Enthymemematical, Epistemic, and Emotional Silence(s) in the Rhetoric of Whiteness

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Whiteness is filled with silences—unspoken/unheard discourses, unacknowledged assumptions, and unrecognized emotions that become lodged cell-deep in our beings as passivity and paralyses. 1 I am consumed by silences now as I “compose” my response. Whenever I encounter an article on whiteness, I am immersed in a paradox of reactions. On one hand, I’m glad that scholars are still trying to bring the subject into view, whether espousing its utility or critiquing the results of this body of research so far. At the same time, I am frustrated. Here we are again, decades into a proliferation of whiteness studies, still focusing on the same issues. What can I say that might make a difference? As a racial category, whiteness functions simultaneously as nothing (invisible) and everything (normal), coloring the way we think about knowledge, the pedagogies we create, our assumptions about our agency as scholars, writers, and teachers, and the ways we analyze and present our scholarship. Whiteness has been said to operate as cultural norm (Keating), trope (Ratcliffe, Rhetorical), strategic rhetoric (Nakayama and Krizek), “white” frame of reference (Anzaldúa; Lunsford), and organizing paradox (Dyer) that conceals power and resists exposure. While white scholars’ contributions to whiteness theory have flourished in the last decade, indebted to more than a century of work by writers and scholars of color, white supremacy silently maintains its hegemonic stronghold, as Matthew Jackson illustrates in “The Enthymematic Hegemony of Whiteness: The Enthymeme as Antiracist Rhetorical Strategy.”

Jackson’s work joins a growing body of scholarship in rhetoric and composition studies that focuses on discursive and rhetorical approaches to naming and exposing white privileges. By locating how the unnamed presence of whiteness (white privilege/white supremacy)2 shapes our discourses and rhetorical practices, we can “rethink the ways in which individuals and groups construct identity, administer power, and make sense of their everyday lives” (Nakayama and Krizek 291). While this line of inquiry provides powerful critical tools, recognizing and naming
is only the beginning of understanding how the hegemony of whiteness perpetuates racist practices. In fact, the failings of multiculturalism and liberal humanism, the continued reign of white supremacy, and the inequities which persist in our so-called PC society point to the limits of our theorizing about whiteness. While arguably whiteness scholarship has helped to raise awareness about racism and white privilege in a variety of spaces, it falls short when we consider how it often fails to spur whites into long-term actions that are transformative. After all, "the fight against white supremacy," Cornel West argues, "has never been a priority for the vast majority of white people in this country" (176).

In addition to demonstrating how "racist enthymemes can function to support arguments for white supremacy inconspicuously and indirectly" (606), Jackson, in his commitment to civic responsibility and antiracist actions, asks an important question: "[Can an] overwhelmingly white body of rhetoric and composition . . . examine its own culture and its investment in whiteness[?]" (626–27). And it is this question, supported by my understanding of enthymematic silences and assumptions posited by Jackson, that I want to take up in my response. As a white woman who embodies the internal contradictions and hegemonic forces of living in a racist society and working in academe, I want to look at some of the components of Jackson's rhetorical strategy in order to explore how whiteness functions silently in our academic writing, masking how powerfully epistemology, emotions, and ethics are intertwined.

Rhetorically speaking, according to Jackson, white supremacy has gone "underground" (604). Jackson points out that syllogistic arguments such as, "All fully human men are created equal/all white men are fully human/all white men are created equal" (and its reverse: that nonwhites are not fully equal, are not fully human/and are not created equal) are "not openly acceptable today" (604-05). As a result, racism/white supremacy is often circulated through the more elusive silence of the enthymeme. Jackson uses a news story about police officers being "exonerated of any wrongdoing in the death of a [nonwhite] suspect" to lay out the following enthymeme: "White men are credible witnesses" (major premise that is missing); "the officer is a white policeman" (minor premise); "the officer is a credible witness" (conclusion). And the reverse is also "true" (605). Jackson cites another example in which Joe Cafferty on CNN asks
viewers, "Should Phoenix, Arizona, police be able to enforce federal immigration laws?" Cafferty poses this question as part of his ongoing rhetoric that because Washington leaders do nothing and our national security is jeopardized, it is up to local governments to deal with "illegal aliens" (606). Jackson explains that Cafferty has

embedded a racist enthymeme wherein people of color are associated with a breach in national security . . . . Cafferty adds to the existing racialized undertones of his message and its association with terror by asserting, with emphasis, that "More than a thousand illegal aliens are caught every day crossing from Mexico into southern Arizona—a thousand a day!" (606)

