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RACIAL HABIT

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Introduction

Race theorists have recently come to understand the notion of 'habit' as a useful resource. In this chapter, we explore what it means to analyse race in terms of habit and consider the benefits of this approach for the study of whiteness. In particular, the habits we are concerned with go beyond simple routine. Here, 'habit' is used to refer to a learned and unconscious disposition to transact with one's environment in a patterned way and thus a fundamental organising principle of social life.

Thinking about race through the concept of habit helps to resolve some of the standard problems of critical race theory. These problems include sorting out the complex relationship between racial ideation (i.e. beliefs, attitudes and imaginaries), bodily existence and affect (i.e. the visible body and the lived experience of racialisation) and social practices and institutions (i.e. cultural formations and the political structures that sustain racial inequities). An analysis of racial habit brings these elements together to show how mental, physical and socio-cultural domains shape – and are shaped by – racial phenomena.

In addition to providing a way forward for critical race theory, a phenomenologically informed conception of habit calls attention to certain aspects of racial phenomena – and whiteness, in particular – that are easy to overlook. Any investigation of racial habit will necessarily lead to a study of white habits by revealing a phenomenological asymmetry that tracks racially dominant and subordinated subject positions. It is not only the kinds of habits that differently racialised subjects acquire that determine their positions within the socially and politically hierarchised landscape but also their very ability to be oriented by and within certain material and symbolic spaces. Put differently, 'white habits' represent more than the typical habits of white people; they also indicate white people's unique orientation to the social environment. This orientation constitutes a privileged social position of whiteness, which can be productively understood as a function of habit.

In the following two sections, we will define the key concepts of 'race' and 'habit' and introduce the theoretical frames that we bring to these notions. Subsequently, in the 'A critical phenomenology of racial habit' section, we will develop a critical phenomenology of racial habit (or, hereafter, 'CPRH') and consider its advantages. Finally, in the 'White habit(s)' section, we will conclude by exploring the role of habit in the experience and study of whiteness.

Critical racialism

There are, of course, many different ways to think about race. For this reason, it is imperative that we begin by clarifying our basic orientation. Our approach is rooted in the later work of W. E. B. Du Bois, but it also incorporates some widely shared commitments from a variety of other theoretical sources.

First, we are 'racialists'. This is not to be understood in terms of racism or crude biological race-thinking but in the repudiation of these classical forms of racialism in favour of a critical form. By 'classical racialism', we refer to modes of race-thinking that sort and rank human populations in ways that mark them for differential treatment. This is the approach that openly defined Europe's orientation to social difference (and much else) from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century and that underwrote the scramble for Africa, the attempted genocide of America's native peoples and the Holocaust. Critical racialism, by contrast, accepts race-thinking while declining to employ it in the classical ways. Racialism becomes critical when, for example, it uses the concept of race to track the effects of structural racism or to organise resistance among the victims of racial oppression. We insist on this classical–critical distinction in order to make clear that criticisms of race-thinking, as such, are premature and require further elaboration to avoid being ill-formed.[1]

We accept that 'race' is a useful theoretical concept and that critical race-thinking can evade and contest the errors and dangers of invidious, classical race-thinking. It is not obvious to us that the ultimate aim of critical race theory is to abolish race or that the elimination of all references to race in public, political or scholarly discourse – either immediately or in the near term – is necessary to fight racial oppression.[2] More precisely, we are racialists in the spirit of what Jeffers calls 'political constructionism', which uses critical race-thinking to track manifest patterns of, among other things, social advantage and disadvantage (Jeffers 2019, p. 50).

Second, we insist on context sensitivity. Taking race seriously means different things in different places, due to variations in practices across social contexts. Consequently, race theory must attend to the workings of race in particular settings. Sometimes, the relevant settings are narrowly confined to particular regions or nation-states, as when we distinguish Brazilian racial politics from its analogues in Norway or the United Kingdom.[3] But often, the relevant context is the geographically dispersed, transnational and international socio-cultural formation that shaped and was shaped by European exploits, settler colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This formation continues to shape North Atlantic societies that think of themselves as the 'developed world' or the West, and it has worked through these societies to mould a contemporary world order that, in many ways, bears an uncanny resemblance to the world of colonial and imperial arrangements that it mostly claims to have repudiated. This neo-imperial world – still importantly divided between the 'white world' and the 'darker nations' that Du Bois studied and engaged with – sets the main context for the current study.

