Self-Reflection and the Reflected Self: African American Double Consciousness and the Social (Psychological) Mirror

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Utilizing examples from sport and everyday interactions, the author interrogates a sample of social theories that deal with situated social activity. The goal is to continue broadening our perceptions of black knowledge of social behavior. Many African Americans resist past ways of knowing white power and control. Still others of us will continually see ourselves on stage and see bicultural scenarios through the double-consciousness lens .

RESEARCH METHODS

My primary means of conveying the black cultural lens phenomenon and associated cognitive dissonances is via the use of personal narrative. Personal narratives are important and enriching. Important, because "walking in the moccasins of others" often gives access, however limited or fleeting, to how the mind of the "other" sees the world. One could argue that a woman narrating her experience of sexism and the effects on her life could be far more intriguing and socializing to university students than journal articles proving the existence of systemic sexism. The two working in tandem are even more convincing. The same might be said for the importance of personal narrative regarding racism and prejudice as experienced by African Americans.

Many of us pursued our careers because of personal experiences or a resonance with the storied experiences of others. To abandon those passionate beginnings of our careers might mean not only dispassionate research, but also the silencing of those passionate stories that might otherwise inspire our students into similar compassionate career options, if not the elimination of stereotypes. In this way our personal stories—and the

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stories of others—enrich our dialogues with racism, sexism and other forms of exclusion by reinserting the complex experiences of everyday people into social discourses. Art Bochner, as embedded in the text of Ellis and Bochner's (2000) extensive analysis of the researcher as subject, might agree, as he states:

> Besides, I became a social scientist because I thought it was a way to address deep and troubling questions about how to live a meaningful, useful, and ethical life. Somewhere along the way these questions took a backseat to methodological rigor. Now I felt liberated to grapple with these questions again, more dialogically, through personal narrative (p. 747).

There is a growing methodological literature to support the development of this personal, powerful space in our research. Exhausting the literature would take me far afield of my purposes of this essay; there are a growing number of academic practitioners employing a variety of qualitative narrative methodologies in their research processes to add depth and texture to data. These qualitative methods range from autoethnography to evocative narratives to reflexive ethnographies.

Autoethnography (Hayano, 1979), wide in its application, is most often thought of as an autobiographical form of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural. Autoethnographers gaze at society through a wide-angle lens, of sorts, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their day-to-day personal experience, before turning the lens inward to expose personal vulnerabilities that both refract and resist various social interpretations (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739; see also Deck, 1990; Neumann, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Written in the first person voice, the distinctions between the personal and the cultural often become blurred beyond recognition as authors narrate action, dialogue, emotion and self-consciousness revealed through action, feeling, thought and language (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

Reflexive ethnographies are employed by those who study feminism (Behar, 1996; Behar and Gordon, 1995; Krieger, 1991; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Richardson, 1997), and those who study cultures and subcultures. In reflexive ethnographies, authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to "bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 740). The researcher's personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture—African American or otherwise—under the microscope of academic study. Reflexive ethnographies allow for

beginning studies from one's own experience to studying the experience of other subjects, and even reflection on the experiences *of doing* a study.

My experiences discussed herein account for only a miniscule amount of the many errors in judgment many black folk make when we carry the double burden of trying to assess white social signs through an "American" lens while also trying to assess (possible) white racist signifiers through a "black" social lens.

WHITE LIKE ME

Once every semester in the early 1990s those of us in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's sociology department who fancied ourselves *sociological* social psychologists would make the jaunt across campus to meet for a lunch research presentation with the *psychological* social psychologists. I recall once asking an enthusiastic presenter: "Could you give me the racial breakdown of the subjects you surveyed?" My question was nervously misinterpreted as "Why didn't you include African Americans and other racial groups in your survey?"

Of course this is a qualitatively different interpretation than the question I intended. The scholar targeted the "lack of non-white students" to draw from in UW-Madison psychology classes. As I later found out, European researchers have noted the strong tendency of United States social psychologists to rely on white college students as research subjects (Amir and Sharon, 1987; Moghaddam, Taylor and Wright, 1993), and it seems that tradition was true on this day in Madison. That critique aside, my question concerning the subjects of the study was directed primarily at the generalizability of the results from this distinct group of Midwestern, white, mostly middle-class students. Had I interrogated further I would have questioned the generalizability of the results to various African American populations, to say nothing of Latina/o populations and many others.

