

Christian Chester

SOC 100 – 03

Professor Wilson

12/19/17

The Concept of a Social Constructionist History of Race and its Effects (WC - 1242)

Race, according to Zuberi, was a social necessity starting in the 15th century.¹ During that time Europeans were barraged with mass amounts of new information to virtually every aspect of life, ranging from uses of plants to treatment of peoples.² It was a rather perturbing reaction to the fact that Europeans now had a challenge to the origin of the human species and to whether or not all persons were of the same *family*.³ Thus, the debate over the concept of race flared, with it being profoundly considered a biological concept, according to much of early European science.⁴ Sociology has come to reject the notion of race as a biological concept and, in favor, view it as a social concept and creation.⁵ This is usually referred to as racial formation⁶.

The qualities, that are seemingly obvious according to Omi and Winant, of the existing racial order exhibit and testify to the effective nature of the racial formation process, through a contribution of their racial meanings and identities.⁷ A prominent example of the clear emphasis placed upon race is that, according to Omi and Winant, we first attempt to identify a person's race upon meeting them.⁸ So, in a way, our initial notions towards people are in large part influenced upon a person's concept of another's race.⁹ This influence has created in "... US society a kind of racial etiquette."¹⁰

The racial etiquette exists through a set of interpreted racialized codes with interactions within our daily life, according to Omi and Winant.¹¹ In society then, according to this theory, without a racial identity one may not have an identity.¹² Due to such, a set amount of crisis is produced when the concept of race cannot be explicitly stated or produced amongst individuals to confer their relevant, formal statuses in relation to society's.¹³ Moreover, this etiquette is more than plain ponderance to the dominant group's ethics, but rather a hybrid of rules and or beliefs of all groups in a society, according to Omi and Winant.¹⁴ This set of mixed beliefs offer to operate as a form of *amateur biology*, in that they explain certain person-to-person variations.¹⁵ Thus, racialized differences supposedly explain lurking and prominent qualities of peoples.¹⁶ These qualities can range from "temperament, sexuality, intelligence, athletic ability, [to]aesthetic preferences ..."¹⁷ In respect to this concept, the integration of race is so fundamental to US society that it is one of the keystone pillars of society, according to Omi and Winant.¹⁸ Thus, *racial projects*¹⁹ largely shape the societies people live in as they compete to provide the dominant, contemporary conceptions of race and its categories.

A historical example being Latin America.²⁰ The citizens of Latin American countries apparently abide by a loosely defined, or rather non-rigid, concept of race.²¹ This is due to the fact that once slavery was abolished much of the racial identities in Latin America had no formal, legal boundary.²² Such a consequence, of said system, is that many people have come to represent what others view as another, or perhaps multiple, races in other respective societies.²³ This even resulted in legal battles, when a Latin American legally applying to become a different race in the US was denied, due to the societal implications and paradoxes presented by the fundamental distinctions of each society.²⁴ Dalton Conley, in specific, defines race as an unchosen, possibly malleable, social identity and or status.²⁵ Thus, those who abide by this form

of thinking have to view the notion of race entirely separate from a biological distinction or geographical phenomena. Conley notes on the idea that ethnicity is a chosen or given affiliation, while race is not, to further explain the concept of racial formation theory. Since societal expectations and preferences are inherent to such a theoretical stance, certain inequalities of societal aspects are inevitable consequences. The notion of *White Privilege*, or more generally societal privileges based upon certain societal categories, and racism are relatively easily correlating core effects of racial formation theory.

Peggy McIntosh has written multiple essays, and articles, upon both of these. She notes that she “was taught to see racism only in acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on [her] group.”²⁶ In reference, racism, in according to a more sociological perspective, is seen as structural differences and or advantages, and similarly disadvantages, between social groups. Peggy draws up the notion that when a group is privileged, or receives advantages in comparison to another, they often deny that they are if it means another person or group is in some way disadvantaged by their efforts.²⁷ She states that when this happens, this denial of privilege, it protects their societal advantages, at least in the current sense.²⁸

Peggy believes that white people in specific are taught not to see, or intrinsically value, their privilege.²⁹ She notes a similar fashion from men’s to women’s privileges.³⁰ Thus, she concurs that much of their doing is unconscious.³¹ Peggy calls these privileges, gained by her whiteness, an invisible knapsack that she “... can count on cashing in each day, but which [she] can count on cashing in each day ...” but was taught to remain oblivious to.³² In her essay *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, she notes upon a story of women of color speaking about oppression from white women.³³ She states that she “remembered the frequent charges” by the colored women to the white women.³⁴ She places an emphasis on the notion that the women

of color found the "... white women whom they encounter[ed] [as] oppressive."³⁵ Next, Peggy recounter on how her academic journeys ventured into seeing white people as oppressors by the notion just discussed.³⁶

"I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us"."³⁷

In a sense, her view of *White Privilege* models much of the notion of racism, in the modern sociological front. Her view of *White Privilege* "... as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck" is widely shared amongst sociological peer groups, due to its structural implications, with correlated racist features that she deems as part of the *invisible knapsack* of being white.³⁸ This systematical oppression of others, on the basis of racism over empowering certain groups, is, according to Peggy, largely avoided by the dominant racial group.³⁹ Thus, in a similar fashion, the dominant racial group, as per the racial formation theory, sets a precedence of unconscious oppression of others.

In conclusion, the racial formation theory provides a layout for racist structures, even though it tries to simply formulate the concepts of race in a fair and moral perception. In direct correlation, its consequences can be seen in legal decisions and battles, across the modern world, over the conceptualization of what race truly may be. Since it is a theory, by nature it admits it may not be the truthful manner of doing or viewing such a concept. Racial formation theory does, however, accurately detail the origin of the concept of race, per specific societies, such that

the historical notes it spawns cannot be argued against. Overall, the theory greatly implores a deep curiosity into societies' concepts and reasonings behind them.

¹ Racial Domination and the Evolution of Racial Classification by Tukufu Zuberi (pg. 70)

² Racial Domination and the Evolution of Racial Classification by Tukufu Zuberi (pg. 70)

³ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 13-14)

⁴ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 14)

⁵ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 14)

⁶ The process by which socioeconomic and political pressures determine the context and importance laid upon each racial category.

⁷ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

⁸ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

⁹ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

¹⁰ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

¹¹ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

¹² Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

¹³ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 16)

¹⁴ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 17)

¹⁵ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 17)

¹⁶ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 17)

¹⁷ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 17)

¹⁸ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 17)

¹⁹ Representations of race in language, thought, imagery, and discourse assigning meaning to a specific racial group within the greater social structure.

²⁰ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 15)

²¹ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 15)

²² Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 15)

²³ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 15)

²⁴ Racial Formations by M. Omi and H. Winant (pg. 15)

²⁵ You May Ask Yourself: An Introduction to Thinking Like a Sociologist by Dalton Conley (Glossary)

²⁶ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

²⁷ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

²⁸ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

²⁹ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁰ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³¹ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³² White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³³ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁴ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁵ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁶ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁷ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁸ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

³⁹ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh