WHAT IS INTERNALIZED RACIAL OPPRESSION AND WHY DON'T WE STUDY IT? ACKNOWLEDGING RACISM'S HIDDEN INJURIES

KAREN D. PYKE
University of California–Riverside

ABSTRACT: *Despite sociology's longstanding interest in inequality, the internalization of racial oppression among the racially subordinated and its contribution to the reproduction of racial inequality has been largely ignored, reflecting a taboo on the subject. Consequently, internalized racism remains one of the most neglected and misunderstood components of racism. In this article, the author argues that only by defying the taboo can sociology expose the hidden injuries of racism and the subtle mechanisms that sustain White privilege. After reviewing the concept and providing examples of the phenomenon, the author draws on critical social theory to examine reasons for the taboo, such as a theoretical fixation on resistance, a penchant for racial essentialism, and the limitations of an identity politics. The author concludes by offering a method for studying internalized racism and resistance concurrently within the matrix of intersecting forms of oppression.*
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It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

—W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1989 [1903]:3)

When I grew up my parents would hate me hanging out with anyone Asian. I mean they would literally say, "Don't hang out with them." I guess they have a preconception of them as being gang members. I don't know. I never really asked them. Maybe it was the way my parents influenced me because the whole time I was with anyone Asian I just felt uneasy. I can't stand Vietnamese people or just Asians in general.

—Author's group interview with Vietnamese American males

Over one hundred years have elapsed since W.E.B. Du Bois (1989 [1903]:3) described how White domination affects a "double consciousness" for the Black American

Address correspondence to: Karen D. Pyke, Department of Sociology, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521 ; *e-mail*: karen.pyke@ucr.edu.

born into "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." Despite an enduring respect for Du Bois and his oft-cited allusion to internalized racial oppression, sociology has yet to devote sustained attention to the topic. In fact, Stuart Hall refers to internalized racism as one of the most common and least studied features of racism. He defines internalized racism as "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them" (Hall 1986:26).[1] My interest in the topic emerged after I unexpectedly found evidence of the phenomenon while interviewing second-generation Asian Americans. Given sociology's long interest in inequality, I was astonished to find the subject largely absent from the race literature. Upon asking race scholars to point me to research on the topic, I met more often with puzzled looks than references. I learned our collective ignorance was no accident but the result of a taboo on a topic dubbed a "dirty little secret" (hooks 1995; 2003; Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992).

It was only by violating the taboo that I became aware of its full force. At an interdisciplinary conference in 2004 sponsored by the Center for Ideas and Society on my campus, I presented a paper on how internalized racism undergirded many Asian American women's accounts of romantic preference for White over Asian American men (Pyke 2010). My research sparked the anger of two visiting Ethnic Studies scholars who argued that the topic of internalized oppression denigrated the Asian American respondents as mere "dupes" and that I ought to consider the "politics of knowledge." They further suggested I focus my analysis on resistance instead. Their rather harsh comments perplexed me for a variety of reasons. Although I was uncertain as to how they were using the notion of a "politics of knowledge," and they did not elaborate, I assume they meant that research on internalized racism was politically harmful to the larger mission of racial liberation. I found this comment particularly bewildering as I regard the study of internalized White racism as integral to the project of resisting racism, especially given that the feminist study of internalized sexism among women has long been regarded as essential to strategizing against gender oppression (e.g., Anzaldúa 1993; Bordo 1993; Crenshaw 1993; Dinnerstein and Weitz 1994; Pheterson 1986; Pyke 1996). To forge effective methods of resistance, it is necessary to understand how oppression is internalized and reproduced. I assumed it to be common knowledge that *all* systems of inequality are maintained and reproduced, in part, through their internalization by the oppressed. Although the suggestion that I frame my study around the concept of resistance was untenable as my data simply did not point in that direction, I was troubled by the potential political misreading of my research and felt awkward defending my position. I lost confidence in my ability to do the topic justice and my research came to a standstill. I contemplated dropping the project altogether but knew doing so would disappoint the many students and respondents who had invested so heavily in the project. In order to gain the assurance I needed to move forward, I spent considerable time exploring why internalized racism is deemed so pernicious a topic as to warrant a taboo. This article is the result of those efforts.

I argue for the sociological study of internalized White racism by debunking some of the myths stalling its investigation and give examples of how such an

inquiry can forward our understanding of inequality and White privilege. I begin with a review of the concept in popular and scholarly discourses where it is referred to as "internalized racial oppression," "internalized racism," "internalized White supremacy," "internalized Whiteness," and the much-criticized term "racial self-hatred." I follow with a preliminary sociological re-sketching of what has been largely a psychological concept. I then engage critical social theory—an approach that considers how authority and power in all aspects of society, including research worlds, contributes to inequality—to evaluate several factors undergirding the taboo on the study of internalized racism. I conclude by offering an analytic method for future research. My purpose is not to provide a definitive discussion of the concept or its measurement, or to present an exhaustive or uncompromising argument. Rather, my goal is to spur sociological engagement with a topic that despite being pivotal to understanding racial inequality has been understudied for far too long.

Due to the tendency to misconstrue internalized oppression as reflecting some problem of the oppressed, I begin by noting what it is *not*. Like *all* forms of internalized domination, internalized racism is *not* the result of some cultural or biological characteristic of the subjugated. Nor is it the consequence of any weakness, ignorance, inferiority, psychological defect, gullibility, or other shortcoming of the oppressed. The internalization of oppression *is* a multidimensional phenomenon that assumes many forms and sizes across situational contexts, including the intersections of multiple systems of domination (Padilla 2001). It cannot be reduced to one form or assumed to affect similarly located individuals or groups in precisely the same way. It is an inevitable condition of *all* structures of oppression (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, and Wolkomir 2000).