Third, we insist on intersectional analysis. Given the space constraints of the present chapter, this commitment predominantly implies writing a blank cheque for the multi-factor analyses that we do not have room to provide. Nonetheless, we reiterate the need for this sort of analysis, and we accept that single-factor analyses of racial phenomena are inevitably incomplete. To paraphrase Stuart Hall, race is a modality through which class, gender, sexuality, age, ability status and other human features are lived (Hall 1980). In this chapter, we aim at capturing this to the greatest extent possible; our failure to speak to it directly is a concession to space, not a denial of the need to do so.

The fourth commitment embraces a kind of dynamic historicism and is really a cluster of related commitments. One of us has referred to this as the 'CAMPS consensus' in race theory, to signal the widespread conviction that race-thinking is a resource for *critically* engaging with the *artefacts* of human activities that became most influential during the *modern* period, with important *political* and *social* implications (Taylor 2013). This perspective is opposed to views that, for example, eschew critical engagement, depict race as a deliverance of nature, see no difference between modern and pre-modern approaches to human difference, ignore racial politics and reduce racial phenomena to individual choices and traits. In this chapter, we will signal this commitment through references to racialisation and racial formation, while setting aside the ongoing and important debates about the limits of these theoretical vocabularies and about which one enables the more productive encounter with racial phenomena.

The commitments noted above define the mode of critical racialist analysis that informs this chapter. In addition, they unite theorists who disagree about much else – from the value of studying vernacular conceptions of race to the prospects of abolishing race altogether. We hope that, in what follows, we will succeed in showing that the notion of habit should be a part of the shared toolkit for ecumenically minded critical race theorists.

Phenomenology and habit

Similar to race, the concept of 'habit' is subject to many different conceptualisations.[4] Some core elements are nevertheless common across the various approaches. A standard social science account is as follows:

> *habits are learned, recurrent patterns of behavior that are enacted with minimal reliance on conscious resources or effort. They typically are tied to an environment or another action that historically has co-occurred with the habit and thereby has come to serve as a stimulus, or cue, for its automatic performance.*
>
> *(Neal 2008, p. 402)*

This idea of a relatively unconscious disposition to behave in a patterned way tracks with lay understandings. Commonly, we think of stress eating as a 'bad habit' and always putting one's house keys in the same place as a 'good habit'. But references to learning, the environment and history, as foregrounded in the work of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, highlight the phenomenological dimensions of habit.

In referring to the phenomenological dimensions of habit, we point to aspects that stand out when an 'attunement to lived experience and its structuring conditions' organises the inquiry (Weiss et al. 2019, p. xiii). Phenomenological inquiry explores the basic 'structures that make the lived experience of consciousness possible and meaningful' (Guenther 2019, p. 11). Such exploration aims 'not to abstract from the complexity of ordinary experience but rather to lead back […] from an uncritical absorption in the world toward a rigorous understanding of the conditions for the possibility of any world whatsoever' (Guenther 2019, p. 11). Habits are crucial for this basic structuring activity, and they enable the uncritical absorption that necessitates phenomenological analysis (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 84).

The general definition of habit noted above highlights several considerations that invite deeper phenomenological analysis. If habits are acquired, relatively unconscious dispositions tied to specific histories and environments, they are also much more. Indeed, they are immediate, temporally extended and embodied transactions between meaning making organisms

and their social worlds. To understand habits as transactional is to imply that they are not only located in particular environments but also shaped by mutually transforming interactions within those environments. Indeed, as actors, we are not isolated but engaged with a social world that demands reflection and response. We build habits from socially approved repertoires of behaviour and manage them by reference to what society allows and refuses. In other words, we develop and deploy our habits as social beings embedded in worlds of meaning.

The work of navigating such worlds of meaning involves the navigation of histories. This casts habits as unavoidably temporal phenomena. However, temporality extends beyond simple historical precedent by pointing to both forward- and backward-looking dimensions of experience. Habits anchor us in time by activating ways of being and doing that were formed in past circumstances yet counsel future adherence. The field of action mapped by our historically formed habits guide our forays into the future, until circumstances and reflection force a change in course.

