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Sociolinguistic lab 2: On theoretical framework

The theoretical frameworks presented by Hill, Rosa and Flores, and Bucholtz thoroughly examine the ways in which the dominant White view of race and racism continue to perpetuate cycles of often unconscious prejudice, bias, and discrimination based on skin color and/or ethnic background. Hill identifies the folk theory of racism, which views race as a biological fact distinguishing humans from one another, though science shows otherwise. Racism is also viewed as individual action taken by ostracized, outcast, and radical individuals, seen as unacceptable behavior, rather than a systemic and institutional matter. Rosa and Flores explain the historical roots of racism as a continuation of the colonial perspective. White Europeans believed expansion to be their God-given right as the superior race and saw people of Color from other parts of the world as sub-human in nature. This view persists today in some respects, where the language of people of Color is stripped of its humanity and is seen as less than. Language is also associated with a race and clear distinctions are drawn where they are essentially unnecessary. Bucholtz lays out five strategies used by White people in order to claim “wounded Whiteness”: the concept that the White race is somehow threatened, or the perpetuation of modern racism.

All of these authors label the origins of racism, a long history of oppression and marginalization, as the foundation of the way that White people view people of Color today. They also all claim that in the mainstream perspective of Whites, racism is individual and rare rather than institutionally present. For example, in my experience, the way that many White people in Texas (where I am from) talk about Latinx workers in hard-labor jobs is a prime exhibition of the perpetuation of modern, mainstream White racism. Stereotypically, a majority of the workers in hard-labor jobs in my hometown of Houston, Texas, are immigrants that come from Mexico or other Latin American countries. Such jobs include trash collectors, cleaning ladies, grass cutters, and other outdoor laborers. These jobs often involve being outside in the heat for extended periods of time. They are degrading, difficult, and pay little. Additionally, it is a stereotype that Latinx people will be the ones to work these jobs, rather than White, middle-class Americans. The assumption by White people is that they speak little English and have come into the country illegally, making them outcasts. Because of this, these degrading jobs are seen on some level as fitting for their class and level of status. The historical view discussed by the authors (seeing Latinx people as immigrants rather than Americans) and the view of racism as individual (seeing their holding these jobs as a result of their poverty, by their own fault, rather than by a systemic power) is exemplified in this example. Here, most Whites would never directly approach these people or say anything overtly racist towards them, but would rather discuss them to one another, likely using Bucholtz’s “wounded Whiteness” framework. For example, they might say that they have no intention of being racist (disavowals of racism),

but have noticed how the “Mexicans” working such jobs tend to listen to such-and-such music, or always work in such-and-such areas. They may also claim that working these hard-labor jobs has “nothing to do with race” (color-mute racism) and if these workers would simply work harder, they would have enough money to get “a real job”. These are the sort of discourses I have heard spoken by Whites in my community, largely through Bucholtz’s framework. However, the view exemplifies aspects of all three works we have read, showing the historical implications of how race is viewed as well as the lack of acknowledgement of the systemic racism that is occurring here.