I would have little issue had the researcher stated that there were "400 white subjects" and that, therefore, "the generalizability of the results must be confined to white students at UW-Madison or in Wisconsin," or some such qualifying statement. The racial number—or the lack thereof—was *not* the reason for the question; my veiled critique was targeted at the implication that because white students were the only subjects of the study, there was no real need to report on the variable of race. Whites, by implication, were non-racial. By further implication, white students were "the norm" and thus broadly generalizable beyond the scope of the data.

The implicit notion of the white researcher was that reporting of the "race" variable was insignificant to the discussion since there were not a significant amount of "racial" subjects in the study. This implication was a telling indictment of how we do research, report results and generalize to populations. All he needed to say, really, was that "all subjects of the study were white." In addition, that "the results are therefore limited in their scope." Instead, a frustrated presenter candidly asked me: "Why would you expect black subjects to act differently?" In other words, "Maybe it is *you* who is showing the racial bias by implying that black students are different."

For example, we *should* expect whites to differ from African American students (though many would not) in their attitudes about reparations, given historical racism, symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears, 1981; McConahay and Hough, 1976), privilege, political affiliation, class standing and other variables. The upshot is, we must always be careful to note not only the race and/or ethnicity of subjects under study (even if they are all white), but also exercise caution in the populations we generalize to—given our sample configuration. This is applicable across racial and cultural groups as well as within groups, especially given the gender, age, ability levels, sexuality and class dynamics within racial and ethnic groupings. While this might appear a restatement of the obvious in conducting and reporting the results of data collection, we are all given to over-generalize here or there, at one time or another.

This issue of across-race generalizability points up one of many challenges researchers confront when their subject pools, often for reasons of convenience, do not include samples from non-majority populations. Equally important is that when researchers gather samples from one racial group (no harm in purposive samples and studies, as many scholars have consciously chosen to study black men), they are careful to consider the variance *within* the sampled group. This has been a stated concern by audience members whenever I present my research on sports, celebratory expression, and black athletes. The primary concern centered on my discussion of "sportsmanlike conduct" rules in collegiate and professional football that targeted expressive African American athletes.

Quite often when I presented research findings on athletes and sportsmanlike conduct, a discussion would ensue that highlighted the many differences in expressive patterns of black athletes and how the media (and to some degree, my study) highlighted the "expressive" athletes to the detriment of the less expressive, more humble athletes. Given that "celebration"

penalties in football by default are called on expressive athletes, and that most athletes that score are African American, this emphasis on the socialization of the more expressive athletes is warranted. But by centering the discussion on the more demonstrative black athletes, the "center" soon appeared to be expressing the "norm" of the group. Whether that was my intention or not, the norming of black athlete behavior as "highly expressive" was one understandable audience reading and concern.

Like my own critique of the psychological social psychologist that winter morning in Wisconsin, I have found it necessary to practice what I've preached and qualify my population and note within-group variances. Taken a step further, I have also decided to target the "marginal" non-expressive athlete, those "outside the scope" of my intended study of expressive athletes. This expansion and purposive tackling, so to speak, of expressive outliers allows for a wider understanding of the variety of expressive behaviors among black athletes: low expression is still expression—and ripe for scholarly interrogation.

In a similar sense, social psychologists can add to scientific knowledge by including "the racial other" in future theorizing in the field. Past theory is fraught with gaps in analysis and could benefit by scholars revisiting our most sacred texts. With that in mind, the following discussion is an initial visitation of works in social psychology highlighting situated social conduct and how these discussions might shift and grow in light of African American situated identity, double-consciousness and the reflected social self.

SOCIAL LENSES AND MIRRORS

Social research has always grappled with the question of social causes and behavioral effects, always in search of knowledge of how individual behavior patterns are influenced by larger social forces such as poverty and class level (see Myrdal, 1944; Wilson, 1978; Steinberg, 1981; Gray, 1995) and masculinity and race (see Kochman, 1981; Duneier, 1992; Majors and Billson, 1992). Sociologists and psychologists in the broad field of social psychology focus on the relationship between the person and the social world by focusing on the internal processes of individuals in social settings. Gordon Allport (1968) has defined social psychology as "an attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (p. 3). The focus of social psychology is on the internal workings of individual cognition and processing of information: how

do we process the information we receive? What are our resulting social actions? For discussion here, more specifically, how does race factor into the equation we calculate when deciding how to behave or evaluate the behavior of others? How might the view of society through our racial "lens" influence our behavior choices?

One of the earliest works cited in the social science literature on social interaction, and a good place to start, is the writing of Charles Horton Cooley in "The Looking Glass Self" (1902). Cooley, in the citation below, summarizes the interaction between the individual mind, the social "Other," and socially situated conduct:

> So in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it. . . . The thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind. . . . We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind (p.184).

