Raced scholars of color have suggested (e.g., Stanford, 1985, 1993a, 1994), even within the pages of this journal (J. A. Banks, 1993, 1995; Gordon, Miller, & Rollok, 1990), that the epistemologies we typically use in educational research may be racially biased. They have argued that our epistemologies—not our use of them, but the epistemologies themselves—are racially biased ways of knowing, implicitly proposing, thus, a new category of racism that could be labeled epistemological racism. There has been, however, a provocative lack of response—pro or con—to this race-oriented argument by leading educational methodologists in journals of education, including this one. But this lack of response is in curious contrast to the lively and contentious debates on other epistemological issues, such as quantititative versus qualitative (e.g., Cizek, 1995), objectivity versus subjectivity (e.g., Hersh, 1994), validity (e.g., Lenzo, 1995; Moss, 1994), or paradigmatic issues in general (e.g., Beren, 1994; Delantshere & Petrosky, 1994; Gage, 1989).

If we were among those raising this race-oriented issue, we would wonder why our efforts to argue that the epistemologies of educational research were racially biased provoked virtually no response, particularly among those who author the quantitative and qualitative research methods textbooks we all typically use. We would certainly wonder whether our argument was ignored because it raised the disquieting issue of race, because it was thought to be a weak or irrelevant argument, or because the argument was simply not understood. Unfortunately, we might also wonder whether this was just one more incidence of Ellison’s (1972) “invisible man” syndrome, of Whites ignoring racial issues and people of color.

As researchers whose race is White and who have written and presented on both epistemological and racial issues (Scheurich, 1993, 1994b; Young 1995a, 1995b), we want to offer a substantive response to the argument of the scholars of color who have contended that our research epistemologies are racially biased. It will be our claim that the lack of response to date to the racial bias argument is not primarily a function of overt or covert racism, as some might argue, or of institutional or societal racism, as others might suggest. Instead, we will contend that this silence is a function of a different lack—a lack of understanding among researchers as to how race is a critically significant epistemological problem in educational research.

Our purpose then is to discuss how our range of research epistemologies—including positivism, postpositivism, neorealisms, interpretivism, constructivism, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms/poststructuralisms—can be understood as racially biased in a way that will (1) facilitate an understanding of just what epistemological racism is; (2) ignite the kind of spirited debate that has occurred around other, arguably lesser, research issues; (3) draw some of the prominent research epistemologists, especially those who author methods textbooks, into this debate; and (4) provoke additional efforts among scholars of all races to address this problem. We will pursue this purpose by discussing five categories of racism and their linkages to research, and we will conclude with some suggestions about what initially needs to be done to address epistemological racism.

The first two categories of racism we shall discuss—overt and covert racism—are typically defined as operating at the individual level; the next two are organizational and social categories—institutional and societal racism—and, in effect, create the social context for the prior two categories. The final one is a national category, and it, we will contend, creates or constitutes the possibility for all of the prior four categories. Further, it is the latter category that is the salient one for discussions regarding the racial bias of research epistemologies. Figure 1 illustrates and positions these categories; it also graphically depicts the structure of this article. The individual level, which includes both overt and covert racism, sits within the institutional level, which sits within the societal level. All of these four sit, in a hierarchy of smaller to larger and broader, inside the largest and broadest category, the national level.

Two Categories of Individual Racism: Overt and Covert
Racial bias or racism is typically understood in popular culture and in academia in terms of individual acts of overt
Researchers, just like other members of this society, typically judge their own lack of racism based on personal evaluations that they do not, as an individual, have a negative judgment of another person just because that person is a member of a particular race. While this individualized, conscious, moral or ethical commitment to anti-racism is a significant and meaningful individual and historical accomplishment, the fact that it restricts our understanding of racism to an individualized ethical arena is a barrier to a broader, more comprehensive understanding of racism—for society and for researchers.

Understanding that we need to get beyond issues of individual racism, whether overt or covert, is critical to initiating a consideration of whether our research epistemologies are racially biased. For example, if we, as researchers, were to read an article that argued that our research epistemologies were racially biased and if we disagreed with this argument because we did not consider ourselves, as individuals, to be consciously or intentionally racist, this judgment would indicate that we did not understand epistemological racism. The error here is that racial critiques of research epistemologies have virtually nothing to do with whether an individual researcher is overtly or covertly racist. A researcher could be adamantly anti-racist in thought and deed and still be using a research epistemology that, given our later discussion of epistemological racism, could be judged to be racially biased. Consequently, researchers considering the issue of epistemological racism need to get beyond the question of whether personally they are racists because this latter judgment is not related to judgments about epistemological racism.

**Institutional Racism**

Institutional racism exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race (for further discussions of institutional racism, see Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1992; Reyes & Halcon, 1988). Institutional racism also exists when institutional or organizational cultures, rules, habits, or symbols have the same biasing effect. For example, if an institution's procedures or culture favor Whites for promotion, such as promotion to a full professorship or to a principalship, over persons of color, this is institutional racism. If a school's standard pedagogical method is culturally congruent with the culture of White students but not with the cultures of students of color (a widespread problem—see, for example, Cummins, 1986; Hilliard, 1992; J. E. King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990; among many others), this is institutional racism.

One particularly important type of institutional racism that occurs in research communities arises when racially biased beliefs or assumptions are embedded within a research discipline or a particular community of researchers or within the variables, labels, or concepts of a discipline or community (Paredes, 1977; Stanfield, 1985; 1993a, 1993b). For example, if educational researchers commonly use, as they once typically did, a phrase like "culturally disadvantaged" or "cultural deprivation" to indicate why some students of color did not succeed in school, this is institutional racism (McCarthy, 1993). While
not using this particular phrase ("institutional racism"), Gordon et al. (1990) have argued, within the pages of this journal, that this kind of racism is endemic to the social sciences: "Much of the social science knowledge [italics added] referable to Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans ignores or demeans [members of these races and] ... often presents distorted interpretations of minority conditions and potentials" (p. 14).

