of sex, race and class, have multiplied since the 1970's, with limited

outward success. Teachers, activists and theorists have all contributed to the

development of liberatory pedagogical strategies. The range of theory and

methodology that has been utilized is vast, including feminist and Marxist theories of

both pedagogy and community development, anti-racism theory, critical pedagogy,

and even forays into liberation theology. We are fortunate that today there is an

extensive body of work on a range of theoretical and applied approaches to anti-

racist pedagogy in general[1], and a more limited range of writing on anti-racism

training and organizational change in particular. Yet despite all the effort, skill and

time that has been applied to anti-racist pedagogy, these efforts have not been very

successful. I am interested in examining why.

I have been a participant or facilitator in a number of workshops given from a range

of perspectives, including cultural competency, multicultural pluralism, and anti-

racist practice and other anti-discrimination initiatives (including heterosexism,

sexism, and ableism). I have been troubled by ways in which, despite best efforts,

oppressive power relations often remain within these workshops, and in subsequent

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[1] For instance: Apple and Weis (1983); Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992); Donald
and Rattansi (1992); Klein (1993); McCarthy (1993); Omi and Winant (1987); or
Razack (1995). It is worth noting that there is a particular wealth of research
generated out of the U.K.

efforts to operationalize anti-discrimination at the organizational level. This frequently results in serious political impasses, hurt feelings and compromised efficiency of the process or project of the group. While this may not be surprising within liberal pluralist cultural approaches to issues of discrimination, it is particularly problematic within anti-discrimination training which has as its explicit foundation an analysis of the material basis for inequality, and a goal of disrupting and altering these relations of power.

This thesis explores the operations of white privilege within progressive service organizations which are explicitly engaged in anti-racist change efforts. I argue that white privilege remains one of the most ideologically normalized and thus entrenched forms of oppressive power. White power and privilege can take an infinite variety of forms. My analysis flows from a critique of two practices, pervasive in, but by no means exclusive to, anti-racist pedagogy in organizations: the use of storytelling[2] and 'moves to innocence'[3]. There is extensive literature on both of these concepts/practices which I draw upon throughout the thesis, however these concepts are not theorized in a uniform manner. After clarifying my engagement with these terms, I will develop a critique of the ways in which the

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[2] I draw upon a number of authors including: H.K. Bhabha (1990); E. Ellsworth (1989); M. Foucault (1980, 1990); P. Gilroy (1990, 1992); D. Haraway (1988, 1990, 1991); b. hooks (1988); C. Luke and J. Gore (1992); M. Orner (1993); S. Razack (1991, 1993); and P. Rosenberg (1997).

[3] I am most indebted to the work of M.L. Fellows and S. Razack (1998), but also draw upon R. Aziz (1995); M. Fine et al. Eds. (1997); J. Flax (1992); P. Gilroy (1990, 1992); b. hooks (1992, 1994); M. Kaye/Krantowitz (1992); P. Lather (1991); A. Lorde (1984); and U. Narayan. (1988) among others.

practices of *storytelling*, and of *'moves to innocence'* are mobilized, consciously and otherwise, to re-circulate and normalize white power and privilege in the 'True Fiction' examples.

Discourses and practices of self confession and innocence/guilt are most obviously manifest in individual and group dynamics, and I use the device of 'True Fiction' stories to conduct possible readings of revealing moments in anti-racist pedagogy and practice. However, I am not interested in individual intentions and correctness of thought, but rather in revealing how organizational and social structures make such discursive moments possible. I provide a composite portrait of progressive, white culture organizations engaged in anti-racist organizational change efforts, all drawn from my experiences. One case example is explicitly pedagogical in that it takes place within an anti-racism workshop. The other two case examples take place post-workshop, one being a meeting of an anti-discrimination committee, and the other being a staff meeting to discuss an anti-racism workshop. The 'True Fiction' examples are not drawn from any particular organization, rather, they are a compilation of various, yet similar organizations engaged in a process of anti-racist change. These examples enable me to describe the more subtle and nuanced aspects of the perpetuation of relations of domination, which are then analysed throughout the thesis. The title "Giving Up the Ghost" is drawn from Sandra Harding's (1990) critique of the myth of "one true story" (p. 194). The title also echoes Jane Flax's (1992) analysis of feminist suspicions of postmodernism which she critiques in terms of "dreams of innocence"(p. 446). Thus my use of the device of 'True Fiction' is not intended as a compromise of either term separately, but to illustrate their

inevitable interrelationship.

It is easy to locate oppressive practices in mainstream, corporate organizations. I am
interested in smaller, progressive agencies which view themselves as on 'the right
side' of social justice struggles in part because these types of organizations are, in
today's conservative political climate, most likely to seriously attempt anti-racist
change. But more critically, the barriers to anti-racism work revealed in their
practices are particularly instructive precisely because, in the context of best
intentions, they are explicitly attempting to disrupt racist relations. This thesis
argues that an examination of anti-racist pedagogy and practice in progressive
service organizations is useful in that it reveals the extent to which white privilege
remains normalized, despite best efforts to disrupt it. I will explore how such
organizations' positioning of themselves as progressive impedes, in specific ways,
effective anti-racist interventions. This leads me to explore the extent to which the
causes of this impasse flow from liberal modernist assumptions and material
practices which infuse anti-racist interventions, both pedagogical and organizational.

I am interested in exploring how a liberal modernist orientation compromises the
radical effectivity of anti-racist pedagogy and practice. However, it is worth noting
from the outset that a liberal orientation to issues of racism (often expressed in terms
of cultural pluralism) and anti-discrimination models are not completely discrete
from one another, nor can they be absolutely defined. Rather, these approaches are
highly contested and to some extent cross fertile. In addition, there is a tremendous
variety of ways to facilitate and apply different theories, and it is not my intention to

impose an inaccurate cohesiveness, nor dichotomy on these two general approaches. Pedagogical strategies which emphasize culture and pluralism are a legitimate, if incomplete response, to social tension expressed along both cultural and ethno racial lines, and some of its practitioners (Bowser et al. Eds. 1993; K. Moodley, 1992) also contend with issues of race and racism. Nor do I wish to imply that cultural pluralist models comprise a shoddy building block on the linear path to greater progress manifest in anti-racism models of pedagogy and social change. Indeed, I will argue that while anti-racist pedagogy and practice has been enriched through criticism of the inadequacies of a liberalist approach, one does not flow from the other, and further, an emphasis on culture and pluralism rather than oppressive power relations (unfortunately) remains predominant in practice. In other words, I will show that legacies of liberalism survive in practices that claim to be anti-racist,[4] and that this undermines the radical potential of anti-racism praxis in specific ways.

My approach to this work is indebted to feminist, anti-racist and poststructuralist[5] theorists, some of whom share allegiance to one, two or all of these descriptors. Specifically, my analysis of anti-racism is rooted in what can generally be described

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[4] There is a wealth of interesting theory on this subject which I have drawn upon including: Apple and Weis (1983); Anthia and Yuval-Davis (1992); Bhabha (1990); Essed (1991); hooks (1988, 1992); Klein (1993); Ng (1993); Omi and Winant (1993); Rattansi (1992); and Razack (1993, 1995).

[5] The terms postmodern and poststructural are used in a variety of (sometimes contradictory) ways, I have taken up Patti Lather's distinction that postmodern refers more to the cultural shifts of a post-industrial, post-colonial era, while poststructural refers to the working out of those shifts in academic theory (Lather, 1991 p.4) . However, as Lather discusses, this distinction is not universally accepted, and Lather herself sometimes uses the terms interchangeably.

as a poststructural view of power, identity/subjectivity, and experience. This triad of poststructural concerns constitute the pivotal theoretical sites of my inquiry. As the place of 'experience' is crucial in anti-racist and other liberatory theory and practice, I will provide a detailed critique of this concept and its mobilization within practices of storytelling and 'moves to innocence'. I am interested in capturing the specificity of the discursive and material aspects of experience in the context of anti-racism practice in order to think about subjectivity and power relations. While I argue that liberal epistemes are inadequate to sufficiently disrupt discourses of white privilege within anti-racism pedagogy and practice[6], I do not unquestioningly embrace a radically discursive analysis.

My interest in poststructuralist ideas over the period of several years enabled me to 'see' the disturbing impasses I experienced and witnessed in anti-discrimination work in a new way. I intentionally use micro social, context specific scenarios as the starting point of this analysis of the operation of power relations within anti-racist pedagogical and organizational change. This daily level of interaction is a vital site of critique because these everyday relations provide the most accessible opportunities for understanding and effectively resisting systems of domination which organize (but do not determine) our social lives and our very identities. Thus, while I begin in small group, organizational and individual experiences, this project is not about individual consciousness and practices. Rather, I critique how the

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[6] A critique of the operations of liberalism in anti-racist theory and practice has been developed by: Bhabha, (1990); Fine, (1997); Goldberg, (1993); Omi and Winant, (1987, 1993); A. Rattansi, (1992); and S. Razack, (1991, 1993, 1997).

broader social nexus of relations of domination produce socio-historically specific subject positions and power relations. In this sense my mobilization of poststructuralism is primarily a conceptual tool to decipher new meanings from political conflicts. In the course of my analysis I explore the potential for a feminist, poststructuralist anti-racist pedagogy to produce alternate, politically effective results. While I expect my analysis to foster creative and poststructural inflected anti-racist pedagogical strategies, it is not the purpose of this thesis to provide specific teaching techniques and I have intentionally limited my forays into the 'how to' of anti-racist pedagogy. My project precedes such an effort and reflects upon the discursive and material practices which produce the problematic I critique within anti-racist pedagogy. Questioning the potential of such a pedagogical practice constitutes much of my conclusion.

I argue that poststructuralist theories of the discursive production of subjectivity and power relations can provide a paradigmatic shift which can be utilized to disrupt white power as it recirculates within anti-racist pedagogy and the practices of such organizations. The strength of poststructuralism, in my view, lies in a complex analysis of the operations of power in the development of subjectivity, experience and knowledge. In this way poststructuralism seems well suited to anti-racist efforts to disrupt the production of white power and black oppression in specific contexts. However, the engagement with poststructural theories is not without risks, one of which is the way that poststructuralism's emphasis on anti-foundationalism and deconstruction can threaten identity based solidarity. I argue that an analysis of the link between multiple and shifting social location/subject position to the production

of knowledge can introduce a fortuitous instability between the deconstructive critique of experience and the valuing of what Foucault (1980) called "subjugated knowledge" (p.126). Foucault describes subjugated knowledge as forms of knowledge or experience that "have been disqualified as inadequate to their task, or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down in the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (1980, p. 82). I argue for the mobilization of a carefully constructed and politically engaged poststructuralism. Through my analysis of the 'True Fiction' examples I interrogate the application of poststructural ideas of power, subjectivity, and experience to the explicitly politicized theory and practice of anti-racism. Taking seriously the poststructural analysis of the formational link between social location, subjectivity, and knowledge production, I will also critique my own stakes and positions in relation to this project (white, lesbian, feminist, educator and so forth). This thesis is an effort to contribute to charting the processes by which whiteness is reproduced, normalized and, potentially, disrupted in educational and organizational contexts.

At the heart of this thesis lies the theoretical tension between the anti-foundationalist and deconstructive impulses of poststructuralism and the liberationist desire to honour the historical and material realities of the oppressed. Among anti-racist, feminist and critical pedagogy theorists there is a significant gap between the level of interest in poststructuralist ideas and efforts to apply them at an operational level. The particular relevance of this thesis lies in its intended contribution to the bridging of that gap. The separation between theoretical excitement and application is (to an extent always inevitable and) understandable given the difficulty of developing

strategies which incorporate a high degree of complexity of subject and power relations in, for instance, anti-racist pedagogy. However, a second even more important explanation lies in the unequal risks involved for participants. Theorists and activists of colour, women, lesbians and gays among others, have long issued warnings of the dangers of deconstructing identity for those who are outside of the dominant axes of power in some way. Different social locations produce unequal risks in engaging with and mobilizing a poststructural liberationist practice. By engaging with an array of anti-racist, feminist, and poststructuralist theorists (and these are not always discrete categories) I attempt to take seriously the risks for those positioned at the margins, while arguing that discursively constructed subjectivity and experience needs to be more fully contended with in how anti-racist theory and social change is practiced. I argue that my reading of the 'True Fiction' scenarios illustrate that the reluctance to fundamentally negotiate complex and multiple subject locations, while understandable, produces its own impasses and is not without risks. In my view the de-centering and de-essentialization of subjectivity and experience is necessary to disrupt the production of white privilege, particularly as it is normalized in the progressive context of the organizations in question. This epistemological insight cannot be strictly contained. While not disregarding the risks involved for the marginalized, poststructuralist insights can also facilitate the ability to negotiate divergent truths and experiences from within marginalized subject locations such as black, lesbian, working class, and so forth.

The unequal risks of engaging in a poststructuralist inflected anti-racist (and feminist) theory and practice are central to my work in this thesis. This tension is

clearly expressed in my arguments (in the final chapter) for the value, without
reification, of marginalized knowledge(s). I explore the pedagogical potential of
shifting experience from its foundational status, while simultaneously crediting the
"epistemic privilege of the oppressed" (Uma Narayan, 1988). I develop an analysis
of how the concept of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1990 and 1993) can be applied
to modify and expand Narayan's principle of epistemic privilege as a way
incorporating the material basis for honouring the social location of the oppressed,
without precluding poststructuralist insights of subject, knowledge and power
relations. This thesis is part of larger efforts to map the configurations of power in
which progressive (pedagogical and otherwise) political interventions, specifically
anti-racism, take place, and to understand such intervention's liberating effectivity or
complicity in regimes of regulation, domination, and exploitation.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

Now that I have explained the essential scope and goals of the thesis, it would be
helpful to outline the organization of the content by chapter. As you have seen,
chapter one begins by laying the groundwork for the thesis, first by outlining 'The
Project', I then provide a description of the context in which this analysis takes
place.

'The Context' section includes a snapshot of the broader social nexus in which my
analysis occurs. While my thesis has a necessarily specific focus, a central feature
of my analysis is the formational, but not deterministic, impact of larger social forces
on the local and particular. Moving from the large scale social context, I then define

my use of composite portraits of progressive white culture service organizations. My thesis does not provide an analysis of any specific, actual organization. Rather, the 'True Fiction' examples are composite sketches of a range of different progressive, white culture dominated organizations engaged in anti-racism organizational change. Indeed my point is that the power relations I explicate are manifest in a broad range of such organizations. I will analyse two forms/strategies of the normalization of white privilege which circulate within anti-racism workshops, and more broadly throughout the (fictional) organizations in question: first, the often unproblematized pedagogical practice of *sharing experiences and telling stories* ; and second, the *move to innocence* expressed in the 'rush to the margins' and claims of 'non-experience'. The three 'True Fiction' examples, gathered through my experiences, illustrate these moves to innocence and the problems of sharing experiences and stories in the course of anti-racism efforts within progressive organizations. These fictionalized, yet experience based, compilations provide the basis from which to examine the regimes of truth being circulated/created within anti-racist training. I argue that the polite, 'do the right thing' environment of liberal progressive organizations can reveal the extent of the subtle (and overt) normalization of white privilege and power, and illustrate the extent of the challenge to anti-racist pedagogy of revealing and disrupting these relations.

The section on 'Race and Racism' details the social constructionist theoretical analysis of racism I utilize, and discusses some of the risks of that analysis. In the section titled 'Poststructuralism' I explain my use of the term, and provide a brief

summary of the key theoretical concepts which are drawn upon and developed throughout the thesis. Thus, chapter one provides an overview of the project, defines the essential terminology, and provides an explication of the theoretical framework I use throughout the thesis.

Chapter two and chapter three provide detailed analyses of the 'True Fiction' examples to reveal the reproduction of white privilege (within progressive organizations), through the specific practices of *storytelling*, and *moves to innocence*. Chapter two constitutes a critique of the practices of telling stories and sharing experiences. I critique the ways in which the mobilization of storytelling/personal testimony, often inadvertently, functions to normalize and re-circulate white power and privilege, despite the explicit goal of shifting these power relations. Drawing upon existing literature I then explore the extent to which the causes of this impasse flow from liberal modernist assumptions which infuse anti-racist interventions, both pedagogical and organizational. After analysing how liberal modernist epistemes compromise the radical effectivity of anti-racist interventions, I specifically explore the ways in which empathy, experience and voice are mobilized. I then suggest that a particular engagement with poststructuralism provides an alternative framework which can reveal and disrupt the operations of racism as they recirculate within such organizations. In my view, a poststructural conception of the complex operations and reproduction of power, and of the discursive production of subjectivity, can provide a way of moving beyond the problems of relativistic plurality on the one hand, and essentialized positioning on the other. The importance of multiple positioning of the subject in relation to

various axes of power is developed further in subsequent chapters.

Chapter three focuses on 'moves to innocence', which can be accomplished in several ways, but the two main patterns I discuss are claims of 'non experience' and the 'rush to the margins'. The third 'True Fiction' case example provides the starting point for my analysis here, but I also reflect upon the other two examples introduced in the previous chapter. 'Moves to innocence' are characterised by strategies to remove involvement in and culpability for systems of domination. I define my use of these terms with reference to various theorists, most particularly Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack, who coined the term 'the race to innocence'(1998). The desire for a position of innocence - as in a non oppressor - is frequently mirrored by a companion desire to claim virtue via oppression. The complexity and tenaciousness of moves to innocence has to do with the ways in which systems of domination are reproduced and recirculated within social and organizational structures, including within liberatory discourses and practices such as anti-racism training. My critique of 'moves to innocence' is developed through a detailed engagement with poststructural ideas of *subjectivity*, *power*, and *experience*, and develops further the concept of multiple subject positioning introduced in chapter two.

Chapter four examines the issues raised by my analysis, and explores some areas that may provide a way forward. I further explore the tension between my engagement with liberatory anti-racist pedagogy and politics, and the deconstructive, anti-foundational tendencies of poststructural theory. I both trouble and acclaim the

mobilization of epistemic privilege in negotiating the material basis for valuing

truths from the margins, while recognizing the partiality and power implicatedness of

knowledge. I explore the pedagogical potential of shifting experience from its

foundational status while simultaneously crediting what Spivak has called 'strategic

essentialism'.[7] I argue for the feasibility of a carefully constructed, and politically

mediated poststructural engagement with anti-racist pedagogy and practice.

1.3 THE CONTEXT

The context in which this analysis takes place is, of course, crucial. I'd like to

outline the social context for this project, and explain my characterization of

progressive, white culture service organizations. While this project is about the

potential of educational interventions to transform consciousness and foster effective

political action, this cultural focus does not belie the hard materialist facts of the

global and local social structures of domination. As Razia Aziz has stated: "Anti-

black racism is one of the great political facts of our time, in large part because of its

relationship to immense wealth creation and appropriation on a global scale" (Aziz,

1995, p.163). Clearly any discussion of racism must grow from an historical

understanding of the impact of colonialism, and the ongoing global organization and

intensification of capitalism.[8] Further, while pedagogical interventions are by nature

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[7] Spivak discusses the perils and possibilities of strategic essentialism in The postcolonial critic (1990), and revises and clarifies her position in the first chapter of Outside in the teaching machine (1993).

[8] For example see: Maria Mies et al. Eds. Women: The last colony (1988), or Gita Sen and Caren Grown Development, crises, and alternative visions (1987), or

discursive, they are not separate from more overt and material effects of power, including the sheer extent of racist violence. In addition, as I will discuss, in a poststructural analysis there is no clear division between concrete material power and discursive power. Culture, and with it education, is key to both the resilience of racism and to the process of resisting it. Aziz suggests that, "Though subversive forms of representation in isolation cannot defeat racism, the *culture* of resistance is inseparable from the *goals* of liberation. An appropriation of history can establish black people as subjects of history, contemporary and past. To the extent that language, culture and discourse constitute reality, this process is pivotal" (1995 p.164, italics in original). So while this thesis does not focus on explicating the structurally profound role of racism in today's social organization, the virulence of its effects remains the all important context for these explorations.

The specific local setting is Toronto in the 1990s, a brief and selective portrait includes: corporate and government (provincial and federal) economic restructuring and downsizing, a history of institutionalized multicultural policy, and the largest ethnic and racially mixed population in Canada.[9] As I write this the federal

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Gloria Hull et al. Eds. All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave (1982).

[9] This is based on Statistics Canada 1991 census (1992) which, it must be noted, asks people to self identify under the much (justly) criticised term 'visible minority' including people who have been Canadian for many generations, recent immigrants, refugees, and with noticeable exclusion of First Nations people, who are categorized separately. 'Visible minority' is delimited as Chinese, Black, south Asian, West Asian and Arab, Filipino, South East Asian, Latin American, Japanese, Korean, Other Pacific Islands.

government is doing everything possible to deny the results of an official inquiry

into the torture and murder of Shidane Arone, and the shooting of a second Somali

man by Canadian soldiers during a 'peace keeping' mission in Somalia in 1993. The

inquiry found clear evidence of an organized cover up, deep corruption, and

entrenched racism within the armed forces.[10] These global and local realities impact

and structure the dynamics within the micro social setting of specific anti-racism

workshops and organizational practices. While I am reading specific organizational

and individual dynamics, I do so to reveal how institutional and social discourses

and practices structure and engender those moments.

At this point it would be helpful to define my use of the descriptor 'progressive

white culture organizations'. The workshop and post workshop organizational

experiences I am drawing from all take place within progressive, fairly mainstream,

albeit left leaning, social service organizations. Analysing the discourses and

practices of anti-racist change within liberal and progressive organizations is vital to

understanding the relatively sparse and scattershot successes of their anti-racist

initiatives. A composite and typical profile reveals that such organizations have

some ethno-racial diversity amongst participants/ staff/ service groups, but the

overall organization remains one of white culture in its hiring practices,

organizational structure, program/service goals, values and assumptions. People of

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[10] Toronto Star,(1997, July 5) and the Globe and Mail, (1997, July 5). The
inquiry was created in 1995 by the federal Liberal government to investigate all
aspects of the Canadian Airborne Regiment's 1992-93 mission in Somalia,
particularly the torture and murder of teen aged Shidane Arone. The inquiry was
shut down by the Liberal government ahead of schedule, preventing it from
investigating the role of the highestmilitary officials.

colour are under-represented in positions of decision making power, and over-represented in administrative and support roles. Equity and anti-discrimination policies will range from non existent to partial and inadequate. Most of the people involved in the organization consider themselves to be open minded, progressive and 'part of the solution, not part of the problem'. The organization likely has a history of fighting for a particular progressive cause such as anti-poverty, reproductive rights, housing and so forth, but will resist an analysis which articulates the issue along race lines. These organizations make explicit claims to progressive and oppositional work. Their raison d'etre is to provide alternative, and often community based services, and as such they position themselves in opposition to regimes of oppressive power. Thus, anti-racism initiatives (and perhaps other forms of anti-discrimination work) are often viewed as an add-on to an otherwise sound philosophy of operation. All of this makes it very difficult for these organizations and the individuals within them to acknowledge and address their own complicity in racist regimes of power.