Jackson worries that because these "fragments of discourse" drift as "unfinished and underexamined arguments" in our everyday discourses, these types of "phrases are increasingly accepted as contemporary versions of what Aristotle meant by 'urbane and well-liked' sayings that are easily understood and allow for 'a kind of learning' or furthering of knowledge through informal argument" (606).

At the heart of Jackson's argument about the racist enthymeme is an ethical imperative for whites to "reduce our complicity in white supremacy and work against racism when and where we can" (602). Rather than cop to a "I'm not racist" defense or to suppose racial neutrality because we are not behaving in an overtly racist manner, as "part of the people," we must "work to limn out some of the ways that whites are involved in matters of race that go beyond willful, conscious, and intentional acts" (602). By exposing how the racist enthymeme functions, Jackson provides another critical tool for exposing one's "experiential ignorances," Victor Villanueva's term for the "ways in which racism creeps into individual ideologies, into the general hegemony" that are unintentional or silent yet beget more racist practices (qtd. in T. West 216).

By redefining the enthymeme beyond the modern notions of "truncated syllogism," authorial intent, and Bitzer's "joint effort" of speaker and audience, Jackson's postmodern enthymeme is "relaxed (not weak), flexible, and rhetorically agile and useful in counter-hegemonic and antiracist work" (608). The postmodern enthymeme
would allow for more than one premise to be supplied by individu­als as part of a fiction of the audience in order to make multiple meanings. . . . [These] meanings can be tentative and dynamic[, ] . . . allow[ing] for types and levels of understanding, for abeyance, and for variation in implicit and explicit manifestations of agree­ment and disagreement. . . . [The] speaker, text, and audience are fragmented, shifting, dynamic, multiple, and not always real (in a positivistic tangible way). That said, we must keep in mind the fact that discourse can carry unmistakable and injurious weight. (616)

From this perspective, speaker and audience are culpable for supporting arguments for white supremacy. Therefore, once a person is able to locate the widespread dominance of enthymemes that perpetuate white supremacy in everyday life, it behooves any “good white person,” (Audrey Thompson’s term) to speak out. Otherwise s/he “give[s] tacit consent and de facto support to enthymematic arguments for white supremacy” (Jackson 608).

After reading Jackson’s article, I started paying attention, collecting news bites such as, “Is America ready for a Black [also insert woman, Mormon] president?” Just listen to the silent enthymeme (white Protestant males are leaders) that constructs the various versions of this headline. In fact, I was overwhelmed by the number of racist, sexist, classist, agist, ableist, and heterosexist examples I encountered when I watched/read the news, read my daily dose of perezhillton.com, and went to dinner with friends. If you want to see how the enthymeme is mined for comedy, watch The Daily Show or The Colbert Report. Stewart and Colbert, for example, can say the opposite of what they mean because they invite the silent judgment of the audience in advance, using both negative and positive relations to speaker and message. I also thought about how I might introduce this critical rhetorical tool into my class­room, especially as a means to “rhetorically listen” (Krista Ratcliffe’s term) to various discourses that reify social injustices. And then poised for action with this new knowledge, another inevitable silence confronted me. While Jackson frames the “difficult choice” for action as “to speak or to remain silent” in order to “oppose the enthymematic hegemony of whiteness with its conceptual frameworks designed in part to thwart and suppress such opposition,” (630) “speaking out” was filled with different
kinds of silences: how do I speak, in what voice, using what forms, and to whom? After speaking, what next?