BACKGROUND: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF INTERNALIZED RACISM

A psychological paradigm directing attention to the individual-level manifestations of internalized White racism dominates scholarly and popular discussions of the topic. This approach emphasizes the psychic costs of internalized racial oppression defined as the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one's racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one's race and/or oneself. This emphasis on individual psychological wounds is evident in a legacy of personal, often anecdotal, accounts of struggles with internalized racial inferiority that span the twentieth century. Anti-racist activists, writers, social commentators, and artists of color frequently touch on the topic in autobiographies, speeches, essays, editorials, films, music, poetry, and novels (e.g., Cliff 1985; Graham 1995; Hurston 1942; Lipsky 1987; Moraga 1983). Internalized skin tone bias in communities of color noted by the higher status and greater resources accorded lighter skin non-Whites is the predominate theme in the popular discourse on the topic (e.g., Brooks 1975; Davis 2005; Golden 2004; Lee 1988; Morrison 1970; Sandler 1994; Thurman 1929; Walker 1984). These narratives and artistic expressions capture the pain and trauma of individuals who are reckoning with their own internalized racism or their experiences with the internalized racism of others in

their racial group, such as family members. Similar themes are touched on in social science investigations of cosmetic surgery, hair straightening, skin lightening, and similar means of creating a more White-like appearance (Hall 2003a, 2003b; Jones 2000; Kaw 1993; Russell et al. 1992). This literature focuses on the psychological responses of the oppressed and how the subordinated can enhance their feelings of self-esteem, such as through consciousness-raising efforts (Lipsky 1987). Placing responsibility on the oppressed to solve the problem suggests it is of their own making, which easily leads to blaming the victims for internalized racism. This adds to the discomfort and disdain this topic inspires among anti-racist scholars and activists, an issue I take up later.

During the 1960s civil rights movement, a critical literature that focuses directly on structural oppression while also attending to the deleterious psychological effects of internalized racism emerged. Several anti-colonial writers concerned with the psychological effects of colonialism on the oppressed in North Africa and South America described a "colonized mentality" marked by a sense of inferiority and a desire to be more like the colonizers (Fanon 1963; 1967; Freire 1970; Memmi 1965). This body of work influenced racial politics in the United States. American civil rights and Black power activists argued that like Western colonialism abroad, White racial domination in the United States inflicts self-doubt and negative self-images, particularly around racialized features like skin tone. Malcolm X blamed "the White man" for Black racial "self-hatred" and viewed its eradication as a vital step toward racial freedom (Bagwell 1994). The 1960s "Black is beautiful" counternarrative and the politics of a natural "Afro" hairstyle were attempts to forge an oppositional consciousness of self-love and racial pride. The Black Pride movement did not endure, however, and was followed in the 1970s by a shift to therapeutic or "self-help" solutions to social problems (Polletta 2006), and thus a return to an emphasis on the psychological aspects of internalized racism.

Psychological and Sociological Research

The first psychological research on internalized racial oppression was a series of now-famous doll studies of Black children by two African American psychologists who interpreted the children's preference for White over Black dolls as racial self-hatred (Clark and Clark 1939; 1952). This set the stage for later work that relies on quantitative measures of self-esteem, self-identity, self-image, psychological adjustment, and attitudes about one's racial group to capture manifestations of internalized racism (Bloom 1972; Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children 1970; Taylor and Grundy 1996). More recent psychological research explores internalized racism's deleterious effects on mental and physical health (Chambers, Tull, Fraser, Mutuhu, Sobers, and Niles 2004), marital satisfaction (Taylor 1990), and ethnic identity (Hipolito-Delgado 2007). Clinical psychologists (Fortes De Leff 2002; Semmier and Williams 2000) and the grass roots reevaluation counseling movement (Lipsky 1987) discuss therapeutic responses to internalized racism, including its secondary effects within communities of color, such as homophobia (Greene 2000) and domestic violence (Brice-Baker 1994).

The early psychological research, particularly the "doll test" studies, were criticized for engaging invalid quantitative measures of racial self-esteem, identity, and preference (Baldwin 1979; Banks 1976), leading to calls for the doll test to "be laid to rest as a valid indicator of African-American children's self-esteem" (McMillan 1988:71; for a review, see McLemore 1994:135–37). Some also charged that the doll studies suggest to be Black is, by definition, to be self-hating (Comer 1970; Kardiner and Ovesey 1965), implying a fundamental "racial" personality type (Schaefer 2004:63). With the focus on the Black psyche, the larger problem of White racism seemed to disappear, leading many anti-racist scholars to reject this body of scholarship and avoid the concept of internalized racism altogether. Community psychologists recently issued a call for research on internalized oppression designed to develop a "liberation psychology" by focusing on strategies for collective forms of resistance (Burton and Kagan 2005; Moane 2003:91; Watts and Serrano-García 2003). A shift from research on the individual psyche to collective forms of internalized oppression would bring attention to the structural reality of racial inequality that went largely unconsidered in the earlier psychological studies.

