

## Friday Plenary Address: Racism in Writing Programs and the CWPA

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Thank you for coming, and I'm grateful to be able to offer you this talk today. I need to warn you though. I may say a few things that might seem disrespectful to some in the room and to the organization. That is not my intention. I have deep respect for those in this room and for those who have helped me in the organization over the years. I'm grateful for the CWPA, which has given me access to wonderful colleagues and opportunities. My intention, rather, is to help us examine the racism in the CWPA and in our writing programs. To do this hard work, it may require that we feel uncomfortable. It may require that we hear the hard truth from someone who is not white, but I urge you not to confuse your discomfort with disrespect on my part.

Let me start by making a bold call to action for all of us. We must do violence to our writing programs and even to the very organization that permits us the occasion to be here today, not just for our students' good, but especially for those who are NOT our students, who for larger historically and structurally racist reasons have yet to be eligible to be our students, and for those who for similar reasons have yet to be eligible to be here with us or run writing programs or teach writing classes. We must do violence to the CWPA and our own writing programs if we are to address racism.

What am I assuming is the case in this call? I'm assuming that racism is commonly occurring in the ways we judge language, even though we may be trying to be fair—in fact, I'll argue later that being fair often is a racist practice. It is the judgment of language, both inside our classrooms and in our writing program assessments, that affects the futures of our students in the field, that allows them to become graduate students in English or Composition and Rhetoric, that allows them to teach writing courses in college and secondary settings, that makes it possible to be published in the organization's journal and other journals, that helps them get promoted to writing

program administrators and elected as officers to the CWPA. While it isn't the entire problem, racism in writing programs and our organization begins and ends with racism in our writing assessments at all levels.

#### HOW WE JUDGE LANGUAGE IS RACIST

Many of you might be saying to yourselves, "yes, but not me. I'm fair. I'm not racist." Let me be clear. I ain't talkin' 'bout people *being* racist. I ain't talking 'bout intentions. We are all good people trying to do what's right. I'm talking about our programs and organization being racist. I'm talking about our dispositions toward language and its judgement being racist. But this is not completely true. I *am* talking about how in unconscious ways *all of us are racist*, but I'll get to that argument later. Right now, let me make the argument that how we judge language typically in writing classrooms and programs, and in all journals of the field, is racist because of the ways language and judgment work and because of the ways race is closely connected to language. To put the claim simply: Our primary jobs as teachers, scholars, and administrators, our jobs as judges of language, is inherently a racist practice. Why? Race and language are closely associated, and when we judge language in order to categorize and rank, the act of judgment becomes racist in our world. It's racism by consequence, not by intention.

Let me back up. Racial formations—material bodies that are racialized—are connected closely to language use and our attitudes toward language. Laura Greenfield makes this point in a number of ways. She argues that in US society and schools, most people, including writing teachers, tend to ignore or overlook the linguistic facts of life that linguist Rosina Lippi-Green identifies and that reveal the structural racism in society and language preference. These facts of life are long-established linguistic agreements in the field and say that all language varieties, from Hawaiian Creole English to African American Language to Spanglish, are legitimate, rule-governed, and communicative. Greenfield argues that standardized Englishes are dominant because white people speak them.

All spoken language changes over time.

All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms.

Grammaticality and communicative effectiveness are distinct and interdependent issues.

Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures.

Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level.

Fig. 1. Rosina Lippi-Green's "linguistic facts of life" (Lippi-Green, 1997, p. 10; quoted in Greenfield, 2011, p. 33)

So-called proper English or dominant discourses are historically connected to the white body. This makes sense intuitively. We speak with and through our bodies. We write with and through our bodies. So language will be closely associated with its source, its point of origin. As teachers and program administrators, when we read and evaluate our students' writing, we do so through and with our bodies, and we have in our minds a vision of our students as bodies, as much as we have their language in front of us. This fact affects who moves on in the academy, who becomes an English major or a Composition and Rhetoric grad student, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not. Which bodies historically have had the privilege to speak and write the most in civic life and in the academy? Whose words have been validated as history, truth, knowledge, story, the most throughout history? Who sits in the teacher's chair or holds positions as program administrators or officers of professional organizations that train and mentor current and future writing teachers and administrators? White people. It's only recently that the CWPA Executive Board has had anyone of color on it. That's me and Karen Keaton Jackson, and we both were elected at the same time because of important and good efforts by the organization's leadership to bring more WPAs of color into leadership positions.