These are hardly new questions, especially for scholars who speak on behalf of those on the margins of dominant power structures (see hooks; Villanueva; Royster). In her critique of academic discourse and inspired by Langston Hughes, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles illuminates the issue: “Our language and our writing should be adequate enough to make our dreams, our visions, our stories, our thinking, and our actions not just revolutionary but transformative” (46). But how? And what can academics truly hope to accomplish in writing on whiteness in academic journals? Even when we link knowledge and action in our scholarship about whiteness, we remain within our own disciplinary norms, conventions, and standards against which our “white meaning-making practices” take shape (Thompson, “Review”). Elizabeth Ellsworth captures the limitations of whiteness theorizing by arguing that “antiracist scholarship is never only antiracist” (263). Because of its scholarly character, which is rooted in mainstream institutions and governed by professional publishing and style rules, whiteness is often reinscribed rather than interrupted. So rather than respond only to Jackson’s arguments about hegemonic enthymemes, I want to address how we respond to knowing that white supremacy is reconstituted through our scholarship—in other words, to look at our methods for addressing the hegemony of whiteness so that our scholarship might better embody, as Jacqueline Jones Royster describes, how the “mind, heart, body, and soul operate collectively” in our personal and professional lives (Traces 279).

Although Jackson spends a great deal of time critiquing the limits of reason and focuses on examples from our “everyday lives,” he builds his antiracist strategy on the foundation of academic discourse, the importance of ethos/logos in classical rhetorical argumentation, and the faith that if one understands something, s/he will take action by “speaking out.” While Jackson’s “postmodern enthymeme” provides a powerful ideological lens through which to locate the hegemonic discourses of white supremacy, I fear his call to action does not inspire the deep-seated changes in thinking, feeling, and behaving that lead to transformation. As Laura Micciche writes in “Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action,” “ethical and rhetorical action is motivated by . . . a judgment that not only
emerges from reasoned deliberation but also from experience and belief and feeling about what is right, what is just" (168-69). By ignoring the "intimate connection between ethics and emotion," (180), whiteness scholarship silences an understanding that "what counts as ethical hinges on understanding how to act and feel in ways appropriate to a situation" (164; emphasis added). In her analysis of African-American women writers, Royster argues that rhetors such as Ida B. Wells, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde, to name just a few, appeal to a sense of "right action," which does not get stalled in disembodied reason:

They also appeal to experience, emotion, suffering, and imagination. They center their arguments, not just rationally and ethically, but in the body—in the head, the heart, the stomach, the backbone—in the interests, apparently, of inducing not just an intellectual response but a holistic one, that is, a whole-body involvement. The goal seems often to be quite literally to "move" the audience. (Traces 68)

This kind of holistic rhetorical approach puts the reader/audience "on alert," "compelled to participate in positive action" against an injustice (Traces 69). Within this "consubstantial space," the enthymeme becomes, to paraphrase Audre Lorde: I am doing my work; are you doing yours? (Royster, Traces 66). Therefore, Jackson's call to "speak out" might be more powerful if he also described or enacted the ways that an awareness of racist enthymemes can be sustained in order to hold the reader accountable for taking action in ways that are transformative. From this perspective, how might the notion of the postmodern enthymeme help rhetoric and composition scholars think more metacognitively about both the ways we learn to internalize ideologies from "fragments of discourse," and how our actions are short-circuited by the hegemony of whiteness?

Unlike many academic articles, Jackson's articulates his professional "assumptions" at the end of the article in his notes, laying out his methods and reasoning for writing about white supremacy. In part, he is enacting his notion of a postmodern enthymeme by foregrounding what he sees as "certain shared values and knowledge about political, ethical, and philosophical issues that are based, to some degree, on Western
social, ontological, and epistemological assumptions” (633 n. 11), emphasizing the relationship(s) between writer/reader/subject matter. For example, he overtly states that he has “framed this paper after the pattern of classical rhetorical argumentation structure that has been reified by academic professional institutions and organizations, such as JAC, and formatted the text in the appropriate documentation style” (633–34 n. 11). Ultimately, then, he hopes that “publication [of his article] serves further to legitimize [his] arguments” (634 n. 11). In other words, he tells us why he has chosen to write in a style that Audrey Thompson describes as a “gentlemanly orthodoxy organized around whiteness as the taken-for-granted measure of value” (“Gentlemanly” 27). At the same time, he acknowledges that his recommendations are “operating on the assumption that [he] can be and [is] aware of [his] own investments in [the very foundations he is critiquing] (such as whiteness)” (633 n. 11).