I assume that this profile will be familiar to many readers who have worked, volunteered, or been activists in progressive social service organizations. I wish to underline that my project here does not provide an analysis of any specific organization. Indeed my point is that the power relations I explicate are manifest in a broad range of such organizations, which in turn are well represented in Canadian society. I believe that the liberal, polite, well intentioned environment of these progressive organizations is a vital site of critique because it exemplifies the extent of the subtle normalization of white privilege and power. Thus, this analysis can

illustrate the extent of the challenge to anti-racist pedagogy of revealing and disrupting these relations of domination. Further, in these politically conservative times, progressive organizations are frequently the most likely to be willing to seriously engage in anti-racist and other anti-discrimination efforts, while simultaneously being invested in their own correctness. Therefore, the micro social power relations revealed within such organizations' anti-racism training and organizational change efforts is a fruitful and necessary site to interrogate the reproduction of racist discourses, and the attendant entrenchment of white privilege.

I am personally drawn to this project because, as a white woman, I have witnessed, experienced, and participated in the very dynamics of white domination that I am critiquing. As such I do not underestimate the difficulty of first revealing (denormalizing), understanding, and then disrupting the reproduction of white power and privilege as it plays out in the specific setting under discussion. My effort here is far from comprehensive; domination/privilege is expressed in an infinite variety of forms, and one can never step 'outside' of these relations. This, however, is not a cynical observation in that I argue that while there is no innocent, apolitical position, there is always the possibility of more effective and radical progressive change in a contingent and contextual way. I focus upon the two dynamics of *storytelling* and *'moves to innocence'* because they are pervasive, and in some sense hinge upon questions of experience and subject location. This to me is fundamental to radically unpacking one's positionality in terms of various axes of oppression - domination, and of analysing the social structures which create those positions as meaningful.

My focus on anti-racism efforts within progressive white culture service organizations is an effort to explore the particularities of discourses and practices of white power and privilege, in a historically, locally specific way. I view this project as one intervention among an array of potential interventions. I argue that intervention strategies are necessarily historically and contextually specific. My focus is on the fairly subtle and nuanced ways in which the radical effectivity of anti-racist pedagogy is limited in specific ways, and obviously I believe that this is a valid and important area for criticism and a site for intervention. However, this is not to say that articulating the pedagogical challenges of revealing and disrupting discourses of white privilege as they are recirculated within anti-racist training is of paramount importance. It is worth stating that I do not privilege exclusively discursive interventions. Within educational institutions issues of curriculum, staffing (teaching and administrative), committee structure, and organizational hierarchy are all necessary sites of struggle. More broadly, political efforts such as strikes, protest rallies, boycotts, and other means of mobilizing progressive resistance are always relevant. I wish to neither underestimate nor overestimate the significance of this specific site of anti-racist change. However, the difficulties I analyse constitute major stumbling blocks for organizations and individuals interested in anti-racist change, and the theoretical issues raised are broadly applicable to both anti-oppression movements and to the field of critical pedagogy.

1.5 RACE AND RACISM

Taking seriously the poststructuralist view of the formational link between power and knowledge, it is crucial to have a word about words, definitions, and language use.

Any definition is incomplete and necessarily excludes as it defines; no terminology is innocent. Language is always tricky, and we must remain conscious of what is revealed/obscured by definitions and terminology. In this section I will explain my use of terms such as 'people of colour', 'black' and 'white'. I will then detail the analysis of race and racism that I use throughout this project, including my belief in the interdependent nature of various forms of oppression. Finally, I discuss my focus on the reproduction of whiteness and white privilege, and some of the risks of this engagement.

First, I'd like to briefly explain the descriptive phrases I use. I do use phrases such as 'women/men/people of colour', and 'black' and 'white' for their general descriptive value, without accepting them as concepts with a fixed meaning (Mani, 1990). However, one must be aware of the struggles over appropriate terms, and sensitive to the effects of any nominal strategy. For instance, both the term 'black' and 'people of colour' have been criticised for their homogenizing and essentializing implications. Further, people of non African origin are sometimes included as 'black', which some, including people of Asian descent have criticised as exclusionary and erasing. There are always linguistic convolutions to describe people of 'mixed race', a term in itself misleading in its literal biologism. Also, the meanings ascribed to these terms vary widely, for instance, in the US, black tends to refer to African Americans, while in the UK and to some extent Canada it is much more broadly applied. However, as Linda Carty has argued:

> ...recently many women of Colour feminists have ...written 'women of
>
> colour' or 'Third World women' not as women who constitute an automatic

unitary category based on geographic location or racial identity in opposition
to white, but as women sharing a common post-colonial struggle based on
their differential though intersecting histories of slavery, colonialism,
imperialism, racism, and genocide in capitalism. Their scholarship located
women of Colour not in terms of their problems and oppression in binary
oppositional categories to white Western women, but as women with
conscious agency in a daily struggle against their oppressors. Their analyses
propose the need to build a politic of unity around the most exploited peoples
of the world. (1992, p. 12)

It is in the spirit of this recent engagement of these terms that I will use them here.
Thus, I use the terms 'black', 'white', 'women/men of colour' in a troubled way,
with the intention not to overlook the specificity and unevenness of their expression
in our everyday lives. Rather than taking identity markers such as Aboriginal,
female, ethnic, lesbian, and so forth as, as Orner puts it, "a problem to be solved or
an obstacle to be avoided" (1992, p.74), an engagement with poststructuralism
enables one to view destabilized and non static subjectivities as a productive means
to interrogate naturalizing and dominating discourses.

Now I'd like to describe the analysis of race and racism that I work with in my
thesis. I work from an understanding of racism as a social construct: it is not based

on biology, phrenology, or genetics.[11] However, stating this does not belie the force, salience, or virulence of racism as an organizing regime in modern society, or historically.[12] It is not my project to provide *a* definition, the debates over this are long and complex, but as will become apparent throughout my thesis my engagement with poststructural analysis leads me to credit the role of structural and discursive forces, including their manifestation in brute violence, individual attitudes, social norms and organizational and institutional structures - all of which are expressed in and through specific historical locations. This is not to say that racism cannot be named, recognized and broadly defined. While a certain descriptive clarity is important, there is a way in which a quest for an absolute definition can deflect and prevent one from getting down to the business of revealing and disrupting racism, and producing counter discourses and strategies.[13]

Further, I argue that a single definition of racism is not possible because racism is not any *one* thing. In fact, there are many racisms - how racism is defined, and even who is constructed as racialized, is historically and locally variable. As McClintock

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[11] For further comment on debates on the definition of see: Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992); Gilroy (1993); Goldberg (1993); Essed (1991); Omi and Winant (1987).

[12] This viewpoint of race/ism as a social construct is not unanimously subscribed to, but has recently become predominant. Omi and Winant (1993) argue that a series of global shifts since the 1940s (including the rise of Nazism, decolonization and independence movements of Africa, urbanization of US black population and the civil rights movement) have led to the erosion of the concept of race as a natural and fixed phenomenon.

[13] Shaheen Ali, (personal communication, fall 1996).

has argued:

> Exploring the historical instability of the discourse on race - embracing as it
> did in the nineteenth century not only colonized peoples but also the Irish,
> prostitutes, Jews and so on - by no means entails a spin into the vertigo of
> undecidability. To dispute the notion that race is a fixed and transcendent
> essence, unchanged through the ages, does not mean that all talk of races must
> cease, nor does it mean that the baroque inventions of racial difference had
> no tangible or terrible effects. (McClintock, 1995 p.8)

In the current Canadian climate *colour* has been, and is, particularly central and
pervasive in the construction of who is racialized, and targeted for discrimination,
and who *remains so over time* (unlike, for example, people of Irish descent such as
myself). While this is a crucial point, it is also equally important to retain the
particularities and tremendous variety of forms that racism, of colour and otherwise,
takes as it is expressed in specific social locations. Goldberg has argued this point
most clearly.

> *Race* [does not] have a single transhistorical meaning, nor does it always
> connote the same phenomenon . . . . Race is irreducibly a *political* category . .
> . [it is] accordingly as altogether misleading to inquire into the determinants
> or causes of racism as such, for . . . there is no generic racism, only
> historically specific racisms each with their own socio-temporally specific
> causes. There is no single (set of) transcendental determinant(s) that
> inevitably causes the occurrence of racism- be it nature, or drive, or mode of
> production or class formation. There are only the minutiae that make up the

fabric of daily life and specific interests and values, the cultures out of which racialized discourse and racist expressions arise. Racist expressions become normalized in and through the prevailing categories of modernity's epistemes and institutionalized in modernity's various modes of social articulation and power. (Goldberg, 1993, p. 90)

Racism is a particular expression of larger processes of Othering/marginalizing and centering, it does not exist in isolation from other forms of oppression. The perspective that I work with here is that all forms of marginalization and centering are cross fertile, and *depend upon one another* as regimes of social organization. These interlocking systems of oppression function not only at the macro social level, but are manifest in the daily minutiae of life.[14]   Certainly in North American history race, gender, sexuality and class relations were interwoven and interdependent in the abuses of slavery[15] and imperialism,[16] both defining institutions of 'the West'. McClintock argues "Race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other - if in contradictory and conflictual ways" (1995, p.

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[14] On the interlocking nature of oppressions see: Apple and Weis (1983); Fellows and Razack (1998); McCarthy (1993); and Walkerdine (1990).

[15] One seminal argument on this is Jaqueline Jones, Labor of love, labor of sorrow: Black women, work and the family, from slavery to the present (1986).

[16] For a sustained and historically detailed development of this argument see: Anne McClintock Imperial leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial conquest (1995).

5).

While my analysis is rooted in the interdependent articulation of various

oppressions in the everyday, nonetheless this project will focus primarily on racism

and the reproduction of white privilege because these issues are so frequently

deflected and minimized. This emphasis is also a strategic prioritizing given the

particular pedagogical problems I want to analyse, and the necessarily limited scope

of my project. Goldberg suggests that racism is not a:

> . . . homogeneous phenomenon . . . not only is [there] no single
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> characteristic form of racism, but also that the various racisms have differing
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> effects and implications. Racisms assume their particular characters, they are
>
> exacerbated, and they have different entailments and ramifications in relation
>
> to specific considerations of class constitution, gender, national identity,
>
> region, and political structure. . . . It follows that there may be different
>
> racisms in the same place at different times; or different racisms in various
>
> different places at the same time; . . .different, that is, in the conditions of
>
> their expression, their forms of expression, the objects of their expression,
>
> and their effects - among different people at the same space-time conjuncture.
>
> (1993, p. 91)

One of the most important features of the current context is that only recently have

we reached the stage where an examination of whiteness - as being just as socially

constituted as oppressed racial categories - has come under theoretical analysis. We

are at an important 'post' colonial moment in which the transparency and

normalization of whiteness and white power/privilege is being rigorously examined. As Omi and Winant have argued: "The dissolution of the transparent racial identity of the formerly dominant group, that is to say, the increasing racialization of whites in Europe and the U.S., must also be recognized as proceeding from the increasingly globalized dimensions of race. As previous assumptions erode, white identity loses its transparency and the easy elision with 'racelessness' that accompanies racial domination. 'Whiteness' becomes a matter of anxiety and concern" (1987, p.8).

Quite rightly, earlier anti-racist efforts focussed on documenting, proving, reclaiming, reconstituting and analysing histories, experiences and epistemologies of oppressed peoples, and this work continues. Recent analyses have highlighted the micro social reproduction of the relations of oppression *and* domination such that the power relations of both positions of this discourse must be revealed and disrupted to foster the potential for liberatory social change. Michelle Fine has put it thus:

> Today the cultural gaze of surveillance - whether it be a gaze of pity, blame,
> or liberal hope - falls on persons of color. Whether we consider ...[specific
> schools], or listen to white working class men angry about affirmative action,
> social surveillance, as Foucault foretold, falls squarely on those who are
> marked : Colored . . . Social scientists too have colluded in this myopia,
> legitimizing the fetish, turning away from opportunities to surveil 'white',
> refusing, therefore, to notice the institutional choreography that renders
> whiteness meritocratic and other colors deficient. (Fine, 1997, p. 64)

As my arguments throughout the thesis will illustrate, it is vital to develop strategies

which can more effectively negotiate the varied relations of domination including: race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability and so forth. My experience with both challenging and downright destructive impasses within heterogenous groups fostered my desire to explore how those impasses are produced in the hopes of developing more effective ways of revealing and disrupting operations of whiteness and its privileges, and of communication across differences.[17] This task requires a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which we are (multiply) positioned as subjects within relations of domination, and the ways that positioning, (for example of domination for whites in terms of race, while also intersecting with class, sex, sexuality, and ability) is constituted and recirculated. Having stated this priority I must also own that I find this to be an uncomfortable shift, and one that is not without its risks. This is true not only in terms of the personal difficulty of interrogating the ways privilege operates in my life, and the difficulties of decentering whiteness, but also in terms of how such an emphasis can play out. This project and others like it which focus on the reproduction and operations of white privilege contain the risk of failing to negotiate a politically effective strategic balance, which could result in recentering whiteness at the expense of people of colour and useful strategies of progressive change. Thus, while I value the theoretical and political necessity of ventures such as mine, there is the risk in this of making whites and whiteness an imbalanced focus within anti-racism liberation theories and strategies. I believe that only by maintaining an ongoing, context specific, practical evaluation of the *effects* of such strategies will we be able to asses

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[17] See for instance: Donald and Rattansi (1992); hooks (1988); Narayan (1988); and Rezai-Rashti (1995).

their radical potential, and in this we are at the very preliminary stages.

In addition, while I embrace the political potential and the theoretical necessity of interrogating the operations of whiteness, the way that this emphasis plays out in the less theoretical field of popular culture is another matter. As Fine has suggested, radical interrogations of whiteness must critically engage with the rising construction of a reconstituted mythical whiteness "bereft of power, yet still symbolizing merit, quality and deservingness" (Fine, 1997, p. 63). This is evidenced in even the most cursory reading of Toronto media which reveals examples of some white people blaming 'minorities' or 'blacks' for the painful costs of global economic restructuring and the current crises of late capitalism. Additionally, the language of pluralism, as promoted within Canadian multicultural policy, has insinuated itself in popular consciousness. This is expressed in the sensibility that 'we are all unique in our harmonious differences'. This sensibility of pluralism can create, and in some way legitimize the space for (white) racists to claim the need to 'save white culture', or for white only spaces. As I will explore further in chapter two, the potential engagements of a kind of popular pluralist rhetoric, without an adequate analysis of power relations, can be very serious in its conservative and racist applications.

Finally, I want to briefly note some of the potentially risky engagements that can flow from the socio-historical constructionist view of racism I utilize. The popular culture misuse of a social constructionist analysis of racism can take many forms. For example, there is the idea that if racism is socially constructed, it must be so pervasive, so institutionalized that there is really nothing that can be done about it.

This is the quasi social constructionist version of the 'naturalness' and 'inevitability' of racism which leads to the argument that we ought to simply carry on with the status quo. A second misuse of this perspective is found in the argument that racism (and also sexism, classism . . .) is just one of many equally important issues which cannot be disentangled or prioritized, so once again the argument becomes that we should carry on with the status quo. In this example the multiplicity of oppressed social positions is used to reduce complex power relations to a tangle of relativised differences. More subtly, a recognition of the complexity and contradictions of the operations of power (in terms of race, sex, class and so forth) calls into question any straightforward, uniform use of terms such as black, women, or the poor.[18] Thus, it has been argued, that we can no longer speak of 'girls' or 'women' or 'people of colour' any more, again reinforcing the status quo. Rather than grappling with (fluid) identity and (shifting) social location we're encouraged to avoid tricky language and return to a generalized humanism. Omi and Winant have stated:

> The main task facing racial theory today, in fact, is no longer to problematize a seemingly 'natural' or 'common sense' concept of race - although that effort has not been entirely completed by any means. Rather our central work is to focus attention the *continuing significance and changing meaning of race.* It is to argue against the recent discovery of the illusory nature of race; against the supposed contemporary transcendence of race; against the widely reported death of the concept of race; and against the replacement of the category of race by other, supposedly more objective categories like ethnicity, nationality,

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[18] Alison Jones addresses this problem in "Becoming a girl: Post-structural suggestions for educational research" (1993).

or class. (Omi and Winant, 1993, p.3 original emphasis)

1.5 POSTSTRUCTURALISM

At this point I would like to provide an overview of the poststructural concepts and

strategies I will be drawing upon and developing throughout this thesis. An array of

feminist and anti-racist writers have taken up aspects of poststructural thought in a

variety of different ways, and at least an equal number have either ignored, rejected

or argued against such an engagement. Poststructuralism itself is merely a generally

descriptive term for a large constellation of ideas which are hotly contested, and it is

not my intention to imply a single homogenous theory. However, there are some

common concerns among the authors I have utilized, which can meaningfully be

described as poststructural.[19]   I make no pretense at having delimited what can be

contained within this term, which is a subject of ongoing debate.   Rather,

throughout the thesis I attempt to explain and theoretically ground the concepts I use

with references to a variety of thinkers.   Wendy Brown (1995), Judith Butler

(1992), Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson (1990), Patti Lather (1991), Chantalle

Mouffe (1992), Donald and Rattansi (1992) and Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1990, 1993)

among others, have explicated the complex issues involved in the nomenclature of

'postmodernism' and 'poststructuralism' and its relationship to progressive, and

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[19] Many of the authors that have shaped my understanding of postmodernism/
poststructuralism have been quite critical of this area of theory, some of these are:
Diamond and Quinby, eds. _Feminism and Foucault_ (1988); E.A. Kaplan
Psychoanalysis and cinema (1990); Annette Kuhn _Women's pictures_ (1982);   Linda
Nicholson _Feminism/Postmodernism_ (1990); C. Ramazanoglu _Up against Foucault_
(1993); Caroline Steedman _Landscape for a good woman_ (1986); Trinh Minh-ha
Woman native other (1989).

particularly to feminist politics.[20] Brown has expressed it thus:

> Is poststructuralism equal to postmodernism? What is the relationship of each
>
> to post-Marxism? And if Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, and Donna Haraway are
>
> all poststructuralists, do *they* share a politics? What kind of kinship does
>
> Vaclav Havel's 'postmodernism' bear with Richard Rorty's? (Brown, 1995,
>
> p. 30)

This section is intended as a brief overview of several key poststructural concepts

which are relevant to this project, and which will be drawn upon and developed

further in subsequent chapters. Poststructural thought rejects monolithic categories

and totalizing, foundationalist theories of the social world. A critique of essentialism

is pervasive. No single concept (such as patriarchy) or theory of social change (such

as Marx's historical materialism) can encompass/explain the social world. In fact,

poststructuralism goes beyond questioning the neutrality or objectivity of the

enquirer to question the very existence of any universal reference points. There is a

rejection of the western tradition of liberal humanism with its emphasis on the free,

rational, autonomous individual.[21] Any idea of an essential nature (be it human,

black, feminine, or lesbian, for example) is also rejected, as is the concept of

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[20] While my focus is on poststructuralism, it is worth noting that, as Mouffe
has argued: "The critique of universalism, humanism, and rationalism has come from
many different quarters and it is far from being limited to authors called
'poststructuralists' or 'postmodernists'. . . including Heidegger . . . Gadamer . . .
Wittgenstein . . . and Lacan" (1992, p. 369).

[21] The politicizing of previously normalized micro social realm is one area in
which poststructuralist theory owes much to feminist theory, accepting that the
methodologies involved can be radically divergent.

structural determinism.

To a great degree my interest in poststructuralism stems from its unique analysis of power. Power is no longer seen as a (relatively) monolithic, top down, and exterior force by which we are shaped and which we resist, be it for example, patriarchy, class domination, or imperialism. Rather, power is exercised in every social interaction in a multitude of ways. As Foucault argues: "[Power] is a composite result made up of a multiplicity of centres or mechanisms . . the task of political anatomy is to analyse the operations of these 'micro-powers', the relations that are between them, and their relations with the strategic aims of the state apparatus" (Foucault, cited in Martin 1988, p 4). The processes of imperialism, for example, certainly operate on a macro social scale, but also are sustained by capillary like manifestation in a highly localized, micro social way. Power has no singular origin, but its effects are everywhere. Wendy Brown argues: "Bursting its modernist containment by the formal categories and boundaries of sovereignty and the public, power reveals itself everywhere: in gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality; in speech, writing, discourse, and the arts" (Brown, 1995, p. 38). In this conceptualization there is no possibility of neutral, apolitical, ahistorical, *or innocent* ground. As Patti Lather has argued, this means that we must interrogate how our ". . . very efforts to liberate perpetuate relations of domination" (1991 p. ix).

Correlative to this is the breakdown of traditional dualisms: self/society, truth/fiction, particular/universal, private/public. Social theory must analyse the formational interplay, and leaky boundaries among these spheres/categories of social

life. Foucault's theories of discursive regimes of power is an influential example of the fluidity between concrete and symbolic forms of power. I understand and utilize 'discourse' as, as Ramazanoglu states: ". . .historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth. . . (which) function as a set of rules. . . power is constituted in discourses and it is in discourses, such as those of clinical medicine, that power lies. Discourses produce truths. . . . (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p.19). As Foucault argues: "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault cited in Ramazanoglu, 1993, p 19).

Central to my engagement with poststructuralist theories is the unique view of subjectivity and experience. In this analysis subjectivity and experience are inextricably linked to the afore mentioned capillary like operations of power relations. Individuals are constituted in and by a complex web of social relations, and there is no one unified, unmediated self. This subjectivity is by definition an ongoing and dynamic process. "Foucault insists that our subjectivity, our identity, and our sexuality are ultimately linked; they do not exist outside of or prior to language and representation, but are actually brought into play by discursive strategies and representational practices" (Martin, 1988, p. 7). Rather than seeking a singular and 'true' identity or (revolutionary) subject, the question becomes how does any subjectivity or identity become constructed within different discourses. The humanist vision of rational, autonomous, singular, and conscious subject, which was central to the Enlightenment, has been de-centered, and "refashioned as a site of disarray and conflict inscribed by multiple contestatory discourses" (Lather, 1991, p.5).

There is an emphasis on multiplicity and difference, and on the non-static nature of experience and identity. Importantly, however, this plurality is not a question of relativised differences. In a poststructural analysis it is meaningless to discuss *differences* without discussing *power relations:* as power is extant in all social relations, difference can never mean simple pluralism. No subject position is discrete, its meaning utterly depends on the meanings constructed by other subject positions. For example, the centrality of heterosexism depends upon the othering of homosexuality, which also interlocks with the process of othering in racism, imperialism, classism and so forth. Further, in life these subject positions are always shifting, multiple and socio-historically specific.

