Black Womanhood: Raciolinguistic Intersections of Gender, Sexuality & Social Status in the Aftermaths of Colonization

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In this essay, we highlight the colonial invention of oppositional and binary categories as a dominant form of social sorting and meaning-making in our society. We understand language as a tool for the construction, maintenance, and analysis of these categories. Through language, these categorizations often render those who sit at the margins illegible. We center the Black woman as the prototypical "other," her condition being interpreted neither by conventions of race nor gender, and take Black womanhood as the point of departure for a description of the necessary intersecting and variable analyses of social life. We call for an exploration of social life that considers the raciolinguistic intersections of gender, sexuality, and social class as part and parcel of overarching social formations. In this way, we can advocate for a shift in linguistics and in all social sciences that accounts for the mutability of category. We argue that a raciolinguistic perspective allows for a more nuanced investigation of the compounding intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and social status that often function to erase Black womanhood.

In 1981, the late bell hooks asked the question: "Ain't I a woman?"[1] During this decade, Black women were reckoning with the fact that the Black liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s had left them in a precarious place. Just one year after hooks asked the question, Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith exemplified this precariousness in their volume *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*.[2] In calling out that conceptions of gender and race are inextricably linked in the minds of many scholars, Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith were chastising the tendency of even the most justice-oriented scholarship to treat issues of race in ways that overlook and even erase the complexities of gender and to treat issues of gender in ways that erase the complexities of race.[3] A decade later, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined and introduced the term *intersectionality* as a lens for interrogat-

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ing these multiple intersecting categories of identity and unearthing how they interact to create compounding oppression for individuals, namely Black women. Gender-based oppression, Crenshaw demonstrated, takes as its normative victim white women, while race-based oppression takes as its normative victim Black men. Thus, a Black woman may find herself at a unique intersection of oppressions, with her employer able to point to similar treatment of a Black man as evidence of lack of gender discrimination, and similar treatment of a white woman as evidence of a lack of racial discrimination. The Black woman is then denied restitution because of the two intersecting marginalized identities to which she belongs : both Black and woman.[4]

Nowhere have the limits of essentialist categorizations been clearer than in the progression of the study of the language of marginalized and multiply-marginalized groups. Sociolinguistics, the subdiscipline of linguistics that considers the relationship between language and social practice, has long understood language as central to identity. Yet the earliest sociolinguistic studies were dialectological surveys, which attempted to draw lines around the language practices of distinct physical regions – north and south, inland and coastal, urban and rural – in ways that reified the distinctions between these regions as distinct, homogenous groups.[5] As the field matured throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, sociolinguists began to pay more attention to language variation that was not rooted in regional difference, spurred especially by early work on the grammatical system and sound system of African American English, a variety recognized as early as the 1930s to be systematically different from white varieties in the same regions.[6] Nevertheless, the history of the analytical focus in trying to circumscribe boundaries, first physical and then raciosocial, as well as to analyze language that was maximally divergent from white varieties, led to a scholarly understanding of Black language that often categorized all Black language as being that of Black working-class men.

Despite the circumscription of "Black language" as being exclusively made up of Black male language, Black women concerned with Black dialect, vernacular, and identity have positioned themselves as both scholars and activists since the earliest days of the discipline. Initiatives such as the Nairobi Day School in East Palo Alto, California, and the teaching of Black language vernacular in college courses exemplified Black women's commitment to affirming and legitimizing Black language and identity.[7] Yet despite the work of Black women scholars to disentangle and problematize these erasures, this situation has only compounded. In the 2010s and early 2020s, hashtags such as #SayHerName, #CiteBlackWomen, and #GirlsLikeUs have brought attention to the complexity of and precarity for Black women who sit at varying intersections of power and oppression. What we learn from these projects and movements is that Black women, both transgender and cisgender, who must navigate colonial formations of power, simply do not have the luxury of existing without constant attention to their race, their gender,

their sexuality, and their social status within the postcolonial societies that constantly render them illegible and thus expendable.