To say that habits are relatively unconscious is to say that they are immediate. Most obviously, they work beneath or behind conscious awareness, without the mediation of conscious planning, reflection and goal setting. This brings to mind the familiar idea of 'rapid cognition', representing the reflexive (i.e. non-reflective) side of human cognition that animates our biases and heuristics. Understanding this function as a mode of cognition, though, underrepresents a second aspect of immediacy. Habits are also immediately felt or embodied. The pattern of behaviour is activated because it *feels* right: the lived, bodily experience at a particular space-time coordinate seems, at a deep level, to require a certain response.

This notion of embodiment is worth separating out as a distinct aspect of habit, due to the well-chronicled dangers of mind–body dualism and mentalistic or rationalist reductionism. Habits are interestingly related to the lived body, which is neither separate from nor subordinate to the mind. As patterned dispositions to act, they can be predominantly physical or mental. Unconsciously falling into a familiar gait while walking is one kind of habit, but reflexively falling into a cycle of self-recrimination after a challenging social encounter is another. In either case, the physical and the mental are intertwined. Physical habits involve mental payoffs such as feelings of satisfaction or comfort, while mental habits have somatic accompaniments such as altered neural structures, neurochemical spikes and accelerated heartbeats.

Dewey and Merleau-Ponty examined habit from these and other angles, reaching similar conclusions – albeit with different emphases. Dewey argued most eloquently that habits 'are functions of the surroundings as truly as of a person. They are things done *by* the environment by means of […] acquired dispositions' (Dewey 1988, p. 15). This leads him to recommend genealogical criticism, public education and democratic culture as resources for cultivating more intelligent and critical relationships to our historically formed selves.

Merleau-Ponty most clearly highlighted the role of habit in perception and orientation, noting that what and how one perceives – as well as what one fails to notice – is a function of the learned perceptual habits that comprise one's unique orientation to social environments. This immediate orientation creates the possibility of habituation, which he described as the 'experience of the accord between what we aim at and what is given' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 146). To be habituated is to be calibrated with one's environment, and this includes not only physical surroundings but also social, political and cultural institutions and practices. When one's habitual intentions are routinely fulfilled, one inhabits the world as one inhabits a home – with familiarity and affordance.

Dewey and Merleau-Ponty shared a broadly phenomenological orientation to habit, but they also shared a limitation that pointed beyond their pioneering work. As noted above, phenomenological analyses aim at examining the basic structures of experience, bearing in mind that these structures are both natural (i.e. dependent on our organic capacities) and cultural (i.e. dependent on how our social life uses and affects our organic capacities). Until recently, though, the heirs of these pioneers paid too little attention to the ways in which 'contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience […]. Structures like patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity' (Guenther 2019, p. 12). Taking seriously the ways in which structures systematically interact with more traditionally recognised basic structures, such as perception and habit, allows for what Weiss, Guenther and others refer to as *critical* phenomenology, which 'draws attention to the ways in which power moves through our bodies and our lives' (Guenther 2019, p. 12).

A critical phenomenology of racial habit

How can a phenomenological theory of habit contribute to critical race theory? If Du Bois was right to say that race involves 'contradictory forces, facts, and tendencies' that go well beyond 'ignorance and deliberate ill-will', then a study of racial habit is very much in order (Du Bois 1940, pp. 651, 761). Approaching this study from the perspective of critical phenomenology – with the aim of producing a CPRH – may avoid standard problems of race theory and clarify key features of racialisation that are easy to overlook and sometimes difficult to explain.

One of the common problems of race theory involves the conceptualisation of race as simply a cognitive matter. This approach reduces racism, racial identity and racialisation to prejudices, conceptions of the self and discourses or ideologies.[5] Confining race to the mind also makes it difficult to account for its immediacy, persistence and reach. Importantly, racial attitudes and practices are affective, involving immediately felt aversions and desires. They sink deep into our engagements with the world, including our perceptions, in ways that resist persuasion and rational accounting. In addition, they shape the organisation of bodies and objects in space, thereby contributing to the sense of ease or unease that attaches to everyday experience. An approach rooted in habit – that is, our disposition to respond to and engage with our surroundings in space and time – is useful for a holistic exploration of race.

To see the benefits of replacing a cognitivist or ideational approach with a study of habit, consider the meanings that attach to segregated spaces. These meanings involve more than simply rights of access or exit and privileges of use; they also involve affect (e.g. the immediately felt satisfaction of owning a space and fully inhabiting it or the anxiety of being out of place and feeling constricted in one's movements). In order to capture these aspects of racialisation, it is important to focus on habits – habits of perception, spatial orientation, mobility and more – as well as beliefs and ideas.