Now, don't get me wrong. Ain't nothing wrong with bein' white. The problem is that with one's whiteness usually comes historically reproduced structures of language and dispositions toward language, toward judging language that are unconscious and harmful to racialized others. Yes, I said that. If you're white, you likely are harming your students of color because of something you can't control, your whiteness and your white language

privilege. This isn't a hopeless situation, but it takes acknowledging it, then concerted action.

In the seven years I helped run the first-year writing program at Fresno State, a historically Hispanic Serving Institution where white students are the numerical minority, there were, to my count, seven total teachers of color teaching in the program. Every year, we brought in around ten to twelve new teachers, sometimes more. We usually had around 25–30 working teachers at any given time. This meant that, on average, there was one teacher of color teaching first-year writing at any given time. The rest were, for the most part, white, middle-class, and female. Given my experiences at four other state universities and a two-year college, these conditions are the norm. At my current institution, I am the only faculty of color teaching first-year writing in the last two years, and most of our students are students of color. In the past when I raised this very issue, I have been chastised by administration and my white colleagues. At one institution, I said publicly that “the problem with our writing program is that all of its teachers are white women, and 60% of our students are of color and often multilingual.” Shortly thereafter, I received a certified letter informing me that I had created an “unsafe work environment,” and I might want to bring my lawyer to the meeting scheduled to discuss what I'd said and what we needed to do about it. I had not said anything untrue, simply stated the problem of racial and gendered representation in our faculty who teach in the writing program. I had simply said that we needed more faculty of color, that white female teachers, while very good, just wasn't a good enough replacement for true racial representation that matches the students we serve. My real crime in the eyes of the white institution and white administration was that I had suggested that white teachers were not always in the best position to make decisions about our writing classes or our students of color, were not in the best position to judge our students of color or their writing. That's not a message white people are accustomed to hearing. How do you feel about it?

What I was reporting is the national norm. A report by the Center for American Progress on “Increasing Teacher Diversity” in US public schools cites equally alarming statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics. Racial minority students make up over 40% of students in all schools in the US, but only 14.6% of all teachers are Black or Latinx, and in 40% of public schools there is no teacher of color, not one (Bireda and Chait 1). In my own public schooling, I was a PhD student, 31 years old, before I sat in a classroom with a teacher of color. That was Victor Villanueva (thank god it was Victor!)—eighteen years of schooling and no teacher of color, none, not one. Imagine it, because I think, many of you have to imagine it. An educational life where you never meet any teacher or author-

ity figure, never meet anyone who looks like you or comes from the same places that you come from or sounds like you? Imagine that these teachers are always your judge, always judging your words by their tape measure, a tape you never got a chance to fully see until it was stretched against you, and you were found short. Imagine that kind of education, then you'll know what I'm talking about, how important the racialized bodies are who judge you in school. You'll know—no, no—you'll FEEL how important race is to the judgment of language. So, in a way, my statement that got me into so much trouble was really asking: “can't our students of color have just one fucking teacher of color? Can't we make sure of that? Can't we make that a priority?”

Now, here's the larger argument, outside the weeds of my experience. If the dominant discourse of the academy is taught almost exclusively by white, middle-class teachers, then isn't it possible that such conditions will affect the discourse valued in writing assessments, in writing programs, in writing journals? Is it possible that those who achieve such positions, such credentials, might have achieved them because they can use and favor dominant, white, middle class discourses, that they embody the discourse the field comes to expect? If so, it is no wonder that dominant discourses in schools are closely associated with the white body and whiteness. It is the reason that you are here today, and not others, not the Other. It is the reason that that statement may feel uncomfortable, or that my saying it directly to you, calling you out, seems so uncomfortable, so impolite, because it's not part of the white dispositions embodied in most hegemonic academic discourses. It ain't terribly white and middle class to point at your audience and say, “you get to be here because others were systematically denied access. Your success is a product of racism.” I'm not supposed to be that direct. It could piss you off. I'm supposed to be calm, objective, neutral. But fuck that shit. I ain't neutral, and I can't be calm about the subject of racism. And I suggest you shouldn't be either. In terms of our writing programs, I'm also arguing that grading and evaluating student writing by a conventional standard is racist. I've made this argument with research and the literature in other places (Inoue “Failure”; *Antiracist Writing Assessment*), so I won't belabor it today. I think you all know my solution, it is to stop grading on so called “quality” and find other ways to produce institutionally-demanded grades for students, such as using labor-based grading contracts. I'm happy to talk about this solution afterwards, and Joyce Inman, Rebecca Powell, and I conducted an institute on this topic at this conference.