Sociological research on internalized racial oppression has been far more sporadic and cursory than in psychology. There is no subfield in sociology devoted to the topic like in psychology. Mention of the concept tends to be fleeting (e.g., Allport 1954; Lee 1996; Lopez 2003:28) or isolated from a larger literature on the topic (Collins 1990; 2004; for exceptions, see Gilman 1986; Osajima 1993; Pyke and Dang 2003; Rodriguez 2006). Popular race and ethnicity textbooks often exclude the topic altogether or limit discussion to a definition of "racial self-hatred," which is a narrower and more politically volatile term than "internalized racism" (e.g., Aguirre and Turner 2004; Healey 2004; Kleg 1993:171–72; see McLemore 1994:135–37).

Sociologists have joined psychologists in the study of skin tone bias, particularly as it affects women. This research documents the effects of skin tone bias on intra-racial disparities in life chances including social desirability, educational attainment, occupational status, income, opportunities for marriage, self-concept, and self-esteem (Freeman, Ross, Armor, and Pettigrew 1966; Gómez 2000; Gullickson 2005; Hill 2000; Hughes and Hertel 1990; Hunter 2005; Keith and Herring 1991; Mullins and Sites 1984; Murguia and Telles 1996; Rondilla and Spickard 2007; Seeman 1946; Thompson and Keith 2001). This largely descriptive literature stops short of linking skin tone bias with a broader category of internalized (racial) oppression. Nonetheless, it provides a foundation on which more theoretically driven sociological work can build.

The neglect of internalized racial oppression is also apparent in the sociological study of immigration. Eurocentric models of acculturation and assimilation derived from research on earlier European immigrants shape this literature and are ill-equipped for studying today's non-White immigrant groups (Kibria 2002; Park 2005). While immigration scholars acknowledge social structural inequality and assimilation pressures, they have yet to devote sustained attention to the acculturative mechanisms by which oppressed newcomers inculcate ideologies of White supremacy and racial oppression (for an exception, see Pyke 2000; Pyke and

Johnson 2003). Similarly, this literature has yet to consider the consequences for immigrants of color who arrive having already imbibed in their homeland an ideology of White (Western) superiority dispensed through military, economic, religious, and cultural colonialism and imperialism (Kim 2006). This literature would thus benefit from greater attention to internalized racial oppression.

TOWARD A CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF INTERNALIZED RACISM

A critical approach that highlights the social structural and cultural mechanisms that maintain and reproduce systemic processes of domination is needed to remedy an overemphasis on the psychological outcomes of White racism's internalization among the oppressed. In this section, I take such an approach in sketching a sociological definition of internalized White racism and clarify some misunderstandings contributing to the taboo on the topic. I then engage a critical analysis of the theoretical assumptions and trends in race scholarship that discourage attention to this concept.

All systems of oppression not thoroughly coerced through brute force and overt repression involve the dominant group's ability to win consent of the oppressed. I rely on a Gramscian (1971) conceptualization of hegemony to understand the process by which the ruling race attains consensus of subordinated groups. The dominant group controls the construction of reality through the production of ideologies or "knowledge" (Foucault 1977 [1975]) that circulate throughout society where they inform social norms, organizational practices, bureaucratic procedures, and commonsense knowledge. In this way the interests of the oppressors are presented as reflecting everyone's best interests, thereby getting oppressed groups to accept the dominant group's interests as their own and minimize conflict (see also Pyke 1996:529). Gramsci's notion of an ideological hegemony is evident when the subjugated inculcate, seemingly by cultural osmosis, negative stereotypes and ideologies disseminated as taken-for-granted knowledge. One need not experience discrete, identifiable instances of overt discrimination to internalize racial oppression. White racism can infiltrate the world view of the racially oppressed without their conscious consent (Osajima 1993) in a subtle process some refer to as "indoctrination" and "mental colonialization" (hooks 2003).

The concept of hegemony also encourages attention to how White racism can be *indirectly* internalized via cultural myths and ideologies that seemingly have nothing to do with race per se. An example of such an ideology is meritocracy, the notion that the selection of individuals for advancement and opportunities is based on their achievements and skills. Meritocracy obscures oppression by suggesting that racial disparities in hiring or school admissions are decided according to "objective" standards applied equally to all. We can include in our definition of internalized oppression the inculcation of seemingly neutral ideologies that justify and direct racist institutional practice, such as meritocracy. This conceptualization allows scholars to consider the involuntary aspects of internalized racial oppression and the limits of individual resistance.

In his study of Jewish "self-hatred," Sander Gilman (1986:2–5) describes how ideologies win compliance by inspiring a desire among the subjugated to be like

the oppressors. He uses the example of the liberal myth that social categories marking difference, such as race and ethnicity, are mutable and all can join the powerful if they abide the rules and behave like the dominant group. The more the subjugated identify with the powerful, the more they accept the ruling values and structural arrangements that keep them down. Gilman calls this a classic double bind situation. The empty promise that the oppressed can escape their "otherness" by shunning their difference lures them into supporting the very rules that define them into existence as the "other"—as those who are not allowed to share power. "Become like us and you will be accepted into our group." But they never are.

In fact, we can begin to talk about internalized oppression at the moment that the oppressed accept the identities imposed on them by oppressors. The creation of a dominant, "superior" class depends upon the existence of groups of exploitable "others" distinguished by their alleged inferiority (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Identities linked to gender, race, sexual, and caste oppressions are not mere byproducts of inequality but a constitutive component of their formation (Foucault 1977 [1975]; Gramsci 1971). These categorical distinctions become habitual as they are constructed in and through social relations and organizations, causing even the oppressed to have a stake in their subordinated identity (see Tilly 1998). When the oppressed come to accept these identities as "real," they are in effect internalizing their subjugated status in their definition of self (Perry 2002:9). Any attempt to construct oppositional identities is greatly constrained as they must do so in relation to the categorical schemas and meanings dictated by the oppressors (Osajima 1993; Pyke and Johnson 2003; Seccombe 1998).