This complex view of subject positions and subjectivity does not only apply *among/between* individuals but also *within* an individual. Since our subject positions are always being constituted by discursive relations and resistance strategies, *any individual is the bearer of multiplicity.* Mouffe argues that: "This plurality does not involve *coexistence,* one by one, of a plurality of subject positions, but rather the constant subversions and over determination of one by the others, which make possible the generation of 'totalizing effects' within a field characterized by open and indeterminate frontiers" (1992, p. 372). In other words, one's location in terms of privilege and oppression is shifting and dynamic as large scale historical institutions of various oppressions are expressed, resisted, and articulated in micro social contexts.

The move away from a monolithic, exterior and top down view of power results in

the fragmenting of the dichotomy of oppressor/oppressed. This introduces the possibility of a more complex understanding of subjectivity in which we are neither fully determined victims of false consciousness, nor are we fully autonomous agents impervious to dominant discourses. As I will argue in upcoming chapters, a significant (potential) advantage to a poststructuralist analysis is the exploration of the multiplicity of relations of subordination/domination, without resorting to the explanatory device of essentialism.

An analysis of the dynamic nature of identity can help to explain why aspects of identity such as lesbian or black, can be experienced as both joyful celebration, and a source of marginalization. Very few people have full membership in the set of most privileged identities including: white, male, heterosexual, able bodied, upper class, employed, educated, etc. It is much more common for individuals to experience partial membership in some identities constructed as powerful, and others constructed as oppressed. Of course a Foucauldian analysis breaks this down into even more site specific, micro social relations such as: teacher - student, doctor - patient, scientist - lay person, and so on, (Foucault, The history of sexuality, vol 1 1990, and Power/Knowledge 1990) such that there is a constant mediation between macro and micro social systems, which are in themselves interdependent (class, race, sex, and so forth). This not to say that some oppressive discourses don't retain greater salience and consistency across many sites, racism and heterosexism for instance, have large scale, structural components which are manifest with amazing pervasiveness. But, as discussed in the section 'Race and Racism' above, the meaning, content, and experience of these relations of domination vary, and are

historically and contextually specific, as are the strategies of resistance they engender.

One of the ways this development of political thinking about subjectivity and identity has played out is in charges of exclusion and essentialism in the mobilization of social categories such as 'woman'. Since the 1980s feminist work has recognized that too often the subject category of 'woman' has been used in ways that obscure the differences and power relations between actual women.[22] As has been effectively charged by many women of colour, feminism has at times hidden behind sisterhood in a way that denied the fact that one women's privilege rests on precisely the same ground as another woman's oppression (Bannerji, 1991; hooks, 1988). Aziz suggests that:

> To address this problem requires the prior recognition that black women's historical position as peripheral to the grand workings of power in society has precluded us hiding behind a mask of generality: too often the exception, the special case, the puzzling, more oppressed or exotic anomaly (even within feminism), we have been largely denied the voice of authority by which white women appear to speak on behalf of the female sex as a whole. (Aziz, 1995, p. 165)

This debate continues through the evaluation of the political necessity of unifying

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[22] For example see: Hazel Carby "White women listen!" in The empire strikes back, (1992); Angela Davis Women race and class (1983); bell hooks Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black (1988); Audre Lorde Sister outsider (1984).

identity based descriptors, and the risks of essentialism and exclusion of this strategy.

In subsequent chapters I will explore how my engagement with poststructuralist theories can offer a useful way of negotiating this dilemma of power and of multiple subject positions within feminism, without necessarily sacrificing the potential for strategic mobilization behind subject categories such as 'women of colour'. Wendy Brown has expressed this dilemma of the political viability of the subject thus:

> This ubiquity of power's appearance through postmodernity's incessant secularizations and boundary erosions both spurs and frustrates feminist epistemological and political work: on the one hand, it animates and legitimizes feminism's impulse to politicize all ideologically naturalized arrangements and practices; on the other, it threatens to dissipate us *and* our projects as it dissolves a relatively bounded formulation of the political and disintegrates the coherence of women as a collective subject. (Brown, 1995, 38)

I would now like to introduce the issue of resistance. The problem of theorizing resistance in a strategically effective manner in terms of specific political goals (such as equality), is evident in some feminist work (poststructuralist and otherwise) in which the very act of resistance is deemed a progressive impulse. This slippage is perhaps understandable when one considers the theoretical emphasis on deconstruction of dominant discourses and texts, and the corollary move to decipher

counter discourses which rupture the monolithic impression of domination contained therein. The oppressed Other, be it women, homosexuals, the poor, people of colour and so on, have never been fully silenced, even within texts/realities created by a dominant culture. Hope, we are to understand, resides in those moments of hidden knowledge, alternate readings, and alterity from the supposed seamlessness of the dominant discourse. This linguistics based discourse theory has been influential in some strains of poststructrualism. The 'structuralism' we are 'post' to refers largely to linguistic (Lacan) and anthropological (Levi-Strauss) structures in the ontology of human development. Indeed this thesis, with its socio-historical specific micro analysis of the techniques of power, owes much to this vein of theory.

While resistance has been, and remains a vital tactic in political strategies, and is an integral aspect of survival, we can no longer afford to romanticize its effects. It is important to note that this elision between resistance and a liberating or progressive impulse is inaccurate. Foucault (1980) defines all power as producing resistance. Resistance, in and of itself, is not progressive. As resistance is coterminous with power the effects of either as liberatory or oppressive is not self evident, but rather, is a matter of political enquiry. Thus, by definition all discourses are implicated in power relations, including progressive strategies. Any teacher who has attempted to integrate a feminist or anti-racist perspective into their work will surely be familiar with a range of student resistance strategies to that 'regime of truth'. (For example see Ellsworth, 1989; Hoodfar, 1992; and Orner, 1993. Wendy Brown has argued: " (W)hile postmodern conditions produce certain historical, epistemological, and ontological ruptures in terms of which we are challenged to develop new political

understandings and projects, these ruptures do not by themselves produce a particular politics; they have no necessary or inevitable political entailments" (Brown, 1995, p. 32).

The anti-racism training and organizational change process I analyse are not innocent discourses. As I discussed earlier in this section, there is no such thing as a value neutral, ahistorical, pure position. Anti-racist pedagogy and praxis constitutes a particular regime of truth, and as such will generate a range of resistance strategies. This analysis of resistance as coterminous with power is essential to understanding my critique of 'moves to innocence' and the operations of storytelling in an anti-racist change process, and will be developed further in subsequent chapters.

Finally, these analyses of the productivity of power and of dynamic subjectivity, lead to particular ideas of social change. With a complex view of subjectivity it becomes clear that there is no one pure voice of liberation (or oppression). Resistance to domination doesn't arise from any single point (such as the proletariat, people of colour, or feminist consciousness). Rather, we resist, struggle and create change in a multiplicity of ways and locations at both the macro and micro social level. Thus, we are neither wholly constructed and determined, nor wholly free. One of the most exciting and defining features of poststructuralism is this denormalizing of the every day, and the explication of power relations of the micro social. I see this as a double movement in which on the one hand power is (rather depressingly) , understood as operating in all social relations (including formation of

experience and subjectivity), and, more hopefully, power relations are therefore vulnerable to disruption, resistance, and change in a vast multiplicity of sites. Subjects are constituted through, but not wholly determined by, discursive relations. This clearly problematizes the nature of experience and truth claims made based on experience. Joan Scott has argued that poststructuralist insights can provide a "...way of changing the focus and the philosophy of our history, from one bent on naturalizing 'experience' through a belief in the unmediated relationship between words and things, to one that takes all categories of analysis as contextual, contested, and contingent"(Scott, 1992, p. 36). One of the themes of this thesis is the mobilization of experience within anti-racist practices, including how experience or the claimed lack of it can be used to authorize privilege. I also explore some of the risks (for whom?) and challenges of opening up the realm of experience to discursive analysis.

Critical questions do arise from the shift in theory that poststructuralism provides, particularly for marginalized groups and those interested in anti-racism and social justice struggles. With an emphasis on multiple and fluid subjectivities discursively structured at the micro social level, is there a risk of a nihilistic fragmentation of marginalized identities which makes political mobilization difficult if not impossible? Is it possible to mediate between different, sometimes conflicting experiences, and if so, how? How might the idea of the de-centred identity be taken up and used by dominant discourses and dominant individuals? How do we interrogate experience without losing its epistemic value, particularly for marginalized people? The risks of engaging with these questions in not equally

shared as 'we' are differentially positioned in terms of power.[23] Racialized (and

other) hierarchies of privilege/domination determine that the answers to these

questions will differ according social location in relation to power. These are some

of the questions most germane to assessing the risks and benefits of the

poststructural politicizing of experience I engage in.

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[23] An analysis of unequal risks produced by different social locations see:
Anthias and Davis (1992); Aziz (1995); Essed (1991); Mani (1990); Orner (1993);
and Razack (1993).

CHAPTER 2: TELLING STORIES & SHARING EXPERIENCES

It is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken. (Audre Lorde cited in Sawicki p.17, 1991)

Breaking silences, telling our tales, is not enough. (Adrienne Rich cited in Rockhill, 1993 p. 39)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes a detailed look at the operations of the practice of telling stories and sharing experiences in an anti-racist change process. Fittingly, the chapter begins with the telling of 'my own' stories. While none of the 'True Fiction' stories is literally about me, all are drawn from my experiences in a range of various organizations. While I have elected not to primarily explicate my own roles and (re)actions, I in no way pretend to be absent within the dynamic power relations I explore.[24] It is implicit within the poststructuralist inflected theoretical framework I utilize that a purely objective and neutral observer/analyst is an impossibility. Nor

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[24] Aside from my interest in the political dilemmas that I get to theorize about in this thesis, there is another reason why I chose not to primarily emphasize my personal, ongoing, journey with unlearning racism. Having successfully negotiated the world of the university thus far, I find personal writing very difficult. I have learned too well that, as Kari Dehli describes "...becoming competent within the university and its forms of knowledge production seems to require not just a transformation, but a forgetting of emotion, desire, pain or pleasure..." (1991, p. 65). This, for me, tends to produce a sort of binding difficulty in conducting an analysis which is both political and self reflexive.

is it necessary for accuracy and truth once one has rejected the feasibility of absolute

measures of either (as I discussed in chapter one). I try not to take refuge in the

authority of the exterior narrator. Instead, I embrace the partiality of my

perspective. Thus, while personal reflections constitute only a small portion of this

project, I am everywhere in the text.

Through a detailed description and analyses of two 'True Fiction' examples I

analyse the implications of the pedagogical and popular practice of personal

testimony. Drawing from an number of theorists[25] I critique the ways in which the

mobilization of storytelling functions (often inadvertently) to normalize and re-

circulate white power and privilege, despite the stated goal of shifting these power

relations. The first story is explicitly pedagogical in that it takes place at an anti-

racism workshop. The second story takes place after the workshop, at a staff

meeting of an organization engaged in anti-racist organizational change.

I will discuss the important precedent of 'telling stories' in feminist and other

liberationist philosophies as an intentional tool of consciousness raising. I will

examine how the problems of this practice are the same whether intentionally

initiated by the teacher/trainer, or spontaneously by the participants. After telling

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[25] Especially important on this point is, Teresa Ebert "Subalterity and feminism in the moment of the (post) modern" (1995), as well as: Elizabeth Ellsworth "Why doesn't this feel empowering" (1989); Patti Lather Getting smart (1991); Luke and Gore Feminism and critical pedagogy (1992); Mimi Orner "Interrupting calls for student voice in 'liberatory' education (1992); Trinh Minh-Ha Woman, native other (1989); Sherene Razack "Storytelling for social change" (1993); and Valerie Walkerdine, School girl fictions (1990).

two 'True Fiction' stories I explore the extent to which the problems I critique flow from liberal modernist assumptions which infuse anti-racist interventions, both pedagogical and organizational. I then specifically explore the ways in which empathy, experience, and thus subjectivity are mobilized. This leads me to argue that a poststructural conception of the complex operations and reproduction of power and subjectivity can provide a way of moving beyond the problems of relativistic plurality on the one hand, and essentialized positioning on the other.

I will now recount the two 'True Fiction' stories, the third story will be told in chapter three. My detailed analysis will follow. In considering my 'readings' of the True Fiction examples, it is important to remain cognizant of the social and organizational context as outlined chapter one. The liberal progressive organizations in question aim to provide alternative and often community based services. Their orientation is to progressive and oppositional work, and they view themselves in opposition to regimes of oppressive power. This makes it very difficult for these organizations and the individuals within them to acknowledge and address their own complicity in racist regimes of power. Within this context it is my intention is to paint portraits of specific events which disturbed me into doing this investigation. No reader warning is necessary, these are not particularly gruesome in their violence, nor extreme by any standard. Indeed it is their very dailiness which makes them a vital site of critique.

2.2 'TRUE FICTION' SCENARIOS

1. **Sharing Stories/ Workshop**: The setting is an anti-racism organizational change

workshop which takes place over several days. The participants come from the type of liberal, progressive, white culture organizations described earlier (in chapter one under 'Context'). About 15% of the participants are diverse people of colour. The goal of the workshop is to provide concrete tools to create structural change within the various organizations represented, thus, the workshop has less of an emphasis on individual anti-racist consciousness. Participants set specific goals in a range of organizational areas, including: mission statements, policies and procedures, culture and value, personnel, program/service delivery and so forth.

The facilitators distinguish their approach as anti-oppression in contrast to multi-cultural. They do this without providing a set definition of racism, but they emphasise its multifaceted expressions in individual attitudes and behaviour, cultural and ideological forms, and its structural and institutional levels of operation. Early exercises help the group to identify and problematize their/our view of culture, ethnicity, race, nationality, and identity in general. The facilitators get us to problematize our conceptions of those categories, and appreciate their leaky boundaries.

The immediate framework for the sharing of personal stories can occur either through invitation by the facilitators for participants to share diverse experiences of marginalization, or through unsolicited narratives by participants (white and of colour). In this instance, the facilitators' goal is to emphasize how many people must negotiate multiple oppressions, as well as to convey the interdependent nature of diverse oppressions. After discussing various forms of oppression including

(dis)ability, sexuality, sex, class, citizenship status and so forth, they ask for a couple of personal stories from the participants in an attempt to convey that people are marginalized and experience oppression in any number of ways. Rather than a couple of stories, numerous white participants begin to focus on their own experiences of class, language, culture, ability and even looks-based discrimination. Very quickly the group takes off with the invitation to share their own experiences of various forms of oppression. Culture is particularly emphasized. Partly because the white participants are numerically dominant, this exercise produces a lot of discussion. (However, as I will discuss, the effect of this has more to do with domination on the basis of political and social power). Soon the people of colour become mostly silent, as do a few white participants.

The facilitators, both women of colour, try to get the group to make the link from their varied experiences, to the concept of how multiple oppressions are interrelated. However, the group, though not cohesive, is side tracked by several white participants in a different direction. In this group the result of the invitation to tell our stories is that white experiences of non racial forms of oppression become the focus of a drawn out and emotional discussion. One white participant even concludes that she 'was a victim of racism' because of cultural and language based discrimination. (Despite having argued in chapter one against the feasibility of any set definition of racism, this claim of racism by a white, non Jewish woman, demonstrates the problem of not having a simple and accessible definition. This is especially difficult for teachers who want to integrate a social constructionist and historically specific understanding of racism into their pedagogy). Both the issue of

racism, and the people of colour, as well as some white participants, are effectively marginalized by an emphasis on white experiences of non racial oppression. At points the line between structural systems of domination and mere inconvenience is blurred. Thus, despite the facilitators providing a very clear framework for the 'sharing of stories' exercise, clarity about the key concepts, and a number of illustrative exercises, several white participants manage to shift the focus away from racism. As I will discuss, I believe that the resulting deflection of issues of racism is not necessarily the intent, but it most certainly is one important effect.

A different but related problem occurs when the facilitators invite more personal stories for a separate exercise. The trainers want to illustrate how race consciousness impacts even our earliest relations with others, and our sense of ourselves. This is an interesting effort to reveal the pervasiveness of issues of racism in a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural contexts, represented by the workshops' participants. The trainers ask each of the participants to share their earliest consciousness of race. Thus, it is not a random, voluntary request, but rather a structured 'go around' (of course people always have the right to 'pass' and not speak).

Once again, given the number of white participants it is inevitable that their/our (not homogeneous) experiences again predominate. The facilitators do not set up any mechanism to name or redress this. However, the more significant problem is the effect of revisiting and even re-experiencing of the violence of racism for the black, Asian, Indian and other people of colour present. Given that racism is a structuring

principle in this society, it is inevitable that most of the white participants' earliest consciousness of race would be racist in some way. Thus, many but not all of the white people recount tales of racist verbal abuse, attitudes, physical abuse and so on, either as observers or abusers.

The exercise results in some truly nasty dynamics. The room is flooded with stories of racist incidents ranging from privileged obliviousness to acts of physical and psychological violence. A few white participants seem to relish the confessional aspect of their stories, as if anticipating some absolution. There is also a pronounced tendency to place all such racist impulses in the safety of the past. Once again, the people of colour become strikingly silent. Eventually, three or four white participants (myself included) try, in a variety of ways, to disrupt and challenge the dynamic. They directly challenge other whites about the implications of their stories, and try to identify the danger and ineffectiveness of the exercise. These interventions are interpreted as personal attacks by the other white participants, and the question is raised 'how can you question my experience?'.

This exercise utterly fails to achieve the facilitators' goals of an appreciation of the formative influence of racism. [26] The exercise causes splits within the group resulting in less integration of white and of colour people, and between the white participants who are critical of the exercise and those who are not. The damage to

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[26] The facilitators solicited and received a lot of feedback on all aspects of the workshop and I have no doubt that they have since adapted their facilitation of this exercise, or replaced it.

the trust that has been developing within the group is neither addressed nor resolved.

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2. **Black Manager/ Staff Meeting:** The setting for the second 'True Fiction' example is a general staff meeting which takes place shortly after an anti-racism workshop has been held for the organization. During the post workshop check-in, there is a consensus among some vocal white staff that the workshop went well, there is relief that it is 'over', and some self congratulations are expressed. Someone (white) says that she feels the organization has a way to go, but that overall "we are doing really well." The few staff of colour and some white staff appear to be very uncomfortable with this perspective. Others say that they think we have barely begun the process, which results in looks of surprise from other white staff. It becomes apparent there is a wide range of assessments about where the organization is in its anti-racism process, and very divergent understandings about what constitutes (anti-)racism.

Eventually, the only person of colour at the managerial level takes the initiative and states that she personally has experienced racism within the agency. She speaks briefly about how white culture organizations, as part of the larger racist social context, cannot help but be racist if they have never engaged in a rigorous anti-discrimination process. She states that her experiences of racism at the organization include both overt and subtle individual acts, as well as racism relating to organizational structure. The atmosphere immediately becomes very tense, with

many white staff retreating into surprised or protective silence. Then, a white staff person asks the black manager to provide specific examples, and clarify what she means by racist acts. The manager explains that it is not her responsibility to educate white staff as to what racism looks like and how either individually or as an agency they are perpetuating it. She also states that this question places her in an impossible and inappropriate position as the 'expert' on racism because she is black. The white staff person argues that if she cannot question the substance of charges of racism, how can she grapple with the problem? The entire discussion is very brief, no more than ten minutes. Because very little time has been allocated within the overall agenda for the anti-racist workshop check-in, the chair closes discussion and adjourns the meeting.

The fallout from this exchange is quite severe. Many white staff are mystified as to how to understand what has occurred, while a minority of more politicized staff (white and of colour) are frustrated by the lack of a forum and proper facilitation to unpack the exchange, learn from it, and attempt to move forward. The manager states that she feels personally undermined and unsupported. Within a few months she leaves the organization, in part because of these oppressive relations.

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The cases of 'Sharing Stories' in a workshop setting and that of the 'Black Manager' illustrate the problematic of storytelling and sharing experiences in heterogenous groups, whether solicited, volunteered, or demanded. Drawing from these 'True Fiction' cases I will now analyse the specific power dynamics operating in these

scenarios. My argument for the importance of a poststructuralist analysis of multiple

and shifting subjectivity flows from a critique of liberal epistemes operating within

the above scenarios. I am particularly interested in how liberal modernist ideals

impacted the workshop example in which the facilitators operated with a

multifaceted analysis of the operations of power and an explicitly anti-oppression, in

contrast to multicultural, framework. (Of course this is not to argue that they used a

poststructural framework.) Thus, I begin my analysis with a brief definition of my

use of 'liberal modernism'. I will then critique the way liberal modernism is

mobilized in the above examples through a particular deployment of empathy and

experience.

2.3 LIBERAL MODERNISM

Unfortunately, as Ali Rattansi has argued, many models of anti-racist education fail

to "...display an awareness of contradictions, inconsistencies and

ambivalences...their conception of racist ideologies and racist subjects or individuals

is no more sophisticated than that of multiculturalists" (Rattansi, cited in Anthias and

Yuval-Davis 1992, p. 161). While there is a growing body of anti-racist and other

radical educators who seriously engage with postmodern or poststructural ideas, a

tremendous gap exists between this excitement at the level of text and theory, and

the application of these ideas at the concrete level.[27] I will discuss how many of the

problems presented in the 'True Fiction' examples are in part produced through, and

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[27] In terms of racism this point has been discussed by: Bhabha (1990),
Grewal and Kaplan (1994); Myrsiades and McGuire (1995);and Trinh (1989). With
more of an emphasis on gender and class see: Bronwyn Davies (1989); Alison Jones
(1993); Valerie Walkerdine (1990);and Kathleen Weiler (1988).

remain unchallenged by liberal pluralist methodology, an approach which has been highly popular and also much critiqued.[28] A liberal, modernist, pluralistic approach does not refer to any one theory per se. I use the phrase 'approach' because I refer to a body of work with a range of methodological diversity. It is not my intention here to explicate the theoretical variety within this general approach, which has been done extensively elsewhere (Briskin, 1992; Ellsworth, 1989; and Essed, 1991). Indeed the entire movement of postmodern and poststructural thought is in some sense a critique of liberal modernism. Rather, at this point it would be helpful to provide a brief description of what I am referring to as a liberal modernist approach to anti-racist and/or multicultural training. A more sustained critique of the methodological and epistemological problems with this approach follows through my critique of the mobilization of empathy, experience, and more broadly subjectivity.

Typically, in a liberal modernist approach to issues of race and racism there is an emphasis on culture, individual attitudes, and sensitivity, as expressed for instance in the 'cultural sensitivity' style of workshop. There is an emphasis on the idea that discrimination is irrational, and an attendant belief that (rational) understanding and familiarity/exposure, combined with good intentions, are sufficient to disrupt oppressive relations. This approach is steeped in the modernist assumption of an autonomous, rational and singular individual, who can engage free will and rational

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[28] For a fuller critique of liberal pluralism and multicultural as opposed to anti-racist educational strategies see: Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992); and Gillian Klein (1993); Ng et al. (1993); and Ali Rattansi (1992).

thought like a pipeline, to dredge racism from his/her consciousness. Omi and Winant argue that much of liberal and radical social science slips, despite best intentions, into an objectivism about racial identity through the treatment of race as a set independent variable. There is an "inadequate problematizing of group identities, and the shifting parameters through which race is understood, group interests are assigned, statuses are ascribed, agency attained, and roles performed" (Omi and Winant, 1993, p 6). A liberal pluralist emphasis on the individual and their capacity to change through rational understanding fails to deal with the formative role of power relations on subjectivity, and the dynamic and shifting nature of both power and subjectivity.

