"Only White People can be Racist":
What does Power have to with Prejudice?

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Abstract

Social researchers and activists who use the '*Racism = Prejudice + Power'* definition, often cited in the sociological literature, generally strive for racial equality by highlighting the need to equalise differences in social power among racial groups. However, this definition can be taken to extreme when the role of social power is given disproportionate weight over the role of prejudice, such as assertions that racism is synonymous with White supremacy. While recent debates in the sociological literature do take into account the complex relationship between power and prejudice, it is still important to point out the pitfalls of a reductionist approach. We argue that the definition '*Racism = White supremacy*' is logically flawed, demonstrates reverse racism, is disempowering for individuals from all racial groups who strive for racial equality, and absolves those who do not. We also argue that the recent literature on cultural competency may provide a more enabling discourse towards reducing racism. Cultural competency is a move away from ethnocentrism and towards respect and value for cultural *difference*, with no racial group treated as a reference point around which the discourse on race relations revolves. We have focused on cultural competency in the delivery of human services in this paper, simply as an exemplar for refining the way the term 'racism' is used and understood in the current sociological literature. Specifically, by properly acknowledging the role of prejudice and not exclusively focusing on power, and by de-centring the discourse on race relations from whites, all racial groups can be better empowered to take responsibility for protecting the human right to racial equality.

Background and Aims

Disagreements in the definition of racism have long plagued the research and policy discourse on race relations. Such tensions have emerged because researchers, policy makers, and activists from different disciplines are interested in different aspects of racism. For example, definitions in the sociological literature (e.g. Cazaneve & Maddern 1999; Carmichael & Hamilton 1992) tend to focus on differences in *social power* as explaining the nature and scope of racism, as well as the factors that sustain or reinforce its occurrence. Definitions in the psychological literature (e.g. Allport 1979) on the other hand tend to focus on *cognitive processes* for explaining the emergence and entrenchment of racism. Legal definitions (e.g. United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cerd.htm) are generally interested in how *institutional practices and policies* contribute to or perpetuate racism, and definitions in the

economics literature (e.g. Blalock 1967; Sivanandan 1993) stress the role of *competition over limited resources* as a primary reinforcer of racism.

Even within disciplines there may be differences in ideology, such as:

- The colour blind approach – the belief that culture and race should make no difference and people are basically all the same;

- The equal opportunities approach – believes that structures should be set up to give people an equal chance to succeed;

- The anti-racist approach – believes that ultimately the world is divided into 'white' and 'black' with white = oppressors and black = victims;

- The diversity approach – belief that there are different cultures and races and that the aim is to value each person's unique attributes; and

- The Marxist approach – believes that blacks are part of an oppressed underclass and the aim is to overthrow the owners of the means of production.

Differentiating the various elements of and approaches to racism is useful because it increases precision and accuracy on our understanding of its nature, causes, reinforcers, and scope. Indeed, racism is a complex phenomenon and a simplified explanation and description would be inconsistent with its nature. Racism is seen in the literature as intimately entwined with issues that relate to class, nation, identity, social justice, and institutionalised practices (San Juan 2002). However, disagreements in the definition of racism can also lead to misunderstanding because researchers, policy makers, and activists do not have a common language with which to communicate. This can stifle progress towards reducing racism. And as Satzewich (1998) argues, the concept of 'racism' is a social phenomenon that is alive and well in contemporary society, even though 'the concept of racism defends us against the project of universal belonging' (Holland 2005) and the concept of 'race' has no scientific validity (Satzewich 1998).

The aim of this paper is not to take these various elements of racism and propose a unified definition that reconciles these differences, but to compare two of the more common definitions used especially in the sociological literature – *'Racism = Prejudice + Power'* and *'Racism = White supremacy'*. While the latter definition has some utility because of its potency to shed light on what reinforces racism in some (mostly white-majority) societies, we

argue that this utility is undermined by four main problems. In particular, this definition is logically flawed, it demonstrates reverse racism, it is disempowering for individuals from all racial groups who strive for racial equality, and it absolves all racial groups for taking responsibility for their contribution to racism in society.