## LANGUAGE IS RACIALIZED ALREADY

But I'm not simply saying that judging language is simultaneously judging bodies. I'm also saying that language carries with it—through our judging of it—imaginary bodies that are hierarchized in our social world. We do this unconsciously. We cannot help this associating of racialized bodies with language practices. Gender and race are the first two things people identify (or try to) about a person when they meet them. We look, often implicitly and unconsciously, for markers that tell us something about the person so that we can interact with them appropriately. Why would teachers or administrators be any different. Are we above the rules of language just because we're aware of bias in judgment, because we understand that there are historically reproduced racist structures in education and language practices? As they say, knowing is ONLY half the battle. So let me be clear: *The fact that all college writing programs demand that their students produce some historically produced dominant discourse, then judge them on their abilities to approximate it is racist since all dominant discourses are associated closely with white middle- and upper-class racial formations in the US.* This isn't just about bodies' associations to language practices. It's also about racialized dispositions that travel with the judgment of language. It's about whiteness and whiteness dispositions.

Some may argue that even if this is true, it doesn't change the fact that there is a dominant discourse that is the lingua franca of schools, the workplace, and civic society. It's our job to help students approximate the dominant discourse, as David Bartholomae has said, in order that they might have a share of future opportunities. We, in effect, negate the structural racism that may hold students of color back, keep power and privilege from their grasp, by giving them the linguistic keys to the kingdom. So, in good writing classrooms, goes the argument, one can honor and respect the languages that all students bring to the classroom, and then teach and promote a local Standardized English so that those students have a chance at future success. It's the preparation argument. We are obligated to prepare them for success, not set them up for failure. But this is a false binary. This kind of argument and pedagogy, says Greenfield, is based on two false assumptions. The first is that these other language varieties, say African American Language (AAL), are somehow less communicative and cannot do the job needed in the academy or civic life (Greenfield 49). We know this is false. If AAL isn't as effective in communicating in civic life, how is it that it is so popular, so mainstream in hip hop and rap music? How is it that it connects to so many different kinds of people? How is it that it can tell such compelling stories? Is it that we don't mind Black people entertaining us (a

white mainstream audience), but we don't want their language tainting the so-called important areas of our life—academics, knowledge making, civic life, law, politics, etc.? Are we fooling ourselves when we celebrate the relatively few academics of color in our midst, the few who made it, the exceptions, so that we can ignore the multitudes who aren't allowed?

The second false assumption that Greenfield says supports the idea that we have to teach a Standardized English because it's the keys to the kingdom is that “[p]eople believe falsely that by changing the way people of color speak . . . others’ racist preconceptions will disappear and the communicative act will be successful” (49). So teach Blacks or Latinxs to speak and write a dominant discourse, and they will have more power and opportunity. They’ll be more communicatively successful. The logic here says that today people aren’t racist toward people, but they may be toward the languages people use. We have language bias or language prejudice. This argument is only partly false. Yes, we have language biases. That’s what judging is—hell, that’s what reading any text is: the applying of one’s biases to language in order to make meaning. Part of these biases are their associations to people. Remember, we consider the body of the writer when judging the language coming from that body, or we imagine one, both when judging speech and writing. Our history in the US is one of race and racism. We, writing teachers and WPAs, cannot step outside of history and be above racial bias in the judgment of language.

Research in behavioral science confirms race’s associations to bias in the judgements of language. For instance, a 2006 study of implicit bias, or associating “stereotypes and attitudes toward categories of people without conscious awareness” (Godsil et al. 10), found that partners in law firms judged more negatively the same report when they thought it was written by a Black lawyer. The same report was given to 60 partners in various law firms. Half of the partners were told the writer was Black, the other half white. The findings show that it isn’t simply language bias that holds some of us back and lifts up whites. It’s implicit bias that feeds what behavioral scientists call confirmation bias, a version of what Joseph Williams found in his famous article, “The Phenomenology of Error,” that judges or readers see what they want to see. If we already see Blacks and Latinxs as “needing lots of work” and whites as always having “potential,” then whatever is in front of us will confirm that bias.