To underscore this point, I consider the phenomenon of "defensive othering," which Schwalbe et al. (2000) describe as identity work engaged by the subordinated in an attempt to become part of the dominant group or to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with the subordinate group. This dynamic is evident in the formation of negative sub-ethnic identities within the group. For example, among Mexican Americans, the derogatory identities *wetback* (Obsatz 2001) and *pocho* (Sahagun 2002) are used to denigrate co-ethnics who are, respectively, newly immigrated or have assimilated into the dominant Euro-American culture. These terms are used to "other" members within the subordinated group, deeming them inferior in order to mark oneself or one's co-ethnic peer group as superior. By attributing the negative stereotypes and images that the dominant society associates with the racial/ethnic group to "other" members within the group, the subordinated can distance themselves from the negative stereotype. Furthermore, intra-group othering allows the oppressed to present themselves as like the oppressors. By demonstrating that they share the same attitudes and disdain toward co-ethnics who fit with the stereotypes, they attempt to join the dominant group. This is the double bind of oppressed identities, as previously noted, for the subjugated cannot so easily escape their "otherness" (Gilman 1986).

Although the subordinated engage defensive othering in resisting the imposition of a negative identity, they do so in a manner that contributes to the reproduction of inequality (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Thus defensive othering is a form of internalized racism. I must stress here that defensive othering is a normal adaptive

response to racism and not a cause of racism (Schwalbe et al. 2000). It is a symptom of the disease of racism, but not the disease itself.

Intra-ethnic othering also occurs at the collective level with the construction of derogatory sub-ethnic identities that are widely recognized and broadly used within the group, fomenting internal group tensions and divides (Anzaldúa 1993). I provide an empirical example from an analysis based on in-depth interviews with 184 young Californian adults who grew up in immigrant Korean and Vietnamese families (Pyke and Dang 2003). This study examines respondents' use of the sub-ethnic identity term *FOB*, an acronym for "Fresh off the Boat," in ways that reiterate the anti-Asian stereotypes of the White-dominated society. The largely derogatory term is used to label co-ethnic peers who are newly arrived to the United States; speak in heavy-accented English or communicate in Korean or Vietnamese among friends at least some of the time; display traits associated with being a "nerd," such as social awkwardness or, contradictorily, with being a gang member; identify strongly with one's ethnic group; assume ethnically "traditional" values and customs; socialize mostly with other co-ethnics; or engage in leisure pursuits associated with ethnic enclaves such as karaoke in Los Angeles' Korea Town or billiards in the cafes of Orange County's Little Saigon. Respondents strategically use FOB to ridicule co-ethnic "others" for displaying the same characteristics associated with anti-Asian stereotypes and, in so doing, distance themselves from those stereotypes. Although an adaptive response to oppression, this strategy of distancing oneself from negative stereotypes by suggesting they are true, just not true for oneself, is a form of internalized racial oppression (Osajima 1993; Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Dynamics of "distancing" are not only an individual response to oppression but also can shape collective practices within an ethnic group. Several respondents described how their entire co-ethnic peer group avoids social contact with other co-ethnic social groups identified as consisting of FOBs. In so doing, the peer group can collectively distance from the derogatory stereotype. To maintain the peer group's identity as non-FOBs, reprimands are given to any member who engages behavior regarded as *fobbish*, such as socializing with co-ethnics who do not speak English. Violators risk expulsion from the group. The social boundaries between peer groups identified as FOBs and non-FOBs are so strict that intergroup dating is prohibited and fights between the two groups are not uncommon (Pyke and Dang 2003:162,167).

The term *FOB* is a vehicle through which anti-Asian stereotypes infiltrate and shape definitions of appropriate behavior within some co-ethnic peer groups, deeming as inappropriate and undesirable more "ethnic" behavior while endorsing as desirable "White" behavior (such as dressing in popular "White" styles and speaking only English). This illustrates how the resistance of racist stereotypes through distancing can pivot on the simultaneous assimilation of White supremacy and the glorification of Whiteness. My purpose in detailing these two examples is to emphasize how internalized oppression manifests not simply at the level of the individual psyche but also in *collective* social practices. To further my case for the sociological study of internalized racism, I challenge some of the assumptions contributing to the taboo on the subject.

WHY WE HAVE NOT STUDIED INTERNALIZED RACISM

Sociology's failure to engage a sustained study of internalized racial oppression is, in part, a defensive response to the concern that such research will be misinterpreted as reflecting some weakness of the oppressed. However, our discipline's relative silence on the topic only buttresses these misconceptions while denying the existence of some of racism's most insidious and damaging consequences. In this section, I discuss several inter-related factors contributing to a misunderstanding of internalized racism and its absence in the sociological study of race.

Misplacing the Origin of Internalized Racial Oppression

We know little about the specific forms of racist ideology and structural arrangements that generate internalized racism and what forms are most powerful in winning the consent of the oppressed. Instead, there is an overreliance on personal anecdotes identifying family members, usually parents, as instilling a sense of racial inferiority, as the following examples illustrate:

> "Don't play in the sun. You're going to have to get a light-skinned husband for the sake of your children as it is." (mother to daughter, Golden 2004:9)

> No one ever quite told me this (that light was right), but I knew that being light was something valued in my family (who were all Chicano, with the exception of my father). (Moraga 1983:28)

> "Your daddy is black but he sure is handsome." (Golden 2004:4)

Shame swirls around such stories prompting reluctance to discuss them or a denial of the problem (Golden 2004:7; Russell et al. 1992). The tendency to frame the intergenerational transmission of internalized oppression as destructive or unloving decenters oppression and the double bind of the oppressed. Family lessons linked to internalized racial oppression are adaptive responses engaged to prepare children and others for the racism they will encounter and to minimize its impact, like telling a child to marry lighter so as to produce lighter-skinned children who will likely suffer fewer costs of racism than their darker-skinned counterparts (Golden 2004; Lipsky 1987; Mullins and Sites 1984; Okazawa-Rey, Robins, and Ward 1987; Russell et al. 1992). Collins (1990:123) describes a double bind among Black mothers who, on the one hand, are compelled to socialize children to accept some aspects of oppression so as to ensure their survival, while, on the other hand, they understand the emotional costs of such training and do not want their children to be completely compliant.

The failure to study internalized racism is partly due to a concern that the racially subordinated will be held responsible for reinscribing White supremacist thinking, casting it as *their* shortcoming rather than a problem of White racism. This fear is understandable given the dogged, largely unexamined practice in anti-racist discourse of denouncing those who exhibit some facet of internalized racism, like the Black person who refuses to date anyone darker or the Korean American who has double-eyelid surgery. Pop singer Michael Jackson's dramatic physical transformation with repeated cosmetic surgeries, including a narrowing of the width of his

nose (a form of rhinoplasty that when engaged by Blacks and Asians is commonly interpreted as reflecting a dislike of one's racialized features; Kaw 1993; Russell et al. 1992), spurred anger and criticism from African Americans who viewed him as "trying to be White" (Clarke 2009) and a "traitor" to his race (Braxton 2009:A10). By focusing on Jackson, this discourse deflects attention from the larger racist society and the way that the imposition of White beauty standards can cause some racial minorities to feel unattractive and to desire more White-like features (Kaw 1993; Russell et al. 1992). Blaming the victims serves to mystify and protect White racism.

The Theoretical Fixation with Resistance

To better understand the reluctance to study internalized racism, we need to consider how the primacy accorded resistance in the study of the oppressed has discouraged attention to complicity and accommodation (Mohanty 2002:208). One anthropologist who noted the absence of research on compliance refers to the "current love affair with resistance" as the "theoretical hegemony of resistance" (Brown 1996:729–30). This fixation with resistance began with the liberation and anti-war movements of the 1960s and 1970s when organized struggle seemed capable of bringing great change in society, such as the end of Jim Crow and the war in Vietnam. However, by the end of the 1970s, the limits of these struggles became clear, making it more difficult for liberation scholars to sustain grand narratives of revolution, insurgency, and emancipation. Their focus shifted to more everyday forms of resistance, as in feminist theory where "the personal became political," and the study of resistance proliferated (Abu-Lughod 1990; Adam 1978; Alway 1995). In their review of sociological research that engages the concept of resistance, Hollander and Einwohner (2004:533–34, 547) find this "fashionable" topic used in contradictory ways and sometimes "it seems to be as much a symbol of the writer's political stance as an analytic concept." To be sure, resistance narratives hold immense appeal for liberation scholars. They inspire confidence and purpose among the subjugated and reinforce commitment to liberation movements. They also provide an occasion for scholars to "reassure ourselves that the pursuit of what might seem to be esoteric [scholarship] is really a form of high-minded public service" (Brown 1996:730).

Certainly the study of resistance has been a much-needed corrective to an earlier depiction of the subjugated as perpetual, powerless victims. However, the inclination to see resistance everywhere and read its many forms "as signs of the ineffectiveness of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated" is problematic; it discourages certain questions about the workings of power (Abu-Lughod 1990:42). Most fundamentally, it forecloses attention to complicity, accommodation, and the maintenance and reproduction of domination (Adam 1978; Chappell 2000; Schwalbe et al. 2000). The result is the exaggeration of resistance in social life and an underestimation of the power of oppressive structures to limit agency. Consider, for example, that the most subordinated members of society who are the least likely to be able to engage resistance do not, by definition, rise to positions that permit them to "speak" their experiences of oppression into the scholarly discourse and shape theoretical proclivities (Andersen 2005; Spivak 1988). Rather, the subjugated who do ascend to such

positions are among the most privileged of their group and, in a refashioning of the Horatio Alger narrative for a liberation politics, often emphasize resistance in narrating accounts of their advancement in academia (e.g., Goetting and Fenstermaker 1995; Laslett and Thorne 1997; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). As relatively privileged members of oppressed groups, these scholars cannot speak for those rendered silent by the extremity of their subjugation and who would be less likely to narrate their lives around a theme of resistance (Spivak 1988). Thus, the theoretical hegemony of resistance reflects, to some degree, the partial perspectives of those with enough power to shape scholarly conversations.