Several things flow from a liberal modernist view of subjectivity and power relations. As discussed by Apple and Weis (1983), Goldberg (1993), McCarthy (1993) and Weiler (1988), the most obvious is an over emphasis of individual beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, and an under emphasis on the structural and material aspects of racism (and other forms of oppression). Thus, while racism is seen as a problem, it is not viewed as central to, or having a formational role in social organization. Furthermore, oppressive power relations, and the ways in which they are reproduced in various sites, remains unexamined and unchallenged. In a sense, liberal pluralism contains an oversimple view of a discrete separation between reality and consciousness. As in traditional literary and cinematic narrative realism 'reality' is seen as concrete, external and discrete, which can thus be understood in an unmediated and unambiguous way by the singular rational subject (Bhabha, 1990; DeLauretis, 1984; Kaplan, 1990; and Kuhn, 1982). Racism, like sexism, ableism,

classism and so forth, is understood as an exterior problem whose influences can be identified and extracted from behaviour and consciousness. Unlike poststructural theory, this modernist approach disregards the power relations inherent in the production of knowledge and subjectivity. As Homi K. Bhabha argues:

> The closure and coherence attributed to the unconscious power of colonial discourse, and the unproblematized notion of the subject, restrict the effectivity of both power and knowledge. This makes it difficult to see how power could function productively both as incitement and interdiction. Nor would it be possible without the attribution of ambivalence to the relations of power/knowledge to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the oppressed – those terrifying stereotypes of savage, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal pain of identification and alienation scenes of fear and desire in colonial texts. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 515)

It can be argued that the liberal modernist approach, particularly as expressed through multiculturalism, has reached high levels of popular currency in mainstream organizations, governments, and agencies precisely because this approach is 'soft' on the status quo of power relations and relatively non threatening to privilege (Rezai-Rashti, 1995). In fact, it is a testament to the resiliency of structures of racism that multiculturalism became entrenched in Canadian federal policy without noticeably disrupting racist relations. The resilience of the multifaceted phenomenon that is racism is seen, for example, in the racist response to multiculturalism which posits that there are fundamental incompatibilities among cultures which can only be resolved by a strong dominant culture. This perspective

is based on the essentializing of cultural differences, which are then engaged to cloak racist agendas (Donald and Rattansi, 1992, p. 2).

As we saw in the both of the 'True Fiction' examples no one was, in the moment, successful at identifying and disrupting the (re)production of white domination I describe. In what follows I will argue that the reason for this does not lie primarily with the inadequacies of any individual efforts, but rather was produced by larger systems of domination as expressed through liberal pluralist ideas which (in this case unintentionally) permeated the discourses of both the workshop and the staff meeting. In particular I will discuss the individual focus, a specific construction of empathy, and the reification of experience.

I'd like to go back to the 'Sharing Stories' example (above) to examine the incident in which many of the white workshop participants shifted the focus away from racism, and on to their own non race based experiences of discrimination. In this case the facilitators explicitly attempted to convey the interdependence of different oppressions, while remaining centered of issues of race. They discussed how class, sex, and race are all organizing systems in Canada, and how any one system of domination depends upon the other. They did a brief analysis of the demographics of black working women to illustrate their point. (This was a brief 'teaching moment' because, as with many such workshops, there is insufficient time to provide a detailed historical perspective). What is important here is that while the facilitators did *invite* stories from the participants, they did so in a contained way, while maintaining the centrality of racism. However, as we saw in the case example, the

majority of white participants leapt into that opening, and expanded it into a large, loud, and prolonged sharing of white experiences of various discriminations.

There are several possible interpretations of this phenomenon and while the readings that I offer begin by analysing individual practices, my interest is not in individual consciousness and practices in and of themselves, but rather understanding how those discourses and practices are produced by social structures. To begin with, I read this centering of white experiences and de-centering of issues of race as the refusal or inability of many (but not all) of the white participants to understand the complex view of power and interdependent oppressions put forth by the trainers. In this instance, some white workshop participants discuss various oppressions as mere pluralism. By pluralism I mean that while there is an appreciation for the multiplicity of differences, there in an inadequate analysis of the interrelationship of their power relations (Aziz, 1995; Bannerji, 1991; Mohanty, 1991). For example no one, myself included, took the opportunity to share a story about how whiteness had afforded us specific *privileges*. Instead the whites who participated in the exercise emphasized their *victim status*. This one sided emphasis on experiences of oppression, and silence about experiences of privilege is pronounced, and is the main subject of the next chapter 'Moves To Innocence'.

Leaving aside for the moment the way this example illustrates a move to innocence, it also testifies to the immense 'common sense' appeal of liberal pluralism. The rush of some of the white participants to tell their (selective) stories can be read as an example of a liberal pluralist emphasis on individuals and on a plurality of

differences, *without an analysis of the power relations which produce those differences as meaningful.* A liberal pluralist regimes of truth remain quite pervasive in the broader society, as well as being reproduced within some anti-racist/multicultural pedagogy (although it was not the stated or intended framework in this workshop). In this case, despite the trainers' efforts to avoid the pitfalls of liberal pluralism, some white participants successfully orchestrated a shift to that precise perspective. This shift illustrates the pervasive, almost normative acceptance of liberal pluralism, and the pedagogical challenges of successfully operating from a different framework. As Chandra Mohanty has argued, this is a very difficult challenge.

> (T)he most difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and **engaged**. Difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance, rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, *bypasses power as well as history* to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism. On the other hand, difference defined as asymmetrical and incommensurate cultural spheres situated within hierarchies of domination and resistance, cannot be accommodated within a discourse of 'harmony in diversity'.
> (Chandra Mohanty, 1991 p.73 italics added)

In addition, the shift, by several white participants, to liberal pluralism constitutes an example of their resistance to the politically challenging regime of truth being circulated by the facilitators. The facilitators invited *a couple* of stories of non racial oppression in order to convey the interrelations between multiple oppressions, but instead what was produced was a volume of white experiences of non race based

forms of discrimination and a corollary silence about white privilege. It is important to notice that the dynamic was so dominating and oppressive that none of the women of colour were able to speak to their experiences of the ways in which racism and sexism intertwine. In this case, the white stories had the effect of deflecting attention away from racism and from the interlocking nature of oppressions, and instead served to create an insular comfort zone of white experiences for some of the white participants. This is important in that it reveals, as I discussed in chapter one (in the section 'Poststructuralism') that resistance is coterminous with power, and is not necessarily in and of itself progressive. This example illustrates how readily pedagogy which attempts to incorporate a sense of the interdependence of various oppressions can, through the operations of liberal modernist epistemes, be coopted into a stance that resists anti-racism.

A different but related reading is that (some of the) white participants shifting the focus to themselves and their varied experiences of pain and/or oppression, at the cost of the intended (and mutually anticipated) emphasis on racism, can superficially be read as mere arrogance and self centeredness - and to some extent this may hold true. However, the issues involved in this discourse are far more complex. We need to move beyond a critique of individual radicalism and personal racism in contending with these issues, and move towards understanding the conditions which create the possibility for such deflection. This is not to say that individual political consciousness and practice is not important, but that an analysis of the recirculation of white privilege within anti-racist attempts to disrupt it cannot fruitfully remain at the individual level. In particular I will examine how empathy and experience are

mobilized, how they can contribute to the process of othering, and how the challenges of a multiplicity of subject positions can be dealt with.

2.4 EMPATHY

The ways in which empathy is mobilized within anti-racist (and other anti-oppression) workshops is crucial. For example it is a common pedagogical practice within anti-racism training for dominant participants to be encouraged to reflect upon, *and share*, their experiences of non race based forms of oppression, and, less frequently experiences of privilege. As in the 'Shared Stories' example, this exercise has the legitimate intent of promoting critical self reflection, but as the examples demonstrate, how it actually plays out is another matter. In racially mixed groups, particularly those in which whites predominate numerically and culturally, white participants' sharing, in a confessional way, their memories of witnessing or performing in blatantly racist ways such as verbal harassment, social isolation, or physical battery, cannot help but cause pain both new and revisited for those who may have been on the receiving end of such abuse.[29] In this group the effect was to push the people of colour into silence, further marginalizing them as individuals, as well as de-centering the issue of racism, which in itself mirrors the effects of racist social structures. It is possible that with different facilitation such an exercise could be useful in a confrontational teaching practice, but to my mind it is never worth the pain it causes to the people of colour participants. In addition, given the broad range

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[29] I am indebted to friends and co-workers of colour whose insight and experience helped me to develop this critique of these empathic confessional exercises.

of political awareness of the group, and the range of class, sexualities, and abilities present, this would be quite difficult. Obviously were people of colour the majority in a racially mixed workshop the dynamics would be very different. In addition it is important that the silence of the people of colour not be read in a monolithic way. Silence can be understood as a form of both defence and resistance, "the 'culture of silence' as Freire calls it, is common when oppressed groups come face to face with authority, even when that authority espouses radical or emancipatory politics" (Orner, 1992, p. 88). As Orner has argued:

> The contexts in which all these silences and speakings occurred were
> complex conjunctures of histories, identities, ideologies, local, national and
> international events and relations. Those who would distill only singular,
> stable meanings from student silence ignore the profoundly contextual nature
> of all classroom interaction. Those who would 'read' student silence simply
> as resistance or ideological-impairment replicate forms of vanguardism which
> construct students as knowable, malleable objects rather than as complex,
> contradictory subjects. (Orner, 1992, p. 82)

Secondly, the white participants often enjoy a confessional state during these exercises, with all the associations of being witnessed/seen and granted some absolution. The confessional mode in fact provides a form of pleasure (in correct knowledge) and release (from guilt) for the confessor without disrupting the operations of dominance that engendered the confession (Foucault, The history of sexuality volume one 1990). This occurred both in the instance of sharing non racial oppression, and in the case of whites reflecting on their earliest consciousness of

race/ism. As I described in the True Fiction example 'Shared Stories/Workshop', the result of such sharing was far from helpful. These exercises did not result in an appreciation for the interdependent nature of oppressions, nor did this expression of somewhat shared, but distinct experiences of discrimination serve as an empathic bridge to some understanding of racism by whites - even though this was one of the goals of the trainers. Once again I wish to emphasize that these difficulties are less a reflection of the individual skills of the trainers, although this is also important, but that the problems primarily flow from broader hegemonic social relations which are very difficult to disrupt. Thus, while the white people who engaged in this 'sharing' clearly felt that they were demonstrating their ability to relate to racist oppression, the effect was to re-centre whiteness and white concerns, emotions, and experiences.

In this scenario, empathy was engaged by the majority of the white participants to gain an emotional identification with another's situation. However, their focus on their own experiences, *without making connections to the operations of racism in their/our lives*, created a false sense of involvement. The stories served to say "look, I'm a victim just like you" with a simultaneous refusal to examine degrees of personal complicity and privilege in terms of those same relations of domination. For some of the white participants in this workshop this false sense of emotional involvement also functioned to assuage sadness and sideline guilt.[30]

When members of a dominant group use stories to this effect it can be understood as

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[30] This point is also discussed by Rosenberg in"Underground Discourses" in M. Fine et al. (Eds.) Off white (1997).

'seeking the comfort of home' (Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, 1986;and Kari

Dehli, 1991). While it may sound odd to talk about the 'comfort' of identifying

class, sexuality, gender, and culture based discrimination, in this context that focus

functioned to deflect issues of white privilege and culpability in terms of issues of

race. Again I emphasize that analysis and discussion of the infinite forms of

expression which interlocking oppressions can take is a necessary and legitimate

project. Thus, I am in no way arguing that there is no place for, for example, my

reflection of how aspects of my social location and identity (including: white, non

disabled, western, educated, lesbian from a large working class family) play out in

issues of racism. The point here, is that within this (and many other) workshops that

analysis was absent, despite the prodding and intentions of the facilitators. Instead

the effect of the 'shared stories' served to ensconce the white storytellers in positions

of innocence - as dominated, not dominators. This is a more comfortable and safe

perspective than struggling to do the difficult work of de-centering whiteness, and

reassessing their/our assumptions of privilege and innocence. (I will revisit the

specific operations of 'innocence' in chapter three).

These two examples of personal testimony within the workshop illustrate not that

empathy and storytelling can never be used effectively, but that the effects of these

practices are not predictable, and indeed can be contradictory to the teachers

intentions. In addition, these examples illustrate how easily efforts to teach about

complex and shifting, power inflected subject positions can be coopted into a stance

that resists anti-racism. As Narayan (1988), Ng (1991), Razack (1993), Schenke

(1991), and Walkerdine (1990) have argued we need to better understand how the

complex operations of power mediate empathic engagements, and how to negotiate

their relations within heterogenous groups. As Razack argues, "If ...we

problematise what the limits of our knowing are, based on our different subject

positions ... we end up realising that story-telling serves various groups differently

and that it should never be employed uncritically in mixed groups" (Razack, 1993, p.

66). Thus, I am not arguing that it will ever be possible to use the pedagogical

practice of storytelling to conduct anti-racism or other anti-oppression training such

that only the desired outcome would result. Pedagogy, surely, is an area where we

must recognize, as Joan Scott has said, "the knowledge of limits and the limits of

knowledge" (Scott, 1991, p.71).

Diverse experiences of marginality and oppression *can* provide a bridge of

experiential learning from which to extrapolate and empathically gain insight into an

oppression one isn't victimized by. In my roles as a teacher, as a student, and

through personal experience, I have found this to be a powerful and frequently

effective tool. I agree with Uma Narayan that "...emotions must be taken seriously

and not regarded as mere epiphenomenal baggage" (1988 p.31). However, within

anti-racism training, the mobilization of storytelling to engage empathy often

contains the assumption that a particular *politically progressive* outcome is

inevitable. In other words, emotional empathy is engaged as if it were simultaneous

with, or a substitute for, political critique and change. In addition to the sense of

safety, familiarity, and innocence that such stories can sometimes produce, their

appeal is linked with the problems of liberal pluralism discussed earlier. In

particular, the emphasis on sharing stories of oppression can reflect the liberal

premise that racism, and other forms of Othering, are based on a lack of familiarity and knowledge of the 'Other'. (This perspective was critiqued earlier in the section 'Liberal Modernism'). Thus, exposure to the experiences of 'Others' through storytelling would be expected to be profoundly effective at addressing racism and other forms of discrimination. History shows otherwise. Not only are the particular subjects produced through storytelling problematic, but how one hears, is taken up by and consumed is equally complex as one's social location in terms of axes of privilege/oppression determines the risk involved (Aziz, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Hoodfar, 1992; Ng, 1991; Omer, 1993; Trinh, 1989; Razack, 1993). The cultural entrenchment of ideals of liberal modernism helps to explain the appeal of storytelling as an intentional teaching device, and also why its effective use is so difficult to orchestrate. Thus, my argument is certainly not that one should not draw on the human capacity to engage emotions, as if a discrete severing were even possible, but rather that anti-racist educators have not done an adequate job of negotiating this complex terrain (Donald and Rattansi, 1992).

While I am critical of the particular engagements of storytelling revealed through the 'True Fiction' scenarios, I am in fact arguing for the possibility and necessity of communication across social differences, for the possibility of points of shared history, and for the validity of human emotion in expanding political consciousness. But the mobilization of experience through storytelling is far more complex and unpredictable than anti-racist educators have assumed. Paul Gilroy has argued the importance of maintaining a sense of shared histories and human empathy across differences (sex, race, 'first' and 'third' world, class and so on). I think his argument

is very valuable in that he also cautions anti-racists against the seduction of fixed categories, which he sees as becoming more numerous. He warns against elevating ethnicity or culture to an essentailized status as a tool of solidarity.

> At the end of the day, an absolute commitment to cultural insiderism is as bad as an absolute commitment to biological insiderism. . . (W)e need to be theoretically and politically clear that no single culture is hermetically sealed off from others. There can be no neat and tidy pluralistic separation of racial groups in this country. It is time to dispute with those positions which, when taken to their conclusions, say 'there is no possibility of shared history and no human empathy'. We must beware of the use of ethnicity to wrap a spurious cloak of legitimacy around the speaker who invokes it. Culture, even culture which defines the groups we know as races, is never fixed, finished or final. It is fluid, it is actively and continually made and re-made. (Gilroy, 1990, p. 80)

Far from producing political solidarity, the deployment of empathy that I critique can in fact 'backfire' and contribute to the process of 'Othering'. The practice I describe centres on, as Razack (1993) argues, the assessment of the worthiness of the victims, and the moralistic weight contained by the concept of 'worth' and 'victim' is central to this engagement. This way of mobilizing empathy is steeped in liberalism such that for whites, anti-racism is based on altruism and as Razack argues, "... on seeing the poor [for example] as having the same moral worth as oneself" (Razack, 1991, p. 148). The focus on empathy and understanding allows those with white privilege to experience a sense of moral correctness and pleasure in their empathic

abilities without having to question their unearned power and privilege. Implicit in this is the assumption that the privileged retain the power to assess what counts as moral worth, and decide not only who is 'othered', but which Others are deserving of 'aid'. Within this discourse relations of power disappear from view, along with issues of complicity. This discourse produces the subject positions of both the empathic powerful oppressor and the victimised oppressed. As unreal as these static and monolithic subject positions are, within this framework they are naturalized to the extent that they are highly accessible.

While this process functions to perpetuate white domination, it can also have detrimental effects within marginalized groups. Gilroy has critiqued the dangers and damage produced when anti-racists, with the intention of validating the realities of oppression and seeking a basis for solidarity, embrace an overly static and reductionist position of people of colour as victims. He argues against:

> The disastrous way in which (anti-racist activities) have trivialised the rich complexity of black life by reducing it to nothing more than a response to racism. More than any other issue this operation reveals the extent of the anti-racists' conceptual trading with the racists and the results of embracing their culturalist assumptions. Seeing in black life nothing more than an answer to racism means moving on to the ideological circuit which makes us (blacks) visible in two complementary roles - the problem and the victim. (Gilroy, 1990, p.83)

A further engagement of this approach is the way it produces a lack of historical and

local specificity in the structuring of the Other. As Homi K. Bhabha has argued: "Colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative in which the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism. ..." (Bhabha 1990 p.76). The use of personal testimony, how it is offered, demanded, heard, and consumed, always traverses the legacies of colonialism, racism, sexism and so on. Empathy may be admirable, but in itself it is inadequate to alter consciousness and practice, and it can have detrimental effects.

The engagement of empathy and pluralism that I critique both function to undermine the radical intentions of the anti-racist workshop. Like empathy, pluralism can be mobilized in such a way as to contribute to the exoticised 'Other'. In the example of 'Shared Stories' pluralism functions to suppress race based power differentials through an emphasis on multiplicity per se, without an analysis of the power differentials which make those differences politically salient. For example, as I discussed above, of the whites who shared stories of discrimination, none reflects upon their privilege and complicity in relations of racism. In this way, at the same time as white power and privilege are obscured from radical examination, their centrality continue to be presumed. Multiple differences circulate around this supposed (white) norm which positions black or First Nation or Asian and so forth, experience as deviance\Other. Thus, like the engagement of empathy I have critiqued, liberal pluralism fails to disrupt the power axes of white, western

hegemony while simultaneously producing the exoticised Other for white culture consumption. In addition, the production of the 'fixed reality' and visibility of the Other provides the illusion of racial tolerance and challenge to the status quo of power relations. This is a compelling example of the production of an ideological myth (of racial tolerance and challenge to power relations) which not only obscures but invert actual structural relations to the benefit of the dominant group.

Of course the question is begged Other from what? The normalizing and centering of white, Eurocentric culture remains unchallenged and indeed invisible within this model. As Himani Bannerji has stated:

> The concept of 'difference', therefore, clearly needs to be problematised. The 'difference' which is making us 'different' is not something inherent or intrinsic to us but is constructed on the basis of our divergence from the norm...it remains a question as to why white middle class heterosexual feminists do not need to use the 'difference' argument for their own theory or politics? (1991, p. 83)

2.5 THE QUESTION OF EXPERIENCE

So why the emphasis on stories and experiences? Why struggle to retain this practice while attempting to do a better job of analysing its mobilization? The idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, and the radical potential of views from the margin has been a central tenet in both critical pedagogy and feminist theory (Briskin, 1990; Gore, 1993; McKinnon, 1982; Walkerdine, 1990; Weiler, 1988). The pedagogical practice of storytelling is an attempt to decenter relations of

domination (teacher/student, white/of colour, male/ female and so forth), by creating

a space for marginalized people to communicate truths from their perspective.

Liberatory educational discourses frequently seek to "transform 'reality' through a

consciousness of one's social position through the articulation of one's voice"

(Omer, 1992, p. 79). Storytelling has always been an integral component of

consciousness raising for political liberation and the importance of this intentional

strategy should not be underestimated. For instance in Mackinnon's influential

essay in Signs the editors defined consciousness raising as a process in which:

> ...feminists confront the reality of women's condition by examining their
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> experience and by taking this analysis as the starting point for individual
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> social change. By its nature, this method of inquiry challenges traditional
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> notions of authority and objectivity and opens a dialectical questioning of
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> existing power structures, of our experience, and of theory itself. (1982, p.
>
> 515)

The insertion of experience (and storytelling) into theory has deep historical roots in

feminist and anti-racist work, and critical/liberation pedagogy (Briskin, 1992; Currie,

1992; Ebert, 1995; hooks, 1988; Laroque, 1990; McKinnon, 1982). The difficulties

of revealing and negotiating relations of domination, which I critique in terms of

anti-racism pedagogy and practice, can be situated within this broader field. Anti-

racism, like all critical pedagogy, is by definition an explicitly political, situated, and

engaged practice which attempts to "...theorize and operationalize pedagogical

challenges to oppressive social formations" (Ellsworth 1989, p.299). This requires

an analysis of relations of power and authority in terms of classroom dynamics,

larger social structures, and the ontology of power itself. There is an emphasis and a belief that learning should begin in and value the learners' experience. Correspondingly teachers, researchers, activists, and writers must be conscious of how their own experience situates them in the social relations of power.[31]

The opening up of previously naturalized spheres of social life to political critique has created a Galilean shift in how we view our world. This, in turn, fostered a critique of objectivity which was eventually extended to critiquing bias not only in content, but also of methodology and epistemology. Speaking 'from one's own experience' became a foundation for truth, but also a tool for challenging dominant discourses. From feminist consciousness raising to women of colour challenging racist exclusions in (for example) feminist theory, 'experience' has been vital to these liberation projects. Indeed, shared consciousness of ourselves as women, of colour, gay/lesbian and so forth remains a vital tool for solidarity and survival. But, the universalizing tendencies within any of these categories has also been critiqued. In response to this strategy of 'the personal is political' came feminist, anti-racist (and other) critiques of identity politics and the risks of fixing, valorizing and foundationalizing experience and identity. In other words, the deployment of 'experience' as a non-discursive, unmediated, and directly perceivable truth must be interrogated.[32] This conundrum is broadly expressed in social theory, and in anti-

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[31] For example see: Gore (1993), hooks (1988), Martindale (1993), Ng (1991), Walkerdine (1990), and Steedman (1986).