Another difficulty in race theory involves the challenge of striking the right balance between dynamism and stability. Classical racialism based on the nineteenth-century model often depicts race as fixed and immutable. When this crudely essentialist approach runs aground on the complexities of historical change and social contingency, some critics respond with anti-racialist arguments about race being ephemeral or illusory.[6] However, this reflexive racial scepticism struggles to acknowledge the persistence of stratifying, unjust and oppressive racial structures. Think here of the racial wealth gaps that grow over generations and persist beyond near-term corrective efforts; or the surveillance and security apparatuses that gather resources and influence in race-stratified societies, also over generations, while

resisting attempts to rein in (or even track) their racially asymmetric outcomes. Time and again, overeager racial sceptics have – whether out of cynicism or naiveté – given cover to these unjust racial patterns by refusing the social theoretic lens of critical race-thinking, which most clearly brings them into view.

A CPRH approach offers a middle ground between essentialism and scepticism. Habits are stable but not static acts. They underwrite the sedimented routines and reflexes that keep social life running along familiar channels, and keep unthinking agents attached to the practices and institutions that make them feel at ease and at home. This helps to explain the dogged persistence of our racial structures. Societies that predispose some of their members to respond to others as 'problem people' – societies that immediately perceive certain people as unruly or threatening and react to such people with negative affect (e.g. fear or contempt) – remain deeply attached to the institutions that promise to contain these problems.

A third problem of race theory pertains to the difficulty involved in specifying the relationship between self and society. This relationship animates an idea that, in recent years, has become widespread in public discourse: the idea that racialised social distributions – gaps in wealth, opportunity, surveillance and so on – can persist without anyone of ill-will working purposively to maintain them. This is surely correct and motivates appeals to structural and institutional racism. However, taken too swiftly, these appeals threaten to relieve individuals of any stake in the wider situation. The states of affairs that people countenance (i.e. the conditions they regard, respond to and affectively register as acceptable, even if they do not actively work to create or maintain them) are as relevant to ethics and social theory as those that are explicitly avowed and acted against.

A CPRH approach, with its insistence on racial habits of perception, attention, interpretation and orientation, offers a way of linking racialised selves to social structures without losing track of individual targets of ethical criticism. It does this in part by enriching another widespread idea in public discourse: the idea that racism (similar to sexism and other mechanisms of othering and oppression) shapes every member of a racist culture. Even people of good will, and even people who 'know better', must continually monitor and manage their perceptions, judgements and assumptions in order to identify and uproot this ideology's attempts to work through them. We hear this all the time from diversity consultants, implicit bias experts, cultural critics and others, but rarely in terms of the rich and intuitively accessible vocabulary of habit. A theory of racial habit provides what is required for this widespread idea and its advocates: a bridge between structural accounts of race and racism and the lower-level forces that produce and sustain these structures.

A fourth standard problem of race theory echoes a familiar concern about liberatory social theory (which is, in itself, an echo of the old philosophical problem of free will). If social forces position individuals in the way that social theory claims, then why should we assume that there is any way out? How can the conditioned or determined individual escape this cultural conditioning and determination? For Marx, this was the problem of revolutionary consciousness; for Foucault, it was the problem of resistance; and for critical race theorists, it is the problem of promoting anti-racism in a structurally racist society.

Generally speaking, this worry is not as frightening as it is often made out to be, in part due to reasons that a CPRH approach makes clear. Cultural conditioning is (apparently) inescapable if social forces cause behaviours in the same way that physical forces cause physical reactions. However, as Dewey took great pains to point out, social forces differ from physical forces, and the failure to note these differences has caused all kinds of problems for the study of humanity. Specifically, social forces work less by causation than by enculturation, prompting individuals to adopt patterns of behaviour – patterns that individuals, unlike protons and reagents, can

interrogate, reflect on and revise. People form, re-form and break habits all the time. Such processes are often quite difficult, but not impossible, especially when society (or some portion of it) recognises this possibility and furnishes its members with more and better resources for ongoing self-scrutiny. This is key to solving the problem of resistance in liberatory race theory – provided that one takes seriously the connection between racialisation and habituation.