If we accept Cooley's picture of imaginative social interaction, then we believe that people constantly interact with the real or imagined images of ourselves reflected back to us; thus, how we correspondingly act is tempered by how the social "other" might view our social actions. As many members of racial and ethnic groups in America can attest, the "other" in the social institution is often white and often in a power position. While this institutional dynamic does not problematize Cooley's construction, at the least, race and power problematizes how people in the "out" racial group situate themselves and "reflect" on how to behave in social settings. This phenomenon of shifting cultural lenses on a daily, hourly or moment-by-moment basis by black people was first noted by W.E.B. Dubois at the turn of the 20th century and is often referred to as "double consciousness" (Dubois, 1964; Adell, 1994).

Race and ethnic cues in the public milieu can foster shifts in the individual that can lead to multiple audiences perceived, multiple messages (physical or vocal) sent and consequently multiple interpretations of social behavior. Studies of black behavior, both verbal and nonverbal, note the many ways behavior can be misinterpreted across cultural lines in power situations and other everyday interactions (Kochman, 1981; Jones, 1986; Majors and Billson, 1992; Andrews and Majors, 2004). "Eye contact" is one of the key unintended nonverbal communication forms of African Americans that is often misinterpreted.

Due at least in part to African Americans historically having to show public deference toward whites, black Americans will often avoid direct eye contact with white authority figures, especially in tense situations. This behavior is often misinterpreted across racial lines by whites as being "suspicious" (see also Majors and Billson, 1992; Andrews and Majors, forthcoming). Research on eye contact across race generally shows that African Americans are less likely than whites to look at others while listening (LaFrance, 1974; Hall, 1974; LaFrance and Mayo, 1976; Harper, Wiens and Matarazzo, 1978; Shuter, 1979; Smith, 1983; Hanna, 1997). Typically, whites look at others more when listening than speaking, whereas blacks tend to look at others more when speaking than when listening (LaFrance and Mayo 1976; Hanna 1997).

Overall, LaFrance and Mayo (1976) found that looking while listening occurred less for black males and most for white females. What some might read as deference in face-to-face interactions, others might imagine as disrespect . . . or when dealing with law officials, guilt. The racial audience, the point in time, gender and power relationships interweave to offer multiple possible actions by actors or interpretations by audiences in social and interpersonal situations.

A black athlete in professional or collegiate sport must at many points in social time choose the racial audience that she "imagines." Whose behavior does she reflect? Whom does she try to please when her audience is predominantly white in the stadium and, in her imagination via the television camera, black at home in her family? African Americans constantly confront this dilemma of audience choice from multiple perceived audiences. At any given time in a public setting, I can consider myself to be just another "American." But, really, I am *never* just another American. That would be my momentary interpretation of the social situation. Some in African American culture might jest that I was a victim of false consciousness by perceiving myself to be the embodiment of the "melting pot" American philosophy. Needless to say, the perception of oneself to be part of a united national collective—*or not*—can lead to much gnashing of teeth and angst in the face of the "American Dream" of equality of opportunity.

The cognitive dissonance about "Americaness" suffered by many African Americans has its roots in how we perceive ourselves versus how our American brethren perceive us. While African Americans may no longer be "torn asunder" by our continued "twoness" in contemporary society, as Dubois (1964) might say a century ago, we are always at one and the same

time trying to imagine we fit "Americaness" in the face of constant reminders by real (and imagined) others that we don't quite fit in. Two examples highlight my point.

SCOTLAND, KILTS, AND THE CAMERA MAN: BLACK TO THE USA

As part of research I am conducting on the British roots of sportsmanlike conduct, I visited England, Wales, and Scotland for six weeks in 1999 to cover the Rugby World Cup and to collect data from various sources. While in Edinburgh covering the New Zealand All Blacks versus Scotland rugby fixture, I decided to visit a large kilt-making shop across from the Edinburgh Castle overlooking the city. Once inside, I said to an elderly bespeckled saleswoman, partly in jest, "Hello—I'm just a typical American in here to find out my family colors and be fitted for a kilt." She took off her glasses and replied, "You're not a typical American—you're black!" "Fair enough," I said, "But my last name is Andrews." To which she replied, "You're probably more Scottish than me!" It was a harmless confrontation, but nonetheless I reflected on what a "typical" American looks like both inside and outside of the United States. Black did not fit into the calculation. While we both had a pleasant laugh while I was fitted for a kilt, the second confrontation did a more psychic damage and saw me later sitting in a pub staring into a beer while chewing on some cognitive dissonance.