But Gordon et al. (1990) are not the only ones who have made this point about the endemic institutional racism of social science research. James Banks (1995), Barakan (1992), and Shuey (1958), among many others spread across the different social science disciplines, have asserted that "scientific" knowledge has commonly been based on racially biased assumptions, labels, perspectives, etc. From Linneaus' 1735 categorization that related race to psychological attributes and positioned the White race as having superior psychological attributes (Webster, 1992) and Caldwell's similar contentions in 1830 to The Bell Curve (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) and the works of Shockley (1992) in the present era, scientists and social scientists have used racist ideas regarding inherited characteristics of different racial groups (J. A. Banks, 1995).

Unfortunately, educational researchers have been and continue to be key participants in this reproduction and elaboration of institutional racism. Examples of such racism by educational researchers in the past are the mental and intellectual measures taken from "cranium estimates," "theories of racial difference" taken from anthropology and biology, "theories of race and intelligence" taken from genetics, and "curriculum theories" that argued that "Black families and Black communities . . . were ‘defective’ and ‘dysfunctional’" (McCarthy, 1993, p. 332; see, also, Gould, 1981). While the use of these racially oriented "cranium estimates" or other such categories would now be considered unacceptable, label-based institutional racism continues to exist. For example, higher percentages of students of color are currently more likely to be labeled "at risk," "learning disabled," or "emotionally disturbed" (see, for example, Cuban, 1989; Mercer, 1988; Ortiz, García, Wheeler, & Maldonado-Colon, 1986).

But, while institutional racism is more widespread than commonly realized (see Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1992) and while expanding our understanding of it is critically important, institutional racism is not epistemological racism. For instance, one could use either racist or anti-racist concepts or labels within a positivist or a constructivist epistemology, but research epistemologies themselves are not necessarily a function of the concepts or labels with which they are used. (This could be argued to be not true for the critical tradition; many of its advocates would consider racist assumptions to be incongruent with its epistemology, but this will be addressed later.) Our point, similar to the point we have made about individual racism, is that researchers who think that epistemological racism is equal to institutional racism misunderstand the former.

Societal Racism

The second type of social racism is societal racism. Societal racism is similar to institutional racism, but it exists on a broader, society-wide scale, though societal racism has received even less attention than institutional racism. In fact, it usually takes major social conflicts, like those of the mid and late 1960s, or major social events, like the O. J. Simpson trial, for societal racism to receive broad social attention, as, for example, in the "Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder" (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, 1968). This report is, of course, the one that used the often-quoted statement that "Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" (p. 1). This report also argued that the "most fundamental" (p. 5) cause of the inequitable bifurcation was a long-term national history of "white racism" (p. 5) and that this racism deeply pervaded numerous facets of national life, from employment and housing to education and political representation.

Societal racism, then, can be said to exist when prevailing societal or cultural assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, expectations, etc. favor one race over one or more other races (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1992). For example, while it is certainly true that there is a complex range of definitions of what good leadership is within the mainstream of public life in the U.S., that range is actually relatively limited when compared with definitions of good leadership in other cultures, inside or outside the U.S. The widely respected anthropologist James Clifford (1988) has demonstrated how mainstream definitions of leadership served as a disadvantage to a Native American tribe known as the Mashpee. In a U.S. trial held to determine the validity of the Mashpee's status as a tribe, the mainstream culture's definition of leadership was used to weaken the testimony of the Mashpee chief, especially in terms of proving whether the chief was a "true" or "real" leader. This "proof" of a leadership deficiency was then used to undermine the legitimacy of the Mashpee's claim to be a tribe.

Similarly, if the socially promoted idea—through the media, through legal practices, through governmental programs—of what a good family is, is primarily drawn from the dominant culture's social, historical experience, that is societal racism. The privileging of one view over others, like the favoring of a White middle-class view of families over an African American view9 of families, results in social practices that have direct negative effects on families that deviate from the dominant norm (Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1972; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; Stanfield, 1985, p. 408; Willie, 1993). The idea that a Mashpee definition of leadership or an African American definition of a family might be considered equal to mainstream definitions is typically not seen as reasonable or warranted in formal or informal social practices.

However, societal racism is, also, not epistemological racism. The latter is drawn from a more fundamental level than societal racism; epistemological racism comes from or emerges out of what we have labeled the civilization level—the deepest, most primary level of a culture of people. The civilization level is the level that encompasses the deepest, most primary assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the ways of knowing that reality (epistemology), and the disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values (axiology)—in short, presumptions about the real, the true, and the good. But these presumptions emerge from a broader terrain than just the U.S.; the presumptions to which we refer are fundamental to Euro-American modernism, the historical period within which the ontologies, epistemologies, and...
axiologies of contemporary western civilization have arisen (see, for example, Bernstein, 1992, or Lyotard, 1984). Our argument, then, is that epistemological racism is drawn from the civilizational level, and, thus, it is to the civilizational level that we must turn to engage directly the question of whether our research epistemologies are racially biased or not.

**Civilizational Racism**

The civilizational level is the level of broad civilizational assumptions, assumptions that, though they construct the nature of our world and our experience of it, are not typically conscious to most members of a civilization (Foucault, 1979, 1988). These assumptions are deeply embedded in how those members think and in what they name “the world” or “the Real” through various categories or concepts (Said, 1979; Stanfield, 1985, 1994). But these assumptions are different for different civilizations, such as the Hopi civilization (Loftin, 1991) or the Zuni civilization (Roscoe, 1991), and, thus, each civilization constructs the world differently for its inhabitants: “Not all people [i.e., civilizations, in this case] ‘know’ in the same way” (Stanfield, 1985, p. 396). In addition, large, complex civilizations often include a dominant culture and one or more subordinate cultures. In this context, subordinate cultures, races, and other groups often have different civilizational assumptions: “Just as the material realities of the powerful and the dominated produce separate [social, historical experiences] . . . each [racial or social group] may also have distinctive epistemologies or theories of knowledge” (Collins, 1991, p. 204). One consequence is that “[d]ominant racial group members and subordinate racial group members do not think and interpret realities in the same way because of their divergent structural positions, histories, and cultures” (Stanfield, 1985, p. 400).10 For instance, “What is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women-of-color” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv; see, also, J. A. Banks, 1993, pp. 7-8; 1995, p. 16; Cose, 1993; Collins, 1991).