A fifth standard problem of critical race theory – less a problem, really, than a nagging tension – involves the discernment and attribution of the role of perception. The classical racialism of modernity tied racial identity tightly to the body, but critical race theory has shown this way of thinking to be misguided and obsolete. We now know that race involves the apparently arbitrary assignment of meaning to superficial traits. If physiognomy means very little by itself, what can justify the critical racialist's continued emphasis on racial morphology? What justifies it, of course, is precisely this manner in which race 'works': the assignment of deeper meaning to superficial traits such as hair texture, skin colour and accented speech is what distinguishes race from other axes of social differentiation, such as ethnicity and caste. But this answer is oddly unsatisfying. The grudging concession to obsolete ideas about human physical variation seems somehow unworthy of the attention it still commands.

A CPRH approach provides a deeper analysis of the ties between race and perception, thereby helping to clarify exactly why this aspect of racialisation remains salient. Here, two of phenomenology's central insights are vital. The first is that perception is always interpretation, which means that what and how we perceive is not neutral but value laden. The second is that perceptual interpretations involve mediated immediacy: they deploy socially provided meanings (i.e. cultural mediation), but they do so in the rapid cognitive mode that informs our biases and heuristics (i.e. phenomenological immediacy). Perception, in other words, involves habits that operate behind the scenes of consciousness to infuse the surrounding world with immediately experienced social meanings. When these habits become sedimented, they form a bodily understanding that interprets and articulates future encounters (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p. 84). This produces an orienting affect, which Merleau-Ponty called the 'habit body' and Dewey described in his later work as 'esthetic quality' (Merleau-Ponty 2012; Dewey 1987).

Race is not only amenable to this sort of phenomenological analysis; in some ways, it presents a paradigm case. As Alcoff notes with respect to visuality, racial consciousness 'works through learned practices and habits of visual discrimination and visible marks on the body' (Alcoff 2006, p. 196). Focusing on the visible is eminently sensible in a world that treats race and 'colour' as synonyms. But the point easily generalises to other sensory pathways. Accented speech and unusual sounding names are also markers of racial difference, as, in some contexts, are the flavours and odours of food in domestic settings. Invidious race-thinking works by infusing these modes of human appearance with layers of additional meaning. Habits aid this work by giving these perceived meanings the feeling of unmediated access to truth' (Merleau-Ponty 2012). For people who have been habituated by (and to) invidiously racialist conditions, seeing a person who 'looks Muslim', whatever this means, is the same as seeing a potential terrorist; and hearing Spanish spoken is the same as hearing the approach of the advance guard of an immigrant swarm. This is one of racialisation's central mechanisms, and it is difficult to make sense of it without some reference to a theory of habit.

White habit(s)

The benefits of a critical phenomenology of racial habit are particularly apparent when applied to whiteness. Whiteness is one node in a network of racial positions that, similar to other nodes, defines individual identities, social populations, cultural imaginaries and

political ideologies.[7] As with all racial positions, it relies on the structuring role of habits. In ways we hope to make clear below, whiteness is in particular need of a CPRH analysis, thanks to its heavy reliance on pre-reflective and affective concealment mechanisms.

The CPRH approach holds that the way in which the world manifests for white people is a problematic part of whiteness, itself. Four elements of this 'white worlding' are particularly relevant to this discussion. The first is a mode of othering perception that sees and responds to non-white people in terms of the objectification of racial tropes. Racialising perception is pregnant with notions (e.g. lazy, dirty, sexually depraved, parasitic, criminal and threat) that appear to white people as naturally and necessarily non-white. The second element is a mode of self-perception and self-directed worldly orientation that encourages dominant racial subjects to take their own being as normative. This white normativity has two primary manifestations: ontological expansiveness and ethical solipsism. We will return to ethical solipsism shortly, but for now, we will define ontological expansiveness as a sense of pro-prietary entitlement to all spaces, positions and goods. Such entitlement is typical of white people but withheld from – or not recognised as appropriately belonging to – non-whites (Sullivan 2006, p. 144). The third element of white worlding is a manufactured failure of perception that conceals white domination from 'whitely' consciousness, effectively render-ing whiteness invisible. Finally, the fourth element is a form of phenomenological ease in the world – call this 'dwelling' or 'being at home' – that is more accessible to white subjects than to people who are differently racialised.