<b>Average Errors Found in the Report When Attributed to a White Lawyer</b>	<b>Average Errors Found in the Report When Attributed to a Black Lawyer</b>
<b>2.9/7.0</b> spelling/grammar Average of <b>4.1/6.0</b> technical writing errors <b>3.2/5.0</b> errors in facts	<b>5.8/7.0</b> spelling/grammar errors <b>4.9/6.0</b> technical writing errors <b>3.9/5.0</b> errors in facts
Comments made:  “generally good writer but needs to work on . . .” “Has potential” “good analytical skills”	Comments made:  “needs lots of work” “can’t believe he went to NYU” “average at best”

Fig. 2. Findings on Implicit Bias in Language from Godsil, Tropp, Goff, and Powell (36)

The point I’m making is one Greenfield has made in a different way, but she sums it up well:

Black people are not discriminated against because some speak a variety of Ebonics—rather, I argue, Ebonics is stigmatized because it is spoken primarily by Black people. It is its association with a particular people and history that has compelled people to stigmatize it. Our attitudes toward language, it appears, are often steeped in our assumptions about the bodies of the speakers. We assume an essential connection—language as inherently tied to the body. In other words, language varieties—like people—are subject to racialization. (Greenfield 50)

Language is racialized already, so when we use our dispositions to create standards, then judge students by those standards, we risk racist consequences. In fact, racism is almost inevitable. Let’s drill deeper. Greenfield uses the word *stigmatized* to characterize the way language practices are already racialized. The word’s root is *stigma*, which the OED defines as “a mark made upon the skin by burning with a hot iron (rarely, by cutting or pricking), as a token of infamy or subjection” (Stigmata). Does this remind you of anything in our history? Stigma is a mark on the body, a judgment, marking something already in subjection, something lesser. No matter what antiracist motives a teacher or WPA may have, including my own motives, we all work within conditions and systems that have branded some languages as less communicative, less articulate, subjective and in subjection



to the dominant white discourse. No matter who we are, we always struggle against racist systems in the academy. This is why arguments about ethical imperatives to teach dominant white discourses to all students because we allegedly know what is good for them are fashionable, hold currency. While this argument isn't completely false, it's not completely true either. Yes, those in power use dominant Englishes, but that's not all that it takes to be successful in our world. You can earn the keys to the kingdom, but if no one gives you access to the lock at the front gate, those keys are useless.

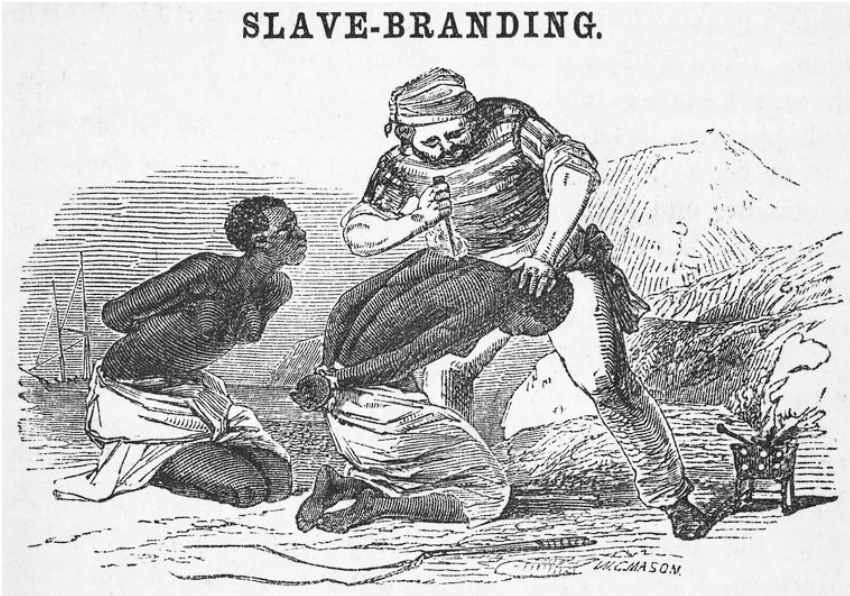


Fig. 3. Picture of slave branding attributed to: "Five hundred thousand strokes for freedom; a series of anti-slavery tracts, of which half a million are now first issued by the friends of the Negro," by Armistead, Wilson, 1819?–1868 and "Picture of slavery in the United States of America," by Bourne, George, 1780–1845.



Fig. 4. An 1845 daguerreotype of Captain Jonathan Walker (inscription on the back reads: “This Daguerreotype was taken by Southworth Aug. 1845 it is a copy of Captain Jonathan Walker’s hand as branded by the US Marshall of the Dist. of Florida for having helped 7 men to obtain ‘Life Liberty, and Happiness.’ SS Slave Saviour Northern Dist. SS Slave Stealer Southern Dist.”)