The name for the Euro-American culture’s construction of “the world” or “the Real,” as was noted above, is modernism. Modernism is an epistemological, ontological, and axiological network or grid that “makes” the world as the dominant western culture knows and sees it (Foucault, 1972, 1973, 1979, 1988; Frankenberger, 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Stanfield, 1985; West, 1993). Though this grid has evolved and changed to some degree, it has, nonetheless, maintained a kind of coherence and consistency, particularly in terms of some of its primary assumptions (that is, its civilizational level assumptions). One of these primary assumptions, the one we are addressing here, is civilizational racism.

Beginning with the modernist period, European colonial and territorial expansion was typically undertaken under the rationale of the supremacy of White civilization, along with other rationales, such as those about economics and religion. For instance, Hacker (1992) asserts that “For at least half a dozen centuries . . . ‘white’ has implied a higher civilization based on superior inheritance” (p. 7) (see, also, Takaki, 1993). To the English attending the Globe Theatre to see Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, “Caliban [the character who epitomizes the native people of the ‘new world’ represented what Europeans had been when they were *lower* [italics added] on the scale of development” (Takaki, 1993, p. 32), while Prospero (the character who depicts the English conqueror) declares that he came to the new world “to be the lord on’t” (Shakespeare, quoted in Takaki, 1993, p. 35; see, also, Feagin & Vera, 1995; Frankenberger, 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Harris, 1993; Stanfield, 1985; Webster, 1992; West, 1993, pp. 3–32). Widely circulated racial hierarchies and exclusions such as these became, then, a central feature in the emergence of western modernism and modernist thought, and, consequently, White racism or White supremacy became interlaced or interwoven into the founding fabric of modernist western civilization (for an extended discussion of this point, see Goldberg, 1993; see, also, Stanfield, 1985).11

These racial rationales were, of course, central, along with other rationales, to the founding of the U.S. Taking land from and killing Native Americans was justified by the Whites’ definition of property as well as the supposed supremacy of White civilization—like that depicted in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (Takaki, 1993, p. 35; see, also, Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1992; Harris, 1993). Similar rationales were used in taking the Southwest from the Mexicans, whom Stephen F. Austin, one of the prominent political leaders of the “Texas revolution,” disparagingly called “a mongrel Spanish-Indian and negro race” (De León, 1983, p. 12; see, also, Takaki, 1993). The enslavement of African Americans and the “subsequent decades of Jim Crow laws, peonage, tenancy, lynchings and second-class citizenship” (West, 1993, p. 256) were also justified in the same racially exclusionary terms (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Hacker, 1992; Harris, 1993; Takaki, 1993), though, of course, these justifications were not the only justifications driving slavery or the appropriation of Native American and Mexican American land.

While this is an extremely brief summary of a complex argument about White racial supremacy and the fact that it was interlaced within the founding assumptions of western civilization, our point can be made in a simpler way. The White race, what Stanfield (1985) has called “a privileged subset of the population” (p. 389), has unquestionably dominated western civilization during all of the modernist period (hundreds of years). When any group—within a large, complex civilization—significantly dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, its ontologies, its axiologies) not only become the dominant ways of that civilization, but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as “natural” or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions (Stanfield, 1985). To a large degree, the dominant group, whatever its composition, makes its own “community the center of the universe and the conceptual frame that constrains all thought” (Gordon et al., 1990, p. 15). Thus, the dominant group creates or constructs “the world” or “the Real” and does so in its own image, in terms of its ways and its social-historical experiences (J. A. Banks, 1993; Collins, 1991; Minh-ha, 1989; Morrison, 1992; Stanfield, 1985, 1994; West, 1993; see, especially, Said, 1979, for an entire volume that discusses how the West gave “reality” to its construct of “the Orient”).

In this view, ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies are not outside history or sociology; they are deeply
interwoven within the social histories of particular civilizations and within particular groups within those civilizations. As Gordon et al. (1990) assert, “Knowledge, technology, and the production of knowledge are cultural products . . . . Knowledge production operates within communicentric [ontological and epistemological] frames of reference, which dominate and enable it” (p. 14). Similarly, Stanfield (1994) has said

The experiences that construct paradigms in sciences and humanities are derivatives of cultural baggage imported into intellectual enterprises by privileged residents of historically specific societies and world systems. This is important to point out, because it is common for scholars to lapse into internal analyses while discussing paradigms and thus to ignore the rather common sense fact that sciences and humanities are products of specific cultural and historical contexts that shape the character of intellectual work. (pp. 181–182)

Or, as James Banks (1993) more simply states, “all knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators” (p. 4).

Consider who the major, influential philosophers, writers, politicians, corporate leaders, social scientists, educational leaders (e.g., Kant, Flaubert, Churchill, Henry Ford, Weber, Dewey) have been over the course of western modernism. They have virtually all been White. And it is they who have constructed the world we live in—named it, discussed it, explained it. It is they who have developed the ontological and axiological categories or concepts like individuality, truth, education, free enterprise, good conduct, social welfare, etc. that we use to think (that thinks us?) and that we use to socialize and educate children. This racially exclusive group has also developed the epistemologies, the legitimated ways of knowing (e.g., positivism, neo-realisms, postpositivisms, interpretivism, constructivisms, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms/poststructuralisms) that we use. And it is these epistemologies and their allied ontologies and axiologies, taken together as a lived web or fabric of social constructions, that make or construct “the world” or “the Real” (and that relegate other socially constructed “worlds,” like that of African Americans or the Cherokee, to the “margins” of our social life and to the margins in terms of legitimate research epistemologies).