Moreover, we aim to show how the power of language can be used to perpetuate or excuse racism and bring about outcomes that are not actually desirable. Indeed, we argue that researchers, policy makers, and activists are interested in different aspects of racism because they have different end goals they aim to attain. Those who aim to overcome structurally racist policies and practices are unlikely to use the economic or psychological definition of racism, in which competition over limited resources (Blalock 1967; Sivanandan 1993) would be used to justify the stigmatisation and devaluing of the 'out-group' and a belief in the inherent superiority of one's own 'in-group' (Allport 1979). This is because definitions are themselves end goals; identifying the factors that cause racism also provide a pathway for identifying how to reduce it. We argue that the end goal of the definition *'Racism = White supremacy'* is less about striving to reduce racism, and more about striving to making whites aware of the privileges they attain by virtue of their racial group's strong social power (Wildman 1996; Chandra-Shekeran 2008). As such, and in line with the anti-racism approach described above, this definition is not wholly counter-productive. However, we see that this end goal is achieved at the cost of the four negative consequences mentioned above.

Finding a language that enhances our understanding of racism but at the same time also helps us reduce it is by no means an easy task. However, it is still seen as preferable to this reductionist definition, which may help us understand racism but not necessarily help us reduce it. Importantly, we have focused on this definition of racism because, although it is most often used in the United States of America (USA) and not in Australia, lessons learned from the consequences of the misuse (and the power) of language are still relevant in the Australian context.

Two definitions of racism commonly used in the sociological literature

    A. Racism = Prejudice + Power

Definitions of racism used mostly in the sociological literature are generally premised on the assertion that racism is the result of two additive components – prejudice and power[1]. This definition was particularly popular during the 1960s to 1980s in the USA (Rattansi 2007) but is still used by a number of contemporary theorists. For example, Cazanave and Maddern (1999) argue that:

> racism is a highly organised system of "race"-based group privilege [*that is, 'power'[2]*] that operates at every level of society and is held together by a sophisticated ideology of colour/"race" supremacy [*that is, 'prejudice'[3]*].

This definition has a number of benefits. Firstly, it goes beyond the individualised cognitive process of negative stereotyping that is used more often in the social psychology literature (e.g. Allport 1979). In other words, the definition *'Racism = Prejudice'* is limited in its ability to explain and describe the nature, causes, reinforcers, and scope of racism beyond individual interactions, and at the societal or systemic level. Secondly, such a definition acknowledges that inequities in the distribution of social power do occur between racial groups. As such, it can highlight the need for structural agendas or movements against racism in organisations and institutions, rather than leaving the struggle against racism solely to individuals. Finally, by drawing attention to both personal and group factors, this definition is able to show that individuals shape and are shaped by socio-cultural factors (Chandrakumar 2008). This is important because although racism is a universal phenomenon, it manifests differently in different societies and so the ways it must be countered are also highly sensitive to the nuances of that contextual environment.

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[1] While there are a number of different types of power – material, economic, political, and social, for example – power is defined here as the capacity to exert any form of influence on others (Giddens 1997). In this paper, 'power' and 'social power' are used synonymously.

[2] Italics inserted.

[3] Italics inserted.

In short, defining racism as the combination of both prejudice and power is beneficial because it is not reductionist or simplistic in its approach, it can mobilise both individuals and institutions to take responsibility for striving to reduce racism, and it is sensitive to contextual factors. Further, the overarching implication of this definition is that to reduce racism, individuals must become vigilant of their racial prejudices and strive to create a society in which the power of racial groups is equal.

Current debates in the sociological literature provide important explorations of how the power of groups are affected by a range of factors (most especially economic ones), and also examine the complex relationship between power and prejudice. For example, the extensive work of Fraser (2005, 1997) conceptualises the attainment of social justice along three dimensions – redistribution (where the inequity is said to be economically-based distributive injustice or maldistribution), recognition (where the inequality is seen as culturally-based status inequality or misrecognition), and more recently, representation (where the inequality is described as political injustice or misrepresentation). When these three dimensions are 'in balance' across racial groups, justice, or parity of economic, cultural, and political participation, is said to be attained. Although Fraser (2005) views 'the individual as the fundamental subject of justice' her approach to consciousness-raising is along the lines that 'the personal is political'.

Contrary to Fraser, Honneth (1996) places less emphasis on structural matters, although he does engage somewhat with the impact of distributive economics, and focuses more on recognition issues. While Fraser (2005) sees this framework as simplistic monism, his counter position importantly draws attention to the psychological component of racism. Honneth (1996) claims that the struggle for recognition defines both human self-formation and social formation, and permeates all struggles for social justice. As such, justice is understood as the "intersubjective satisfaction of moral expectations that arise as individuals attempt to establish a positive self-relation via recognition from others" (Yar 2001, p. 297).