Now, let’s keep in mind that everyone speaks and writes a brand of English that has its nuances, its deviations. In fact, language practice might best be described as defined by deviation. For instance, not every African American student will speak AAL, and not everyone who uses it will use AAL in the same ways that others will use it. V. N. Volosinov makes this point clear about language generally, arguing against Saussure that there is no language, only parole, only language that is in a constant state of flux and change. Vershawn A. Young’s arguments for code-meshing agrees and helps us see the nuance, helps us see why it’s difficult to speak of AAL or a dominant white discourse alone. In fact, none of us speaks or writes one brand of English alone. We use variations of English that we encounter around us. Young argues that we all have hybrid Englishes. We speak in codes that are meshed with other codes, and we should account for this in the classroom, in the organization, in our journals. Additionally, because the dominant

discourse is a white racialized discourse, associated with white bodies historically, Young explains that

[w]hen we ask Black students to give up one set of codes in favor of another, their BEV [or AAL] for something we call more standard, we're not asking them to make choices about language, we're asking them to choose different ways to perform their racial identities through language. (Your Average Nigga 142)

However, just because we can see the hybridity of any language practice doesn't mean the stigmas go away in judgement practices. The question is: how do we not let the stigmas determine the value and success of students of color or non-white discourses in our classrooms, or in our programs, or in our journals? I'm not asking us to negate the racialized stigmas. That's not realistic. That's denying the power of history and the hegemonic in the academy.

The bottom line is, as judges of English in college writing classrooms, we cannot avoid the racializing of language when we judge writing nor can we avoid the influence of race in how we read and value the words and ideas of others in journals or at conferences or in faculty meetings. Freire says, "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (23). When we read the words that come from the bodies of our students, we read those bodies as well, and by reading those bodies we also read the words they present to us; some may bear/bare stigmas, some may not and be coded as white. The CWPA and we as writing teachers and WPAs shirk our ethical duties to make the world a better place by not educating our colleagues, institutions, and students of this racialized linguistic reality, of the fact that the judgment of language if used to rank and enforce standards is racist and we are all complicit in it. We are all racist.

#### THE CWPA AND WRITING PROGRAMS EMBODY WHITE RACIALIZED *HABITUS*

Apart from language and its association with racialized bodies, the racialized *habitus* (or durable dispositions) of ourselves and of the CWPA as an organization that guides writing program administrators and their scholarship also is a source of racism. I said earlier that I wished to talk today not just about bodies' associations to language practices but also about racialized dispositions that travel with the judgment of language. What I've suggested so far is the primacy of whiteness and white skin privilege to the judgment of language and the construction of so called standards—and its sister term, *rigor*. Now, I turn to the ways whiteness as a discourse

and whitely dispositions are pervasive and racist in our writing programs and the CWPA. And I gently remind us that I'm not blaming individuals, I'm talking about larger structures and individuals' implication to those structures.

Many have discussed how to define whiteness as a construct that affects writing pedagogy (Frankenberg; hooks; Keating), which has bearing on how writing is judged in classrooms by teachers using a local Standardized English or some other academic expectations for writing. Timothy Barnett synthesizes five statements about whiteness that the scholarship on whiteness overwhelmingly confirms and is a good way to begin to understand whiteness as a racial *habitus* in writing classrooms, programs, and the CWPA. It is a set of structuring structures that are performed or projected onto student writing and all decisions made in programs and our organization.

Whiteness is a "coded discourse of race," that "seems **invisible, objective, and neutral**";

Whiteness maintains its power and presents itself as "**unraced individually**" and "opposed to a racialized subjectivity that is communally and politically interested";

Whiteness is presented as a **non-political relational concept**, defined against Others, whose interests are defined as "anti-individual" and political in nature;

Whiteness "is **not tied essentially to skin color**; but is **nevertheless related** in complex and powerful ways to the perceived phenomenon of race";

Whiteness maintains power by **defining (and denying) difference** "on its own terms and to its own advantage"

Fig. 5. Timothy Barnett's Five Statements about Whiteness as a Discourse (Barnett 10)