Eton College was the site of a couple of days of digging through archives to ascertain the role of sport in the process of turning "boys to men." I was vaguely familiar with the quote that the wars of England were won on the "playing fields of Eton," and wanted to search for historical clues about the role of sport and character in this famous school southwest of London. One afternoon, I decided to visit Windsor Castle, just a short walk across the bridge from Eton. On my way back to my hotel I stopped on the small footbridge to admire the swans, the river, the sun setting and the very tranquil and historical setting, a long way from my current home in Aotearoa/New Zealand and my past home in the United States. I wanted to capture the moment, and so asked a passing gentleman if he'd mind taking my photo with the Castle in the background. He replied, "As long as you take my photo with my camera also." "Sure," I said, noting his American accent. The accent was both foreign and familiar to my ears at one and the same time. Living in New Zealand one becomes accustomed to the local cultural terrain and accent, to say nothing of enjoying the kind treatment African Americans receive.

After the photo, the tourist returned with my camera and I set it down next to my research bag on the bridge's bench. As he gave me his camera, he had apparently noted my American accent also, which does tend to stick out in the British countryside. He stared me right in the eye and, with serious concern tempered by a sly grin, said, "Now you aren't going to run away with my camera, are you?" I was so shocked at the question and implication of my latent criminality that later I was surprised I was able to gather together a coherent response. I looked him back in the eyes and said, "Sir, I don't think my university would take kindly to its professors stealing cameras." He gave me the camera along with a sheepish grin, backed for his photo, and returned to say, "I was just kidding." Sure he was.

More likely, I had activated a stereotypical schema about black men (for more on racial stereotypes and schemata see Higgens, Rholes, and Jones, 1977; Devine, 1989; Hansen, 1995; Hansen and Krygowski, 1994; Ford, 1997). As many rap artists like KRS-One, L.L. Cool J., Ice Cube, and Chuck D. note, black men are always considered suspects (Rose, 1994). Others have noted that black men are stereotyped as dangerous (Feagin, 2001; Fiske, 1993; Majors and Billson, 1992). This is certainly one situation where my learned East Oakland "cool" tempered my reaction, though I would never promise that many cousins from the same environs would have dealt with the delicate situation so diplomatically.

I never thought I'd have to later give "camera man" a theoretical going over, but confronting the racial "other's" perception of my latent criminality left me wanting for an explanation. The weak apology I received from "camera man" was his way of sheepishly acknowledging his own prejudice while at the same time laughing it off with the deflection that it was mere "joking." Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) note that whites are consciously concerned with maintaining an egalitarian and nonprejudiced self-concept even if they hold negative sentiments toward African Americans. And for white associates I have related this story to, the advice is, understandably, that I should "shake it off—he was just being a jerk." Another white person commented, "Everybody needs to be concerned about theft when traveling abroad," the point being that caution should always be one's guide when dealing with the unknown. I understood the general reasoning in both white responses above, but reasoned that they failed to see, feel or understand my hurt as a (relatively) young black American male cast forever and always as the criminal suspect.

Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) note that discrimination is most likely to occur when nonracial justifications for discriminatory behavior are available. It would appear that, for better or for worse, other whites also look to find nonracial justifications for the actions of other whites so as to diffuse racial angst of blacks and possibly to further cement their own status as egalitarian and non-prejudicial. I am open to the notion that some white associates may in fact be enacting social situational comforting behaviors, similar to how males might downplay a woman friend's comments about a possible sexist scenario in order to diffuse notions of that she was treated unfairly, thereby "comforting" her, however patronizing the attempt might appear. In fact, when we relate these scenarios, in the moment we tell them, quite often what we are subjectively asking the listener is, "Do ya feel me?" Sometimes, as simple as it might seem, we just want someone, anyone, to say "I feel ya." That is, "I understand, I see your point, I can sense how *you* feel about that reaction, and it must feel awfully bad." Not as a way to feel sorry for us, but more of a validation that the pain we have experienced has some interpersonal, human resonance.

For many African Americans, these daily or weekly interpersonal chinks in our collective protective armor are not as easy, though, to "shake off" as my white friends might desire; indeed, they can shake African American "imagined selves" to the core. There is the momentary sentiment that regardless of education level, attire, diction, conservative hairstyle or leather carrying case, to many white Americans we are already and always imagined as potential thieves. There is the accompanying stress of wondering what next need be done to rid one of whatever semblance of criminality might remain on one's public persona. But the problem did not begin with the individual African American or even the white American in most scenarios.