I was intrigued by his note 11. Despite Jackson’s attempts to be self-reflexive, I can’t help but think of bell hooks’ reminder in “Making Movie Magic” that it is important to interrogate texts (films, scholarship, literature) that claim to be progressive and antiracist to see if they really promote counter-hegemonic methods that challenge the conventional structures of domination that uphold and maintain “white supremacist capitalistic patriarchy” (hooks’ term). Was Jackson “admitting” (as if guilty or complicit) that he is communicating his ideas within the “raced space of rhetoric and composition education” for which he “norm[s] and [is] normed in that space” (629)? If he knows that “the hegemonic power of whiteness is wrapped up in the power to set the terms of the discourse, to determine the taken for granted rules of society . . .” (626), then why did he employ such a privileged discourse? How does he attempt to offset this privileged discourse by inviting in other ways of knowing? Did he offer this explanation as a way for his readers to take issue with these assumptions, a self-reflexive move that provokes further consideration? Or, was he simply employing the normative white epistemologies that have served his understanding of these issues? As Thompson points out, feminists and scholars of color have often used academic conventions to foreground radical ideas. And some might argue that JAC’s submission guidelines and MLA style conventions create a “neutrality” that allow scholars to communicate across political and intellectual differences.
(“Gentlemanly” 34–35). Pragmatically, such conventions, for example, help junior faculty such as Jackson and PhD students such as myself acquire professional capital so that we might work on antiracist issues within the academy. Yet even if scholars try to make conscious their intentions and acknowledge the white privilege that underpins these forms—Audre Lorde’s poignant question of whether or not we might “use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house”—there are more silent assumptions that we have not yet recognized. When we write professionally, what are the enthymematic silences that support our performance of whiteness in certain ways? How do we know when these academic forms “are using us and when we are using them” (Thompson, “Gentlemanly” 57)?

Critiques of “academic discourse” figure prominently in rhetoric and composition studies. On one hand, despite these various critiques, Joe Harris, for example, argues that the “briskness, clarity, and self-effacement of classic academic prose can be seen not simply as a surrender to the logic of patriarchy but also as a kind of deference, as a desire not to impose too much on one’s readers” (51). On the other hand, many feminists and scholars of color describe the “colonizing” effects of a textual economy that does not honor different ways of knowing, being, and representing in written documents (Anzaldúa; Gray-Rosendale and Gruber; hooks; Royster; Sandoval). Furthermore, while scholars such as Nedra Reynolds urge us to “disrupt” academic writing and “rethink radically the forms of writing we find acceptable” (71), we still find our professional texts filled with essays that maintain the conventions of academic prose. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford address the significance of feminists’ reliance on conventional academic prose when they note that the essays in Feminism and Composition Studies seem to “accept and embody, rather than to transgress, the conventions of traditional academic prose” (318). They question whether this move “mark[s] a place of paradox and difficulty or . . . a judicious response to [one’s] specific rhetorical situation” (318). While this is a difficult question to answer, especially since, as Jane E. Hindman argues, our profession demands the “abstract, rationalistic, disembodied rhetoric” (“Writing” 93) that Jackson articulates in his note, it points to the ways we consent to certain assumptions despite our critiques. It also highlights how the structure of
academic discourse maintains itself by keeping out the kinds of holistic epistemologies that might upset its discursive power. In other words, the "master’s house" remains firmly intact. And when the "master’s house" stands, so does white supremacy.  

Because the subject matter and target audience create a matrix of resistance, ethos is very important when writing about whiteness. Instead of looking at ethos in terms of the sources Jackson cites (see Jackson 633–34 n.11; Thompson, “Gentlemanly”), I want to focus on how he enacts a common introduction to whiteness scholarship. Before Jackson can move into his very insightful discussion of the postmodern enthymeme and its usefulness for recognizing arguments for “white supremacy,” he employs “The Whiteness Theory Introduction”: rouse the reader (read white) to accept that “we” are not neutral or color-blind about race; soothe feelings about guilt; point out that if race is constructed, then white is also a race; argue that being racist doesn’t mean wearing a white sheet or saying the n-word; provide evidence about how white privilege is unearned and maintained in political, economic, and cultural systems at the expense of nonwhites; and implore whites of their moral/ethical responsibility to work against racist practices and white privilege and their complicity in perpetuating racism if they don’t. After at least a decade of whiteness studies, it is disheartening to note that in 2007, white scholars’ rhetorical moves into the subject are eerily the same.