[32] See Jennifer Gore's account of feminist pedagogy as a 'regime of truth' in The struggle for pedagogies (1993), and Donna Haraway (1990)"Manifesto for cyborgs", and Mimi Omer (1993) "Interrupting the calls for student voice in

racism training, as the tension between the valuing of experience and 'voice' on the one hand, and the necessity of interrogating their supposedly non-ideological truth claims on the other. In essence this expresses the tension between feminist empiricism and radical constructivism.

My analysis of how *stories* and questions of *experience* are mobilized is an effort to de-foundationalize their engagement, while still appreciating their radical epistemological potential. As Arlene Schenke has argued, the sharing of personal stories has been utilized by educators as a way "...to shift the relations of power that constitute [teachers] as 'figures in dominance' in the racial, cultural and linguistic mainstream, but this practice can end up constituting student stories as an unproblematic way out of an equally unproblematic silence" (Schenke, 1991, p. 48). Thus, the problem with many liberatory discourses of (marginalized) voice is the assumption of a static, unitary, coherent and rational subject whose 'voice' provides access to unmediated truths. As Omer has argued:

> These discourses, enmeshed in humanist presuppositions, ignore the shifting identities, unconscious processes, pleasures and desires not only of students, but of teachers, administrators and researchers as well. . . Little or no attention is given to the multiple social positions, multiple voices, conscious and unconscious pleasures, tensions, desires, and contradictions which are present in all subjects, in all historical contexts. (Omer, 1992, p. 79)

Rather than assuming the liberatory potential and effectiveness of the strategy of

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'liberatory' education".

storytelling, we must assess the social organization of speaking, silence and listening, and the ethics of knowing 'others' that this organization brings into play. Each of the 'True Fiction' examples illustrate how the practice of personal testimony is problematic, and can even work to reproduce dualistic subject positions and relations of consumption and coercion. Luke and Gore have argued:

> As teachers with all good intentions rush into classrooms ready to emancipate, to liberate, to grant space and time for silenced voices, few would question the importance of 'giving' students voice, or empowering the marginalized, and of democratizing classroom discourse. But a post structuralist feminist position takes issue with the technology of control, the silent regulation, deployed by signifiers such as 'power', 'voice', 'democratic freedoms' and the 'class, race, gender' triplet. (Luke and Gore, 1991, p. 4)

I argue that anti-racist educators can develop via poststructuralist insights a more sophisticated analysis of the operation of power relations through subjectivity and experience, and thus of the 'truth' from one's location. This effort is part of the process of breaking out of a liberalist epistemology including the democratic individualism it contains. We must be critical of the concept that speaking and giving voice is, in and of itself, transformative. As Mimi Orner argues :

> If our subject positions, versions of history, and interpretations of experience are seen as temporary and contingent understandings within an on going process in which any absolute meaning or truth is impossible, then our voicing of our differences ought not be received as if we are speaking some solemn Truth about our lives. We must refuse the tendency to attribute

'authenticity' to people's voices when they speak from their own experience of difference, as if their speech were transparent and their understanding of their experience unchanging. *At the same time, we need to accept responsibility for our implication in actual historical social relations.* (Orner, 1992, p. 86 italics added)

The 'True Fiction' case of the black manager provides an example of the complex link between subject position and power relations. The white staff person asks the manager to tell her story of racism in order to prove its veracity. I am not arguing that this is an always inappropriate question, rather my point is that it is impossible to catalogue, in a decontextual way, a list of acceptable versus dominating questions, actions and strategies. The risks of speaking, and the conditions under which one is heard and taken up differ depending upon social location in relation to race, class, and gender hierarchies of power (among others). Thus, as I argued in the introduction, there can be no blueprint of how we do anti-racist work, it is always context specific. Anthias and Yuval-Davis have said that "[There are] different facets and different constructions of racism and their articulation with ethnic, class, gender and colour divisions; these take place both within the state realm as well as within civil society. Any strategy of effectively resisting racism, therefore, cannot be unitary - and probably not even unified" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, p. 157) . In this instance the problem lay in how the question was asked, by whom, and what remained unexamined. I'd like now to unpack the subject and power relations operating in that exchange.

Most notably this example demonstrates the classic request by an oppressor to be educated by an oppressed person, in this case along the power axis of race. As Audre Lorde has said "whenever the need for some pretense of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes..."(1984, p. 281). This strategy has been extensively critiqued for the way in which it deflects the white person's responsibility for their own learning while simultaneously giving the impression of concern. Further, women of colour are homogenized and essentialised as expert spokes people for the entire institution of racism.

In the example with the black manager the white staff person's immediate, almost righteous willingness to interrogate the black woman's experience *even across her managerial position* is quite striking. Her position as a manager within the organization was, at that moment, surpassed by the racist relations operating within the meeting. What was missing on the part of the white woman was any corollary enthusiasm to interrogate her own experience and actions within the white culture agency, and on a broader social level. There was no public scrutiny of race dynamics within the agency, or of the power dynamics for that specific white person in that localized setting. In spite of anti-racist training initiatives, as Aziz has stated: "Black women's particularity is transparent because of racism; any failure of white women to recognize their own particularity continues that racism" (Aziz, 1995, p. 165). The effect of this was that the white woman's query was set up as a straightforward 'need to know' situation, obscuring the white woman's privilege

based blindness as to what constitutes racism within that agency, while highlighting the black woman's particularity. Thus, she discursively recirculates the white/norm, black/other positionality.

The discourses and practices evident within that particular organization are produced by the broader social context which denies that racism is a central feature of our history and social organization. It is my belief that this context of marginalizing the significance of racism is what produces the question 'show me, tell me, prove it', and makes it possible for such a question to be asked and to appear 'reasonable'. Gilroy argues that not only is this view of racism as peripheral to the substance of political life pervasive in popular culture, it is frequently replicated within anti-racist pedagogy. He states: "The anti-racism I am criticising trivialises the struggle against racism and isolates it from other political antagonisms - from the contradiction between capital and labor, from the battle between men and women. It suggests that racism can be eliminated on its own because it is readily extricable from everything else" (Gilroy, 1990, p. 73). Thus, the conflict within the staff meeting expresses the importance of making visible and denormalizing the ways in which racism interlocks with other oppressions in the structuring of the social world.

The white staff person's request for 'examples of racism', was in essence a request that the black woman 'prove' her statement of experience, which by fiat excuses the questioner from her responsibility for that knowledge. It is not that the white woman could never critically examine the black woman's statement, but rather when and how she did so. I am arguing that there were a number of other options including:

attending and reflecting on the manager's comments before responding; using the information and skills from the anti-racism workshop to think through what she has just heard; to begin with an assumption that she as a white woman has a different perception of racism and thus could well be missing something which the black woman has communicated; to return to the issue at a future meeting in a general manner rather than interrogating the black manager's personal experiences; and so forth. It is not my focus here to supply a practical guide to participation and facilitation of anti-racism pedagogy and practice, but it is important to appreciate the range of possible responses to the information the manager put forth, and to reflect on the dominating effect that particular white woman's response created.

I also interpret the discourse in terms of the operation of liberal pluralism in that race, once again, was positioned as just one of many differences, which inaccurately positions all the players as equally at risk. This effectively obscures the oppressive power dynamics structuring the black manager's space to speak - as well as the assumed 'right' of the white staff to speak. With the illusion of a pluralistic, equal opportunity place to speak, there seems to be no way to appreciate the risks that the manager took. In fact, unequal risks flowing from particular social positioning *cannot* be adequately incorporated within a liberal pluralist framework. The risks for the black manager were layered, she spoke about her experiences in a white culture agency in which she was a minority, and within the specific dynamics of the meeting in which some white staff had clearly indicated their belief that racism was either not a problem or a superficial one. This small, but significant example illustrates the inability of a liberal pluralist approach to mediate the complexity of

layered and shifting power relations and multiple subject positions. The risks of speaking are not equally shared. In this instance the marginalized voice of the black manager was not 'allowed' a place to enter, but rather was corralled, directed, and confined into occupying a very specific space, structured by the discourses of white privilege operating in that setting. This is an illustration of how questions of voice, stories, and sharing experiences are always complex and problematic. The dismal outcome of this 'True Fiction' case (the black woman left the agency) highlights the impetus for seeking (in poststructuralism) a more adequate theoretical model from which to understand and ultimately negotiate this social terrain.

Indeed the *demand*, by whites, for stories/experiences of marginalization of people of colour is the other side of the storytelling coin (hooks, 1992; Razack, 1991). In 'Shared Stories/Workshop' I examined how invited and spontaneous stories by whites can often function to re-entrench discourses of white privilege. Now through the 'Black Manager/Staff Meeting' example we can see how the demand for stories by whites (or others in positions of dominance) can also serve to perpetuate oppressive relations in several ways. In summary: first, it creates the possibility of white people passively consuming the story/truths of those structured as 'Other' without interrogating the ways in which they/we are implicated. Secondly, the demand for and consumption of such stories can contribute to the process of exoticisation essential to the process of Othering, with the attendant recentering of white as norm. Thirdly, it allows those with white privilege to enjoy feelings of emotional engagement without contending with oppressive dynamics. And finally, as argued in the previous example, it deflects from white responsibility for their/our own learning

about relations of racism, and our complicity with them.

As both the 'True Fiction' stories illustrate, the demand for stories can be engaged to solicit empathy, pity, fear, or even to 'prove' that the oppression is 'real'. In this mobilization storytelling results in a rather fascinating, morbid emphasis on victimization, and a demand for the stories of the oppressed for mainstream consumption. Ron Scaap has argued: "Liberals may pride themselves in their ability to tolerate others but it is only after the question has been redescribed as oneself that the liberal is able to be 'sensitive' to the question of cruelty and humiliation. This act of redescription is still an attempt to appropriate others, only here it is made to sound as if it were a generous act. It is an attempt to make an act of consumption appear to be an act of acknowledgement" (Scaap cited in hooks, 1992, p. 13). Thus it is clear that the mobilization of stories and experiences in heterogenous groups is always complex, and far from being liberating, can function to reestablish dominant discourses.

Linda Carty discusses the complexity of the deployment of experience as a black professor working in Canadian Women's Studies.

> While a focus on experience my appear to create a space for us [women of
> colour] to speak, it is important to recognize that this space is an artificial one
> since we are not present in the academy in any significant numbers to
> dislodge the hegemonic discourse, or to influence the structure of the
> discipline...(thus to demand stories of people of colour in such a context) ...is
> hardly evidence of anti-racist feminist pedagogy or feminist inclusionary

praxis, but a denial of responsibility, and an act of exploitation. (Carty, 1992, p. 15)

Carty suggests that the absence of a sufficient willingness on the part of white educators to do our (writing as a white woman) own homework is one reason that women of colour are expected to recount their own personal experiences in anti-discrimination pedagogical efforts.[33] This precisely reflects the set of assumptions operating in the staff meeting in which a white woman asked the black manager to explain what she meant by racism. Carty argues: "White feminist professors who claim to be engaging in anti-racist feminist pedagogy cannot possibly be serious unless and until they are prepared to challenge the institutional hierarchies of power of which they are an integral part" (Carty, 1992 p. 13). This point highlights the participatory role white people must play in anti-racist efforts whether within formal educational settings such as a school or workshop, and within organizations. White anti-racist practices cannot be strictly contained. This harks back to my earlier point that the broader context for these engagements must always be kept in mind, and a range of anti-racist interventions, beyond the discursive, is necessary. As Teresa Ebert argues:

> Without denying the importance of these struggles to speak, we need also to recognize that such an agenda reinscribes the autonomous individual of bourgeois ideology in which 'speaking', 'coming to voice', is largely understood as a voluntaristic act of free will and consciousness, presupposing

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[33] Also see Sherene Razack (1991) "Issues of difference in women's studies: A personal reflection".

a coherent, self-identical subjectivity. The discourse of empowering voice, in short, reduces the struggles for emancipation and the end of exploitation to a discursive freedom that equates democracy with speaking, with free speech. In doing so, it displaces *material democracy* - the equal access of all to social and economic resources - and substitutes verbal empowerment for economic and social enablement; individual expression for collective struggle to transform existing social relations. (Ebert, 1995, p 212)

It is important to briefly discuss what issues are raised by the fact that both facilitators in the workshop example were women of colour. While is impossible to state categorically, it seems likely that the emphasis on white concerns was more difficult for them to deflect as women of colour. Homa Hoodfar (1992) has argued that it is often easier for a white teacher to be aggressive in challenging racist relations in the classroom without being labelled/dismissed as angry or 'biased'. (By extension the same could be said, for example, of a heterosexual teacher challenging heterosexism). This is not to argue that it is preferable to have 'experts' who don't experience a given oppression teach about it. Rather, my point is that power relations operating across different oppressions - privilege axes produce unequal risks in practising critical pedagogy, and therefore necessitate a range of strategies. As Hoodfar argues: "The risks of practising critical pedagogy are clearly not the same for everyone" (Hoodfar, 1992, p. 312).

When I began teaching college at twenty eight I had to reconsider assumptions I had held about feminist pedagogy as I found that my gender, sexual orientation, and to

an extent working class background played out in contradictory ways in heterogenous classrooms. Many authors of colour, such as hooks, Hoodfar and Ng, and white authors such as Steedman and Walkerdine, among others, have analysed the disjuncture between their teaching experiences and feminist and anti-racist pedagogical theory. For example, an emphasis on openness, a friendly collegial atmosphere, and empowerment, while clearly riddled with liberal humanist assumptions critiqued earlier, tends to backfire for teachers of colour for a number of reasons. Openness can be read as unprepared or unprofessional, collegial friendliness amounts to self destruction in the face of racist students, and questions of empowerment are complicated by multiple and shifting subject positions. Hoodfar writes of the painful experience of gaining authority in her classroom only after a visiting white scholar legitimised her in the eyes of her students (Hoodfar, 1992, p. 313). Hooks has written extensively on her counterpuntal practice of a pedagogy of confrontation (hooks, 1992 and 1994). As Ng has argued minority teachers - black, of colour, lesbian, and so forth - are doubly challenged as "...their credibility is challenged due to large social patterns, and because critical teaching challenges norms and assumptions of the institutions that grant them authority" (Ng 1991, p. 108).

The writings of theorists and teachers of colour (and others who are marginalized in different ways) comprise a productive critique of feminist and anti-racist pedagogy. Aside from corroborating the critique of liberal modernism in anti-racist pedagogy, they are particularly interesting for the ways in which the authors engage with questions of experience. For example, Hoodfar writes of incorporating personal

experience as a minority person "not as a subject whose validity is open to question, but as a statement of a reality they should know" (Hoodfar, 1992, p. 314). In this we see the importance, in terms of both personal survival and broader political goals, of validating the truth from the margins. My argument is that it is problematic either to excessively deconstruct *or* to essentialize knowledge from the margins. The risk is that in an effort to theorize and actualize a place from which marginalized people can speak and be heard, it is tempting to stray too far into an authorizing essentialism. However, it is possible to embrace the fortuitous instability between deconstruction and essentialism of subject/knowledge production.

Thus I am arguing that it is vital to critically examine the constructed and non static nature of experience (and story/truths based on that experience) but that unequal power relations which constitute our subjectivities must be considered in how that analysis is done. World historical systems of domination produce certain positions as silent or distorted. The erasure of the histories, experiences, and perspectives of marginalized peoples is a defining feature of oppression. Thus it matters profoundly that oppressed groups and individuals stake out a space from which to be heard. My point is that while it is impossible (and not desirable) to extricate subject experience and positionality (in terms of axes of social power) from knowledge, it is imperative not to romanticize the deployment of voice/experience, including those produced from the margins. And that is the troubling tension of this analysis.

Poststructuralist theory has the potential to provide a useful way of thinking about the difficulty of valuing of marginalized voices/experiences/truths, without reifying

them. As I discussed in chapter one, poststructural thought sees individuals as having multiple and changing subjectivities which are all implicated in power relations. This is not be confused with the concept of false consciousness which can be stripped away through consciousness raising. Individuals, in a poststructural view, have multiple subjectivities that are constructed through competing discourses which interact with social realities on an ongoing basis. Our subjectivities are made by and within the social order, we are both agents and subjects within and against that order. With a poststructural analysis of the discursive nature of subjectivity and experience this critique has moved to a new level, experience itself must be 'unpacked'. We can no longer reify an oversimple notion of voicing experience as having necessarily liberatory potential (Ellsworth 1992, Omer 1992, Martin 1988, Ng 1991, Walkerdine 1990). Being allowed a space to speak is meaningful, but it isn't necessarily sufficient. Speaking to, talking from and understanding experience are necessary beginnings to political understanding, but they do not have any necessary political outcomes (Brown 1995, Razack 1993). This causes trouble for feminist and anti-racist claims of authentic voice and experience as an automatic, foundational basis for political knowledge. However, as Spivak argues, troubling these claims is not the same as altogether displacing them.

> It is not a solution, the idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, or the radical critics speaking for them . . . . On the other hand, we cannot put it under the carpet with demands for authentic voices; we have to remind ourselves that, as we do this, we might be compounding the problem even as we are trying to solve it. And there has to be a persistent critique of what one

is up to, so that it doesn't get all bogged down in the homogenization; constructing the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence and so on. I think as long as one remains aware that it is a very problematic field, there is some hope. (Spivak 1990, p. 63)

As we saw in the 'Sharing Stories' example, it is difficult to translate the theory into practical strategies which undermine the reification of experience and question the authority of truth claims made on the basis of experience. When several white participants attempted to challenge the relations of white domination being played out through story telling within the workshop, the response was "How can you question my experience?" Indeed it seems very difficult to do so, and in the example of the 'Black Manager/Staff Meeting' I have argued that *how* one interrogates experience is highly politically contingent and context specific due to the differential risk involved for those who are outside of the dominant axes of power. This is a particularly tricky dilemma for anti-racists, feminists and others interested in liberation struggles, who appreciate the potential effectiveness and importance of oppressed people speaking their realities. However, as discussed above, as appealing as 'the truth of experience' may seem, earlier feminist pedagogical practice has already demonstrated that a straightforward notion of 'sharing our experiences and voices' is insufficient. In summary, first, such practices assume a natural, unmediated voice to which we all have access as unified singular subjects (a concept I also critique in chapter one, and under 'Liberal Modernism'). Second, there is the assumption of a coherent, rational subject, fully

capable of acquiring 'correct' consciousness, and altering their practices accordingly. Finally, such practices assume an equality of risk in the speaking and consumption of stories, insufficiently contending with the ways systems of domination (race, class, sexuality and so on) structure the relations of communication in heterogenous groups.

Any effective use of storytelling in anti-racist practice with heterogenous groups must consider the power relations which structure the unequal risks in the telling and consuming of stories. This point is taken up by Ellsworth (1989), hooks (1992), Narayan (1988), Orner (1993), Razack (1993) Schenke (1991), and Spivak (1990), among others. Speaking across differences is always complex as these positions are traversed by legacies of domination and exclusion (colonialism, racism, heterosexism and so forth) as they are articulated in the power relations of daily life. As Arlene Schenke has stated: "(I)t matters fundamentally who speaks and who listens, under what conditions of possibility, and along the lines of which political and pedagogical agendas" (1991 p. 47). Part of the interrogation of the normalization of white (and other) privilege inevitably concerns the question of the position from which one speaks, is taken up, and listens. With an analysis of unequal power it is clear that the risks of speaking are never equally shared. For example bell hooks reflects upon the way 'ordinary' abuses of power in graduate school differentially impact students of colour. Her point is important (despite a tendency in this quote to homogenize whites as uniformly positioned in terms of the privileges of class, sexual orientation and ability).

White students would tell me that it was important not to question, challenge

or resist. Their tolerance level seemed much higher than my own or that of other black students. Critically reflecting on the differences between us, it was apparent that many of the white students were from privileged class backgrounds. Tolerating the humiliations and degradations we were subjected to in graduate school did not radically call into question their integrity, their sense of self-worth... White students were not living daily in a world outside campus life where they also had to resist degradation and humiliation. To them tolerating forms of exploitation and domination in graduate school did not evoke images of a lifetime spent tolerating abuse. They would endure certain forms of domination and abuse, accepting it as an initiation process that would conclude when they became the person in power. (hooks, 1988, p. 58-59)

The naming of privilege and domination by whites (and others who exercise it) is absolutely central to the ability to analyse how power relations mediate empathic engagements and communication across differences, as is an active effort to move to address it, to whatever extent is feasible, in context specific ways. This can mean everything from interrogating one's public 'air time' in discussions, to a willingness to de-centre one's experiences, agendas, and identity. This is what was absent in the workshop example of some whites shifting the focus to their own experiences, and also in the staff meeting in the white woman interrogating the black woman's experiences of racism. For instance in the 'True Fiction' example 'Black Manager' the white woman could have found a way to address her questions without interrogating, in an undermining fashion, the black woman. But to do this she would

first have to have had an understanding of the ways in which racism already had positioned the two women unequally, and have the skills the find alternate ways to think through her questions. Imperialism and racism have normalized the supposed right of whites to speak for and to insert ourselves (speaking as a white woman) into anywhere (hooks, 1992). The project becomes how to engage in the development of new forms of discourse without repressing pluralities, conscious always of what is revealed, and what obscured by specific discursive strategies.

2.6 FLUID AND MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITY

The 'True Fiction' case examples demonstrate that we need a way of understanding and negotiating how we are multiply situated within relations of domination. Poststructuralist insights of differential access to material and discursive power can enable us to negotiate the social politics of difference, including the ability to interrogate different, sometimes competing claims based on experience. An analysis of subjectivities which are multiple, shifting and in process is essential for a pedagogical practice which can negotiate complex power relations and their formational link with knowledge. The importance of this conceptual shift cannot be overestimated. It enables us to break out of the static dichotomy of being *either* the oppressor *or* the oppressed. It becomes possible to analyse complex, layered, and shifting power relations as they play out in specific contexts. The question becomes: how does one mediate and negotiate among multiple, possibly competing truth claims based on experience? This perspective requires a dual movement critical analysis which is both externally focused on macro social structural relations, and a self reflexive critique of the ways in which we are positioned in terms of various

axes of privilege/domination. A simple example would be that my experience of racism is one of privilege, and my social location is also set by my sexual orientation, sex, class and so forth. Further, in the context of a workshop I may have specific authority as the facilitator. A poststructural political analysis in fact necessitates a willingness to deconstruct or unpack the meanings of that (shifting) positioning, including how one's position is implicated in experience/ knowledge/ power. Thus, a poststructural conception of the complex operations and reproduction of power, and of discursively constructed subjectivity, can provide a way of moving beyond the problems of relativistic plurality on the one hand, and essentialized positioning on the other. (I will develop this argument further in chapter three).