It is therefore not an overstatement to say that Black (mostly queer) women have been at the center of liberatory efforts for all marginalized social classes in the United States.[8] Grounded in histories of abolitionist thought and liberatory praxis, Black women have interrogated labor, self-determination, language, the body, and indeed humanity itself. Crucially, these theories and demands for a recognition of Black humanity have been responses to the misogynoir that we have been forced to endure.[9] The complexity of Black womanhood cannot be understood without attending to the raciolinguistic intersections of language, gender, sexuality, and social status. As such, we take Black womanhood as the point of departure for a description of the necessary intersecting and variable analyses of social life. Further, we understand language as the place where identity is mediated; thus, we explore the ways that language (and its theorization) impacts our social understandings of the world around us.[10]

The authors of this essay are not new to the condition of having to navigate the complexities of their race, gender, and sexuality in nearly every facet of their lives. Clemons identifies as a Black cisgender and heterosexual woman. At an early age, it became clear that these categories were not so clear cut, often having her ethnoracial declarations questioned and re-ascribed as she moved through differing geographic contexts. Additionally, her inability to accept heteropatriarchal structures has forced her to redefine her heterosexuality through a queer lens, one that seeks a problematization of the structure and category itself. Grieser grew up navigating the complexity of life in a transracial adoptive family. Choosing to move among Black peers as a young adult, she learned that rejecting certain performance norms of heterosexual femininity meant being variably perceived as either not particularly Black or not particularly straight, but rarely both or neither at the same time, which similarly forced the necessity of interrogating the interconnectedness of race, gender, and sexuality.

With these backgrounds, we join the growing wave of Black language scholars who challenge the essentialism of early work by centering current explorations of Black language on the ways that it, and attitudes toward it, are embedded in the processes of discrimination and power relations. As a result, the current scholarly turn has seen a great deal of linguistic work that has had tangible, real-world liberatory effects on Black speakers through the areas of education, housing, and criminal justice. These works rely on understanding the role that racism and racist ideologies play in the material marginalization of racialized speakers. Racism is often circumscribed as being individual acts of violence and discrimination against racialized people; these works and we as authors instead define racism as the systemic, structural, and institutional policies that are enacted against racialized people, which promotes racialized ideologies that stratify power.

The "enlightened" move of many twenty-first-century scholars is to acknowledge that the definition of racism focused on individual-level violence and discrimination is incomplete. Yet understandings of the machinations of systemic racism also serve to reinforce boundedness between different groups by treating groups as homogenous, reifying the boundaries upon which systemic racism thrives. The creation of postcolonial society relies on forced categorizations and binaries, despite known Indigenous formations that counter many of these structures.[11] Through the enactment of the binary, each term gains meaning only in relation to its counterpart and "because oppositional binaries rarely represent different but equal relationships, they are inherently unstable."[12] Since modern power formations rest on the ability to impose and maintain oppositional boundaries of difference, which often manifest in binaries, racism itself is insufficient as a guiding construct for understanding power formation. Instead, we focus on the oppositional boundary of anti-Blackness as the root of hierarchical power formations across the Americas. We define anti-Blackness as "the ideological manifestation of white supremacy, whiteness, and white apathy."[13] Anti-Blackness thus requires *whiteness* as a logic, which stands in its opposition. Importantly, whiteness allows those who identify and exist within its categorizations – as indicated by proximity to Europeanness and its aftermaths – to elude racial categorization and maintain individuality in their humanity.[14] In positing anti-Blackness as an organizing principle of life for all Black peoples in the Americas, we highlight an oppositional category that has been dominant in our formation of society due to these nations' colonial histories. Race is not only a category; it is also a technology for iterative and discursive categorization, exerting itself onto all other social categories.[15] Language, something so fundamentally human, is and has been a tool for the construction, maintenance, and analysis of these binaries, often itself falling victim to oppositional boundedness.

However, language also provides us the necessary tools to interrogate the intersections between these identities. Thus, the tradition of linguistics that deals with the interface of language, race, and identity is particularly well suited to intersectional analyses in the pursuit of linguistic justice.[16] Intersectionality, in this instance, can be understood as not only the overlapping of multiple bounded categories of oppression, but a refusal to draw boundaries around named social categories in the first place, privileging complexity over the simplified, multiplicity over the essentialized, and mutability over static definitions of the human condition.[17] Raciolinguistics – a branch of sociolinguistic inquiry that theorizes the conaturalization of language and race in ways that are inextricable, coinfluential, and embedded in society – provides a way into this more nuanced exploration of the genesis and instability of the categorical formations of power that have defined postcolonial societies.[18]

In their influential essay "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective," Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores lay out five key compo-

nents of a raciolinguistic perspective: 1) that the conaturalization of language and race are rooted in colonial formations of society; 2) that people perceive, enact, and act on perceptions of racial and linguistic difference; 3) that those differences between race and language are seen to be naturally connected in ways that render invisible the human agency and racist processes creating them; 4) that past explorations have underemphasized the colonialist roots of race and overlooked the degree to which racialization is still a major organizing identity-framework; and 5) that the power formations that have resulted from the unacknowledged linkage of race and language practice must be contested.[19] Consequently, a raciolinguistic perspective is generative in that it functions as a lens through which, centering the inextricable interconnectedness of language and race, one can iteratively examine hegemonically situated power hierarchies.