Jackson opens his article with his response to a good friend who says whiteness is “‘all about making white people feel guilty about being white’” (601). After reading what has become an ethical trope in whiteness scholarship, I contemplated this strategy. Is Jackson trying to establish himself as an ethical white person? How many introductions did he write before he settled on this one? What is he not saying? How did his academic frame silence what else he might have said? For example, what are the emotions that fuel his friend’s focus on guilt and Jackson’s need to argue against this view? What investment does Jackson have in being the one who performs “white responsibility for our privileged racial positionalities” (602)? As Linda Martin Alcoff puts it:

Whites cannot disavow whiteness. One’s appearance of being white will still operate to confer privilege in numerous and signifi-
cant ways, and to avow treason does not render whites ineligible for these privileges, even if they work hard to avoid them. (17)

Does this move represent Jackson's attempt to use the secret handshake so that the academic club members would at least let him in the door even while he critiques his membership? Will such a move create the kind of identification (enthymematic pact) with the reader that makes it impossible not to act?

My fear is that such a move can be easily dismissed because many white readers will position themselves with Jackson intellectually rather than with the naïve, uninformed version of whiteness studies embodied in the friend. However, after reading Jackson's recasting of the enthymeme, I wonder how the silences embedded in "The Introduction" might be relocated simply by assuming that all of the above premises comprise the unspoken major premise. Because hegemonic discourse is not so neatly tucked away, I imagine that "The Introduction" might be addressed in an opening note tucked away at the end of the paper—just in case "we" need to cover our bases. It might read something like this: "Historically, part of the rhetorical strategy in writing about whiteness/white privilege was to include contested definitions of whiteness/white privilege/white supremacy, as well as arguments that racism exists and that white supremacy/white privilege flourishes despite efforts to recognize white hegemonic power."

Maybe after several articles appear with the note, the premises in "The Introduction" can be disposed of entirely. Then we might begin to construct a different kind of ethos—one that assumes, per bell hooks, that we are all racist because we live in a racist society, and that it is everyone's responsibility to find ways to thwart oppressive systems of domination (internally and externally). The rhetor, then, employing more holistic methods to understand the dynamics of white supremacy, can share his/her vision of how to better understand these hegemonic forces, take action, and tell stories about the struggle against one's own white privilege(s) and moments of transformation. I imagine that we might invent new kinds of ethos for white scholars writing about whiteness by translating the kinds of holistic ethical strategies we see in the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Victor Villanueva, Malea Powell, Joyce Irene Middleton, bell hooks, Patricia Williams, and Min-Zhan Lu (to name just a very few).
While it is important to consider how whiteness scholarship might disrupt this introductory trope that continues to uphold certain assumptions even as they are being deconstructed, there is something more powerful missing when ethos is performed in this disembodied manner. If the speaker/writer's character is important to persuading his/her audience/reader to action, isn't it also important to understand how the rhetor grew into this consciousness? What were the "white moments," the emotional history that led to an awareness of individual and institutional racism, where learning occurred from lived experience that led Jackson to his critical inquiry about white supremacy? I am not calling for a confession of a white scholar's racist moments or his/her guilt about enjoying various white privileges. Rather, I am arguing that if there is any hope of whiteness scholarship having a real effect in our "everyday lives," our ethos must also account for the ways emotions shape reason.