Gilroy (2005, 1999) is more historical than Marxist or philosophical in his approach, and offers an understanding of racism and multiculturalism within the context of British colonialism and its "(melancholic) attachment to global grandeur" (Williams 2005). Gilroy has an "antipathy towards nationalism" (Gilroy 1999, p. 184), and argues that overcoming racism requires a planetary or cosmopolitan humanism (cited in Robotham 2005); where

individuals are asked to overthrow their attachment to (Black) identity and discover "that crushingly obvious, almost banal human sameness" that we all share (Gilroy 2000, cited in Gregg 2002).

These sociological theorists have different conceptualisations about the nature of racism (and as a result, how it could be combated), but have in common an interest and focus on 'group' factors that bring about racism at the systemic or societal level. Nevertheless, their positions are still organised around the role of power in relation to individual factors such as prejudice (albeit to greater or lesser extents).

While an examination of economic and other factors that affect the historic and current social power of racial groups are important dimensions in any analysis of racism, a fuller exploration of these are outside the scope of this paper. Here, we aim to show that dire consequences can arise when too much weight is given to the unequal distribution of power between racial groups, and insufficient attention is paid to individual responsibility to address prejudice. Indeed, past formulations on the nature of racism, namely that racism is essentially synonymous with White supremacy, still appear in contemporary literature.

B. Racism = White supremacy

Although the political activist, Lewis (1995), acknowledges the role of prejudice, he essentially reduces racism to differences in power between racial groups. In this way, he asserts that:

> in terms of the current world system, racism is essentially and primarily synonymous with White supremacy … There's no such thing as reverse racism because there's no such thing as a simple reversal of the power relationships between Whites and Blacks … In the current context, *only white people can be racist*[4].

While there are no known researchers, activists, or policy makers who define racism as *equivalent* to White supremacy (for doing so would be uncomprehensive and mismatched to its complex nature), there are a vast number of writers who use a definition of racism that is *essentially* synonymous with White supremacy, in the same way Lewis (1995) does. For

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[4] Italics inserted.

example, the North American sociologist, Feagin (2006), argues that 'rarely are whites seen as the central propagators and agents in a persisting *system* of racial discrimination' (p. 5). Similarly, Bonilla-Silva (2001, 1996) argues for the importance of a structural theory of racism based on racialised social systems in any discourse on racism.

Wellman (1977) was more extreme in his view, arguing that "only 'white' people express racist sentiments and act in a racist manner", although this view has since been rejected (cited in Miles & Brown 2003). However, somewhat more recently, van Dijk (1991) writes that "many white people may no longer believe in white racial supremacy. They may in principle even endorse values of social justice. However, massive legal and scholarly evidence … and personal experiences … show that white people and institutions still engage in the many daily practices that implement the system of white dominance and seldom challenge its underlying beliefs and ideologies" (p. ix).

The aim of using a definition of racism that is essentially synonymous with White supremacy is to highlight the pervasiveness of the inequitable distribution of social power in the US (and other white-majority countries like Australia), and the resultant level of oppression that is experienced by others. Thus, researchers, policy makers, and activists who use this definition aim to demonstrate that if social power were distributed more equally among racial groups, and the pervasiveness of White supremacy were then diminished, racism would reduce. While it may indeed achieve this end goal, we argue that there are four major problems that also arise from using this definition, and which undermine its effectiveness in achieving the end goal.

Problem 1: This definition is logically flawed
A definition of racism that gives disproportionate weight to power over prejudice is based on a logical flaw. It begins with the equation *'Racism = Prejudice + Power'*, but uses the historic and current inequity in social power in favour of whites to replace power with this nominal racial group; that is, *'Power = whites'*. In this way, it falsely deduces from these two premises that *'Racism = Prejudice + whites'*, or in the words of Lewis (1995), that 'only white people can be racist'.

The pervasiveness of White supremacy and the oppression it causes others, cannot, and more importantly should not, be denied. There are countless extreme and devastating examples of

White supremacy throughout human history: Nazi Germany against Jews, Blacks and immigrants; the Klu Klux Klan; slavery of Africans in America; British colonial rule in India; apartheid in South Africa; and the Stolen Generation in Australia.