Two terminological matters require attention before we proceed. First, we use ethico-political notions such as 'white supremacy' and 'white privilege' quite broadly, mindful of the many questions that surround the probity of these concepts but, for reasons of space, bracketing these questions all the same. Second, we follow Marilyn Frye in using notions such as 'whitely' and 'whiteliness' to distinguish the modes of perception recommended by hegemonic forms of whiteness from the empirical individuals who may or may not heed these recommendations (Frye 1992). Individuals can see the world in whitely ways irrespec-tive of the racial identities for which their appearance and ancestry qualify them. Further-more, as we will explore below, a person who is racialised as white may aspire to a resistant form of white subjectivity that refuses whiteliness.

Dwelling and home

Whiteness involves privileged access to the experience of dwelling or being at home. As Sara Ahmed puts it, this involves being 'so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to dis-tinguish where one's body ends and the world begins' (Ahmed 2007, p. 158). The basic idea here is one that Levinas described in terms of 'a recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome' (Levinas 1971, cited in Dekkers 2011, p. 297). Asymmetric access to the experience of dwelling or being at home is constitutive of whiteness and intimately bound up with a structure of racialised habits that enables this orientation to the world. White voices have been amplified, white bodies have been protected and white interests have been prioritised; all other things being equal, this has made the world a more welcoming place for white people – a place they can unthinkingly approach as a resource rather than an obstacle, in ways that others cannot.

Interestingly, this aspect of whiteness remains largely hidden from those who benefit most from it. Ahmed notes that this mutual adequation of white selves and their surroundings leads to a kind of invisibility or anonymity. 'One fits', she writes, 'and by fitting the surface

of one's body disappears' (Ahmed 2007, p. 158). Whiteness proceeds anonymously for the white body: the white subject is not confronted by whiteness in the same way that Du Bois, Fanon and others described being confronted by Blackness. Fanon famously made this point in the following passage:

> *In the white world, the [person] of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person […]. I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple.*
>
> *(Fanon 2008, pp. 90–92)*

Similarly, while a Latina in an Anglo environment may experience the world incongruously, with a persistent, haunting awareness of how others are reading her *as* 'other', a white person can occupy and move seamlessly through environments that reflect white needs, experiences and interests. Dwelling, rather than alienation, is the default mode of experience.

Invisibility

The idea of white anonymity or invisibility has been central to the recent study of whiteness in ways that warrant independent discussion.[8] Scholars have tended to explain this invisibility using epistemic terms. From this perspective, white privilege remains invisible to the white subject because it involves a particularly recalcitrant form of manufactured ignorance that actively thwarts attempts to reveal its existence (Sullivan 2006, p. 3). These epistemologies of ignorance highlight the active dimensions of epistemic failure, pointing to psychological factors such as unconscious desires and interests.[9] In this understanding, white ignorance is not a naïve lack of information that can be corrected through education, but a motivated ignorance driven by white interests that works to benefit and support hegemonic racial orders.

An account of habit complements the epistemic account of racial ignorance by supplying a richer picture of the naturalised knower. Habit economises our daily goings-on by making it possible to act without attending to every movement. But this enabling force also allows destructive habits, such as those that make up white privilege, to go undetected. As Sullivan puts it, white ignorance involves a resistant unconscious formed out of customs and attitudes acquired through transactions with racist environments (Sullivan 2006, pp. 21–23). Turning to habit in this way effectively naturalises the knower as more than a knower: the epistemic agent becomes a socially constituted habit body for whom belief formation is not a simple rational function, but a function of affectively charged experience forged from prior experience. Persons constituted by habits of white privilege are unlikely to see their privilege, not only because society shields them from salient evidence and encourages them to take deliberative short-cuts, but also because their pre-reflective, deeply felt senses of self and the world are bound up with these shields and short-cuts in ways that DiAngelo's account of white fragility and Baldwin's discussions of white American innocence draw out (Baldwin 1998; DiAngelo 2018).

Normativity

White invisibility points to a broader normative orientation that also defines whitely ways of being in the world. Whiteness is often invisible to itself because privilege can easily position itself as normal. The normal then passes, often enough, beneath notice and without

comment, for good phenomenological reasons: only deviations from the norm upset the habits that take root in routines of normalcy; thus, only deviations provoke reflection and require conscious attention. It is a short step from here to reading deviations as deviant and reading the normal as normative.