The problems of white American distrustful coexistence with African Americans were begun on the slavery fields of America and are still resonating after the "big bang" that was the "freedom" of the Civil War. Racial profiling, as it turns out, extends beyond the police force in America, beyond American shores, and for many white Americans extends to wherever African Americans are located in space or time, especially if we are male and wearing tennis shoes. As my mother used to say, "You can run, but you sure can't hide." In this case, the implication is that we are already and always suspects in the imaginations of many white Americans, regardless of class standing or the country one is standing in.

BLACK PACIFICA: NEW ZEALAND AND AFRICAN AMERICAN BODIES

New Zealand, a land of 4 million people and 40 million sheep, is a country of two primary islands. At the lower tip of the North Island lies Wellington, a small cosmopolitan city that serves as the nation's capital. Wellington is a stunningly beautiful city, not unlike San Francisco in its hilly landscape and bay setting. This was the site of a conference on culture in 1999, and another conference I attended in 2000. In both visits I experienced something that I doubt many African Americans have ever experienced.

My experience in Wellington was positive and very much unlikely in urban environments in the United States. I had decided to walk, in 1999, from Victoria University down the long winding hills into the city and to Te Papa Museum. Less adventurous professors attending the conference decided to take a cab. I got lost. In my wanderings back and forth I happened upon a man with paint buckets in his hands and walking towards a small truck in front of a house. Turns out he was a hired painter. I slowly moved in his direction and matter-of-factly noted that I was lost and needed help finding my way into town. He pointed across the city to the Museum and noted that I needed to follow a winding road, and then take a left, then a right, and then another left until I saw the road down. I was reminded of my brother telling me how whites sometimes gave black people bad directions as a joke. I was more confused after this 50-year-old white man's explanation. I said "thanks," and began to walk off, determined to save the $7 cab fare with pride. He hollered back at me, "But if you can wait five minutes, I'll give you a lift into town." I said "Sure."

I squeezed my large frame into the front seat and rode down the hill with him to my destination as we talked rugby. On the ride I had the amazing experience of lightness. I was experiencing trust by another individual who had white skin but did not know me. Call me deprived, but I had never experienced this level of trust and confidence from a white stranger in America. No doubt there are many who might have trusted me. But the amazement was that I reflected in the moment how I had constructed myself as a criminal. I actually said to myself, "Why does this man trust me? Doesn't he know that I am a black man? I could kill him and take his money and his truck! Why does he trust me?" Of course, this was an absurd internal dialogue from a man who is a Green Party member and a pacifist.

But on reflection I now realize that I had internalized all

the images of myself as *large black man as criminal*, as dangerous, as not to be trusted. I reflected on how my internalization might have influenced my interaction with whites, how I might already always be enacting negative social roles and reading from scripts in my mind that have me framed as a "bad nigga" all the while attempting to show that I am as harmless as Uncle Ned, Uncle Tom or your average coon or sambo on the plantation. That is, when I am in the social milieu of whiteness, my imaginings of the white other's interpretations of my black body and its threat cause me to attempt to reflect a docile persona in order to achieve some desired result.

Over time those ethnic myths about my body as a representation of black male terror, while still shadows on the cave wall of my social imagination, have ceased to be busily dancing and begging for recognition at every turn. Gradually, over a period of years, I have been able to bring to the fore a calm in social interactions that does not bear the weight of American racism. I have always wondered what the unbearable lightness of whiteness was—to walk outside and wave at neighbors, to ride elevators without having others cringe, to walk through a store with a backpack and not worry about being checked, and to test drive a car without leaving identification behind.

By this time my social expectations of white New Zealanders had risen, so there was not the element of surprise, and my stress level had fallen, so there was not the accompanying feeling of lightness. What I experienced instead was a new, more positive way of looking at whites through my social lens and a new, more positive way of looking at myself as a "human" through the eyes of the reflected social other; no longer did I look at myself as a threat. This more holistic way of looking at others and self socially gives context to why I was shaken so strongly by cameraman one year later in Eton, England. Indeed, social psychologists would do well to study not only whites outside United States university classrooms, as suggested by other researchers above, but also to study African Americans who have lived beyond those shores as they represent a unique Rorschach test of racial knowledges, both learned and unlearned.

I need to emphasize here that my experience in Wellington is unique, and does not represent the experience of all African Americans who visit New Zealand, but I will add that many who have visited and remained do so because of the cordial relationships with Maoris, Pakehas, Samoans, and others here in Aotearoa. I also stress that my interpretation of my scenario is an individual interpretation. Many African Americans would not have thought twice about asking for directions, nor

have been shocked at receiving a ride, nor felt any great lightness at white acceptance. But I would suggest that a great many African Americans who have visited foreign lands have noted the respectful treatment accorded them. I would also suggest that there are millions of untold African American stories about social situations in America where their racial status was highlighted, low-lighted, compromised, or otherwise negatively acted upon by white Americans.