There is an exciting potential in a poststructural informed anti-racist practice to negotiate differences *within* socially salient identities such as black, lesbian, woman, and so on, and also, via an analysis of oppressive power relations, to inform a practice of working *across* differences. However, with a fluid and dynamic understanding of power and identity/experience negotiating this terrain is always context specific and risky. Most importantly, these risks, as we have seen, are never equally shared. Spivak argues that:

> The question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?' 'I will speak for myself as a Third World person' is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism, really, which simply says that because I happen to be

an Indian or whatever...A hundred years ago it was impossible for me to speak, for the precise reason that makes it only too possible for me to speak in certain circles now. I see in that a kind of reversal, which is again a little suspicious. On the other hand, it is very important to hold on to it as a a slogan in our time. (Spivak 1990, p. 60)

For disenfranchised groups and individuals who have only recently negotiated a space from which to be heard, the interrogation of experience, and the fluidity within and across differences in various contexts can be threatening, and these risks, as I have argued are real. Politically it remains important for such groups to maintain some authority, premised on their shared experiences of oppressive structures. Yet, as the example of the black manager illustrates, *how* such voices are heard in racially and otherwise diverse settings is also very complex. For marginalized people the question remains: what are the risks of speaking, will you be heard, will your voice be appropriated?

CHAPTER 3: MOVES TO INNOCENCE

White women are as much a part of social relations as black women are.

Therefore, they must be as knowledgeable about the interactions of these

structures of domination, albeit from a very different position. Racism,

however, relies on a perspective of deviance which obscures white

particularity. This masks the fact that white-ness is every bit as implicated as

black-ness in the workings of racism. Thus, whether or not they are aware of

it, *racism affects white women constantly.* (Aziz, 1995, p.166 original

emphasis)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter turns to the seductiveness of the innocent position. Each of the 'True

Fiction' examples, in different ways, illustrate the operations of innocence as a form

of resistance to the disruption of racist relations. I begin by recounting the final

'True Fiction' scenario, and develop a critique of the operations of 'moves to

innocence' through this, and to a lesser degree, the previous two examples. The

phrase 'moves to innocence' is drawn from the "race to innocence" coined by Mary

Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack in an article of that name (1998), although as I

will describe, I engage the concept in a slightly different way. The phenomenon is

also discussed, in different ways, by Gilroy (1992), Fine (1997), Flax (1992), hooks

(1992) and Kay\Kantrowitz (1992), whose work I also draw upon.

I analyse moves to innocence in two distinct forms; claims of *non experience* and the *rush to the margins*. The (im)possibility of innocent or power neutral knowledge production and subject location has been a philosophical and political concern to a wide range of theorists. As Jane Flax argues, citing everyone from Kant and Locke to the current work of John Rawls, "a central promise of Enlightenment and Western modernity is that conflicts between knowledge and power can be overcome by grounding claims to and the exercise of authority and reason" (1992, p. 447). As discussed in chapter one under 'Postmodernism,' in the Enlightenment vision the external and concrete Real can be apprehended by the singular, universally rational subject to perceive the objective Truth by rising above the mire of the local, historical and contingent.[34] With the advent of postmodernism and poststructuralism the necessarily contingent, historical and power implicated nature of knowledge production and subject location has been foregrounded, and it is this philosophical orientation that is the basis for my endeavours here. As Flax argues: "This does not mean that there is no truth but rather that truth is discourse dependent. Truth claims can be made by those who accept the rules of a discourse or who are willing to bridge across several. However, there is no trump card available which we can rely on to solve all disputes" (Flax, 1992, p. 452).

As I am attempting to conduct a reading the 'True Fiction' examples which takes seriously a poststructural analysis of the formational link between power and

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[34] On the subject of Enlightenment visions of truth, knowledge production and objectivity/innocence see for example: Brown (1991, 1995); Butler and Scott (1992); Diamond and Quinby (1988); Gunew and Yeatman (1993); and Nicholson (1990).

subject/knowledge construction, while mediating that engagement through a historical and political commitment to anti-racist (and other) liberatory theory and practice, my use of the concept of innocence is necessarily drawn from a range of theorists. My critique of the operations of innocence as expressed through the 'rush to the margins' is most indebted to the work of Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack in "The Race To Innocence" (1998). While I draw upon their analysis my use of the concept is slightly different in that in my critique of the 'True Fiction' examples I view claims of 'non experience' as another important process of moves to innocence. Thus, for clarity I use the phrase the 'rush to the margins' instead of the 'race to innocence'. I have not seen the claim of 'non experience' analysed elsewhere as a specific move to innocence, and I attempt to delineate its operation here. Additionally, I diverge from their work in my attempt to analyse the operations of the rush to the margins through the different lens of a critique of liberal modernism, the efficacy of poststructuralist theory, and the necessity of politically valuing marginalized voices.[35] I am also indebted to the work of Flax (1992), Gilroy (1992), Kay/Krantrowitz (1992), Fine et al. eds. (1997) and hooks (1992) among others. There is significant theoretical and methodological diversity amongst the theorists I have drawn upon, and it is not possible here (nor is it my intent) to

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[35] Fellows and Razack provide a detailed analysis of how the 'race to innocence' is produced through 'competing' marginalities. Through an historical analysis the authors analyse how the concept of respectability is central to understanding the production of the social locations of the margins and the centre. By examining current concepts of respectability in relation to the issue of prostitution they "show how the race to innocence and the related practice of securing a toehold on respectability currently serve to reinforce systems of domination and maintain hierarchical arrangements among women" (1998, p. 4).

survey the interesting breadth of their analyses. Rather, I directly source specific

work throughout the chapter and draw upon it to conduct my analysis of the legacies

of liberalism which survive in the anti-racism practices of the liberal progressive

organizations I describe, and my corollary interest in a poststructuralist decentering

of the subject.

After explaining my use of the concepts 'non experience' and the 'rush to the

margins' I use the 'True Fiction' examples to critique how these distinct moves to

innocence are mobilized and to what effects. I then argue that the pervasiveness and

tenacity of this positioning cannot be adequately understood in terms of individual

consciousness or radical intent but rather is produced by particular social relations.

Central to this critique is an analysis of the formation of subjectivity in oppressive

material conditions. Further, continuing from the previous chapter I argue that for

marginalized peoples there are unique difficulties and risks in an analysis of the

ways in which one can be multiply positioned in terms of both oppression and

privilege.

3.2 'TRUE FICTION' SCENARIO

White Board Member/ Anti-racism Committee: This third example is set within

a composite portrait of an afore-described white culture, liberal organization, which

is engaged in an anti-racist change process. For this organization there is significant,

but uneven pressure from the staff to integrate anti-racist initiatives and policies

throughout the organization's structure and service delivery. As with many

community/ social service/ health agencies, it is quite difficult to get the board of

directors to prioritize the issue (although the situation can also occur in reverse). More significantly, a feminist women of colour community group has challenged the agency to deal with its exclusionary practices. A small anti-racism committee (all women) has been formed, consisting of two white staff people, the managing director, also white, and two external representatives from the broader community, both highly regarded professionals, both black. The committee tries for almost a year to get board representation on the committee. Within the organization very little action has been taken, the staff representatives are frequently excluded from the committee meetings, the manager changes the staff representative several times, and the committee still had no clear mandate or goals in place. At this point the two black women from other organizations demand that the chair of the board and one other board member attend the next meeting. One board member shows up, the chair of the board does not. The two community representatives state that a few basic criteria that must be in place for them to continue to offer their skill in assisting the agency in its anti-racism initiatives. The criteria are essentially the same as they had been at the beginning of their involvement a year ago, none of which has been met. These were: a clear commitment from the board to the process of anti-racist organizational change, including appropriate board directives; consistent board presence at the committee; and a clear allocation of resources for such things as staff training, client surveys and so forth. If these criteria continue to be unfulfilled, the community members would withdraw.

Clearly the situation is rather desperate. Yet throughout the discussion in which the two black women were explaining the situation to the board member, she is restless,

uncomfortable and appears uninformed. The board representative, a white upper class lawyer, repeatedly interrupts the black women, speaks in a loud authoritarian voice, fails to directly respond to the questions and challenges they raise, and generally seems intent on defending herself. When asked to explain the board's inactivity for almost a year she says that she cannot speak for the board because they "hadn't had a full discussion yet". But, speaking for herself she says "this is just not my issue, you know, it's like pushing a baby stroller in the snow, if you've never had to do it you just don't think about it". In an attempt to be open minded and conciliatory she turns to the women of colour and states "I don't know what to do, tell me what to do, you are the experts here".

One of the staff representatives challenges the board member by pointing out that as white women, they have the option of denying and erasing their race privilege, which is in fact an expression of how accustomed they are to that privilege. She challenges the board member to take responsibility for questioning her own experience, and further suggests that this is in fact part of her job on the board. The managing director then intervenes and tells the staff person that she is out of line, and that her perspective doesn't represent the staff's view. The ultimate outcome is that the two community members withdraw from the committee. This is a significant setback for the organization and the client/community it serves. (Of course, agitators for anti-racist change continue their efforts and progress continues in a slow and uneven manner).

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3.3 TERMINOLOGY

Before analysing the operations of innocence in the above 'True Fiction' scenario,

I'd like to define my use of the concept of moves to innocence through claims of

'non experience' and the 'rush to the margins'. First and foremost, as Fellows and

Razack (1998), Flax (1992), Gilroy (1992) and hooks (1992) argue, moves to

innocence are forms of resistance to anti-racist (or other anti-oppression) discourses,

practices, and initiatives. However, the reasons for the deployment of moves to

innocence are complex, and range far beyond individual self protective strategies, to

institutional structures and the ontology of subjectivity in materially oppressive

conditions. As discussed in the introduction, the rush to the margins is drawn from

Fellows and Razack's definition of the race to innocence as "...the process through

which a woman comes to believe her own claim of subordination is the most urgent

and that she is unimplicated in the subordination of other women" (1998, p 2). As

Fellows and Razack argue, the process of the *rush to the margins* is distinguished by

efforts to align oneself with one's position(s) of oppression while de-emphasising

privilege. In the organizations I observed I found that the claim of *non-experience*

was equally pervasive in how moves to innocence were accomplished. The

mobilization of non experience is distinct from the rush to the margins in that this

move to innocence does not rely upon claims of marginalization, but rather on a

perceived *absence* of experience of oppressive power relations. Non experience

emphasizes a lack of experience of victimisation through the operations of racism (or

other form of oppression), whereas experiences of the power and privilege of being a

member of the dominant group are obscured. Both strategies can be engaged in

different and overlapping ways. In each of the case examples, whether it took

place in a workshop setting, post workshop staff meeting, or at the committee level, there was a pronounced tendency for (white) participants to identify most strongly with their positions of oppression, and great discomfort, or out and out unwillingness, to see their own degrees of privilege and power. These moves to innocence, which I've seen virtually every time I've participated in anti-discrimination training and organizational change efforts, are quite striking (and I include my own reactions here) and can have devastating effects. The move to innocence is certainly not a strategic process exclusive to white privilege, although that is my focus. Considering multiple subject positioning with regard to power and oppression, it is clear that moves to innocence can, and often do, occur anywhere that privilege exists. Thus the problem of moves to innocence is expressed not only between 'the' margins and 'the' centre, but is also present in negotiating amongst distinct yet interdependent marginalities. Understanding how moves to innocence are produced is necessary to deconstruct their operation in anti-racism (and other anti-oppression) practices without resorting to structural determinism or mere individual blame.

3.4 CASE ANALYSIS

I'd like now to provide a reading of the operation of moves to innocence through the 'True Fiction' examples, and to outline the ways in which specific material conditions produce the seductiveness and tenacity of this form of resistance. In the above 'True Fiction' example of the white board member a number of structural factors impede the anti-racism committee's efforts. The difficulties of a staff and community initiated process are apparent in the lack of involvement and

commitment from the board. The manager in this example also seems unwilling to push for commitment from the board of directors, and instead chastises the staff representative for doing so. The imbalance of power in the hierarchical structure of this organization is an important factor in the failure of the anti-racism committee. Further, it is a testament to the power base of the liberal progressive, white culture agency that they could afford to largely ignore the concerted pressure to change being exerted by the women of colour community group. In this example there are obvious structural and material constraints on the anti-racism initiative, and I do not wish to minimize their significance. However, for my purposes here I am more interested in the mobilization of innocence by the white board member to deflect accountability for the organization's anti-racism process, as well as her personal privilege.

The interaction in this case example is perhaps more overtly racist than the other two 'True Fiction' scenarios. First, the two black women had volunteered their time to the predominantly white culture agency (as defined in chapter one) for almost one year, and even though this is the first meeting which a board member attends, she is authoritarian, interrupts the women of colour, and deflects their questions and challenges. She refuses to be accountable for the board's inactivity over the year with the simple statement "we hadn't had a full discussion yet", when the lack of commitment on their part was precisely the point of her attending.

Speaking for herself while simultaneously deflecting personal accountability she states "this is just not my issue, you know, it's like pushing a baby stroller in the

snow, if you've never had to do it, you just don't think about it". The context of this statement is crucial, in that the board of directors had been kept abreast of the anti-racism committee's efforts over the year - it should have been their issue. The board member's attempt to shift the discussion to a personal level was a shell game to deflect the organizational responsibility of the board to set policy - after all, she was present as a representative of the board of directors. But the 'baby stroller in the snow' comment has to analysed at another level. Superficially there is a common sense appeal to this statement. It says 'I don't experience the problems you do, so I don't think about it'. But this only makes 'sense' if one accepts the equivalency of world historical systems of domination (racism) with individual life inconveniences (stroller in bad weather). More critically, I argue that the statement is based on a set of assumptions about social relations, including: how power operates, the norm of whiteness, and the dissociation between white power and privilege and racial oppression.

3.5 THE MYTH OF NON EXPERIENCE

The baby stroller statement is an explicit illustration of a move to innocence via the claim of non experience. Innocence by virtue of non experience is the premise for the related statement "tell me what to do, you are the experts here" (also critiqued in chapter two). The commonsense appeal of such statements, which enable the board member to utter them sanguine in her appearance of equanimity, is rooted in the normalization of a liberal analysis of power relations. The seduction of the 'innocent' position is premised on a rather crass but pervasive understanding, critiqued in the previous chapter, of power as external and top down, and of

subjectivity as singular and static.[36] This results in the popular and simple view of power in which racism is understood as a negative and abusive power located 'somewhere out there'. Claims of innocence by virtue of non experience are based upon this exterior view of power which function to distance and separate white people from the workings of racism (Gilroy (1990), Goldberg (1993), Fine (1997), hooks (1988, 1992), McIntosh (1989), Omi and Winant (1993). Within this liberal framework it becomes 'logical' to claim, *by virtue of good intentions* alone, to be *outside of* the relations of racism. This is reflected in the often held belief that if one doesn't actively discriminate against anyone, one is not implicated in racism. Essentially this posits that black oppression could exist without white privilege. Understanding the normalization of such a view of the operations of racism helps to explain why the claim of good intentions, whether stated or implied, is a particularly stubborn point of resistance to the ownership of degrees of power and privilege.

Both the baby stroller statement and the 'you are the experts here' statement draw upon the appearance of good intentions. Like the mobilization of empathy analysed in the previous chapter, the deployment of 'non experience' provides the dominant person (in this case the white board member) with the comfort of the appearance of good intentions, while simultaneously obscuring their implicatedness in oppressive relations, in general and context specific terms. Indeed the severing of the material relationship between power which accrues to white people and the oppression of people of colour is so complete that the board representative can claim to have "no

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[36] It is this analysis of power which Foucault (arguably) more than anyone else has thoroughly overturned especially in Power/Knowledge (1980).

experience" of racist relations. It is from this basis that she attempts to make the black women responsible for telling her "what to do".

The claim of good intentions, which is really a move to innocence via the (impossible) position of *non experience*, is also illustrated in the earlier example of the white staff person asking the black manager for examples to 'prove' her experience of racism in that organization. In the 'True Fiction' example with the black manager we can see that the white staff person assumed that her good intentions would a) be apparent, and b) be sufficient for her questioning of the black manager to be a-racist, as in unimplicated in racism. What the manager experienced as severely undermining, the white staff person saw as a perfectly straightforward question. Less obviously, the case of 'Shared Stories' can also be read as an instance of innocence via non experience. In that example white participants deflect from the subject of racism, which they experience as privilege, to instances of (non racial) victimization as if empathic bonding over victimization is their only avenue to understanding racism. The ways in which racism benefits whites is so normalized that white participants don't even think to discuss it. These case examples illustrate the extent of the invisibility, through normalization, of white privilege. In an amazing fiat racist oppression is seen as effecting only those discriminated against, not those accruing power and privilege. Michelle Fine has expressed it thus:

> What if we took the position that racial inequities were not primarily attributable to individual acts of discrimination targeted against persons of color, but increasingly to acts of cumulative privileging quietly loaded up on whites? That is, what if by keeping our eyes on those who gather

disadvantage, we have not noticed white folks, varied by class and gender, nevertheless stuffing their academic and social pickup trucks with goodies otherwise not as readily available to people of color? . . . I worry that those of us interested in qualitative inquiry and critical 'race' theory have focused fetishistically on those who endure discrimination. By doing so we have been unable/unwilling to analyse how those who inherit privilege do so. As such, we have camouflaged the intricate institutional webbing that connects 'whiteness' and 'other colors'.(Fine, 1997, p. 57-58)

Clearly, we must move beyond questions of good intentions on the part of those with power. Questions of intentionality, while not unimportant, are mired in a liberal individualist mode which deflects consideration of both the *effects* of given actions/positions, and the institutional forces which structure individual relations. Thus, in my view the seductive hook of innocence by virtue of non experience (although perhaps well intended) is premised on a highly individualist model of oppression, and an exterior view of power. Furthermore, good intentions are not limited to individuals. In all of the 'True Fiction' case examples the liberal progressive organizations themselves have an institutional culture which is heavily invested in being 'good' and 'on the right side'. The institutional relations of such organizations profoundly undermine efforts to reveal the extent to which the organization itself (re)produces racist relations. Illustrating this with concrete examples is more difficult than it is with obvious individual statements or actions. However, if we return to the post anti-racism workshop staff meeting in which the black manager discussed (and is questioned on) her experiences of racism within the

agency, we can see aspects of the institutional culture which perpetuate racist relations. First, the 'check in' with the staff about the anti-racism workshop is prioritized low on the agenda, at the end of the meeting, with only a few minutes allocated. Secondly, the chair was unable to respond to the conflict that arose, and instead simply ended the meeting. The resources to facilitate the conflict were simply not there. There was no flexibility or responsiveness within the agency to create a different forum for follow up. The result of all of this was that the liberal progressive, white culture perspective remained largely intact and undisrupted. But for the black manager it was yet another moment of erasure which ultimately induced her to leave.

While it remains striking the extent to which otherwise intelligent, critically minded, and political white people will succumb to this positioning of themselves as 'outside of' relations of racism, the pervasiveness of this form of resistance to anti-racism can only be adequately understood through consideration of larger social relations. The institutional structures, at the societal and organizational level, which produce innocence via non experience are premised upon the social relations of white domination in that whiteness (even unconsciously) is understood as the centre as opposed to the margins, the norm as opposed to the deviant, the neutral as opposed to the particular. As Fellows and Razack have argued:

> The marking of subordinate groups, and the unmarking of dominant groups leaves the actual processes of domination obscured, thus intact. Subordinate groups simply *are* the way they are; their *condition* is naturalized. To be unmarked or unnamed is also simply to *embody* the norm and not to have

actively produced and sustained it. To be the norm, yet to have the norm unnamed, is to be innocent of the domination of others. (Fellows and Razack, 1998, p. 12)

As many theorists have argued, white experiences are presumed to be the norm/standard and thus are not in need of explanation or critique (Ebert, 1995; Fine, 1997; Gilroy, 1992; Hoodfar, 1992; Lorde, 1984; Ng, 1995). The domination of whites/whiteness is naturalized to the extent that the actual operations of that domination are rendered almost invisible. It is in this way that the move to innocence via non experience emphasizes a lack of experience of *victimisation* based of the operations of racism, whereas experiences of the *power and privilege* of being a member of a dominant (in this case white group) are obscured. The pervasiveness and tenacity of the production of innocence through non experience testifies to the naturalizing power of racist discourses (and other oppressions) in structuring subjectivities. Subjectivities are formed in part through the material and discursive operations of oppression. 'Non experience' posits the impossible, that is, the extrication of oneself from (oppressive) material social relations. It is from this basis that claims of good intentions, colour blindness, and so on are put forth as an adequate response to racism. As Omi and Winant have argued, such a view:

> . . . fails to recognize that the salience of a social construct can develop over half a millennium or more of diffusion, or should we say enforcement, as a fundamental principle of social organization and identity formation. . . (T)his approach fails to recognize that at the level of experience, of everyday life, race is an almost indissoluble part of our identities. Our society is so

thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. To be raceless is akin to being genderless. (1993, p 5)

The sheer extent of the naturalization of discourses of race and their productive link to identity formation is precisely why it is so difficult to explore and disrupt the seductiveness of the innocent position.

3.6 THE RUSH TO THE MARGINS

The rush to the margins is at least as pervasive as the myth of non experience as a form of resistance to anti-racist pedagogy and practice.[37] As discussed in the introduction, my use of the concept the 'rush to the margins' is most indebted to Fellows and Razack's (1998) conception of the "race to innocence" which they argue is constituted by aligning oneself with one's positions(s) of oppression while de-emphasizing the ways in which one exercises power and privilege. As Fellows and Razack argue: "Feeling only the ways that she is positioned as subordinate, each woman strives to maintain her dominant positions. Paradoxically, each woman asserts her dominance in this way because she feels like it is the only way in which she can win respect for her claim of subordination" (1998 p.4). The rush to the margins is expressed in the simple bipolar assumption that 'if I am a victim/oppressed, I am innocent'. Despite an often sophisticated political analysis,

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[37] In addition to the detailed theoretical work done by Fellows and Razack (1998); Fine (1997); Flax (1992) and other theorists, in discussion with classmates and co-workers I have heard this process popularized and referred to as 'the race to the bottom' and 'virtue by victimhood.'

most of us who are marginalized still find it hard to own, and integrate into praxis,

the ways in which we also exercise unearned power and privilege (Fellows and

Razack 1998, p 5-10). This is most clearly illustrated in the 'True Fiction' case of

the workshop in which many white participants shifted the emphasis away from

racism to their experiences of other oppressions. It is striking that in the 'Shared

Stories' example the workshop participants were asked to share a couple of stories to

illustrate the interdependence of different oppressions, how race, class, sexuality,

sex, disability and so forth are interrelated systems of social relations. But, as

discussed in detail in the previous chapter, the result was a myopic focus on

oppression as experienced by whites. In this case, despite specific instructions to

reflect on the relationship among various forms of oppression, *none* of the white

participants discussed the relationship between white privilege/power and racism.