One obvious manifestation of white normativity involves a kind of 'ethical solipsism'. Sullivan borrows this expression from Adrienne Rich to name an orientation to the world through which 'only white values, interests, and needs are considered important and worthy of attention' (Sullivan 2006, p. 17, citing Rich 1979, p. 306). A CPRH approach makes clear that this is not simply a matter of priority in ethical deliberation, but a lived experience of attending and feeling compelled to attend to some things and not others, on racial grounds. United States drug policy provides several examples of this phenomenon. While we are unable to do justice to the fuller policy issues, we will here register simply how this drug policy has been received by a racialised counter-public that is not shaped by whitely ideology. The legalisation of marijuana was a non-starter in United States politics until white people decided to make money from it. Similarly, it might be argued that the only difference between the current crisis of opioid addiction, which is a public health issue, and the crisis of addiction that inspired a multi-decade war on drugs, is that the former is perceived as a problem for white people and the latter was perceived as a threat for dark, problem people. In these and other cases, whiteness has used its reflexive frames of reference to define actionable criminality and blameworthy viciousness and to distinguish these from regrettable suffering and remediable pain.

A second manifestation of white normativity involves what Sullivan calls 'ontological expansiveness', representing a sense of proprietary entitlement that is typical of white people but withheld from – or not recognised as appropriately belonging to – non-whites (Sullivan 2006, p. 144). This sense of expansiveness leads white people 'to act and think as if all spaces – whether geographical, psychical, linguistic, economic, spiritual, bodily or otherwise – are or should be available for them to move in and out of as they wish'. In the grip of this habitual orientation, 'the self assumes that it can and should have total mastery over its environment' (Sullivan 2006, p. 10). A CPRH reading of this phenomenon helps to make sense of the peculiar affective gap that separates the policy from the politics of issues such as gentrification and residential segregation. Standard liberal political philosophy has plenty of resources to explore resource hoarding and asymmetric access to social goods such as space and home mortgages. But this analysis leaves an affective remainder, involving, for example, the dismay that comes from feeling a sense of entitlement seep into gentrifying neighbourhoods, or perceiving the ease of the new residents, facilitated by their sense of entitlement. It is difficult to register this remainder without considering the phenomenology of racial habit.

Abolition or redemption?

CPRH represents a useful resource for considering the prospects of liberatory conceptions of whiteness. Scholars and activists have long puzzled over whether anti-racist whiteness is possible. Individuals racialised as white can oppose racism, to be sure. But it is not clear whether this ethical stance involves an inherent opposition to whiteness, as such, or whether it instead seeks to recruit whiteness to the cause of fighting white supremacy. Some think it is possible to refurbish white identities and inhabit them critically and ethically.[10] Others think that whiteness is suited only for racist uses and is therefore irredeemable and fit only for abolition.[11] A CRPH approach offers some help in navigating these options.

To say that all white people are racist, as clumsy as that sounds, is to speak some truth. As noted earlier in this chapter, if we are constituted through our transactions with our environment, and if we are brought up in a society marked by white domination, we are constituted by its culturally embedded ways of being and doing. Races are historical forma-tions, and the particular history that has produced the white race is one of supremacy and domination. This is not to say that environments determine us once and for all; of course, we are capable of responding differently to the same environment. Nor is our subjective constitution fixed for all eternity. But whiteness has acquired its primary meanings through oppression and conquest; and in a largely white-privileged world, the current meanings of whiteness are inseparable from that history. White people brought up in a world in which whiteness means privilege necessarily inherit some of that privilege.

Notwithstanding this unavoidable immersion in white supremacist culture, several the-orists of racial habit suggest that transformation is possible. Helen Ngo notes that the lived body is constituted by its porosity: the adequation between oneself and one's surroundings never achieves perfect alignment but leaves space to cultivate counter-hegemonic modes of being (Ngo 2017, p. 113). Sullivan argues that the transactional nature of human habituation imbues every encounter with the possibility of reconfiguration and reorientation. Similarly, Alcoff points out that

> perceptual practices are dynamic, even when congealed into habit, and that dynamism can be activated by the existence of multiple forms of the gaze in various cultural pro-ductions and by the challenge of contradictory perceptions. To put it simply, people are capable of change.
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> *(Alcoff 2006, p. 189)*

In addition to suggesting that change is possible, a CPRH approach suggests that habit can be a resource for counter-hegemonic self-reconstruction. In this spirit, Alia Al-Saji encour-ages the cultivation of a habit of hesitation as a way of remaining open to reconfiguration. She distinguishes between affective hesitation, which is made possible by the anonymous temporal structure that sustains habit, and hesitation, which results from trauma or the internalisation of the objectifying gaze of others. She argues that the disruption of the body schema that worried Fanon can actually be productive by opening a space for self-reflection and self-criticism, inciting one to question the structures of habituation and socialisation that are taken for granted. She explains, 'hesitation does not only delay, it also opens onto elaboration and becoming otherwise. Since all is not given, what happens in the interval is becoming' (Al-Saji 2014, p. 143).