These influential people and their “world-making” or “reality-making” activities or practices, however, are not separate from the social history within which they live: “all knowledge is relative to the context in which it is generated” (Gordon et al., 1990, p. 15). And, thus, “when academics and public opinion leaders construct knowledge[,] . . . they are influenced by the ideas, assumptions, and norms of the cultures and subsocieties in which they are socialized” (J. A. Banks, 1995, p. 16). Just as Julius Caesar was “constructed” by the social history of his particular group, saw and understood the world in terms of the social constructions of his people in their time and place, the influential authors of modernism have been constructed by their position, place, and time. Just as Caesar did not see the world from the point of view of other cultures that Rome dominated, these influential western modernists did not see the world from within the epistemologies and ontologies of other races and cultures inside or outside of western modernism. “How we create, define, and validate social knowledge [and, thus, reality] is determined largely through our cultural context” (Stanfield, 1985, p. 388).12

Our argument, however, is not that these influential White individuals were involved in a racial conspiracy or moral bad faith, but that these individuals can only name and know from within the social context available to them, from within the social history in which they live. While we seem to have little trouble understanding that those far away in time existed in terms of their social contexts—i.e., Julius Caesar—we seem to resist understanding this about ourselves. We, as our predecessors did, live, understand, work, think, and act within a particular social history, within a particular social construction. We do not live, in some universal sense, above culture or history; we live inside a culture, inside a civilizational social construction; we live in the terms and ways of a particular social history.13

This, then, is our central argument about epistemological racism. Epistemologies, along with their related ontologies and epistemologies, arise out of the social history of a particular social group. Different social groups, races, cultures, societies, or civilizations evolve different epistemologies, each of which reflects the social history of that group, race, culture, society, or civilization; that is, no epistemology is context-free. Yet, all of the epistemologies currently legitimated in education arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant White race. They do not arise out of the social history of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, or other racial/cultural groups—social histories that are much different than that of the dominant race (a difference due at least partially to the historical experience of racism itself [see, for example, Collins, 1991]). Cornell West (1993) validates this judgment when he says “social practices . . . [and research is a social practice] are best understood and explained . . . by situating them within . . . cultural traditions” (p. 267). It is, then, in this sense that scholars of color contend that the dominant research epistemologies are racially biased.14

By epistemological racism, then, we do not mean that the researchers using, say, positivism or postmodernism are overtly or covertly racist as individuals. Nor do we mean that epistemological racism is a conscious institutional or societal conspiracy in favor of Whites (B. M. Gordon, 1993, p. 267). Epistemological racism means that our current range of research epistemologies—positivism to postmodernisms/poststructuralisms—arise out of the social history and culture of the dominant race, that these epistemologies logically reflect and reinforce that social history and that racial group (while excluding the epistemologies of other races/cultures), and that this has negative results for people of color in general and scholars of color in particular. In other words, our “logics of inquiry” (Stanfield, 1993a) are the social products and practices of the social, historical experiences of Whites, and, therefore, these products and practices carry forward the social history of that group and exclude the epistemologies of other social groups. But, again, the critical problem—for all of us, both Whites and people of color—is that the resulting epistemological racism, besides unnecessarily restricting or excluding the range of possible
epistemologies, creates profoundly negative consequences for those of other racial cultures with different epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies.

Some Negative Consequences of Epistemological Racism

First, epistemologies and research that arise out of other social histories, such as African American social history or Cherokee social history, are not typically considered legitimate within the mainstream research community (see Anzaldua, 1990; Collins, 1991; B. M. Gordon, 1990, 1993; Minh-ha, 1989; Sarris, 1993; Stanfield, 1993a, 1993b, 1994; among many others). As Reyes and Halcon (1988) suggest, “the traditional Euro-centric perspective used to evaluate their [scholars of color] scholarship disadvantages nontraditional [race-based] research because predominantly White male academics lack the appropriate cultural perspectives from which to judge its real merit” (p. 307). Similarly, Collins (1991) contends that “[w]hile Black women can produce knowledge claims that contest those advanced by the white male community, this community does not grant that Black women scholars have competing knowledge claims based in another [equally warranted] knowledge validation process” (p. 204; see, also, Stanfield, 1994, p. 176). Or, as Sarris (1993) asks, “Can Apache stories, songs, and so forth be read (or heard) and thus understood in terms of Euroamerican-specific expectations of language and narrative [i.e., Euro-American epistemologies]” (p. 427)?

Second, there has been a large chorus of scholars of color (including Anderson, 1993; Anzaldua, 1990; Collins, 1991; Paredes, 1977; Sarris, 1993; Stanfield, 1994; among others) who have contended that dominant group epistemologies and methodologies—the epistemologies and methods themselves and not just “bad” applications of these epistemologies and methodologies—tend to distort the lives of other racial groups. For example, Gordon et al. (1990) have asserted that

Examination of the social and educational research knowledge bases relative to Afro-Americans indicated that these sciences have traditionally attempted to understand the life experiences of Afro-Americans from a narrow cultrocentric perspective and against equally narrow cultrocentric standards [i.e., epistemological racism]. (p. 15)

Consequently, as Stanfield (1985) has said, mainstream “[s]ocial science knowledge production about racial minorities still dwells on the pathological and on the sensational” (p. 411). A result of this is that these negative distortions pass into the dominant culture as “truth,” thus becoming the basis of individual, group, and institutional attitudes, decisions, practices, and policies (i.e., institutional and societal racism). Another result is that these distortions are often enculturated into those who are the victims of the distortions (hooks, 1990; Rebolloso, 1990), especially children, who have less ability to resist becoming the basis of individual, group, and institutional environments that are often hostile to such efforts.