In this essay, we interrogate the intersections of gender, sexuality, and social status, focusing on the experiences of Black women who fit into and lie at the margins of these categories. We again acknowledge that social categories in and of themselves are multiple and mutable, and thus any model used to interrogate these categories must be able to engage multiple strategies toward sustainable social justice.[20] Additionally, we reject the standard assumption of white cisgender heteropatriarchal capitalism as being the center of social formation. As such, we highlight the work of scholars who have consistently dismantled raciolinguistic ideologies as inextricably tied to the body. We do this with a primary goal of exploring the theoretical advantage of applying a raciolinguistic and intersectional lens to our explorations of social worlds through the study of language. As a secondary goal, we reveal the imperative that justice-oriented scholarship be deeply informed by minoritized epistemologies and by minoritized scholars. We argue that to investigate the very structure of society, one must pay attention to the most vulnerable. In other words, none of us are free until we all are.[21] With this in mind, we review the implications of applying a raciolinguistic perspective to social science scholarship. We follow with a brief overview of the ways that Black women have consistently challenged the idea of category, and thus complicated notions of language, race, and identity through a Black feminist praxis that insists on reclaiming humanity for Black women. Lastly, we profile an exemplary Black language scholar, noting the development of a Black feminist raciolinguistics. Ultimately, our goal is to offer a way forward in expanding already established moves toward more justice-oriented and equitable language-centered research.

Many of the most significant developments in the field of linguistics have been built on the exploration – and some might say exploitation – of minority languages and minoritized speakers. The dominant North American paradigm of variationist sociolinguistics owes many of its early findings about systemic social variation of English to the studies of African American En-

glish conducted in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.[22] As the field had, until that time, been heavily rooted in atlas studies of regional dialectal difference, the discovery of a variety that was relatively uniform across regions, and predicated instead on membership in an ethnoracial category, offered an exciting counterbalance to regional variation studies and, as such, provided opportunities for intriguing new findings about the full scope of possibilities for English language variation.[23]

At the same time, these early studies revealed the importance of centering Black lived experience. While these studies encompassed work by both white and Black linguists, it is in the work of the Black linguists that we find explanatory models rooted in the Black experience. One of the most compelling examples of Black linguist agency in Black language from this era comes from John Rickford's work in his home of Guyana, where he shows that language choices along the creole continuum correspond to speakers' overall situatedness with respect to models of conflict between social classes, offering a new example of motivations for language choice as well as new models for considering differences of class.[24] While all of this work furthered the understanding of Black language use in the Americas, it was these studies by Black linguists that took the social conditions of Blackness as being integral to the interpretation of the data that provide many of the richest explanations of Black language use.[25]

As with studies of racialized language differences, the intersection of gender and sexuality and language has similarly been a preoccupation of the field.[26] These foundational literatures make clear that linguists and linguistics have often been preoccupied with the work of understanding "category," both in terms of defining linguistic varieties as systems, as well as describing language communities. In linguistics, it is the form (that is, language practices and productions) that traditionally dictate boundaries, resulting in borders between languages, dialect, register, and variety. These borders, however, erase the role that sociocultural factors play in deciding which linguistic structures belong to which varieties.

As an example, one could look to structures that are considered part of African American language such as negative concord (*didn't nobody want none*). Many of these structures are also part of other varieties of English, and they are generally understood even by speakers who do not use them. The decision to categorize them as being part of African American language then, despite being understood by and used by speakers from other social groups, is one made on social not structural grounds. But speakers both produce and are produced by the language choices they make. Thus, making the social choice to ascribe certain linguistic structures to African American language reifies the category of "African American." Further, these sorts of choices are not produced in a vacuum – they reflect the power relations of a society that is itself unable to extricate itself from the racism and patriarchy that creates it. As we erase the social constructedness of social categories and treat groups as more homogeneous than they are, category itself

becomes a mechanism for contributing to power structures that hurt people. Ultimately, representation through essentialization erases the heterogeneous nature of members of larger social categorizations (in this case, Black women).