As a *habitus* that is practiced in language, expected in classroom behaviors, and marked on the bodies of students, teachers, and administrators, whiteness, then, is a set of structuring structures, durable, transposable, and flexible. As Barnett summarizes, these structures construct whiteness as invisible and appealing to fairness through alleged objectivity. The structures are unraced (even beyond race), unconnected to the bodies and histories that create them. They are set up as apolitical and often deny dif-

ference by focusing on the individual or making larger claims to abstract liberal principles, such as the principle of meritocracy. These structures create dispositions that form reading and judging practices, dispositions for values and expectations of writing and behavior. Echoing Lippi-Green and Greenfield's arguments that connect race to language, Barnett offers a succinct way to see whiteness as a racial project in the classroom, and I'll add in writing programs and the CWPA:

“Whiteness,” accordingly, represents a political and relational activity disguised as an essential quality of humanity that is, paradoxically, *fully* accessible only by a few. It maintains a distance from knowledge that depends on the power of authorities, rules, tradition, and the written word, all of which supposedly guarantee objectivity and non-racial ways of knowing, but have, not incidentally, been established and maintained primarily by the white majority. (13; emphasis original)

In her discussion of the pervasiveness of whiteness in bioethics in the US, Catherine Myser defines whiteness as a marker and position of power that is situated in a racial hierarchy (2). She asks us to problematize the centrality of whiteness in bioethics as a field of study and industry. By looking at several studies of whiteness, Myser provides a rather succinct set of discursive and performative dispositions that could be called a white racial *habitus* that writing teachers and administrators also enact. Using her useful account and other sources on whiteness, I've come up with a four-part description of whiteness as a discourse in writing classrooms, which is used to judge and make standards for writing in programs and our journals. Whiteness as a discourse and set of dispositions in writing, like the dispositions distilled from Barnett's summary, can be boiled down to a focus on individualism and self-determination, Descartes' *cogito*, individuals as the primary subject position, abstract principles, rationality and logic, clarity and consistency, order and control, and on seeing failure as individual weakness, not accounting for larger structural issues.

- **Hyperindividualism— self-determination and autonomy** is most important or most valued; self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-control are important. Individual rights and privacy are often most important and construct the common good. The truth is always good to hear, no matter how painful, good, or bad it may be (each individual has the right to know the truth).
- **Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self**—person is conceived as an **individual who is rational, self-conscious, self-controlled, and determined**. Conscience guides the individual and sight is the primary way to identify the truth or understanding. Social and cultural factors are external constraints to the individual. Meaningful issues and questions always lie within the self; individuals have problems and solutions are individually-based; both success and failure are individual in nature; failure is individual and often seen as weakness. Control of self is important, as is work and staying busy or being industrious and productive; unsure how to cope with the uncontrollable in selves, society, or nature.
- **Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships**—Focus on the **individual in a contractual relationship** with other individuals; focuses on informed consent; model relationships negotiate individual needs. Individual rights are more important and non-political, whereas socially-oriented values and questions are less important and often political (bad) by their nature. There is an importance attached to laws, rules, fairness as sameness, contractual regulations of relationships. Little emphasis on connectedness, relatedness, feeling, interconnection with others; individuals keep difficulties and problems to themselves
- **Clarity, Order, and Control**—Focus on **reason, order, and control**; thinking (versus feeling), insight, the rational, order, objective (versus subjective), rigor, clarity, and consistency are all valued highly. Thinking/Rationality and knowledge are non-political, unraced, and can be objective. Anti-sensuality is valued while there is a limited value of sensual experiences, considerations of the body, sensations, and feelings. A belief in scientific method, discovery, and knowledge; deductive logics are preferred; usefulness and pragmatism are important measures of value and success.

Fig. 6. Whiteness as a Discourse (White Racial *Habitus*)

These dispositions are very similar to Brookhiser's six traits of WASP whiteness in the US, but the important thing about whiteness, as Barnet and many others have identified, is that it's invisible, often denied as being whiteness. It's just effective communication. This is the nature of whiteness as a *habitus*, as a set of linguistic dispositions. Ross Chambers explains that

whiteness remains unexamined, that whiteness has been “unexaminable” (or rather, “examinable, yet unexamined”) because it is not only the yardstick by which difference (like quality of writing) is judged and identified in the classroom and out of it, but whiteness is bound to “the category of the individual” first through “atomizing whiteness,” then by homogenizing others, which allows it to be invisible (192).

This invisible and universalizing nature of these dispositions gives some reason for why the first two items are perhaps the most contentious. These two dispositions (hyperindividualism and the primacy of the *cogito*, or rationality) alone make up much of Faigley’s 1992 discussion of tastes in the ways teachers in Coles and Vopat’s 1985 collection, *What Makes Writing Good*, described the best student writing in their courses. What did most teachers say was good writing? Writing that exhibited a strong, authentic, honest voice. And what does strength, authenticity, and honesty look like as textual markers? It is a self-reliant voice that is focused on itself as a cool, rational, thinking self in the writing and in its reading of the writer’s own experiences or ideas. This isn’t to say these are bad qualities in writing, only that they are linked to whiteness, and this link often has uneven racist consequences in writing assessments when used as a standard.