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed at clarifying the role played by habits in sustaining and contesting sys-tems of racial meaning. We have suggested that a CPRH approach may deepen the study of racial phenomena by illuminating the lived experience of these phenomena and helpfully sup-plementing the work of race-theoretic analysis. We have argued that whiteness is particularly well suited to CPRH analysis, as, by linking whiteness to habitual modes of perception and embodied interaction, it is able to capture aspects of whiteness that can otherwise be puzzling.

Humans are habituated beings, comprised of dispositions to transact that take shape through active engagement with particular environments. Because these dispositions – these habits – necessarily implicate not only ourselves but also the material and cultural world in

which our actions unfold, they are as much a part of the environment as they are a part of us. Through them, we reinforce the environment, just as the environment reinforces us. Thus, social environments shot through with white privilege and organised around white supremacy will call white habits into being and depend on the working of those habits. White privilege, then, is not only something that happens to befall people in those environments, nor is it only something they consciously work to create and maintain. It is, instead, part of who and what they are, and part of the environments that contribute to making them what they are. Fortunately, and in part because of this environmental connection, it is not who and what they have to be. Personality, character and identity are functions of contingent relationships with mutable social worlds, and, as such, they can undergo change along with those worlds.

We are not encapsulated atoms sealed off from our environment, with moral fates that are predestined by the contents of our hearts and minds. Nor is our environment a brooding omnipresence, impervious to transformations in individual personalities. Self and world are intertwined, each dependent on the other and each subject to transformation in light of transformation in the other.

Notes

1 See Taylor, P. C. (2022). *Race: A philosophical introduction*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Polity, Chapter 2.
2 Abolition and eliminativism might be appropriate strategies, but they are – at minimum – not *obviously* appropriate, and this is not the place to debate this point.
3 We do not mean for these references to draw attention to any particular racial dynamic. The point is merely that race does not translate seamlessly across contexts, but appears uniquely in each context – though the forms of different contexts may partially overlap. Think, for example, about the partly overlapping but importantly distinguishable meanings, weights, denotations and uses of Blackness, Indigeneity, immigration and Islamophobia in these three settings.
4 For a particularly influential alternative to the approach we adopt here, see Bourdieu (1994).
5 See Murakawa, N. (2014). *The first civil right*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p. 11: 'I use the term "postwar racial liberalism" to capture the historically grounded understanding of the American race "problem" as psychological in nature, with "solutions" of teaching tolerance and creating colorblind institutions'. For a more fine-grained mapping of the concept of racism that distinguishes psychologistic accounts (either doxastic or affective) from alternatives, see Faucher, L. (2018) 'Racism', in Taylor, P. C., Alcoff, L. M. and Anderson, L. (eds.) *The Routledge companion to philosophy of race*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 405–422, 416.
6 For early examples of racial eliminativism, see Zack, N. (1993) *Race and mixed race*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press; and Appiah, K. A. (1985). The uncompleted argument: Du Bois and the illusion of race. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), pp. 21–37. Both authors have moderated their views and adopted more complicated positions over time. Recent studies of South African non-racialism provide more current and politically responsible approaches to something like eliminativism. See Erasmus, Z. (2017). Rearranging the furniture of history: Non-racialism as anticolonial praxis. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 5(2), pp. 198–222.
7 For a related but distinct view, see Alcoff (2015, p. 74).
8 The use of invisibility as a metonym for a broader perceptual phenomenon raises concerns about ocularcentrism and encourages some commentators to describe it instead as camouflage. However, the metaphor is sufficiently central to longstanding debates that it remains in wide use.
9 See, for example, Mills (2007) and Medina (2013).
10 See Alcoff, M. A. (2015). *The future of whiteness*. Cambridge: Polity. For perhaps the best version of this approach in action, see Berry, W. (1970). *The hidden wound*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
11 Roediger, D. (1994). *Towards the abolition of whiteness*. New York, NY: Verso; Ignatiev, N. and Garvey, J. (1996). *Race traitor*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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