Like social categorization, many of our underlying assumptions about language are best understood as being more indicative of ideology than of objective linguistic structure, process, or practice. Research across varying linguistic disciplines has integrated investigations of raciolinguistic ideologies and their impact on the human experience. A salient example appears in linguist and disability scholar María Cioè-Peña's exploration of the orthoepic exam, a linguistic-evaluation test used in the 1930s in the Dominican Republic to determine whether speakers were of Haitian or Dominican descent, and ultimately whether they deserved to live or die based on the pronunciation of the shibboleth *perejil* (*parsley* in Spanish), leading to the Parsley Massacre where thousands of Black-presenting Dominicans and Haitians were slaughtered.[27] A testament to the dangers of raciolinguistic ideologies, the study shows how the pathologization of accent is part and parcel of projects of structuring genocidal power.

Taking a raciolinguistic perspective requires us to grapple with historical formations of power that rested on the ability to make ideological and structural connections between language and ethnicity, gender, class, level of education, and sexuality. Much of this can be captured by a process called linguistic enregisterment, the means by which listeners come to form ideologically mediated connections between certain forms of speech, and the speaker types to which the listener considers those speakers to belong: for example, thinking of *y'all* as "Southern" or *he be runnin'* as "African American."[28] Grounded in their assertion of raciolinguistic ideologies as the naturalized conflation of certain racialized bodies with stigmatized linguistic practices, Rosa and Flores propose the existence of a process of "raciolinguistic enregisterment" by which language and racial categories are jointly constructed and drawn into processes of oppositional difference.[29] In doing so, they offer a means for exploring ties between language and the racialized bodies that produce it. Assuming raciolinguistic enregisterment as the starting point presses researchers to move beyond the description of language practices as production of distinct linguistic features by distinct ethnoracial groups. Instead, researchers are pushed to an exploration of how speakers have been positioned in relation to named racial categories and linguistic varieties. In turn, they are able to deconstruct the idea of language varieties and racial categories as discrete "things" that can be demarcated by particular characteristics, whether they be linguistic forms or biological features.

These frameworks have gifted a new generation of scholars (of color) with the ability to locate and expand notions of the body, category, social semiotics, and indeed the very nature of how our societies are structured. So, while the lineage of sociocultural linguistics, by virtue of its focus on minoritized languages

and speakers, has been instrumental in challenging hegemonic understanding modes of the nature of language exploration, as we demand more equitable and just societal formations, we sociolinguistic researchers too must engage in more nuanced examinations of society. Scholarship that takes from and deeply impacts the perceptions of minoritized and racialized populations must be informed by those populations. In the most recent turn in sociocultural linguistics, we can see a shift toward scholarship informed by both minoritized epistemologies – looking to Black studies and activism to inform theory and methodological innovations – and minoritized bodies. Black feminist scholars have theorized oppositional categories of difference over the years, providing a foundation for the integration of intersectionality into language scholarship as a way to resist the deracialization of theories that often results in the reification of marginalizing power structures. Linguistics needs Black feminism, Black feminism needs linguistics, and any scholar seeking to subvert the inequitable power structures that stem from an overreliance on categorization needs them both.

The condition of being Black, woman, queer, and of meager social status can reveal the inability of category to fully or accurately capture social experience because the nature of these categories is in of itself multiplicative rather than additive: it is not that a Black queer woman has the same experience as other queer women but for being Black, or the same experience as other Black women but for being queer. The intersecting identity is a unique identity that defies the other categories. A focus on these intersectional conditions offers the possibility for subverting colonial logics. And Black feminist studies can orient us toward an understanding of the negative impacts of binary thinking. Black feminist theorists from Saidiya Hartman to Patricia Hill Collins to Sylvia Wynter to Katherine McKittrick have invested significant amounts of their intellectual labor explicating and then disrupting boundaries of oppositional difference.[30]

Collins alerts us to the ways "interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy" underpin oppression through a constant subordination of that positioned as "other."[31] Drawing on the work of other Black feminist scholars, Collins situates this theorization in an understanding of the African enslaved woman as the quintessential representation of oppositional "other" in U.S. society. Collins notes the ways that ideologies surrounding femininity are upheld through a comparison of the natural and correct, exemplified by white women, to that of the unnatural and masculine, exemplified by Black women. In doing so, we come to understand the Black woman only in relation to that of the white woman, thus creating a binary. Nonetheless, the logic of this binary is contested, in both the work of Collins and that of other Black feminist theorists. In particular, Wynter, in her conception of bios-mythoi, disrupts the bifurcation of humans as biological on the one hand and cultural on the other.