To put it more bluntly, a white racial *habitus* often has racist effects in the classroom and in program assessments, even though it is not racist in and of itself. The racism occurs by assuming that it is a neutral *habitus*, one that is free from the racial and economic politics we all operate within. The maintenance of whiteness and white supremacy, even if tacit as in the “new racism” that Bonilla-Silva and Villanueva describe, is vital to maintaining the status quo of society’s social, economic, and racial hierarchies, the structuring structures that (re)produce a white racial *habitus*, the structuring structures that reproduce the white hegemonic rule in the CWPA, the structures that brought all of you here today, and only you, not others. A white racial *habitus* keeps the linguistic keys that many students of color already hold in their hands away from the locks of the gates of education and opportunity. Name the last article in the WPA’s journal that was about whiteness or racism in writing programs? You can’t because there hasn’t been one. That’s a bold statement. I can name Craig and Perryman-Clark’s 2011 article on race and gender politics of WPAs, but how many others are there in the last 38 years of the journal’s existence? Maybe one or two. I guess that’s something, something very small. It’s not like we’ve had this racism problem for very long.

The lack of sustained treatment on issues of whiteness and racism in the journal isn’t surprising. The way I’ve seen most compositionists deal with racism and their own whiteness is to have good intentions and then avoid

the topic altogether because that's not what they do, or they're not experts, or others do that work. These practices participate in the new racism that Bonilla-Silva and Villanueva discuss. Bonilla-Silva says that the new racism manifests through five key practices (272), ones we might all do well to check in our own work:

- racial language practices that are increasingly covert, as with those who argue that using a local Standardized English in a writing classroom is not racist because the course is about the appropriate language use for college students, without questioning why that brand of English is deemed most appropriate or providing ways in the class to examine the dominant discourse as a set of conventions that have been standardized by a white hegemony;
- racial terminology that is explicitly avoided (or a universalizing and abstracting of experience and capacities), causing an increasing frequency of claims that whites themselves are experiencing reverse racism;
- racial inequality that is reproduced invisibly through multiple mechanisms, reproduced structurally, as in who takes advantage of this conference or who becomes grad students in rhetoric and composition;
- safe minorities (singular examples or exceptions, often named) that are used to prove that racism no longer exists, despite the larger patterns and statistics that prove the contrary; and
- racial practices reminiscent of the Jim Crow period (e.g., separate but equal) that are rearticulated in new, non-racial terms.

These practices are part of a white racial *habitus*, a set of whitely dispositions that serve the white status quo in the CWPA and our writing programs. This new racism occurs more frequently in writing classrooms and programs because we uncritically promote (often out of necessity) a dominant white academic discourse. As Bonilla-Silva shows in his famous study of whites' attitudes toward racism, whites tend to use four frames, or "set paths for interpreting information," to justify the new racism, a racism that appears to be about other things, not race or racism (26).



- **Abstract liberalism**—using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., “equal opportunity,” the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters.
- **Naturalization**—explaining away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences.
- **Cultural racism**—relying on culturally based arguments such as “Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education” or “blacks have too many babies” to explain the standing of minorities in society.
- **Minimization of racism**—suggesting that discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life chances (“It’s better now than in the past” or “There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there”)

Fig. 7. Frames of Color-Blind Racism (or the New Racism) (Bonilla-Silva 74–78)

These discourses and sets of linguistic conventions, along with the discourse of whiteness, need interrogating with students as structuring structures that give us certain tastes in language and thought. But writing programs cannot leave a white racial *habitus* at that, at just critical discussions of language and texts, without also using those discussions in some way to change the program, to change the dispositions toward language that drive judgment in the program. The same goes for the CWPA. For instance, what is our outcomes for the Diversity Committee in the CWPA? What do we expect? What tangible goals is our Executive Board formulating that will make less racism in the organization and field tomorrow, and how are they measuring success? How is the CWPA guiding future administrators toward antiracist agendas, ones that don’t try to administer fair programs but administer writing programs that are NOT unfair. There’s a difference between trying to be fair and trying NOT to be racist. The difference is in what we assume about the systems we work in. None of this is easy work, and to be fair, some of it is already beginning in various committees.