Raymond Williams calls these kinds of emotional experiences "structures of feeling," "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity" (132). Feminist pedagogies, too, often recognize that emotional experiences are intimately connected to thought and that the transformation of consciousness requires critical analysis of the spaces between ideology, power, and agency. However, other than employing what I call a "sanitized I" to introduce his topic, a seemingly "personal" narrative that remains disembodied, Jackson masks the depth of emotions at play both in the representative discussion and the use of this personal anecdote as ethos building. This disembodied approach functions much like a film's voice-over narration in which the human voice off-screen has no direct relationship to what is being articulated on-screen. In this case, the reader is not privy to the breadth of white supremacy that Jackson, engulfed in a swirl of racist enthymemes, experiences in his everyday life. Instead, the "personal" narrative functions pragmatically as exposition or to provide a sense of authenticity to the scholarship. As a result, it circumscribes the scholar's "passionate attachments" toward his subject and his "commitment to social responsibility," part of Royster's method to forge "critical ways of doing that are also
capable of being touchstones for critical ways of being” that spur social action (Traces 279).

Understanding, articulating, and embodying our critical ways of being and doing is especially important in whiteness scholarship, as Minnie Bruce Pratt points out in her essay “Identity: Skin Blood Heart.” If one is born with certain privileges and enjoys the material and ideological comforts of those benefits, why and when does a person willingly embrace the need to change, to question his/her safe beliefs, or alter his/her ways of thinking about self and others? Jackson’s understanding of the silence embedded in the enthymeme might also help us recognize the emotional assumptions that undergird white scholars writing on whiteness, or what Megan Boler calls the “absent-presence” of emotions in “shaping our perceptions, our selection of what we pay attention to, and our values that in turn determine what seems important to explore” (xv). What are the “outlaw emotions,” to use Alison Jaggar’s term, that are deemed legitimate or illegitimate within the dominant discourse? What ways of constructing ethos have been “disciplined” and “silenced” through certain rules of being to which we consent? What kinds of knowing and being have been usurped by an adherence to what we construct as intellectual knowledge?

One of the enthymematic silences that underscores Jackson’s use of traditional academic writing is his reliance on the cognitive dimensions of understanding and action. As Villanueva exclaims in his work on memory, “Academic discourse is cognitively powerful! But the cognitive alone is insufficient. It can be strong for logos. It can be strong for ethos. But it is very weak in pathos” (“Memoria” 12). Jackson articulates the assumptions that support his rationale this way:

We live in a society and we ought to try and get along; there are problems with our society; we use language to name and explain these problems (race, class, and gender); people suffer because of these problems; something can and should be done about problems; solving problems takes a lot of work; work can be intellectual and physical; work can be described in writing; writing is a good way to share, promote, and do work; editors decide what is “good” and should be published; published ideas are valid; people should read what is published; and people should consider taking action based on what they read. (633 n. 11)
To be more precise, one might insert "white" before many of the nouns. As academics, we still harbor a fantasy that if we can construct the right argument, using the most compelling facts and theories, we can evoke change. However, if whiteness theory has taught us nothing else, it highlights that "whiteness, like racism, is always more than one thing, and it's never the same thing twice" (Ellsworth 266). Therefore, we cannot necessarily understand it away, nor "fix it," or "fight it," by hoping that ethical action follows reason. As Lynn Worsham points out in "Going Postal":

Yet a tear is not simply an intellectual thing, and a change of heart does not follow, naturally or simply, from a change of mind . . . . Grief, hatred, bitterness, anger, rage, terror, and apathy as well as emotions of self-assessment such as pride, guilt, and shame—these form the core of the hidden curriculum for the vast majority of people living and learning in a highly stratified capitalist society. (216)

In America's Atonement, Aaron Gresson argues that multiculturalist pedagogies have substantially failed to change whites' attitudes because they have overlooked the "emotional underside of identity change" experienced by dominant group members (3). And when we continue to write in academic forms that privilege ethos/logos and circumscribe the affective components in learning, action, and transformation, how are we perpetuating the white supremacy we hope to combat?

Critiquing how whiteness theory is articulated in rhetoric and composition is important as we enter into what Mike Hill calls the "second wave" of work on whiteness when critiquing the "epistemological stickiness and ontological wiggling immanent in whiteness" will determine its political force (3). Our persistence in adhering to the conventions of academic discourse despite our postmodern sensibilities leads me to a question that burns in the background of whiteness theory. It is interesting that Jackson starts with the James Baldwin's quotation that "white supremacy [has] forced [white] Americans into rationalizations so fantastic that they approached the pathological" (601). This pathology, doing the same thing over and over and getting the same consequence (writing about whiteness in traditional academic discourse while the
resulting social changes remain inadequate), begs the question posed by James Golden and Richard Rieke when whiteness scholarship was burgeoning: “Is racism a problem of persuasion or psychiatry? . . . [Can any intellectual understanding overcome] the defense mechanisms of denial, silence, and innocence that circumscribe and sustain the social and psychological privileges of Whiteness” (qtd. in McPhail 45)?