Ideologies of individualism, self-determination, and meritocracy pervasive in Western culture (Andersen 2005; Park 2005) infuse such stories, contributing to an exaggerated belief in the ability of individuals to resist complex structures of power through localized actions and consciousness-raising efforts. This stance overlooks the cracks in systems of oppression that afford discrete opportunities for upward mobility that can be realized without concerted resistance. Indeed, to avail one's self of such opportunities can require a degree of complicity so as to secure their benefit. Yet the resistance-orientation does not consider how docility can have consequences that are personally liberating and/or culturally transforming (Bordo 1993:192). And in fact, it is more optimistic and analytically easier to attribute success to individual efforts than to pinpoint small openings of opportunity in labyrinthine systems of domination, especially when those opportunities accrue to subjugated subgroups or individuals with relatively more resources and privileges (Bonacich 1987). Unfortunately, the theoretical hegemony of resistance has the conservative effect of directing attention away from the reproductive and recuperative tendencies of domination. By focusing on resistance and agency, we risk forgetting what oppressors and systems of oppression *do to* the oppressed (Andersen 2005:443). As Bordo (1993:194) aptly observes, "the 'postmodern' inclination to emphasize and celebrate 'resistance'" mystifies and normalizes domination. Hence, some scholars, most notably in anthropology, recommend we resist the study of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990; Brown 1996:729–30; Chappell 2000).

Identity Politics and Racial Essentialism

In this section I discuss how identity politics and a tendency to regard race as an essential category contribute to the taboo on the study of internalized racism and the theoretical fixation on resistance. Despite widespread agreement that race is an arbitrary social creation that "does not correspond to any biological referent" (Glenn 1999:6), there is a persistent inclination to treat race as an essentially *"real"* and immutable social category (Harris 2003:34; McBride 1998; Morris 2007). As Glenn (1999:4) notes, social constructionism has been better integrated in feminist scholarship, as applied to gender, than in race studies (see also Pyke and Johnson 2003). Racial essentialism is evident when we regard members of racial groups as unified around some trait, behavior, or attitude, such as having a shared, monolithic experience of race and racism. This thinking slips into reductionist notions of *the* Native American/African-American/Asian/Chicana(o)/Latina(o) who possesses an "authentic" racialized experience and viewpoint (Anzaldúa 1993). The

mythic vision of a natural, homogenous group identity rooted in a unified experience of oppression is central to identity politics (Appiah 2001:364; Lee 1996:116). The oppressed racial subject is regarded as possessing expert knowledge of the domination he or she faces and as using such knowledge to forge resistance. This contributes to authenticity tests to determine who is a *real* member of the group (Anzaldúa 1993). *Real* racial subjects resist. Those who do not are *sell outs* or not *really* black, brown, or yellow. The experience of oppression is the same as opposition to it (Mohanty 2004:109, 112). Being non-White and being anti-racist are one and the same; "we are all oppressed and hence we all resist" (Mohanty 2004:112). The assumption is that being oppressed is "sufficient ground to assume a politicized oppositional identity. . . . I am, therefore I resist" (Mohanty 2002:208). The agency of the subjugated is reduced to resistance: to act *is* to resist.

The conflation of agency and resistance romanticizes the oppression upon which they depend. In an Orwellian contradiction in terms, domination produces agency/resistance, and additional layers of domination afford more openings for agency. Take, for example, a study of the Han-Chinese domination of Uighur Muslims in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Obol (2005) argues that Uighur women enjoyed more opportunities to resist male domination within their ethnic group when faced with greater forces of domination. She notes that the additional layers of ethnic and religious domination while "largely oppressive" were simultaneously "partially liberating" for the Uighur women. "It does this by creating new ways of thought and *new avenues of agency*" (Obol 2005:204; emphasis added). I do not mean to suggest that the Uighur women did not enjoy reductions in male domination vis-à-vis Uighur men after domination by the Han-Chinese. However, an increase in women's power relative to co-ethnic men may not translate into an increase in their power or social status more generally. The relative gain in power attributed to women in any subjugated racial group must be considered alongside any loss of power and material resources to the group as a whole. It often is the case that women's power increases when that of men within their group decreases and conditions of inequality and exploitation worsen. In such circumstances, men can become increasingly dependent on women and their resources, such as earnings, stimulating a gain in women's power vis-à-vis men in the group (Pyke 2007). This study of the Uighur exemplifies how treating agency and resistance as a product of domination can slip into recasting domination as a positive force. Not only does this exclude the possibility of reproductive or complicit agency, but it overlooks how the oppressed, in the wake of greater waves of domination, can acquire small freedoms that create the illusion of increasing power in the sea of oppression.

The Model Resistor Stereotype

These dynamics create what I call a "model resistor stereotype," a romanticized misrepresentation of the experience of oppression. Though the super-resister stereotype can be a political resource, incorporating it into our theoretical assumptions and taking it for reality generates distortions. Clearly we need the study of resistance, but when it precludes inquiry into internalized racial oppression, we are left with an "impoverished politics of knowledge" (Said 1993:310). Essentializing

the non-White racial subject as resistant to oppression contributes to ousting from the racial group those who display internalized racism (see Anzaldúa 1993); hence, Michael Jackson and Clarence Thomas are not *really* Black. By expelling such individuals from the group, the myth of the model resistor can be maintained and internalized racial oppression does not have to be explained.

The model resistor stereotype is evident in controlling images of Black females that on the surface appear positive—as in stories celebrating strong, resistant Black females like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks that circulate in both the White-dominated mainstream and Black subcultures. Even though the construction of the non-White subject as strong and ever-resistant provides political capital for an identity politics, it is a distortion that obscures the *injuries* of racism and thus the extent of racial oppression. Herein is the appeal to the White dominant group of controlling images that cast the oppressed as impervious to pain, ever-resilient, and possessing a virtually superhuman ability to endure hardship. If the oppressed feel no pain, the oppressors can easily deny its infliction.