White supremacy manifests even in more covert forms. To borrow an example from immigration policy in Australia, over the 12 years under the Prime Ministership of John Howard (1995–2007), the language of 'assimilation' was arguably normalised in official vernacular. The Department of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) was changed to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), reflecting a move from celebration of multiculturalism to citizenship rights and responsibilities conditional on integration to and knowledge of 'Australian values' (http://www.citizenship.gov.au/); the language of '*tolerance* of difference' rather than '*acceptance* of difference' was arguably routinised; and without a human rights framework in Australia, the rhetoric of 'social inclusion' rather than 'social justice' still implicates that some groups have the power to decide who should or needs to be socially included (Jakubowicz 2008).

Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of white supremacy should not negate inclusion or discussion of instances of racism that do not involve whites. For example, racism can occur between two or more minority ethnic groups in white-majority countries. Instances of this are demonstrated between Asians and Caribbeans in the United Kingdom (UK) during the 2005 riots (Townsend 2005). Although, as Noivo (1998) argues, the occurrence of inter-minority racism is in part due to the racialisation they undergo at the hands of dominant group, he also argues that there are other processes that influence how and why minority groups discriminate against one another. Racism can also occur between relatively established migrant groups and newly arrived migrant groups in Australia (Griffiths, Sawrikar, & Muir 2008; Satzewich 2002), as well as between migrant groups and Indigenous Australians (Griffiths et al 2008). To extend the point, racism can occur between the majority and any minority ethnic group in any non-white majority country, such as between Fijians and Indians in Fiji (Davies 2007). Indeed, the extensive work of Okihoro (2001, 1994) embodies alternatives to the commonplace binary-based narratives that devalue or exclude the experience of Asian peoples in the USA and assume that there are only two races – white and black (Newman 2002).

Thus, the pervasiveness of white supremacy does not justify replacing the definition of racism, and instances of racism that do not include whites should not be excluded from discussions and debates on racism. In short, we argue that *White supremacy necessarily implies racism* because it is one (very common and powerfully destructive) example of racism, *but racism does not necessarily imply White supremacy*. These two terms should not be used synonymously.

Problem 2: This definition demonstrates reverse racism

The statement or belief that 'only White people can be racist' (Lewis 1995) is itself a negative or prejudicial stereotype. While this statement or belief does not assert that every white person is racist, it does assert that only white people have the *capacity* to be racist because only white people have power. This is prejudicial, because it reflects a negative generalisation about a racial group (Devine 1989). (Indeed, the term prejudice is derived from the Latin *prae judicium*, meaning 'pre-judgement').

Lewis (1995) asserts that 'there's no such thing as reverse racism because there's no such thing as a simple reversal of the power relationships between Whites and Blacks'. While it may be difficult to overturn entrenched discrepancies in social power in the future, given the current and historic inequity in the distribution of social power, it is untrue that racial groups other than white have *no* social power with which to hold whites accountable for their racism. Thus, the prejudicial assertion that only white people can be racist is an example of how people from minority ethnic groups can misuse the social power their racial group does have, albeit currently lower than their white counterparts, and demonstrate reverse racism. In this way, it repeats the very mistake it is trying to rectify – devaluing 'the other'. It justifies the use of racism to overcome racism, thereby perpetuating its occurrence.

Problem 3: This definition is disempowering

The concept of white supremacy uses the current and historic context to *fix* the social power of whites as definitively higher than all other groups. By doing so, the *quality* of power becomes inherent or fixed to ethnicity; white people have more power than other groups *because* of their race. However, since ethnicity cannot be changed, the implication is that their higher power also cannot be changed.

This is disempowering for all groups that strive to reduce racism. For example, whites who are aware of the privileges afforded to them from their current and historic social power may nevertheless be trapped by 'White guilt' (Steele 2006); they cannot strive to attain their goal for reducing racism because they cannot change their ethnicity. Similarly, individuals from racial groups other than white also cannot strive to reduce racism because their ethnicity precludes them from having the power to affect the discourse on race relations and the way power is distributed across racial groups. They too must accept racism as an 'unchangeable fact' because their ethnicity is unchangeable. To overcome this sense of disempowerment for all racial groups, it is important to note that levels of power are not inherent to race; they are reactive to circumstance and therefore can change. In other words, the past does not (have to) dictate the future.