She suggests instead that because humans are simultaneously biological *and* cultural, then all natural processes are, in fact, conditioned by social coding that impacts the working of mind, body, and soul.[32] Fundamentally, Wynter disrupts the notions of binaries, ones that would require us to understand the physical body in absence of culture and/or the cultural modes of someone in absence of their physical body. In doing so, she disrupts category itself.

Steeped in a rigorous engagement with the scholarship of Wynter, McKittrick draws on her background as a geographer to provide a transformational heuristic for understanding boundaries of difference, which move beyond the binary. McKittrick suggests that understanding Black being requires an acknowledgment that the spaces where Black diasporic beings perform their identities are and have been continually shaped by white European practices of domination over Black bodies and psyches, as exemplified in the case of Black Canadian womanhood.[33] For Black women then, the condition of Blackness requires an evolving reimagining of self and space beyond the binary of Canadian versus "other" to make oneself legible within structures meant to erase Black humanness. Finally, Hartman challenges the notion of Black womanhood as "outside the gendered universe" by arguing that the juxtaposition of the enslaved woman's condition to that of white femininity "becomes a descriptive for the social and sexual arrangements of the dominant order rather than an analytic category."[34] In each of these accounts, it is through Black womanhood that we can come to know the shape of the world around us.

In language research, Black women have been especially dedicated to exploring the intersections of race, gender, class, and whatever other categories of opposition are used to create boundaries of difference. Take, for example, June Jordan's "Report from the Bahamas," in which she describes a "consciousness of race, class, and gender as [she] notice[s] the fixed relations between these other Black women and [herself]."[35] Jordan describes the connection between herself and a white Jewish student who find common ground in a shared love and dedication to the "forceful" survival of their own marginalized language varieties, Yiddish and Black English.[36] Jordan notes both the moment she and her white student become symbolically aligned in regard to their relationships with these languages and when they were symbolically torn apart due to a class positionality, which placed the Jewish student and Jordan's own Black son in direct opposition on the issue of federal aid programs for minority students. Thus, a linguistic minority status alone could not account for experience, which ultimately drew Jordan back to a consciousness of race and class. Jordan's "report" is just one of several examples revealing an impossibility of language exploration without an account of intersecting social modes of being.

Though not always explicitly stated as rooted in Black feminist thought, much of the work of Black women linguists has similarly broken down categorizations

that have been undertheorized by dominant disciplinary paradigms that have privileged the speech of men. Sociolinguist Tracey L. Weldon has made important arguments about how the speech of the African American middle class has been undertheorized and, as a result, left a gap in our understandings of Black language.[37] Sociolinguists Shelome Gooden and Jennifer Bloomquist's work on the lower Susquehanna Valley and nearby Pittsburgh complicates our understandings of Black language as an urban phenomenon, showing how speakers construct Black identity in an area that is considered rural and white.[38] In her work on African American women's literacy and language, sociolinguist Sonja Lanehart has demonstrated that African American womanhood is constructed differently and results in more complex relationships to language than does African American manhood.[39] In our own work, we have shown how class pressures caused by gentrification complicate the traditional narrative of the urban Black speaker and the complications of one-to-one mapping of language and race for diasporic Black subjectivities.[40] And Anne H. Charity Hudley's work applies understandings of African American language to the inherently feminist liberatory work of making room for Black voices in educational settings where they have historically been marginalized.[41]

An exemplary scholar taking up the work of Black feminist raciolinguistics is semiotician Krystal A. Smalls. Through close investigations of how language creates meaning, Smalls reveals a model for how interdisciplinary reading across fields such as Black feminist studies, Black anthropology, Black geographies, and Black linguistics can result in expansive and inclusive worldmaking. Smalls's work is useful in showing how raciolinguistics expands and advances Black feminist thought that has been instrumental in critiquing colonial power structures. In particular, Smalls positions semiotics as a methodological heuristic for meaning-making about race, gender, and ultimately the structure of society. Her theorization of raciosemiotics at its core aims to understand the ways that signs (that is, the combination of referent, psychological indexes of that referent, and symbols that represent that referent) and the body coconstruct with race, ultimately revealing processes of semiosis, racialization, and racism.[42] In her own estimation, the semiotics of race explored by Black scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, John Baugh, and Arthur K. Spears has allowed the field of semiotics to advance beyond the traditional call for a grounding in historical contexts to interrogate and interpret the processes for meaning-making by different people.