Despite its overall popularity, Black feminists recognize the burdensome and coercive aspects of the strong Black woman imagery, for it demands a constant display of strength. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2007) implicates this imagery in Black women's depression. In attempting to abide the "mandate" that one's authenticity as a Black woman requires "bearing up to unremitting adversity," many women hide their "discourse-discrepant feelings, thought, and needs" that suggest vulnerability and pain (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2007:30, 38). This masquerade denies the suffering and pain of exploitation and inequality and likewise the experience of oppression, contributing to—and exacerbating—depression that must be denied to maintain a facade of strength. Mystifying the Black woman as super-resilient creates an undue strain by denying the psychological, physical, and spiritual costs of their oppression. It also contributes to self-loathing and self-disgust upon feeling one's knees give in to the weight of oppression and recognizing one's complicity with forces of domination too great to resist. A female student of color in one of my graduate seminars hinted to this burden when, upon noting the topic of internalized oppression on the syllabus, whispered with a deep sigh of relief, "I'm so glad we won't be talking *only* about resistance."

Ignorance about internalized racial oppression benefits White folks who are largely unaware of its existence. This is due, in no small part, to the model resistor stereotype that casts non-Whites as especially adept at resisting racism. Thus, White folks are not held accountable for the problem of internalized racism. For this reason, the taboo on the study of internalized racism can be considered, in and of itself, an example of internalized racial oppression.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF INTERNALIZED RACISM

The study of internalized racism can contribute to a general theory of the reproduction of inequality and internalized oppression. Schwalbe et al. (2000:419) suggest we need a "sensitizing theory of the generic processes through which inequality is reproduced." In their review of qualitative research, they identify several

"transsituationally occurring process[es]" by which inequality is reproduced (Schwalbe et al. 2000:422). Although they do not refer to the concept directly, some of the processes they identify have elements of internalized oppression, such as "defensive othering" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:425; e.g., distancing) and "subordinate adaptation" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:427; e.g., the sub-ethnic identity term "FOB" described earlier). Noting that quantitative research has focused on measuring inequalities, such as resource distribution, rather than processes of inequality, these authors argue that qualitative methods are needed to capture the interactional dynamics and meanings that form and maintain inequality, the perceptions and experiences of the subordinated, and whether they respond with resistance or complicity (Schwalbe et al. 2000:419–21; see also Adam 1978; Morris 2007). While I agree that qualitative methods are particularly useful for these goals, it is premature to foreclose the possibility of quantitative measures of these processes. The dearth of sociological study of internalized racism is not due to problems of measurement as much as our methods of analytic inquiry, which I explore next.

Adapting Matsuda's Method of "Asking the Other Question"

In correcting for the fixation on resistance in much of today's scholarship on inequality, we need to move beyond either/or models of resistance and complicity to consider their simultaneity within the matrix of power relations. Given the interconnection of inequalities (e.g., gender, race, class, colonialism, and sexuality), a method that concurrently analyzes resistance and complicity across multiple, intersecting forms of oppression is needed. Such a method would allow us to consider how actions resisting one form of domination (e.g., gender) can comply with and reproduce oppression along another dimension (e.g., race). In this section, I propose such a method.

Consider the case of women of color and non-Western women who pursue White, Western men as romantic partners. Feminist scholars find that many such women who describe a romantic preference for White Western men commonly reiterate a globally circulating discourse that exalts White Western masculinity as more egalitarian and superior to that of non-Western/non-White men. Some interpret this as resistance to the "patriarchy" of co-ethnic men (Nemoto 2009; see Pyke 2010:5). I argue, however, that such "resistance" is limited. While this discourse and the romantic relations with White Western men it encourages *might* improve the life chances of some women, this form of resistance relies on the reiteration and internalization of an ideology of White Western men's global supremacy. That is, this resistance to gender oppression rests firmly on the internalization and reproduction of racial oppression.

I thus approach with analytic caution any action that at first glance appears to be resistance. I do so by adapting Mari Matsuda's method of "asking the other question" to analyze the interconnection of oppressions in the matrix of power relations. Upon noting racism, Matsuda asks: Where is the sexism in this racism? Or where is the classism in this racism? Similarly, when observing sexism, the "other" question might be: Where is the racism in this sexism? Or where is the heterosexism in this sexism? And so on with other forms of oppression (Matsuda 1996:64). Adapting her method to the study of resistance and internalized racism,

I ask: Where is the internalized racism in this act of resistance? Where is the resistance in this case of internalized racism (Pyke 2010)? This analytic method requires us to consider the simultaneity of resistance and complicity and accords the opportunity to do so across many forms of oppression. Next, I use a simplified example of intra-racial class tensions among African Americans to illustrate this method and its potential contribution to the study of internalized racism.