Instead the majority of the white participants narrowed the focus to their own

experiences of discrimination. The white emphasis on victim status and on degrees

of marginality is a striking example of a quest for the comfort of innocence through

the rush to the margins. As Audre Lorde has argued: "Those of us who stand outside

. . . power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to

be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference,

some of which we ourselves may be practising" (Lorde, 1984, p 282).

Less obvious perhaps, is the rush to the margins of the organization itself in the

above 'True Fiction' example of the white board member. The identity of the

organization as a whole is premised on being progressive as in anti-establishment,

counter status quo, and engaged in community based resistance to a particular

system of oppression (other than racism). The work of the organization is understood as a form of resistance, be it women's health or social housing, and as functioning in opposition to dominant power relations. The institutional structures of the organization are premised on an identification with the margins, and thus are heavily invested in the position of innocence. Obviously this produces tremendous barriers to examining the ways in which the agency is implicated in producing racist social relations.

The rush to the margins, while distinct from innocence through non experience, is an equally normalized discourse. In my view, how the dichotomy between oppression/innocence is produced and normalized is heavily implicated with the myths of modernism discussed in the previous chapters. One mechanism of the process of naturalization relates to the myth of a singular identity. The concept of a fixed and singular subjectivity/identity remains profoundly pervasive in popular thought, despite the profusion of poststructuralisms in the academe. The singularity of 'I' appears to be so natural and commonsensical that, despite one's critical thinking, there is a strong gut reaction that 'if I am oppressed/marginalized, I cannot be an oppressor/possessor of privilege'. As this last statement illustrates, the supposed singularity of identity is tied in with an equally dualistic modernist concept of power, *as if there is only one axis of power and therefore only two fixed subject positions to occupy.* In these postmodern times, the classic hierarchal dualisms of modernism continue to resonate with current consciousness, contributing to the pervasiveness of moves to innocence.

A second and related myth of modernism is that of universal subjectivity, a humanist approach which relativises different oppressions and social locations. The 'we are all just people' assumption of universal subjectivity is at work in the rush to the margins of the whites in the anti-discrimination workshop. The emphasis of white experiences of non racial oppression can be read as an effort to relate to black oppression through the supposed sameness of outsider status. Similarly, the paralytic and shocked silence of most of the white staff people in the face of the black manager's statements about racism within the agency is in part a response to the disruption of an assumed sameness of perspective. Most significantly, the institutional culture of the progressive organizations in question position anti-racist change as a bit of training, a bit of talking, but not a fundamental altering of power structures and service delivery. Of course, this myth of universal subjectivity is premised upon the centrality and normalization of whiteness. As bell hooks has observed in the context of anti-racist teaching in heterogenous groups:

> Often their (white people's) rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal conviction that it is the assertion of universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of 'sameness' even as their actions reflect the primacy of whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think. (hooks, 1992 p. 339)

Fellows and Razack (1998) argue that one of the most destructive aspects of the rush to the margins is the way it is both premised upon and recirculates a sense of competing marginality, which inevitably produces the no win situation in which we

attempt to evaluate and rank which set of oppressions embodied in a given individual is the most extreme, and therefore the most innocent.[38] The absurdist equation of oppression = innocence is probably familiar to many political activists and those who have worked in the type of liberal progressive organizations I describe. It produces the impossible and trivializing question of who has the more innocent - authentic - correct knowledge from their social standpoint. For example the white, disabled, working class, lesbian or the Latin American, heterosexual, female refugee torture survivor? While this may sound facetious when spelled out so plainly it nonetheless is precisely the kind of destructive impasse that develops from the linking of marginalization with both innocence and with essentialized subjectivity (as discussed in chapter two).

Importantly, as Apple and Weis (1983), Fellows and Razack (1998) and McCarthy (1993) argue, what is lost within an additive model of oppression is the complexity and interdependence of systems of oppression and the ways they play out in daily lives and struggles.   Patricia Hill Collins explains it thus:

> Additive models of oppression are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous
>
> thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought. This emphasis on
>
> quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief that
>
> either/or categories must be ranked. The search for certainty of this sort
>
> requires that one side of a dichotomy be privileged while its other is
>
> denigrated. Privilege becomes defined in relation to its other.   Replacing

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[38] Fellows and Razack argue that the concept of competing marginalities in part *produces* the race to innocence (1998).

additive models of oppression with interlocking ones creates possibilities for

new paradigms. The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as

interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach fosters a

paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as

age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity... Placing African-American

women and other excluded groups in the centre of analysis opens up

possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess

varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system. . .

. (Collins, 1990, cited in Fellows and Razack, 1998, p. 3)

An appreciation of the interlocking structure of systems of domination makes real

the ultimate self interest in deconstructing oppressive relations, including those in

which one is positioned as dominant. As Fellows and Razack have argued: "When a

woman fails to appreciate how she is implicated in other women's lives and retreats

to the position that the system that oppresses her is the only one worth fighting and

that the other systems (systems in which she is dominant) are not of her concern, she

will fail to undo her own subordination" (1998, p 3).

While it is ultimately true that attempts to separate out one system of domination

leaves the overall structures of domination intact, I would argue that in an immediate

and local sense the rush to the margins does in fact benefit the person or organization

who mobilizes marginality in this way. On a visceral level we experience the rush to

the margins as a more familiar, safe and innocent position. And as the 'True

Fiction' scenarios illustrate, such a strategy is often very successful, in the short

term, at protecting the interests of those who position themselves as innocent through claims of subordination (the rush to the margins) or through being outside of relations of domination (non experience). The appeal of these move to innocence is not easy to undermine as it speaks to the tension between benefits which are immediate and visceral versus long term and abstract.

Thus, the pervasiveness of both moves to innocence via non experience and the rush to the margins cannot be fully explained by critiquing individual political consciousness or radical intentions. Rather, these moves to innocence are endemic because they are a product of modernist ideals of subjectivity and power relations which remain a largely naturalized discourse in society today. This is not to say that moves to innocence are impossible to detect or disrupt, but that a strictly rationalist and individualist approach is inadequate. Anti-racists need to develop pedagogical strategies to unpack those moments of resistance as they are produced, with an emphasis on the broader power relations which make moves to innocence so seductive.

To take this analysis to the practical level requires that white people (and those with other forms of privilege) must enter into anti-racist practice by examining not only the material operations of oppression, but also the particularities of whiteness as it is (re)constructed in our daily lives. Thus arguing, as Aziz does in my introductory quote to this chapter, that "racism a ffects white women constantly" (1995, p. 166) is not about claiming that whites can know everything about racism, and certainly not about shoddy relativising that whites are damaged by racism - we are not - but we

(whites) do experience daily the uneven construction and recirculation of relations of domination. Thus, there are myriad opportunities for theorizing and practising resistance to these relations.

Since few people are without privilege of some kind, particularly in the socio-historical context of my case analyses, it becomes incumbent on everyone to engage in the dual movement analysis of the ways in which one is marginalized from various axes of power, and the ways in which we approach the centre. The ways in which the interlocking structure of systems of domination (for example race, class, gender, and sexuality) are articulated is always historically and contextually specific. For this reason there can be no map of the blurred and fluid boundaries amongst oppressions to guide our interventions. Of necessity liberatory strategists must release the quest for an established guide and instead do the difficult work of enabling theory to inform specific, local practices. This is no mean feat, as central to this project is the subject's ability to read and negotiate the shifting terrain of power relations expressed in highly context specific ways. Thus, as Wendy Brown argues: "... the viability of politically effective resistance strategies relies heavily on a subject which is formed in and through repressive regimes of power, (late capitalism, class, race, gender and sexuality oppression and so on)" (Brown, 1991 p.79).

3.7 RISKS FOR THE MARGINALIZED

I have argued that the seduction of the innocent position is difficult to disrupt

because it has to do with the very *formation* of identity/subjectivity in historical

context. However, for marginalized people there are unique risks in attending to the

ways in which one is also privileged. For those who are marginalized in terms of

access to material and social power there are serious risks in the analysis of the ways

in which one can be multiply positioned in terms of both oppression and privilege.

This is further complicated by the fact that subject position and subjectivity itself is

not static. Granting that we are materially and discursively structured, as bell hooks

(1992), Audre Lorde (1984), Fellows and Razack (1998) and Steedman (1986) have

argued, we nonetheless experience discrimination in some sense because of *who we*

are; those aspects of race, sexuality, class and so forth are defining features - we

own them. There is always a dynamic tension between marginalized identities as

sources of, on the one hand, strength, community, resistance, and unique knowledge,

and on the other hand as something given and constructed as 'Other'. The power of

this cannot be overestimated when such things as being refused housing, being

verbally or physically attacked, being the last if ever to be hired, comprise a

significant number of your experiences, and an ever present risk. Thus the appeal

of the position of innocence to those who are marginalized in some way remains

strong in part because the historical realities of the holocaust, the middle passage,

the witch hunts, the long march and so forth *are* defining features of the modern era,

still circulating in the rearticulation of daily relations.

Furthermore, it must be recognized that conservative forces are constantly at work

to erase the saliency and validity of these histories to the current context. As bell

hooks has argued:

To name that whiteness in the black imagination is often a representation of
terror one must face a palimpsest of written histories that erase and deny, that
reinvent the past to make the present vision of racial harmony and pluralism
more plausible...Theorizing black experience we seek to uncover, restore, as
well as to deconstruct, so that new paths, different journeys are possible...The
call to theorize black experience is constantly challenged and subverted by
conservative voices reluctant to move from fixed locations. (hooks, 1992, p.
342)

The point is that the naming and claiming of the effects of one's social positioning as
marginalized, constitutes a fundamental act of survival and resistance. As discussed
in chapter two, reclaiming and redefining experiences of everyday power relations
from 'the' point of view of the oppressed is a foundational premise of critical
pedagogy and social change, it is also an active practice of producing counter
hegemonies. Thus, as Ellsworth (1989), hooks (1992), Narayan (1988) and Fellows and
Razack (1998) argue, the *risks* in attempting to shift perspective from one's
marginality to one's locus of privilege are *real*.

Thus, I believe that in order to build an analysis of the ways in which any given
individual is multiply situated, and possesses degrees of both privilege and
oppression two things are necessary. As Apple and Weis (1983), Aziz (1995),
McCarthy (1993), Fellows and Razack (1998), and Ware (1992) have argued, the
first is an analysis of the interdependent nature of systems of domination such that,
one's own experience of oppression is understood as existing in and through, in

historically specific ways, other systems of domination. As Fellows and Razack have said: "This 'interlocking' effect means that the systems of oppression come into existence in and through each other so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies, imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, and heterosexism and so on" (1998, p 2-3). Secondly, multiple and non static positioning in terms of privilege/oppression requires a complex understanding of subjectivity and social location, which I have argued previously, can be found through an engagement of poststructural theories of the discursive nature of subjectivity and its formational link with knowledge/power. The poststructural project involves a radical reconceiving of the context and production of concepts such as self/society, private/public, thought/feeling. There is an explosion of the discrete dualism and hierarchical ordering of the modernist take of these and related concepts. Without a complex view of subjectivity and an appreciation of the interlocking nature of systems of domination it is almost impossible to fundamentally embrace multiple and shifting subject positioning as both oppressor and oppressed. This, in turn, is necessary to truly negotiate among different truths produced from various positions on the oppression - privilege continuum, such as discussions across racial difference, and also to negotiate different truths *within* a given oppression, such as among women of colour.

The move to innocence expresses the significance of power relations in the ongoing process of subject formation and knowledge construction. As Ellsworth has argued: "Educational researchers attempting to construct meaningful discourses about the politics of classroom practices must begin to theorize the consequences for education

of the ways in which knowledge, power and desire are mutually implicated in each other's formations and deployments" (Ellsworth, 1989 p. 316). I have argued that moves to innocence are produced through the operation of modernist myths of a singular and static subjectivity, an exterior view of power, and the centrality and normalization of whiteness. Bringing a postructural analysis of subjectivity and the epistemological nature of knowledge to bear can better enable us to appreciate the extent to which we are entrenched in the 'truth' from our position, at an individual, organizational and societal level. This analysis helps to explain the intensity of emotions and grave political impasses that often result when attempting anti-racist initiatives. I have discussed how for the marginalized there are unique personal and political risks in incorporating an analysis of points of privilege as well as oppression. These risks must be analysed in a context specific way to negotiate diverse (and possibly discordant) claims from the margins. Thus, we can analyse the perspective of 'competing' marginalities and the move to innocence as much more than products of a mere lack of rational understanding, or an ungenerous spirit, or false consciousness. In other words, the complexity and tenacity of the 'move to innocence' has to do with the ways in which systems of domination are produced and recirculated, even within liberatory discourses such as anti-racism training and organizational change.

CHAPTER FOUR: TROUBLING EPISTEMIC PRIVILEGE

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself', as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. (Antonio Gramsci 1971, cited in Gilroy, 1992 p. 187)

To an extent, the way in which one conceives of oneself as representative or as an example of something is this awareness that what is one's own, one's identity, what is proper to one, is also biography, and has a history. That history is unmotivated but not capricious and is larger in outline than we are. (Spivak, 1993, p. 5)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I further examine the issues raised by my analysis and explore some areas that may provide a way forward. I explore the tension between my engagement with liberatory anti-racist pedagogy and politics and the deconstructive, anti-foundational tendencies of poststructural theory. By using Spivak's conception of 'strategic essentialism'[39] to modify Narayan's principle of 'epistemic privilege'(1988) I both trouble and acclaim the mobilization of epistemic privilege in

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[39] Spivak discusses the perils and possibilities of strategic essentialism in The postcolonial critic (1990), and revises and clarifies her position in the first chapter of Outside in the teaching machine (1993).

negotiating the material basis for valuing truths from the margins, while recognizing the partiality and power implicatedness of knowledge. In other words, I explore the potential of shifting experience from its foundational status while simultaneously crediting the necessity and salience of mobilizing from the margins. I argue for the feasibility of a carefully constructed, and politically mediated poststructural engagement with anti-racist pedagogical theory and practice.

I have utilised poststructural insights to analyse the normalization of white privilege/power even as it is reproduced in specific ways in anti-racist initiatives. By analysing the impasses that are produced by an overly static view of experience and identity I have argued for the necessity of defoundationalizing the theoretical place of these concepts. A poststructural analysis of power as extant in every social moment makes imperative the deconstruction of daily experience in order to denaturalize and make visible the details of the production of dominant discourses. This is in itself an act of resistance, and exposes multiple other sites as possibilities for strategic progressive interventions. Joan Scott has stated the necessity of "...focusing on the processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive nature of 'experience' and on the politics of its construction. Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political" (Scott 1992, p. 37).

However, as I have discussed, for the marginalized, for those oppressed by racism, there are significant risks and difficulties in the deconstruction of experience based

truth claims and identity, and in the incorporation of complex subject location in terms of degrees of both power and oppression. In the hotly contested arena of poststructuralism, anti-racism, and feminism many have been concerned that the deconstruction of essential identities renders effective political action impossible.[40] For those interested in liberation struggles, a troubling tension is produced within this analysis between poststructuralism's deconstructive impulse and the organizational need to construct the category of the subject (such as women, people of colour, the poor) as a mobilizing political strategy, which involves honouring yet not reifying the value of marginalized knowledge. As discussed in the previous chapters, there has recently been much troubling of this terrain as the need to interrogate all discourses as regimes of truth, bump up against the borders of valorized identities. Recognizing, as Barbara Christian argues, that for the marginalized "speaking from one's experience is an act of *survival*" (1988, p. 55) complicates any attempt to critically examine what amounts to survival speech. While macrosocial structural realities of oppression are surely sufficient reason to value marginalized knowledge, I have argued throughout this thesis that essential and static subject positioning creates its own grave problems which ultimately work against effective anti-racist interventions.

The limits of identity based organizing have been much discussed, particularly by feminists and anti-racists interested in postmodern or poststructural theory. In fact identity based organizing has been critiqued for both over homogenizing the range of

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[40] For example see the work of Christine de Stephano (1990), Seyla Benhabib (1990), and Teresa Ebert (1995).

actual differences within a subject/identity category (women of colour, lesbian, working class), and also for an excessive fragmentary compartmentalization of identities.[41] For instance, bell hooks discusses her feelings of silence, anger and alienation when her experiences as a black woman transgressed the authorized version of that social location within a women of colour caucus she was involved in.[42] This is an example of what Haraway discusses as regimes of truth operating within discourses of resistance and liberation (Haraway, 1990). The other side of the identity based dilemma argues that newer versions of racism which emphasize (insurmountable) difference and an absolutist view of ethnicity have become a fragmenting organizational feature of anti-racist organizing itself. As Gilroy argues:

> The potentially unifying effects of their different but complementary
> experiences of racism are dismissed while the inclusive and openly politicised
> definitions of 'race' ...have been fragmented into their ethnic components,
> first into Afro-Caribbean and Asian and then into Pakistani, Bangladeshi,
> Bajan, Jamaican and Guyanese in a spiral. This boiling down of groups into
> their respective ethnic essences is clearly congruent with the nationalist
> concerns of the right, but it is also sanctioned by the anti-racist orthodoxy of
> the left and by many voices from within the black communities themselves.
> (Gilroy 1990, p. 77)

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[41] Donna Haraway argues that "Taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation from official women's experience" (1990, p 198). See also Judith Butler (1990 and 1992).

[42] In particular see: bell hooks, "Revolutionary black women" in her book Black looks (1992). This problem is also discussed by Omi and Winant, (1993) p 10.

The grievance of over homogenizing and excessive fragmentation really express the limits of identity as a foundational organizational tool. Rather than attempting to fix or resolve the tension, we should recognize the limits of the concept of identity and embrace its instability. Any definition of identity will involve the tension between the overly generalized and/or the overly specific, between inclusion and inclusion. This leads me, in the next section, to explore this tension between the importance of "granting the epistemic privilege of the oppressed" (Narayan 1988), while also critiquing the problems of reified experience and subject position.

4.2 TROUBLING EPISTEMIC PRIVILEGE

At the heart of this thesis lies the theoretical tension between the anti-foundational and deconstructive impulses of poststructuralism and the liberationist desire to honour the historical, material realities of the oppressed. I turn to the concept of epistemic privilege as a way of negotiating the material basis for valuing truths from the margins, while recognizing the partiality and power implicatedness of knowledge. Indeed an analysis of power relations as they are played out and (re)produced in the microsocial field makes it incumbent upon us to explore the perspectives produced by the oppressed - not as unquestionable truths, but as a rich source of knowledge from that social location at a given historical moment. Poststructuralist insights facilitate breaking out of the dichotomized positioning of subjugated knowledge as either essentialized and authentic or pluralistic and relativised.

Epistemic privilege expresses the familiar feminist and anti-racist notion that

knowledge produced from the margins provides unique and potentially transformative perspectives on social relations.[43] Implicit in this is the recognition that one's social location in terms of power/oppression bears a formational relationship to knowledge production. As Uma Narayan defines it : "The claim of epistemic privilege amounts to claiming that members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle and critical knowledge about the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of that oppressed group" (Narayan 1988, p. 35). It is worth briefly detailing three main points of Narayan's conception of epistemic privilege. First, epistemic privilege of the oppressed does not imply that the oppressed have a clearer or better knowledge of the *causes* of oppression. Here Narayan recognizes the value of daily experiences, emotions, and critical analyses of the oppressed, while simultaneously recognizing that someone outside of a particular oppression may possess explanatory theories, and insight (p. 34-35).

Secondly, "the claim to epistemic privilege for the oppressed does not mean...that people who are not members of the oppressed group can *never* come to understand the experiences of the oppressed or share in their insights or knowledge" (Narayan 1988, p. 36). This is very important in that Narayan posits a non monolithic yet valued positioning of marginalized knowledge, along with the potential of understanding, to some significant degree, across our varied differences. Further, she argues that succumbing to the supposed "unconveyability of insights" across

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[43] Narayan credits Alison Jagger with coining the phrase 'epistemic privilege', it is engaged in various ways by Sandra Harding (1982); and Nancy Hartsock (1983); and Judith Butler (1990).

marginalities would make effective political action virtually impossible. She appeals to her readers lived experiences with those outside of particular oppressions, who in their beliefs, actions and politics have to a significant extent integrated an anti oppression praxis. "Many of us would claim to know, say, a few men who are sympathetic to and understand a good deal about feminist concerns, or white people who are concerned with and understand a good deal about issues of race" (1988, p. 37). This point is crucial in that it is a refusal of an essentialized subjectivity, and of a *deterministic* relationship between subject position and knowledge production. A possibility that Narayan does not discuss, but which in my view is also opened up through this analysis, is the negotiation of divergent experience based claims *within* a particular oppression. As discussed in chapter one, because racism, for example, is not any one thing, but rather is constituted in a variety of locally and historically specific ways, it can be experienced by different people of colour in different ways.

This is far from a universally popular analysis. Ultimately, mobilizing epistemic privilege means contending with differently positioned people differently. As introduced in the previous chapter, the privileging of the knowledge of marginalized people, of people of colour, explodes the boundaries of liberal democratic ideals. For instance, equal time for each person to speak would not have disrupted racist relations in the 'True Fiction' case of the staff meeting because culturally and numerically the white (and liberal) perspective was predominant. This was also the result in the 'Workshop' example (discussed in chapter two) of shared stories of early consciousness of race/ism. Thus the concept of equal time actually serves to perpetuate racist relations. Ellsworth argues that testimony from the margins ". . .

cannot be 'public' or 'democratic' in the sense of including the voices of all affected parties and affording them equal weight of legitimacy. Nor can such debate be free of conscious and unconscious interests which some participants hold as non-negotiable no matter what arguments are presented" (1989 p. 320). However, while I support the necessity of epistemic privilege I would argue that with the aim of defending the marginalized, some theorists and practitioners can stray too far into an equally problematic essentializing of subjectivity, and a deterministic relationship between subject location and knowledge production. For instance, Ellsworth states that "It is inappropriate to respond to (marginalized speech) by subjecting them to rationalist debates about their validity" (1989 p. 320). Ellsworth is clear that she is not claiming that marginalized voices are always true, but in my view, forecloses many possibilities for hearing/speaking across unequal social positions. While Narayan's conception of epistemic privilege values without reifying knowledge produced from the margins, she also attempts to negotiate a careful opening of communication across differences, in which participants listen to each other, always mindful of their respective degrees of privilege/oppression.