#### THE CWPA AND WRITING PROGRAMS ENACT WHITELY WAYS OF JUDGMENT

Finally, one aspect I’ve not mentioned of a white racial *habitus* is the whitely ways in which we enact judgment and policies. Bonilla-Silva gets at this whiteness in his frames, which are a result of such ways with dealing with others. In “The Race to Truth: Disarticulating Critical Thinking from

Whiteness,” Catherine Fox argues that many critical and feminist pedagogies in writing classrooms work against their stated goals of helping students do critical conscious-raising, or critical thinking through their writing, because those who enact these pedagogies do so in whitely ways. She explains that the problem in writing classrooms is four-fold (201), which I summarize as the following:

- We think of *critical thinking* as a kind of god-term, in which teachers already understand what it is and looks like.
- We equate our notions of critical thinking to the right way of seeing things and judge our students against our versions of this right way.
- We often confuse critical thinking with feminist and critical ideologies, leaving little room for other critical thinking ways with words.
- By doing the first three things, we end up enacting a pedagogy of transmission, or a kind of banking model, that we ostensibly criticize.

Today, I argue that this critique can be leveled on most writing programs and the CWPA as an organization. I say this not because I’m hatin’ on ya but because I love this organization and the good people who make it what it is. *And I want more for us.* I’ve said in the past that one problem with the CWPA is that it’s really the Council of White Program Administrators. Much of this problem is due to the ways we judge language and ignore the racialization of language in our teaching, assessing, and scholarship. Recently, the organization’s Executive Board and its executive officers, such as Rita Malenczyk, Susan Miller-Cochran, and Dominic DelliCarpini, as well as the WPA-GO, have made important strides toward better representation and participation by academics, WPAs, and teachers of color in the organization, but that’s not the only reason I’m bring up Fox’s problem. Representation is a problem that results from the racialization of language but not the only problem of structural racism in writing programs and in the CWPA. I’m talking about the problem of whitely ways of administering writing programs and judging the languages of non-white others. And I’ll end on this point.

In 1985, Minnie Bruce Pratt offered her own white ways of being in the world, and in “White Woman Feminist,” Marilyn Frye, using Pratt, offers a list of dispositions that equate to whiteness. These dispositions amount to (and again, I summarize):

- Being a judge and peacemaker: a disposition toward giving responsibility and punishments, being the preacher and martyr, taking responsibility and the glory.
- Self-understood benevolence: a disposition toward seeing oneself as benevolent, good-willed, fair, honest, and ethical.

- Being procedurally ethical: a disposition toward forms, procedures, due process, and rules as the basis of the ethical.
- Authority: a disposition toward running the show, or aspiring toward it, and a belief in one's infallible authority in most matters.

In her critique of critical pedagogies, Fox reveals these whitely dispositions as the source of the four problems she mentions. She poses the problem as a question to writing teachers, which I think applies well to WPAs and all of us as officers and members of CWPA. All we have to do is replace in her questioning “critical thinking” with something like “WPA outcomes” or “writing standards.” Fox asks:

How much of the critical thinking that we laud in ourselves is embedded in our assumed righteousness, principled conduct, goodness, and standing as moral and ethical citizens and teachers who, because we possess these whitely qualities, have the authority to run things? Does the critical thinking we encourage our students to apply lead them to aspire to the same qualities? If so, it poses the danger of reproducing the very hegemony that radical pedagogues aim to disrupt. (204)

Is it possible that our programs and the CWPA are run by whitely dispositions, by a white racial *habitus* that ignores the racialization of language, thus making most of what we do racist because of our good intentions? Is it possible that you each are here at the cost of someone of color? Is it possible that you have been and are racist because of a white racial *habitus* and a set of whitely ways that you embody, not out of choice or intention but out of necessity and luck of birth? Is it possible that along with your hard work, this white racial *habitus* and your whitely ways have granted you privileges and benefits at the expense of others? If so, how is that socially just and what do we do about it now that many of us do run things? I realize this may be a tough thing to swallow and a tough question to answer. That's the work of antiracism. Marilyn Frye too suggests that you'll have a hard time with seeing your whitely ways, that it will be an attack on your very being. It will be violence. I say, let the violence begin. Do violence to your own whitely *habitus*, to your writing programs so they cease to be white programs, and do violence to the organization so that we can be even better tomorrow, so that we directly address the racism that has helped most of us get here at the expense of others, of the Other.

Thank you.

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