Much like earlier scholarship of language and gender, semiotics has long considered structures of power. Nonetheless, by juxtaposing theorization of the body by Black feminist scholar Hortense Spiller against that of Black sociologist Frantz Fanon, Smalls expertly demonstrates the ways a racial frame without an intersectional lens results in the further erasure of Black women. Scholars in allied

fields such as H. Samy Alim, Angela Reyes, and Paul Kroskrity describe Smalls's contribution to linguistic theorizations, noting that she "contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the role of racial subjectivity in semiotic mediation by introducing a historico-racial schema to semiotic theory, effectively denaturalizing the white body/subject as the default 'human' in semiotic models."[43] In other words, Smalls's use of Black feminist praxis and sociohistoric contexts calls explicit attention to the ways binary categories themselves come to be. Alim, Reyes, and Kroskrity's description points to Smalls's dedication to incorporating Black feminist musings on the concept of "human" as explored by scholars such as Wynter and Hartman, whose work we have described above, as well as scholars such as Hortense Spillers and Judith Butler, who she engages throughout her work.[44] Smalls relies on Black feminist theory to move beyond white hegemonically positioned theorizations, but also beyond Black theorizations that may fail to consider Black womanhood. So, raciosemiotics is not the adaption of critical theorizations by top semiotics scholars, but rather the layering of theories through the introduction of Black studies and then Black feminist studies, which again allows for the dismantling of oppositional binaries that are often at the center of power formations.

In the last component of a raciolinguistic perspective, as explained by Rosa and Flores, the struggle for social change must move away from investigations of the behaviors of racialized subjects to an investigation of the dominant ideologies that permeate institutions in which these subjects perform themselves.[45] The contestation of racial and linguistic power formations rests in the ability to incorporate analyses of broader political and economic processes with those of racial and linguistic mappings onto specific populations. It is here where a Black feminist praxis is useful and necessary; and it is in this space where scholars have the potential to achieve the social justice goals of their research. While scholarship on African American language offers insight into Black womanhood at the intersection of language and social category, linguists have recently begun to engage critically with Black feminist theory and intersectionality explicitly.[46] Early- and mid-career Black scholars such as Tasha Austin, Uju Anya, and the authors of this essay have exemplified how Black feminist praxis and raciolinguistics can revolutionize the ways we engage social science research.[47] Ultimately, it is through the engagement of these intersections of language, race, and the body that understandings of social structures become clear.

While this review of Black feminist raciolinguistics is not exhaustive, it provides insight into how the understanding of language can and should be implicated in analyses of the social realities of our interactive contexts. Drawing on the work of scholars who take up what we have defined as Black feminist raciolinguistics, we argue that one must engage interdisciplin-

arity in ways that allow us to account for sociohistorical contexts, systemic power structures, and processes of marginalization. Language and race, inextricably linked and comediated, are both central to understanding the ways that power structures have been defined globally. Attempts to ignore race undoubtedly reify race, and attempts to ignore language fail to recognize the mutability and contextual nature of power structures and the ways they are often invisibly mediated. We must continue to contest the oppositional categorizations that exist as a result of colonial formations of power.

Truly liberatory scholarship can and must recognize the ways that language is implicated in the intersecting and overlapping consequences of social categorization. Investigations of language, race, gender, sexuality, and social status can and must be complicated beyond human as object, product, or category. Critical studies help us to interrupt the thingification of human performance of self. We thus urge scholars to integrate Black feminist raciolinguistics into their critical analyses of social constructs. In this way, we will be able to complicate and dismantle essentialized notions of the human.

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ENDNOTES

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[3] Ibid.

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[6] In sociolinguistics, *language variety* or simply *variety* refers to differences in speech patterns, for example: dialect, register, and general style. Standardized English is one of many varieties of English. For more on varieties in sociolinguistics, see Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Cecil L. Nelson, eds., *The Handbook of World Englishes* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

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