SHIFTING STAGES—SHIFTING AUDIENCES

As noted, African Americans are always at one and the same time trying to imagine we fit in to "Americaness" in the face of constant reminders by real (versus imagined) others that we don't quite fit in. Many African Americans have stopped trying to please the imagined white other in media situations, preferring instead to send a "shout out" to the brothas and sistas backstage. Janet Jackson and many other Grammy award winners will often recognize poor black Americans who do attend awards shows but who are sitting high in the rafters, or who could not afford to attend at all but consume far more of a percentage of their income on CDs and hip hop paraphernalia. "Backstaging" one's cultural roots has shifted to "frontstaging" one's race, ethnicity and culture, in the process leaving many to conclude that an "uncultured element" has slid between the cracks into mainstream America. While this is one interpretation, another is that many youth simply don't care to have their cultural norms take a "back seat" on the bus of public presentation any longer. The imagined authoritative white public other is for many African Americans in the hip-hop generation losing its fear factor.

FAT BOB

Reference group shifts in certain interracial social situations and in various social roles can, though, still problematize patterns of behavior for many African Americans. Black folks may experience cognitive dissonance when deciding who the "real" audience is. These shifting cues can fog the social mirror from which we reflect our behavior. Yes, we do always imagine, "and in imagining share the judgments of the other mind," as Cooley states; but those judgments necessarily shift with the audience. In a social setting in Texas I might be acutely aware of local knowledges of blacks that are negative. Consequently, my resulting imagined white construction would shift my social demeanor, my social attitude, and my social behavior.

Likewise, my stereotypes of white Texans might taint how

I perceived their behavior and actions. African Americans are also prone to stereotype, though admittedly more out of cross-cultural fear than out-group disdain. Given the many horrific acts by white supremacist groups, the police, and the U.S. government over the years toward African Americans, it should never come as a surprise when black folk overreact to what they perceive as a racial slight in a public setting. A time when I got it wrong serves as an example of how one's perception of self as "black" has one occasionally misread the positive intentions of white Americans.

I stopped for coffee in the middle of Nebraska on a trip from Wisconsin to California in 1994. What was curious to me was why my coffee was taking so long. I grew certain that the rather large, what I would otherwise call a "hillbilly redneck" white man, had been out back in the kitchen doing torturous things to my coffee. After all, it was just one cup of coffee I wanted. I had heard horror stories of what waiters can do to food or beverage items in order to sabotage customers. I resolved to "accidentally" spill the coffee and ask for a second cup, fearing the bad he had obviously done. As the hillbilly finally appeared from the back and neared the counter, and as I prepared to feign clumsiness, I saw a couple of black men approach the counter, having already left the money for the check on the table, and gaze strongly at the hillbilly and say, "Take care of yourself Fat Bob," to which he matter-of-factly and kindly said, "Be safe Jimmy and Tiny. See you soon," as if they'd know each other all their lives. I realize they probably did. In an instant, I turned to Fat Bob, who said to me as he totaled my bill, "Sorry for the delay—I decided to make a fresh pot for yah and it took awhile." I was the one sheepishly grinning this time, as I gave my "thanks" to him for the fresh coffee.

On my way to the car I reflected on the statistical notion of "false positives" and wondered about the build-up of years of accumulated stress of even having to figure out these situations and whether someone was being trustful or not. I also wondered about the damage I might have done by wrongly accusing someone of showing bias toward me. At this disjuncture and in many a cross-racial scenario, the social mirror is beyond foggy. The social mirror is not solely our own construction; we reflect at any given moment our personal collective experiences, in addition to the experiences of others of our group as told through stories. In addition, we reflect what we have heard other whites say and feel about us, in addition to what has been done to us over many years. This is all put into the mix of how we think about our situation or our lives or our skin color at any

given moment in any given space. There is, quite often, a parallel feeling of remorse when we get it wrong and anger at having to perpetually be reflecting and interpreting what might be right or wrong.