"Asking the Other Question" to Explain Intra-Racial Class Tensions

Middle- and lower-class African Americans have become more socially, economically, and geographically distant from one another in recent decades. Due to escalating violence, the growth of the illicit drug industry, and the loss of jobs, conditions for poor African Americans in urban neighborhoods have worsened (Wilson 1987). Increasing class distance has inflamed intra-racial tensions, with middle-class African Americans blaming the morals and values of lower-income African Americans for their plight (McDonald 1997). The culture of poverty discourse, attacked in the 1970s for blaming the victim and ignoring structural inequality (Roschelle 1997), is popular once again, even among some African Americans. The multimillionaire comedian and actor Bill Cosby provides an example in a series of speeches he delivered in 2004, including one at a NAACP commemoration of *Brown vs. The Board of Education*. Cosby ridiculed lower-class blacks for bringing hardship on themselves with their alleged poor values and morals. He referred to their improper English, unwed pregnancies, and bad parenting evident by the names given to children "like Shaniqua, Saligua, Mohammed and all that crap" (Dyson 2005:xii; Kaplan 2005:14). Renowned African American Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., who heads Harvard's W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, similarly places blame on poor Blacks. He attributes their poverty to "deciding to get pregnant or not to have protected sex. Deciding to do drugs. Deciding not to study. Deciding, deciding, deciding . . ." (Street 2005:127). Ignoring the vast body of research linking poverty and teen pregnancy (see Kaplan 1997), Gates calls for a "moral revolution" among African Americans: "Look—no White racist makes you get pregnant when you are a black teenager" (Hochschild 2007). This attitude infuses the humor of Chris Rock, a Black comedian and actor with a large White following. Rock distinguishes the economically stable "Black people" from the lower-class "niggas" when he says in a comedy routine, "I love Black people but I hate niggas! Boy, I wish they'd let me join the Klu Klux Klan" (Street 2005:127).

These attacks are commonly attributed to intra-racial class tension (Dyson 2005). However, if we pose the analytic question, "Where is the internalized racism in this intra-racial class oppression?" a more complex picture emerges. All Blacks regardless of their social class must contend with being stereotyped as poor, ill-educated, criminal, lazy, and immoral (Feagin and Sikes 1994). By attributing these traits to poor African Americans and blaming the values and morals of these "bad Blacks" for their poverty, class-privileged Blacks can distance themselves from the negative stereotypes and create a positive self-identity as the "good Blacks." This oversimplified example of "asking the other question" uncovers the simultaneity of class oppression and internalized racism, broadening our analysis beyond either/or models to consider not only the simultaneity of resistance and complicity

but also that of oppressor and oppressed beyond a one-dimensional field of in-equality. This analytic method reveals the centrality of internalized (racial) oppres-sion in developing a general theory of the processes by which inequality is created, maintained, and reproduced in the matrix of domination.

Studying Internalized Racism to Advance Critical White Studies

When we acknowledge the existence among people of color of internalized racism (i.e., internalized White supremacy), we reveal White domination in our society, for every mechanism of internalized racial oppression contributes to the system of White privilege. For example, Bill Cosby unwittingly serves as a buffer between Whites and the racially subjugated by attracting the anger of many of his racial counterparts for his derogatory depiction of poor Blacks and thus deflecting blame from the White power structure.

Every instance of internalized racism among the racially subordinated contrib-utes to the psychic, material, and cultural power and privilege of White folks. Thus, the study of internalized racial oppression is a study of the mechanisms by which *all* Whites are racially privileged, including those with anti-racist commitments. By investigating internalized racial oppression and focusing an analytic lens on how it supports White privilege, the blame will shift from the victims to the structure of racial inequality and those who are its beneficiaries. Doing so will make it harder for Whites to deny White privilege. In explaining why White feminists failed to thor-oughly engage women of color critiques of the racism lodged in feminist theory, Aenerud (2002:76) writes:

> It is perhaps not a great mystery. . . . After all, seeing oneself as racist is highly disagreeable. Our popular discourse does not permit a nuanced understanding of racism, either one is or is not racist; there is little room for a more compli-cated understanding of a subjectivity opposed to, yet complicit with racism. In large part, this limitation has its source in the popular discourse depicting racism as individual not structural. In this framework, a plausible response to racism, particularly for one who is White, is simply to distance oneself from racist expressions and people.

Aanerud (2002:76) describes how reading about the struggles of women of color feminists with internalized racism and a belief in White superiority made her more courageous about exploring how she, a White woman, had been led to believe in the superiority of Whiteness:

> Although never overtly taught that whiteness signaled superiority, I began to see that indeed this was precisely what I'd been taught. . . . I also felt a tremen-dous gratitude to the [*This Bridge We Call Home*] authors who articulated so honestly their own battles with racism in its many forms. . . . If they could delve into that "deep place of knowledge," so could I.

The taboo forbidding mention of internalized racism has kept the problem a se-cret. Whites in general remain ignorant about how the system that accords White racial privilege, whether they want it or not, is fundamentally dependent upon

the successful transmission of ideologies of White superiority and the inferiority of non-Whites to *all* members of society, including the racially subjugated. Hence, contrary to the assumption that attention to internalized racism will detract from the problem of White racism, I believe it would make more explicit the extensive harm of White domination and hold Whites accountable for the problem.

The failure of sociology to study internalized racial oppression hampers our empirical and theoretical understanding of the reproduction of racial inequality. As Rubin (1997:51) notes, "we cannot dismantle something that we underestimate or do not understand." Until we defy the taboo, wrestle control of the concept away from a victim-blaming frame, and give it a fitting conceptual location in our discipline where it will not be reduced to a psychological phenomenon, sociology will continue to underestimate the injuries of racism.

NOTE

1. Although the internalization of racism can be considered a generic process by which racist beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies are inculcated by Whites as well as people of color, the concept of "internalized racism" refers specifically to White racism that is internalized by the non-White group or individual and is directed inward toward the self or the group. I use the terms "internalized racism" and "internalized White racism" interchangeably.

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