Problem 4: This definition absolves all racial groups for taking responsibility for racial inequality

Whites who do not strive for racial equality and do believe in the inherent superiority of their race can use the 'fixed' higher social power to justify their racism. If the *definition* of racism accepts that whites have more power than other groups, then there is an increased risk that whites will believe they are more worthy of this higher social power than any other racial group. This definition lets whites who do not strive for racial equality 'off the hook' for taking responsibility for their contribution to racism, because they cannot change their ethnicity and the fixed higher power that this ethnicity then implies. Similarly, individuals from racial groups other than white are also absolved for taking responsibility for their contribution to racism because they can use their current and historic lower social power to argue that they are less accountable for the prevalence of racism in society. While it is arguable about whether their racial prejudices may have less capacity (or power) to adversely affect others, this does not however indicate that these racialised prejudices are not in fact demonstrations of racism; it is untrue that 'only white people can be racist', as Lewis (1995) and others (e.g. Feagin 2006) argue. The capacity to be racist is a human phenomenon, not a racialised one.

Summary

In short, the definition *'Racism = White supremacy'* is tendentious, and creates two other social problems in addition to the entrenchment of racism in society: it perpetuates its occurrence by justifying the use of (reverse) racism to overcome racism, and it makes the task

of reducing racism impossible because it is based on the notion that racism is an inherent component of racial identity which cannot be changed. By ignoring the subjective (or cognitive and interpretative) aspects of racism, this definition has the perverse effect of 'fixing' racism as an inherent constituent of society rather than something which can be changed or combated. Indeed, since the definition 'Racism = White supremacy' has somewhat gone out fashion during the 1980s, and with the introduction of anti-racism and anti-discrimination laws and the implementation of (albeit sometimes tokenistic) policies to improve parliamentary representation, overt racism has reduced, demonstrating that over time things do and can change.

Extreme examples of institutional racism periodically emerge to remind us of how entrenched white supremacy is. For example, the racist murder of Steven Lawrence brought to light the systemic racialised inequality and injustice of the UK Metropolitan police force (Sivanandan, Sebestyen, & Seabrook, 2000). While such examples are severely costly and support Sivanandan's (2000) assertion that "institutional racism is the litmus test of a society's democracy" (p. 73), there is also a risk that such examples can induce an equally extreme swing toward mis-weighting the respective roles of prejudice and power in the occurrence of racism. To help bring back the balance after these extreme reminders of the prevalence of white supremacy, we need a language that also reminds us that there are indeed (at least) two aspects or factors necessary for its occurrence; power alone cannot bring about racism[5].

Where to from here?

We have shown in the discussion above that definitions do matter. The challenge is to develop a definition of racism which would show empathy for all racial groups who have suffered hundreds of years of oppression because of White supremacy; advocate for the needs of racial groups with especially low social power[6] by taking responsibility for rectifying current inequities in social power[7]; instil a sense of awareness among whites for the privileges that are afforded by their groups' strong social power (but as Pedersen (2008) points out, doing so by developing empathy for the oppressed which is an enabling or

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[5] By analogy, 'power' is the length of a matchstick, but 'prejudice' is the redhead needed to light the match.

[6] Or religious groups, especially Muslims.

[7] For example, 'the Apology' to Australia's Stolen Generation and generating strategies to 'close the gap' in access to health and education opportunities.

empowering emotion, rather than inducing feelings of guilt which can be disempowering); and look forward into a hopeful future towards reduced racism.

So what could be an effective approach for developing a definition of racism that enables its reduction through the more equitable distribution of social power and also continues to highlight its subjective aspect, but without perpetuating its occurrence, disempowering individuals and groups that strive for racial equality, and absolving those that do not? We have turned to the recently emerging literature on cultural competency in the specific area of the delivery of human services to assist in answering this question.

While the concept of cultural competency is becoming increasingly acknowledged across a range of study fields (e.g. media studies, Downing & Husband 2005), we have drawn here upon one specific area with which we are familiar – the delivery of social services. Essentially, cultural competency in the delivery of social services is a move away from ethno-centric organisational practices and institutional policies, and a move toward respecting and valuing cultural *difference* for the richness this difference can offer to both service users and service providers.