I want here to highlight that there is a cumulative effect of stress on the individual from having to decipher and react to one's race in the social milieu. Black males, I believe, carry a significant amount of stress once in adulthood from reactions to their perceived "threat" in interracial settings to the social order and from having to sort out, as above, any number of social scenarios where race plays a factor. I never knew this stress existed until I arrived in New Zealand and slowly realized I was no longer being followed in stores by employees suspecting theft, was no longer a profiled citizen by the police force, was not subjected to suspicious looks by campus staff if I appeared in or near my office late at night, and was not feared and avoided in rides up the elevator. My personal stress level has reduced significantly. Health researchers would do well to interrogate the implications of race-related stress on black males.

WHOSE NORMS ARE WATCHING YOU?

In a mixed setting how do we continually shift and decide which group is the true social mirror? The choice of audience to reflect is a daily situational contestation with professional and non-professional African Americans who are always and constantly in cross-cultural settings and interactions. Whose norms do you choose? Who is watching? Whose imagination do you reflect?

While there is a general norm of black resistance and racialized intragroup pressure in social settings not to conform to white norms, there is also a general level of acceptable conformity in mixed social settings. This acceptable situational conformity varies by individual actor, assessor, and social setting. In general, the posture, diction and level of real or feigned subservience are allowed to shift toward the white norm in order to get the job done and pay the bills, so to speak. Most African Americans calculate that there is no escaping some level of assimilation in order to advance economically. We all—regardless of racial background—undertake social performances outside of our box of personal integrity at points in social time.

Many women, gays, and lesbians have to do this social dance in very different ways. In addition to the "racial other" having to "talk the (white) talk" and "walk the (white) walk," once the dramaturgy has played itself out in the situation the black social actor must be able to readjust to black norms (or

Asian, Native American, Hispanic and Latino/a) in black settings and sell the temporary conformity as just that—temporary and situationally necessary. Hence the "double" in double-consciousness; one must perform for whites and also enact "face-saving" performances for the respective in-group.

The inability to perform this "cultural dance" with efficiency can lead to in-group labeling of African Americans by the in-group as "fake," a "sellout," and "Uncle Tom" or an "Oreo" cookie—black on the outside and white on the inside. Asians are stigmatized and labeled "bananas," Native Americans are labeled "apples," and Mexican Americans "coconuts" for the inability to negotiate biculturality and double-consciousness.

White Americans, to be sure, have their own term for whites that perform verbal and nonverbal culture in black mode. One term is a "wanna be," a term also used for blacks who some feel truly "wanna be" white. But the far more derogatory term used by many whites is "whigger," short for "white nigger." The social dance African Americans perform is at one and the same time a performance of "blackness" for the black audience and a performance of "whiteness" for the white audience. Other racial/ethnic groups, possibly to a lesser degree and varying from individual to individual, negotiate similar cultural shifts, as noted above.

When we assess our own social behavior, as Cooley reminds us, we not only refer to our own "self" feelings but also reflect on what "others" think about our behavior. As society has integrated, it could be argued that both black and white have gained more knowledge and access to how the consciousness of how the other reflects. Because of social and institutional power dynamics, though, African Americans over the years have by necessity had to be far more conscious of the imaginations of whites than the other way around. And thus, through the act of reflection on how we as blacks "should" behave, we have become increasingly, if not defiantly, socially conscious of white "others."

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, the Black Panther Party and the raised fists of the black Olympic athletes in 1968, African American expressive behavior has ushered in the era of brashness, in addition to the past norm of the quiet, acquiescent black star. Many athletes are losing the double-consciousness "veil" and opting for the *singular* consciousness of blackness, often embodied in the do-rag, skullcap or other headgear. The reflection many athletes are now seeing in the social mirror is one of a black social under (forgotten) class.

Social psychologist John Hewitt (1991) notes that the general process of knowledge and self awareness gained of one's surrounding social world can evoke a "dawning of consciousness," for people can become self consciously (or double-consciously) aware of their reflected actions: "The organism that minds itself is aware of itself as a part of the world, and has gained an important capacity for control over its own acts" (Hewitt 1991:46). While some, then, might interpret Deion Sanders or Allen Iverson (or Muhammad Ali or Dennis Rodman) as being *out of control* with their celebratory expression or "ghettocentricity" (Rose, 1994), this is only one very specific interpretation (and knowledge) of an act. Athletes such as Deion Sanders, Allen Iverson, Ray Lewis, and others may be acting *in complete control* by moving beyond white parameters they feel are too constraining or controlling. We have to be careful not to confuse Hewitt's statement of "capacity for control" with being a "controlled" individual. Personal control can be used to resist hegemonic control and thus transformed into personal power.

SITUATIONS AND CONTEXTS

We do not act in a vacuum, especially if we are in the public eye. We think before we act. Individual reflection on behavioral choices requires us to take the place of the "other"—to inject *other* definitions of the situation into our own situated identity when making a conduct choice. Conduct becomes situated activity when it is anchored outside the self and constrained by presumed "monitoring" by others (Alexander and Wiley 1990:273). For example, when we enter the sociocultural milieu and see an ex-lover in Starbucks coffee shop, we face the choice between greeting her or disregarding her. Our behavior in the situation might translate to our being characterized along dimensions of "rude-polite, respectful-disrespectful," and so forth (Alexander and Wiley 1990:274).

We choose specific behaviors in every sociocultural situation and in so doing imply to others our situated identity or our persona in the given social context. Moreover, our choice of situational behavior can be extremely important to others. Our parents, bosses and spousal equivalents all come to expect certain behaviors of us in social situations. To breech those expected norms by acting out extremely different behavior patterns at, say, a wedding, might bring on a heated discussion later that evening about expected behavior in future social situations. Any argument with significant others about your future behavior might contain a suggestion, as Alexander and Wiley note, about

"*What* is done" as much as "*how* it is done" (1990:274). Indeed, whereas "form follows function" in architecture, form is *informed by the function* of our social acts. That is, how we choose to act is a function of what we are attempting to communicate.

Even when a person acts in perfect accord with normative expectations, he or she still acts "with a certain style, timing, vitality and so on" (Alexander and Wiley 1990:274). *Style* of behavior becomes as important as the behavior itself. How we "present" the act is key. A mother teaching her son to say "thank you" must note in some form that a smile is more appropriate than a frown when uttering the social grace. The spoken word, even if positive, can carry negative connotations if the "wrong" voice inflection and body language are employed (unless, of course, the intent *is* negative).

It is a valuable scholarly exercise to survey the various ways a given social act might be construed among members of the various racial groups. Social acts, though appearing clear-cut in their intent and outcomes, always have various audiences and varied knowledges. One woman's intent to "look her best" while running the 4 x 400 meter relay with jewelry, painted nails and red lipstick might be another woman's cause for contempt and disdain. By way of example, during the 1996 Olympics, New Zealand athletes were tested along with the American track and field athletes for drug usage, and the situation led to some ill feelings about black female behavior and concern with personal appearance.

After the test, athletes were escorted to take photographs for their Olympic Village badges. In an interview with New Zealand Olympic swimmer, Anna Simcic, she confided how amazed she was at the "vanity of the African American woman athletes," who continually primped, applied make-up and lipstick, and demanded that photos be retaken if not perfect. Simcic finally said to one African American woman, "Who was having her photo retaken once again and who was drop-dead gorgeous . . . what are you *on* about?" (Simcic, 1998:40). Simcic, on the other hand, wore no make-up and took an awful photo, but refused to ask for another. Different acts, different national norms, different racial interpretations of femininity, different behaviors and different attitudes about behavior.

DISCUSSION

Here, I will do an "about face" of sorts so as to not overemphasize differences between racial or gender groups. Though groups and individuals are obviously complex and unique, in many ways we share national cultural norms for situ-

ational behavior that often have broad acceptance across racial, cultural and class lines. As social creatures—black or white—we exhibit similar responses in similar social situations: most of us show our "sadness" for the dearly departed at funerals and also show our "good cheer" for the newlyweds at wedding receptions. The similarities among diverse people along various social axes in society outweigh our differences. We quite often respond in similar fashion in social frames. And given the scenario and the individuals involved, it is difficult to generalize about how any given cross-racial situation might eventuate. Every situation and every individual is unique.

To be sure, though, situations exist where black Americans misinterpret white Americans, where women misinterpret men, and where white Americans misinterpret black American actions or words. Historical issues in America surrounding race and gender and sexuality, though, make some misinterpretations more critical and urgent than others.

I also do not want to vocally paralyze whites who interact on a daily or periodic basis with African Americans. By the hyper-critique of past actions and white behaviors in interracial environments, it might be easy for white students, professors and others to adapt a "say nothing, do nothing" approach in ambivalent interaction scenarios. Many men have adopted the same stance toward interactions with women in academic or other institutional settings for fear of being branded sexist. I want to emphasize, then, that it is fine to say what you think in social settings with African Americans. But also think about what you say, and if called upon to self-reflect, be willing to step outside the norm of whiteness, white rules, white manners and white hegemony to be able to take the imagined position of the social/racial/cultural/gendered other. Part and parcel of the ability of African Americans to redefine interracial social spaces as appropriate venues for the enactment of blackness might be the dual ability for whites to exhibit double consciousness about multiple meanings of the social acts of non-whites.

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