The concept of epistemic privilege is far from simple or unacrimonious at an operational level. It must be recognized that the valuing/prioritizing of marginalized voices explodes the parameters of liberal democratic ideals of equality in that equality no longer means treating everyone the same (Ebert 1995, Ellsworth 1989, Razack 1993, 1995 and Walkerdine 1990). For example, in the 'True Fiction' case of the black manager and the staff meeting the interrogation of the manager's experiences of racism in the organization was performed in a manner which was

undermining to her both personally and as a manager in the organization. Epistemic privilege would dictate not that her perspective was unquestionable, but rather that it should be valued, received, heard, taken up in a more politically nuanced manner. How it would be heard depends upon the social location of the person hearing it, albeit not in a deterministic sense. In other words, I am arguing that epistemic privilege is about how communication among heterogenous groups is possible. It is not about *whether* we can critique knowledge produced from the margins but *how*. The mobilization of subjugated knowledge can only be negotiated (in heterogenous groups) with an historical and political analysis of power relations. In the aforementioned example, the white staff person could have adopted Narayan's call for methodological humility and caution; to assume the likelihood that those in a privileged position are likely missing something, to accept the limits of one's knowledge, to be cautious in criticism (Narayan, 1988, p. 38). Narayan argues:

> Outsiders may, rightly, feel that the exercise of methodological humility and methodological caution may cramp the spontaneity of their reactions and the ease with which they communicate. However, this loss of ease and spontenaeity seems a necessary and small price to pay to avoid causing offense to insiders and causing serious breaches in dialogue. If it is not only possible that insiders have epistemic privilege, but if it is also true that insiders are specially vulerable to insensitivities from outsiders they trust and work with, it seems both unavoidable and only fair that outsiders bear the burden of exercising caution and of taking care not to offend. (Narayan, 1988, p. 46)

Finally, and most importantly for my argument, Narayan's third point is that "...the claim that the oppressed have epistemic privilege does not amount...to a claim that the knowledge that they have of their oppression is in any way 'incorrigible'" (1988, p 37). In other words, epistemic privilege does not mean that an oppressed person is always correct, or that their knowledge is innocent, as in unimplicated, in power. In this conception epistemic privilege is not premised upon a static, unified subject or monolithic construction of race (or gender, dis/ability, and so on). Thus epistemic privilege is not about claims to innocent, unquestionable, authentic truths. Rather it is premised upon the recognition that historical material conditions of oppression produce subject positions as marginalized/centered, and that these power relations are the vortex in which subjectivity, identity and knowledge are produced. The concept of epistemic privilege moves beyond the principle of compensatory redress for the oppressed to a fundamental epistemological insight about the formational link between the ontology of subject and knowledge production in oppressive material conditions.

It is vitally important to place a high value on the experience/knowledge of the marginalized, not because the standpoint of the oppressed produces innocent knowledge, but rather because the recognition of the discursive quality of knowledge leads one to value (but not uncritically accept) the unique perspective provided. The theoretical basis for this can be traced right from Karl Marx to Dorothy Smith(1990) and many other feminists, through various postmodern writers. As Donna Haraway states: "The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial

of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge" (1991, p. 190). Foucault

discusses this as the value of "subjugated knowledge" (1980), Said as the "originality

of vision" (1990, p. 366), and hooks as an "oppositional world view"(1988).

What Narayan does not address how the principle of epistemic privilege operates in

group contexts in which participants are both 'insiders' and 'outsiders', as is the case

in my 'True Fiction' examples and in many workplaces and political coalitions

engaged in anti-racism (Grewal and Caplan, 1994; Razack, 1993). Multiple and

shifting subject positioning in terms of oppression/privilege complicates the

operation of epistemic privilege in that outsider/insider status is never singular nor

static, either within an individual or among them. Epistemic privilege contains

within it the potential for an overly homogenous construction of truth from the

margins, such as, as hooks critiqued above, 'the' black women's perspective.

Multiple and divergent truths/perspectives from within a particular oppressed social

location (such as Aboriginal, lesbian, poor and so forth) are not anticipated within

Narayan's conception. Thus, the principle of epistemic privilege alone cannot

ensure the ability to negotiate through divergent truth/stories from within or among

marginalized locations. The deconstruction of 'the' margins and 'the' centre to

encompass complex subject locations of privilege and oppression cannot be

contended with solely on the basis of epistemic privilege. There remains the need

for a historically and locally informed political basis from which to strategically

negotiate truth claims.

For anyone interested in anti-racist pedagogy and organizational change the concept

of epistemic privilege supports our ability to really hear and learn across differences in power. To practice epistemic privilege requires making conscious and visible the ways in which one exercises power through some aspects of social location, even as one is marginalized in others. In some sense epistemic privilege amounts to a 'non-foundational premise'. Knowledge from the margins is prioritized for its unique perspective on oppressive relations and for its potential to be transformative. The recognition that such knowledge is not innocent, value free, or unimplicated in power relations does de-essentialize truth claims made on this basis - but it does not invalidate them. However, as I have argued previously, there can be no assumed progressive political engagement or outcome from the truth from the margins. The complexity of interlocking systems of oppression determine that marginalized perspectives will be imbricated in power relations with varying effects, from liberatory and progressive to re-entrenching the status quo.

I have argued that the concept of epistemic privilege is a valuable tool to disrupt the production and recirculation of white privilege/power in anti-racist initiatives, provided that one remains vigilant against tendencies to reify marginalized knowledge, or retreat into uncritical acceptance. Yet, the necessary mobilization of marginalized knowledge must still be negotiated with a consciousness of large scale and microsocial power relations. In other words, a historically and locally informed political basis from which to strategically negotiate truth claims (from oppressed positions and otherwise) is necessary. To locate a basis from which to negotiate among complex and shifting power/knowledge relations I turn to Gayatri Spivak's

conceptualization of "strategic essentialism".[44]

4.3 STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM

The theoretical tension in this thesis between the deconstruction of complex, shifting and multiple subject/knowledge production in material context, and the political agenda of effective anti-racist pedagogy and practice is expressed in my engagement with strategic essentialism. I have argued that epistemic privilege is necessary but not sufficient to negotiate the range of voices, experiences and realities across and within differences in power. I argue that we must assert both the importance of positionality and refuse to essentialize it - the deconstruction of identity is not a refusal of its importance. I am interested in Spivak's recent use of the term 'strategic essentialism' as the "*strategic* use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (1993 p. 5 original emphasis). Spivak clarifies her engagement with strategic essentialism in the following quote:

> The strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or master word like
> *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all
> mobilized. . . This is the impossible risk of a lasting strategy. . . The critique
> of ...the master word has to be persistent all along the way, even when it
> seems that to remind oneself of it is counter productive. Otherwise the
> strategy freezes into something like what you call an essentialist position,

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[44] Spivak's analysis of strategic essentialism has changed and developed over time I am most interested in the critique she provides in her text Outside in the teaching machine (1990), particularly "In a Word: Interview" in which she is interviewed by Ellen Rooney.

when the situation that calls forth the strategy is seemingly resolved. (1993 p. 3-4)

This definition values the strategic political necessity and effectiveness of mobilizing under the fictions of fixed identifiers such as race, sex, class and so forth, without collapsing that necessity into supposedly real, static identities. What is extremely important here is that this analysis recognizes the power and saliency of identity based organizing without romanticising over the discursive nature of identity. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, shared understandings of experiences of oppression, both historical and current, are an active and meaningful basis of organizing our (marginalized) social selves. I am arguing that valuing 'experience' and 'truth' from the margins is not necessarily antithetical to a discursive analysis, but it does change how and what questions get asked, how one hears/perceives, and how one values experience in social theory. Experience, particularly of marginalized people, should not be interrogated to the point of atomisation, or theorized into oblivion. There is a concrete risk that the interrogation of experience could be taken up through dominant discourses and used as a tool to undermine and silence those oppressed by racism.[45] What must be considered is what is at stake for those already silenced? To deconstruct identity, to problematize knowledge produced from the margins, should not lead to an overall suspicion of their value. Rather, as Spivak argues "The greatest gift of deconstruction. . . (is to) question the

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[45] On the risks for people of colour speaking about their experiences see for example: Audre Lorde, "Age, race, class, and sex: Women redefining difference" (1984); and bell hooks Talking back: Thinking feminist thinking black (1989).

authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him [sic], persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility" (1993 p 5).

Clearly, specific oppressions produce equally specific strategies of resistance. It would be foolish, for the sake of a theoretical imperative or the deconstructive momentum of poststructuralism, to take the deconstruction of experience and identity to an extreme such that we belie what is apparent in the everyday. Critical examination of assumptions, conditions for creation, and space for expression of marginalized knowledge are necessary, but let us not lose sight of the power of mobilizing around these 'fictions' of unified identity. For example, when Toronto's black community (not a homogenous, or perhaps in strictest sense 'a' community), mobilizes a demonstration against racist police violence (particularly against black men) it *matters* that so many people come out. In my view, there is the hopeful possibility that strategic political pragmatism can function to limit the deconstructive tendency to excessive fragmentation, and dislocation of (albeit discursively produced) experience. The practice of critical seeing and hearing is far from simple, and while there are no *necessary* political outcomes or engagements attached to any of these strategies, a political analysis can inform the negotiation of this terrain. Daily experiences of violence, exclusion, and silencing must inform a progressive politic, but one can only make sense of these subjugations within the broader social context of capitalism, racism and so forth.

Thus, what is posited is that an essentialized vision of identity is not necessary for effective political solidarity. This constitutes a refusal of a foundational premise of

identity for political solidarity and resistance. In her introduction to her interview with Spivak in <u>Outside in the teaching machine</u> Ellen Rooney discusses the conundrum for feminists, and I would add of anti-racists and others involved in anti-oppression work, who seek some authorizing fixed and essential basis of solidarity. Rooney states:

> We seem to desire that what unites us (as feminists) preexist our desire to be
> joined; something that stands outside our own alliances may authorize them
> and empower us to speak not simply as feminists but as women . . . In the
> U.S., this is an old dream of 'non partisanship' at the heart of politics, as well
> as what Haraway calls 'the dream of a common language. . . a perfectly
> faithful naming of experience'. (Rooney 1993, p. 2)

I believe we can mobilize strategic essentialism without it becoming a fetishistic quest for a concrete foundation or a tabula rasa of anti-racist theory and political organizing. This strategy brings to bear the critical force of anti-enlightenment theories mitigated by a strategic political desire for liberation.

Strategic essentialism is quite challenging to put into pracitce at the daily level. It is here that it is necessary to make decisions about how one teaches, what is opened or closed for discussion, how we ask questions and hear across differences, how we address relations of domination in heterogenous groups. Rather than seeking a foundational premise, be it identity or something else, to create a universal strategy we must do the difficult work of enabling political theory to inform context specific practices. Each of my 'True Fiction' examples illustrate common theoretical

concerns, but the strategies to disrupt the specific operations of white privilege would have to respond to the local and particular discourses that require it. Spivak emphasises that "a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory" (1993, p. 4). Further, she states: "Strategy works through a persistent (de)constructive critique of the theoretical. 'Strategy' is an embattled concept-metaphor and unlike 'theory', its antecedents are not disinterested and universal" (1993, p.3).

The greatest difficulty and risk in strategic essentialism is that it requires vigilance against slippage between a strategic and substantive essentialism, as well as an ongoing self conscious critique of the strategy. Ironically, the more effective essentialism is as a strategy, the more tempting it is to forget that it is a pragmatic ploy, not a theoretical Archimedean point. As Spivak notes:

> Within mainstream U.S. feminism the good insistence that 'the personal is political' often transformed itself into something like 'only the personal is political'. The strategic use of essentialism can turn to an alibi for proselytizing academic essentialism. The emphasis then inevitably falls on being able to speak from one's own ground, rather than matching the trick to the situation, that the word strategy implies. (1993, p. 4)

The erosion of strategic to substantive or 'real' essentialism inevitably produces the no win query seen in the 'True Fiction' Workshop scenario, "but how can you question my experience?" The anti-racist interventions I explore through the 'True Fiction' scenarios not only fail to challenge discourses of white domination, they inadvertently reproduce them. In an effort to guard against excessive fragmentation

and relativism of racial oppression, I believe anti-racists have been overly cautious about incorporating analyses of complex, non-static and multiple subject location, and by extension, discursive knowledge production. As I have discussed, this is understandable given the risks involved for those marginalized by racism. However, the case scenarios I have used illustrate that an overly essentialized, unitary and static construction of subjectivity/identity actually produces impassable barriers to the disruption of racist relations, including the perpetuation of white domination. As Haraway has argued: "Innocence, and the corollary insistence on victimhood as the only ground for insight, has done enough damage" (Haraway, 1990 p 198).

I have argued that there is a theoretical space from which to de-essentialize knowledge production, including that from the margins, while also valuing subjugated knowledge for what it reveals about power relations, and its potential for transformational change, (in addition to its compensatory and empowering aspects). The question now becomes how to work with the breakdown of that dichotomy, to embrace the unstable tension between these dynamic tendencies. While this may not seem to be an overly radical insight, the implications of actually working with this tension are significant. In much of the literature and most of the practices I have been party to, there remains an overwhelming tendency to be positioned on one side or the other; either working from a position of essentialized subject/knowledge as the basis for liberation, or radically deconstructing identity and social location to the extent of fragmentation and (ironically) an excessive emphasis on the local and individual. As Haraway states: "In the consciousness of our failures, we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up the confusing tasks of making

partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. Epistemology is about knowing the difference" (1990, p. 202). Through the 'True Fiction' examples I have attempted to convey the deeply problematic outcomes of both an overly essentialized or overly relativised mobilization of subject/knowledge production within anti-racist pedagogy, particularly as the are mobilized through storytelling and moves to innocence.

I am arguing that strategic essentialism should work against the supposed ontological integrity of 'lesbians', 'women of colour', or 'the marginalized', but that the mobilization of people and interests along these lines of solidarity is a risky necessity in the face of historical and current operations of domination. These categories of identity have meaning only in the context of their enforcement through oppression. To deconstruct and de-essentialize (oppressed) identity categories does not eclipse their continuing social/political salience. As Donna Haraway argues:

> Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. . . Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism. (Haraway, 1990, p. 197)

Thus, I argue that strategic essentialism is part of a keen historical and political awareness of large scale discourses of domination which can limit any poststructural tendencies to excessive fragmentation. As Fraser and Nicholson argue, a feminist

and postmodern critique " need forswear neither large historical narratives nor analyses of societal macrostructures" (1990, p. 34). A politicized social and historical perspective is necessary to negotiate the unequal risks participants in anti-racist efforts bring to the table. Such an analysis foregrounds the political basis and goals of anti-racist work, rather than alliances and positioning based upon supposedly essential identities. In this we discover the possibility of a non static, contingent and political basis for negotiating among varied and contradictory truths from given subject locations. Without this basis there is a real risk of succumbing to a paralytic pluralism which effectively whitewashes power differentials. For instance, from this perspective the unequal risks of working in heterogenous groups can be appreciated. Who questions experience, how queries are set up and categories interrogated matters. This challenging aspect of radical positioning is rarely worked through very closely, but it is integral to the politically engaged, yet deconstructive practice I am advocating. As Haraway has stated: "The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility for webs of connection called solidarity in politics and shared conversation in epistemology" (1988, p. 584).

Efforts to centre marginalized knowledge and people of colour in anti-racist work privileges those discourses, however, this is not done from an essential but rather a contextual basis. As Ellen Rooney argues: "To undertake to place contemporary debates on essentialism in 'context' is already perhaps to take sides in the controversy those debates have engendered. In some lexicons, at least, context is an anti-essentialist slogan; to contextualize is to expose the history of what might

otherwise seem outside history, natural and thus universal, that is, the essence" (in

Spivak, 1993, p.1). While in the moment of specific anti-racist workshops or

organizational change efforts the principles of strategic essentialism and epistemic

privilege should mean less unfettered access to resources and 'air time' for white

people, ultimately the challenge of these principles function to open more discourses

than it closes. Incorporating an analysis of the shifting, in process and discursive

nature of subjectivity and identity formation, de-foundationalizes identity/subject

location based truths. This provides a strong theoretical basis for working across and

within differences of power, while limiting the exclusivity of issues. It opens up the

possibility, for example, of heterosexuals speaking to heterosexism, whites speaking

to racism, and so forth. However, as I have discussed, speaking across power

differentials must be done with a dynamic critical analysis of the conditions of one's

social positioning. Even as the exclusivity of authorizing identity is undermined,

much greater care and methodological humility on the part of the privileged is

required. Razia Aziz argues eloquently the importance and difficulty of this work,

we must:

> .. .incorporate *both* the deconstruction of subjectivity *and* the political
>
> necessity of asserting identity. . . (I)ts recognition of the fact that language
>
> and culture constitute reality needs to coexist with a recognition of the
>
> unmitigated realities of violence, economic exploitation and poverty. . . these
>
> questions need to be answered in relation to the imperatives of each historical
>
> moment. This requires as a degree of self-consciousness and responsibility of
>
> thought, utterance and action from our oppressed and oppressor selves alike
>
> which is nowhere prevalent yet. But the potential for alliance between black

and white women depends upon it. (Aziz, 1995, p. 171)

Despite the challenges of this project, it is one that must be pursued. As Narayan agues: "Working together across differences seems to be project we cannot avoid or get away from. We are condemned to either ignoring or annihilating differences, or to working tenuously across them to form always risky bonds of understanding" (1988, p.34). I am aware that I wind up on shaky ground here, adopting aspects of poststructuralist theory while remaining unwilling to let go of the value of marginalized experiences and identities, which I believe are of strategic necessity. Indeed my argument is that there is no secure foundational position or premise. We can't ignore that major institutions, such as the law, remain structured by modernist ideals of rights and the singular subject. However, the sense of any neutral, innocent or essential basis for anti-racist (and other liberatory) interventions has shifted irrevocably. There is no unquestionable position from which to speak or be heard - power is implicated in all discourses, including those of liberation. At this juncture we must be ever aware of the exclusions of any given theory and strategy. This analysis enables anti-racists to embrace the inevitably partial (in both senses) nature of our narratives. The basis for strategic and contingent political action is at once more fluid and destabilized than past theories could have conceived of. While the risks are not equally distributed, we are all walking on shifting, contingent ground.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of 'True Fiction' scenarios I have examined how anti-racist pedagogy frequently fails, despite the best intentions, to disrupt the (re)production of white privilege in progressive service organizations. By interrogating the operations of storytelling and moves to innocence I provided a sustained critique of liberal modernist ideals of singular, static subjectivity and identity production. I have explored the particular risks for those who are oppressed by racism, (or marginalized in other ways) in embracing a deconstructive analysis of multiple subject positioning in terms of privilege and oppression. However, I have argued that within a carefully constructed poststructural critique it remains valid to value, prioritize, and struggle for knowledge produced from the margins. I explored the tension between my engagement with liberatory anti-racist politics and poststructural theory through the mobilization of 'epistemic privilege' and 'strategic essentialism'. Recognizing the impact of power relations on the ontology of subject and knowledge production, I have argued that the strategic centering of the oppressed does not require the essentialization of oppressed subject positions and identities, nor the reification of knowledge produced from the margins. My hope is that this thesis contributes to further understanding of the processes by which whiteness is reproduced, normalized, and potentially, disrupted in organizational and educational contexts.

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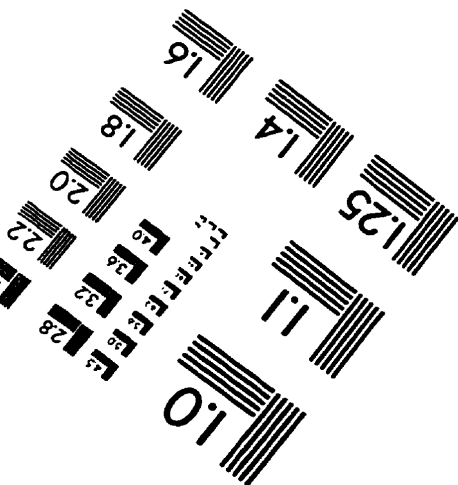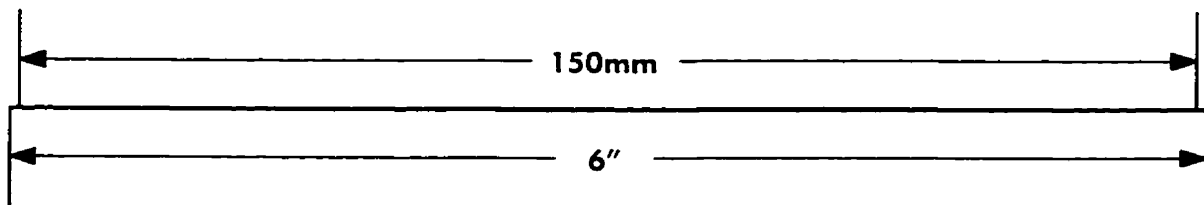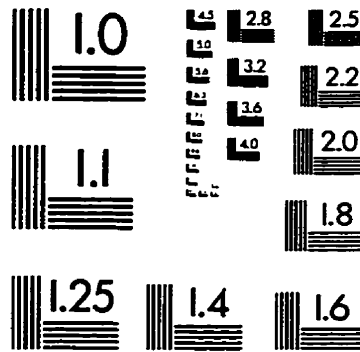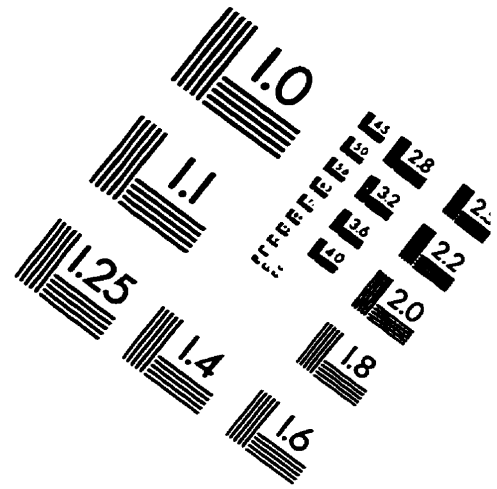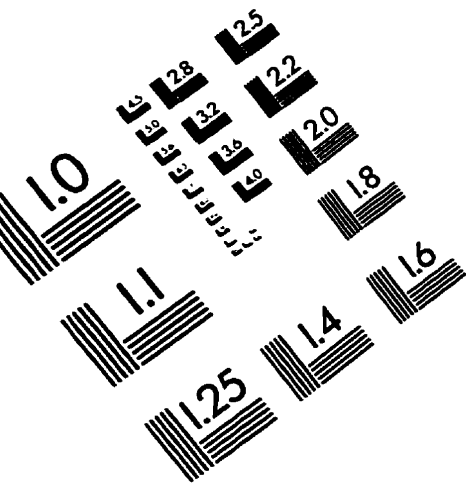
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IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

150mm

6"