Cultural competency in social service delivery is a multifaceted concept, with the literature emphasising personal or self reflective, organisational, and/or political components (e.g. Korbin 2007; Butt 2006; Gustafson 2005; Webb & Sergison 2003; Weerasinghe & Williams 2003; Campinha-Bacote 2002; Purnell 2002; Box et al. 2001; Forehand & Kotchick 1996). Based on these various characteristics, we have re-conceptualised cultural competency as an ongoing *process* (rather than an attainable state) that usually, but not necessarily, emerges from two other interrelated components – cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity.

As we have described elsewhere (Sawrikar 2009; Sawrikar & Katz 2008), we define cultural awareness as having knowledge about the norms of other racial groups. In essence, it requires us to have sufficient knowledge about a group to be able to form a stereotype. It is important to note that stereotypes are neither inherently positive nor negative; they are simply cognitive schemas that help us organise information and allow us to make inferences in cognitively efficient ways (Baron & Byrne 2006). They are only said to be prejudicial when the beliefs that comprise the stereotype are detrimental to the wellbeing (Vaughan & Hogg 2005) and/or compromise access to opportunities for individuals in that racial group (Fraser

1997). Importantly, by having cultural awareness, a service provider is able to acknowledge the impact of culture on the behaviour of their clients from minority ethnic backgrounds.

On the other hand, we define cultural sensitivity as referring to knowledge about how individuals *within* that racial group differ from the 'norm' of that group (Sawrikar 2009; Sawrikar and Katz 2008). In other words, we are now asked to challenge the stereotype we have formed so that it is sensitive to individual variation. The complexity of individuals can then be acknowledged, instead of treating them as representatives of their cultural group (Noble 2008).

There are a number of *personal* outcomes for service providers in striving for cultural competency. These include (but are not limited to), having a sense of efficacy when interacting with and providing social services to people from other cultures (Bell et al. 2005), not being fearful to admit a lack of cultural awareness about a particular group (Brophy et al. 2005), increasing one's general interest in cultural diversity (Braithwaite 2003), being less likely to judge cultural differences as positive or negative, and being more able to accept the occurrence of, sometimes irreconcilable (Rossiter 2008), cultural differences. And it is based on these personal and beneficial outcomes identified in the cultural competency literature that we draw inferences and conclude on the pitfalls of the reductionist definition *'Racism = White supremacy'* at the broader sociological level.

By analogy, we infer that the main outcome of cultural competency at the *societal* level is that one's own racial group is de-centred as the reference point from which others deviate. In culturally competent social service delivery, service providers are asked to explore how their own culture impacts their behaviour and values and to be vigilant on how these may be contributing to biases in the way they deliver services to their minority ethnic clients with different cultural behaviours and values. In doing so, the client group is not seen as *deviating* from some (ethno-centric) standard, but that the (culturally *different*) space between the service provider and service user is an ethnically equitable dyadic unit[8] in which subjective and interpretative, but negative, stereotypes can be overturned (by both service users and service providers).

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[8] We are referring here to equity in racialised social power, but acknowledge that professional differences in social power will also affect this unit.

At the broader level, de-centring the two groups so that they are each understood in relation to one another, (and not understood as the minority group in relation to the white group), allows for the unique cultural characteristics of each racial group to be acknowledged and valued equally. Respect and value for 'the other' emerges because each culture is equally valued in their own right, and the value of *difference* is seen an important asset contributing to the fabric of socio-cultural life; each has something to teach and learn from 'the other side'. This approach is consistent with the 'diversity approach' described earlier.

Importantly, if there is no reference group around which the discourse on racism revolves, then it can avoid a number of problems. For example, it avoids inadvertently strengthening the power of whites who are seen as the fixed reference point with definitively higher social power than all other groups; no racial group dominates the agenda or movement towards reduction in racism; instances of racism that do not involve whites are not excluded from discussions on racism; each racial group is valued for their unique cultural characteristics; and no racial group is held hostage to their unchangeable ethnicity from which inferences about social power may be made.

We have drawn here on the service provision sector as an example of how debates in the general academic literature on racism may want to form itself in the future; taking direction from an area in which 'the general' is currently applied (and indeed across several fields of application). However, this paper is not about racially equitable service provision or any other area of application. It is about the definition of racism, the power of language, and the need to avoid discourses that impede the goal of reducing racism. To this end, the concept of cultural competency, drawn from the service provision literature, has been used here to show a possible way forward from the simplistic and (what we see to be) destructive definition *'Racism = White supremacy'*.

In short, we are arguing that 'respect for cultural difference' is one possibly effective strategy for attaining the end goal – reducing racism (or attaining racial equality, to use a part-utopian optimism) by equalising social power but without perpetuating its occurrence, disempowering groups that strive for racial equality, and absolving those that do not. In the words of Honneth (1996), 'it is a claim for 'respect' in the form of 'rights'' (cited in Yar, 2001, p. 300).

Our argument is consistent with Taylor's (1994) advocacy for 'cultural survival'; national policies that demonstrate value for cultural preservation. We see that policies that promote cultural preservation enable all citizens (from both the white majority and all minority ethnic groups) to *choose* which aspects of all the diverse parts of their exposure to multiculturalism (phenotypic, cultural, and/or linguistic, for example) that they would like personally preserve and incorporate into their subjective or "affirmed identity" (Taylor 1989, cited in Weir 2009).

Implementing policies that reflect the opposite of cultural survival, namely nationalistic policies of assimilation, ultimately reflect a judgement on which culture (the dominant, 'mainstream' culture) is valued or respected enough to (continue to) preserve. Such political forces of tension that require minority groups to forsake parts of their own cultures and adapt to some nationalistic set of behaviours and norms arguably provide fertile breeding ground for different groups to be pitted against one another in a separatist fight to preserve their authentic identity. The framework we have offered is a vision of plurality that does not pretend that there is a 'mainstream' nor strives to redefine it (at least at this stage), but argues for the equal value of 'non-mainstream' cultures to daily and national life. [Arguably, 'respect for cultural difference' and the right to be different without inherent judgments about the value of this difference can become a tie that unifies a nation (Etzioni 2009) assuming a shared national vision is what is desired, although we do not see that striving for a shared set of national values is desirable because such a goal will inevitably involve divisive processes].

Importantly, we see that this framework espouses the value of culture itself; and it is the loss of culture which is seen as detrimental and in need of protection. But as culture is a dynamic process in a constant state of re-interpretation (across situations, time, individuals and generations, for example), it is not the specific, identifiable or categorical aspects of culture which we are asking to respect and protect. Indeed, we are quick to point out that it is not the group differences that essentialise people and cultures that we see as important in preserving, as Taylor has been criticised for implying by Fraser (2005) and others (e.g. Crowder, Ludeman, & Vas Dev 1997). It is the principle or ideology that culture itself (in however a (globalised) citizen *chooses* to express their numerous cultural parts) is of value, and that (multi-)cultural differences between people are a rich source of society's fabric to be acknowledged as essential in preserving. In this way, 'status equality and not the validation of group identity' (Fraser 2005) is what is protected.

Having said this, we do acknowledge that the rhetoric of 'respect for cultural difference' comes with its own set of complex issues and it is not a simple goal to understand or implement. For example, such rhetoric will likely lead to questions such as those posed by Cantle (2005) who asserts that "in a multicultural country there must be a clear political will to reach a consensus on what level of "difference" is accepted and which differences are acceptable" (cited in Burnett 2007, p. 116). That is, the need to empiricise the quantity and quality of 'respect for difference' among some researchers as the basis for homogenising a nation and its citizens through some sort of 'shared vision' (a notion also espoused by San Juan Jr, 2002) will form part of the challenge in implementing our suggested framework and language. However, we still take the position that at the very least, this kind of language is a positive step towards reducing racism compared to the perverse and disempowering definition *'Racism = White supremacy'*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, racism is not reducible to White supremacy. As the stereotypes that underlie racism are subject to change with new information that either broadens, challenges, or disconfirms the previously held prejudicial stereotype, racism is seen, in part, as a choice. Indeed, it is crucial to create a space for the language of choice and personal responsibility in the discourse on racism because this kind of language is empowering and therefore seen as an effective tool for reducing racism. By properly acknowledging the role of 'prejudice' in racism, and not exclusively focusing on the element of 'power', individuals can be better empowered to exercise their own personal power and choice to be vigilant on their racial prejudices, and all racial groups can be better empowered to take responsibility for protecting each of our human right to racial equality.

Acknowledgements

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