Nonetheless, the critical tradition, even if more favored by intellectuals of color, is itself almost exclusively drawn from White social history, from what Stanfield (1985) has called “European-derived paradigms” (p. 399). The critical tradition’s ontology, epistemology, and axiology are predominantly the creation of White scholars and their
social context (e.g., B. M. Gordon, 1993; Stanfield, 1994). Cornell West (1993), one of the eminent scholars of the critical tradition, argues, therefore, that the dependency of intellectuals of color on the critical tradition may be “debilitating for black intellectuals because the cathartic needs it [critical theory] satisfies tend to stifle the further development of black critical consciousness and attitudes” (p. 79). In addition, virtually all of the different critical approaches—including critical theory, feminism, lesbian/gay orientations, and critical postmodernism—have been repeatedly cited for their racial biases (see, for example, Alarcón, 1990; Bell, 1992; Frankenberger, 1993; hooks, 1990; Huggins, 1991; Minh-ha, 1989; Stanfield, 1994, pp. 179-181; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993; West, 1993). Consequently, as Ellsworth (1989) argued in a different context, while critical theory has been important to anti-racist efforts and perhaps important to the development of new race-based epistemologies, it is not necessarily the appropriate epistemological frame for all race-oriented emancipatory work. Advocates for the critical tradition, therefore, need to support the emergence and acceptance of other epistemologies that are derived from different racial or cultural social histories, to which a brief introduction follows.

“New” Race-Based Epistemologies

One prominent example of an effort to develop, and apply, a “new” race-based epistemology (some of them actually are historically “old”) is Patricia Hill Collins’ Black Feminist Thought (1991). In this important work, she has a chapter titled “Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology” in which she names and discusses the four “contours” (p. 206) or characteristics of her race-based epistemology: “concrete experience as a criterion of meaning” (pp. 208-212), “the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims” (pp. 212-215), “the ethic of caring” (pp. 215-217), and “the ethic of personal accountability” (pp. 217-219). To develop this epistemology, she says she “searched my own experience and those of African-American women I know for themes we thought were important,” and she relied “on the voices of Black women from all walks of life” (p. 202), many of whom she cites and discusses in her explanation of the four “contours.” Accordingly, her Afrocentric feminist epistemology, “like all specialized thought [such as positivism to postmodernisms], reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators” (p. 201).

That this epistemology is respected by other Black women is evidenced by the fact that Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992) recently published, in the American Educational Research Journal, results from a three-year research study that uses Collins’ Afrocentric feminist epistemology as her “theoretical grounding” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 471).

Ladson-Billings, in her study of “successful teachers of African-American children” (p. 471), after stating her choice of Collins’ epistemology, briefly discusses each of Collins’ four contours and her use of them to provide the epistemological grounding for her study of these successful teachers. Ladson-Billings’ appropriate concern is to select an epistemology that reflects “who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had,” given her “membership in a marginalized racial/cultural group” (p. 470). That is, she chooses to use an epistemological frame that “fits” her social history, that emerges out of her race/culture’s social history, rather than an epistemological frame that has emerged out of the social history of the dominant race.

But Collins is not the only one who has developed a race-based epistemology nor is she the first. Molefi Kete Asante has for some time advocated an Afrocentric epistemology that he developed through a relatively large body of work (e.g., 1987, 1988, 1990, 1993), and this work, along with that of other African American scholars advocating a similar perspective, has inspired or supported a wide range of scholarship, including that of Azibo (1990), Baldwin (1981), W. C. Banks (1992), Beverly Gordon (1990, 1993), Kershaw (1989, 1992), W. M. King (1990), and Taylor (1987), among numerous others (see, also, the entire issue of The Journal of Negro Education, 61[3], 1992, guest-edited by Edmund W. Gordon). From Asante’s viewpoint (1993), “Afrocentricity is a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of [their own] historical experiences rather than objects [author’s emphasis] on the fringes of Europe [i.e., western modernism]” (p. 2). Later in the same book, Asante, in a chapter titled “On Afrocentric Metatheory,” briefly discusses the “Cosmological Issue” (pp. 106-107), the “Epistemological Issue” (pp. 107-108), the “Axiological Issue” (p. 108), and the “Aesthetic Issue” (pp. 108-109)—four issues that he sees as central to Afrocentricity. In “Afrocentrism and the Afrocentric Method,” Kershaw (1992) discusses the steps of an “Afrocentric emancipatory methodology,” a method that includes qualitative methodology, analysis and description of the data collected, critical dialogue with those involved in the research, education, and action, all leading to the generation of Afrocentric knowledge. Kershaw (1992) cites John Gwaltney’s Drylongso: A Self Portrait of Black America (1980) as “an excellent example of Afrocentric generated practical knowledge” (p. 165).

More recently, another race-based epistemology has begun to gain the attention of “progressive intellectuals of color” (West, 1995, p. xi). This epistemological perspective originated in legal studies. According to Cornel West (1995)

Critical Race theorists have, for the first time, examined the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination. In the process, they not only challenged the basic assumptions and presuppositions of the prevailing paradigms among mainstream liberals and conservatives in the legal academy, but also confronted the relative silence of legal radicals—namely critical legal studies writers—who “deconstructed” liberalism, yet seldom addressed the role of deep-seated racism in American life. (p. xi)

However, this perspective has just begun to migrate from legal studies into the social sciences generally and into education specifically. That this migration is occurring, though, is evidenced by a “Call for Papers” on critical race theory for the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, under the special-issue editorship of Donna Deyhle, Laurence Parker, and Sofia Villenas of the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Utah.

Most White scholars are, however, unfamiliar with this race-based range of work because it often appears in explicitly race-oriented academic journals (like The Journal of Negro Education) or in books by race-oriented publishers.
(like Africa World Press) that have typically been started because of the lack of acceptance, in mainstream journals or by mainstream presses, of research on African Americans by African American perspectives. For example, Padilla (1994) suggests that the lack of research on African Americans in six of the leading APA journals may be “because the peer-reviewing process serves the gatekeeping function of excluding research that does not conform to acceptable paradigms [italics added] or methodologies” (p. 250). Similarly, Beverly Gordon (1990) says

The number of Black Studies libraries at universities and at private and public collections around the country bears witness to an enormous body of literature written by African-American scholars, while the academy gives little credence or visibility to this work in preservice and inservice discussions. This curricular gap says as much about the theories and paradigms [italics added] embraced and disseminated by university faculty as do the resulting pedagogical practices and worldviews of teachers, principals, and school districts. (pp. 89–90)

In other words, the very existence of these journals is one of the consequences of the mainstream exclusion of race-based epistemologies and the research resulting from these perspectives; the problem, of course, for scholars of color is that for tenure and promotion these race-oriented journals are not as respected as the mainstream ones.

It is not our intention, however, to privilege some of the race-based epistemologies over others. The ones we have briefly introduced here are those we have become most familiar with and those that we increasingly see being used in educational research. There are other efforts to develop these new race-based epistemologies and extensive arguments among scholars of color about these epistemologies, but a comprehensive survey of these race-based epistemologies and current discussions of them would require an entire article (an article we would certainly like to read). Our point is that these new epistemologies exist and that they need to be understood, respected, and discussed, just as those epistemologies that have been produced by the dominant race are understood, respected, and discussed.

What Is to Be Done?

Research needs to be based on the reality of our [Hopi] existence as we experience it, not just from the narrow and limited view American universities carried over from the German research tradition. (Hopi Tribal Council Chairman Vernon Masayesva, quoted in Krupat, 1993, p. xix)

While there has been a powerful social tendency among Whites and White society to define racism in individual terms or, at best, in limited institutional terms, such as in hiring or promotion, we do not think most White researchers consciously support racism in any terms—individual, institutional, societal, or civilizational. But this intention is not sufficient if our argument here is a persuasive one. In a very important sense, we White researchers are unconsciously promulgating racism on an epistemological level. As we teach and promote epistemologies like positivism to postmodernism, we are, at least implicitly, teaching and promoting the social history of the dominant race at the exclusion of people of color, scholars of color, and the possibility for research based on other race/culture epistemologies. We can, however, use our opposition to racism to consider the question of whether our dominant epistemologies are racially biased or not and, if they are, to begin to change this situation.19

The single most important effort needed is to initiate a vigorous debate/dialogue among scholars of all races, including particularly those who write the commonly used methods textbooks. Of all the myriad issues crucial to educational research, surely this ought to be a hotly debated one. For instance, we know there are many scholars who would oppose our contention that epistemologies arise out of the social history of specific groups. Many traditional researchers or social scientists, for instance, argue that their epistemology reaches above history toward a context-free kind of truth. Let these scholars join the discussion. Let them lay out their arguments in public debate. Let us have a fierce row over this. If the possibility that our typical epistemologies are racially biased is not genuinely worth the price of a spirited intellectual conflict, what is?

Second, those of us who teach methods courses must begin to study, teach, and, thus, legitimate the research epistemologies that arise out of the social histories of people of color. Often “students get the message either directly or indirectly that ethnic-related research is not something that they should engage in as part of their training or for their dissertation research” (Padilla, 1994, p. 24). As professors, we need to support an informed understanding and skillful use of these race-based epistemologies by interested students of color. (But we ought not to try to force them in this direction as most students of color typically know that race-oriented scholarship is more risky than mainstream-oriented scholarship.) As scholars, we need to add race-oriented journals to our own reading lists, and we need to increase our valuation of those journals during tenure and promotion proceedings. As dissertation chairs, we must support doctoral studies drawn from these new race-based epistemologies. As journal editors, editorial board members, and journal reviewers we must study and support the publication both of discussions of these epistemologies and of studies based on them, like that of Ladson-Billings (1995). Even better, we need to solicit this kind of work, including doing special editions of our journals. As editors and reviewers for publishing companies, we must insist on the inclusion of race-based perspectives in methods textbooks.

We know that efforts of these sorts are possible. We have taught research methods courses in which we cover other race/culture-based epistemologies (African American, Hispanic American, Native American, Asian American, among other racial designations), along with positivism to poststructuralisms. We have class members help find new materials, and the students of color are continuously educating us through their class discussions of the materials and through their written work. In addition, other professors at our university have become interested in this approach, and there is now serious discussion of a college-wide course of this sort. Furthermore, we know of professors at other universities who have been doing the same. In addition, as the new editor and managing editor
of a respected academic journal, we support and promote the publication of scholarship discussing race-based epistemologies and research based on those perspectives.20

Obviously these suggestions are insufficient, but they are only intended as initial steps toward a crucially needed conversation that to date, unfortunately, has largely been attended to only by scholars of color. But our hope is that other White researchers will join this conversation because we have been able, hopefully, to provide a useful discussion of just what epistemological racism is. We especially hope that those who write, or are considering writing, research methods textbooks will join this conversation.

Racism of any sort is heinous, most terribly for its victims but also for its perpetrators.21 One of the worst racisms, though, for any generation or group is the one that we do not see, that is invisible to our lens—the one we participate in without consciously knowing or intending it. Are we not seeing the biases of our time just like those a hundred years ago did not see the biases of their time? Will those who look back at us in time wonder why we resisted seeing our racism? The unfortunate truth is that we can be strongly anti-racist in our own minds but be promulgating racism in profound ways we do not understand (Pine de Hillyard, 1990, p. 595). As Coser (1993) says in The Rage of a Privileged Class, “people do not have to be racist—or have any malicious intent—in order to make decisions that unfairly harm members of another race” (p. 4). It is our contention here, based on the seminal, ground-breaking work of scholars of color, that we educational researchers are unintentionally involved, at the epistemological heart of our research enterprises, in a racism—epistemological racism—that we generally do not see or understand. Once we see and understand it, though, we cannot continue in our old ways. To do so would be to betray our fundamental commitment as educators and as educational researchers.

Notes

1Although the scholars of color who address the issue of whether our epistemologies are racially biased do not name all of the specific epistemologies to which they are applying this question, we argue that this judgment can justifiably be applied to a broad range of currently “popular” epistemologies, including positivism, postpositivisms, neo-realisms, interpretivism, constructivisms, the critical tradition, and postmodernisms/poststructuralisms (all of which are briefly defined in note 3).

2Race, undeniably, is a tricky social construction: to use it is to reinforce it as really “real,” to naturalize it (Webster, 1992); to not use it is to act as if race were no longer a significant differentiating variable in social life (Wright, 1994) or in education and research (Webster, 1992). In some southern states in the past, to have but one drop of African American blood was, according to law, to be an African American, while today the race of a child of parents of two different races is problematic or, even, a personal choice on some official forms. Race, then, has always been a mobile construct. As Rizvi (1993) says, race as a construct “is continually changing, being challenged, interrupted, and reconstructed, in the actual practices in which people engage” (p. 129) and in the discourses that they employ. See, also, Toni Morrison’s Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992) for one discussion of this issue.) By race, we mean historically and socially situated race-based cultures that are tied both positively (i.e., cultural pride) and negatively (i.e., racism) to skin color (see, for instance, Lee, 1995). We understand, however, both that skin color within “one” race can vary considerably and that the experience of a race-based culture by its members can also vary considerably. We also understand that the growing, though still relatively small, number of bi-racial or even tri-racial individuals significantly complicates what a particular race-based culture is and who is a member. We would, nonetheless, argue that there is a range of “positive” consistencies or features within a race-based culture that make it a culture such that we can one (though we would not say that all of those consistencies or features apply equally to all members). We would also argue that the “negative” external force of persistent racism, past and present, against these race-based cultures is a significant factor in maintaining these cultures as more or less consistent entities that could be called a culture. (“For a provocative discussion of these issues, see Appiah, 1992.)

3We define “positivism” as the traditional application of the scientific method within the social sciences. We are aware, nonetheless, of the debates about whether this is the appropriate label or not and agree, as Phillips (1987), but language, as usual, is at least partially uncontrollable, and, thus, it seems that the meaning we give it is the one that has passed into common academic parlance. With “postpositivisms,” we concur with Guba and Lincoln (1994) that they represent “efforts of the past few decades to respond in a limited way (that is, while remaining within essentially the same set of basic beliefs) to the most problematic criticisms of positivism” (p. 109). By “neo-realisms,” we mean that range of realisms, including scientific realism (e.g., Bhaskar, 1986, 1989) and hermeneutical realism (e.g., Evers & Lakomski, 1991), that has sought, similarly to postpositivism, to address the strong critiques of the scientific method that have emerged over the past few decades, while maintaining the basic validity of the scientific method. By “interpretivisms” and “constructivisms,” we agree with Schwandt (1994) that they are “a loosely coupled family of methodological and philosophical persuasions . . . that share the goal of understanding the outcome of research . . . ” (p. 118). Within the “critical tradition,” we include critical theory, feminism, and lesbian/gay perspectives, all of which start from the experiences of a social group that has been excluded, marginalized, or oppressed over lengthy historical periods; which typically include a critique of social inequities related to those experiences; and which work toward, directly or indirectly, some sort of emancipatory social change for those groups. By postmodernisms/poststructuralisms, we include the work of the French theorists like Foucault, Iriarag, and Derrida that subjects the fundamental, civilizational assumptions of modernity itself to critique. But we also include in this category the work of many others, like that of Patti Lather (1991) or Judith Butler (1993), who have extensively appropriated this philosophy to their own interests.

4While our focus is on “epistemological racism,” a similar argument to the one we have made here could be made about “ontological racism” or “axiological racism,” all three of which, we say later, are aspects of the “civilizational level.” Of course, none of these three can really be separated from each other; an epistemological position, an ontological position, and an axiological position are “strongly” interdependent. However, we focus here on “epistemological racism” because we are researchers and because research itself is the techniques or processes for “producing knowledge” within a particular epistemology. In a certain sense, then, research, as techniques and processes, is “housed” within epistemology rather than within ontology or axiology, though, as we said above, any particular epistemology is interdependent with a particular ontology or axiology. We do not say that ontological or axiological positions are not fundamental to research; in fact, we would hope someone would provide a discussion of axiological racism for researchers.

5We do not mean to imply that these categories exhaust all types of racism, though we believe they are reasonably comprehensive. We also do not mean to imply that our category schema is better than others, such as those of Dube (1985); virtually all category schema in the social sciences are heuristic devices, the utility of which must be evaluated within the discourse in which they are used. As James Banks (1987) notes of his knowledge categories, “The ... categories approximate, but do not describe, reality in its total complexity. The categories are useful conceptual tools . . . but the relationship between the . . . categories of knowledge is dynamic and interactive rather than static” (p. 6).

6For those familiar with the poststructuralist work of Foucault, we would argue that what we are here calling the “civilizational” level is somewhat similar to an “archaeological” level, the level, that is, at which the “real” is constituted. In his genealogical period, however, Foucault would oppose the structuralist metaphor of levels (though his archaeological work has been argued to be structuralist [see Gutting, 1989]); he would argue in this later work that all “levels” occur at the level of human activity (Gutting, 1989). While we agree with his latter or genealogical position, our diagram of the “levels” of
racism and our argument are based on a structuralist metaphor, one in which each subsequent level is deeper and broader than the prior one. We have done it this way because the structuralist bias is so deeply embedded in all of us that it is remarkably difficult to draw a readily understandable graphic that can portray multiple influences, some of which are more fundamental or more primary or more constitutional than others, while drawing them all at the same "level." We have, consequently, adopted a structuralist metaphor (graphic) in the interest of making our larger point about the racial bias of research epistemologies more accessible. However, our focus on the "civilizational" level actually grows out of a larger project in which one of us (Scheurich) has drawn from the archaeological work of Foucault (1972, 1973, 1979, 1988) to formulate a poststructuralist approach to social theory and research methodology. For those interested in seeing the initial efforts to sketch the outlines of that project, see "Policy Archaeology: A New Policy Studies Methodology" (Scheurich, 1994a).

7The difference between White racism and the racism of people of color is a highly contentious issue. We strongly agree with Tatum (1992) who, in the context of an article about her personal experiences as teacher of a course titled "Group Exploration of Racism" and attended primarily by White students (who typically evaluate the course as one of their best college educational experiences) says a distinction must be made between the negative racial attitudes held by individuals of color and White individuals, because it is only the attitudes of Whites that routinely carry with them the social power inherent in the systemic cultural reinforcement and institutionalization of those racial prejudices. To distinguish the prejudices of students of color from the racism of White individuals (and vice versa) to say the former is acceptable and the latter is not; both are clearly problematic. The distinction is important, however, to identify the power difference between members of the dominant and subordinate groups. (p. 3)

Similarly, Hacker (1992) says that "individuals who do not have power may hold racist views, but usually only come cause much harm" (p. 29; see, also, Feagin & Vera, 1995, pp. ix-x). Consequently, for individual racism, we have stated our definitions in race-neutral terms, though the tendency to define racism solely as individual is chiefly done by Whites; for all of the other types of racism we discuss, our definitions are constructed in terms of the racism of the dominant group.

8Numerous scholars of race argue that this social consensus is "lip-service" opposition to racism and not a real commitment. (See, for example, Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1990, for a discussion of this.) Unhappily, our classroom experience with White students validates this. These students will readily support racial equality, but the distance between that initial verbal support and a strong commitment to change racial inequalities is very large.

9We are not suggesting that either of the two mentioned groups—Hopi or African American—are completely homogeneous or would totally agree on what good leadership is. Nonetheless, if U.S. society were on the brink of a new cultural era (postmodernism), if these two or from the many other race/culture groups within this society, there is little doubt that the presidential campaign would be significantly altered. For instance, Hopi ideas of leadership are much different because for the traditional Hopi all acts are sacred acts (Lottin, 1991), an approach very foreign to U.S. presidential campaigns. See Stanfield (1993a, pp. 19-25) for an insightful discussion of this issue.

10This assumption that dominant culture and a non-dominant culture, both within the same society, can "see" the same event in entirely different ways—through different cultural "lenses"—is recently apparent with the O. J. Simpson criminal trial. Near the end of the trial but prior to the verdict, over 70% of those in the dominant White culture believed Simpson was guilty, while over 60% of those in the African American culture believed Simpson was not guilty. Each group was seeing differently, in our opinion, because each was looking through the lens of a different social history.

11Pre-modernist Europe typically was biased against "barbarians," not races; at that time, "race" tended not to be a primary category of exclusion (Goldberg, 1993). West (1992) verifies this when he asserts that "the first substantial racial division of humankind is found in the influential Natural System (1735) of the eminent natural philosopher of the eighteenth century, Carolus Linnaeus" (p. 262). Foucault (1980) also substantiates this view that race emerges as a critical exclusionary category in the modernist period when he says, in reference to the beginning of modernity, that "the new concept of race tended to obfuscate the aristocratic particularities of blood" (p. 148).

To argue that these people were influential because they, at least in part, saw beyond or were superior to their social circumstances does not work. W. E. B. DuBois was easily one of the greatest intellectuals of his era or of any era. If anyone can be said to rise above or be superior to her or his time and place, DuBois was that person, but he had only one social mainstream among his life and continues to be largely underappreciated by intellectuals in general. The anti-racist discourse, which itself arose out of the cultural experience of African Americans, that he "spoke" was not significantly legitimated in his time and still is not in this one.

It is a modernist assumption, one with which we disagree, that subjectivities and discourses of individuals (agents) and their contexts can be separated. That is, modernism posits that an individual (an agent, a subjectivity) can act or think outside of the epistemological, ontological, and axiological web (context, discourses) within which the individual exists. However, we would suggest, following the French poststructuralists, that individualism (agency) or subjectivity itself is a production of the web, context, discourses. Consequently, when we cite influential philosophers, writers, etc., we do not intend to imply that epistemological racism is an individual production. It is not; it is a production of the western modernist web, and these influential individuals are "spoken" by that web. Of course, alternative webs, discourses, contexts do exist. For example, anti-racist discourses do exist, even among a small proportion of Whites (though we would argue that this White anti-racism is deeply dependent, for its existence and survival, on cultures of color and their anti-racist efforts). However, these anti-racist discourses, whether asserted by people of color or Whites, is not [here emphasis added] the anti-racist discourses do not fit the White culture's deeply embedded civilizational assumptions. Whether we are now at an historical moment when anti-racist discourses might be more significantly influential in the modernist west (which would require a shift in civilizational assumptions about something might be called postmodernism), we do not know. We are equally hopeful and skeptical. That this essay was published in a major outlet is hopeful; nonetheless, the central initiating point of this essay is that prior discussions of race-based epistemologies authored by scholars of color have largely been ignored by White research epistemologists and methodologists, a not-hopeful fact.

14A major implication of our argument is a new, and more fundamental, definition of what racism is; it is epistemological and ontological. It is woven at the deepest level into the construction of "the Real." That is, racism is primarily located in the founding civilizational categories—the ontology—and the epistemologies that dominate western civilizational. Remedies for racism, then, that focus only on the individual level or even only on the institutional or societal level will be insufficient. What is required is that the "real"—its dominant ontology and epistemologies—be co-constructed in a relatively equal way by all races/cultures.

15Race-based discussions of research epistemologies and methodologies by scholars of color in the U.S., like the many cited here, can provocatively be seen, by critical theorists, as a significant contribution to global postcolonial studies. In fact, this U.S. discussion can be seen as an "inner" or "domestic" postcolonial literature. A theme of comparison between the literature cited here and that contained in collections like The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995) will make our point readily apparent.

16See Ladson-Billings' book The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children (1994) for a more comprehensive treatment of this slightly.

17This is the first time that we know of that a specific race-based epistemology has been used in a study published in an AERA journal.

18In our opinion, the best text to date on critical race theory is Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement (1995), edited by Crenshaw, Gotanda, and Thomas.

19John Hope Franklin, in an interview on his 80th birthday, recently said, "I'm not very optimistic [about racism in the U.S.], I really am not. ... [J]ust about the time you sit down or sit back and say, 'Oh, yes, we're really moving,' you get slapped back down" (Applebome, 1995, p. 37). Bell (1992) in Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism argues persuasively that racism is such a necessary part of White U.S. culture that it is, in effect, "a permanent component of American life" (p. 13), but he also argues that this judgment should not stop us from working for racial equality in all aspects of our social life. While we are apprehensive that the first part of what he said is true, the second part is a necessity.
References


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