After writing a fairly traditional academic response to an academic paper and critiquing the rhetorical strategies of academic writing as I employ them, I’m opting for the psychological explanation. That’s not to dismiss the discursive/rhetorical approaches to whiteness theory or all of the work devoted to antiracist practices within our scholarly frames. I am also not arguing that whiteness scholarship should return to a focus on personal identity, “helping” white folks unlearn their racist thinking and actions (unconscious and unintentional) so that racism can be eradicated (insert swelling music). Instead, I’m acknowledging that with all the critical tools I’ve gained from studying whiteness theories, I am still filled with unproductive silences. Jackson, too, recognizes the psychological components that may thwart understanding and action: “Enthymematic arguments for white supremacy might not be readily identified and, even when they are, whites might not feel a great desire to disagree demonstrably with arguments that endure their superior status” (616). If this kind of resistance, or “pathological” denial of reality, is such a strong deterrent in taking action, and ultimately threatens to relegate whiteness scholarship into an “intellectual exercise,” then how might white scholars better formulate methods for “healing” such an affliction?

Underneath all of the scholarship on whiteness, there is an enthymematic call to “give up” something. Gresson calls this sense of loss and vulnerability white pain, which is a kind of “racial pain . . . caused by voluntary or forced identification with a ‘spoiled racial identity’” (Goffman 1963; Gresson 1982). It can be viewed as a felt absence of power and the strong presence of guilt and shame” (14). Therefore, as Gresson argues, “if we understand that the racial critique of whiteness promotes white pain as well as racial understanding, then perhaps we can begin to see that the mediation of white pain is a major initiative . . .” (56). By linking how our emotions construct our understanding and (in)abilities to act in certain ways, whiteness scholarship might open up more productive ways
of creating the kinds of “rhetorically agile” postmodern enthymemes that are “useful in counter-hegemonic and antiracist work” that Jackson imagines. (608). Rhetorically, white writing on whiteness needs to be more “embodied,” which Jane E. Hindman conceives this way: “[Embodied writing] begins in intense affect . . . . Expression of undisciplined emotion is its invention; the body is its generator” (“Making” 103). When it is successful, it “transforms [one’s] immediate self-absorption with subjective affect into an awareness of not only how [one’s] responses have been socially conditioned and socially perceived, but also how [the] author can intervene in that conditioning” (103). In terms of whiteness scholarship, embodied writing is not just a stylistic or aesthetic shift in our academic prose style. Instead, it provides inventive and interpretative spaces where we might account for the kinds of silent enthymemes that corral our more holistic ways of knowing and stunt the kinds of deep-work that might be more transformative. Therefore, embodied writing that better articulates the connection between our thoughts and feelings and intuitions might also empower us to live more fully in relation with difference and advocate and serve more effectively in changing inequities.  

In response to Jackson’s appeal to uncover one’s “enthymematic relationship with the hegemonic premises and claims of white supremacy,” (607-08), I have argued that we also need new ways of “speaking out” about white supremacy that embody how emotions, epistemologies, and ethics are inextricably linked. While I don’t end my response with specific answers, Jackson’s unveiling of the racist enthymeme provides some heuristic questions that might guide us toward more embodied scholarship on whiteness: how might white writing about whiteness move beyond the rubric of reason to provide a space where “white pain,” the fears of letting go of white ways, the vulnerability of not employing white episteme in our professional work, and the powerlessness of not knowing what to do might be articulated? How might our academic writing accommodate more textures, the flesh and blood and spirit that shape our experiences, knowledge-making, and relationships to ourselves and others—a way of writing that does justice to the multidimensional realities of our lives and our theories? If we want our theories to prompt social action, to provide for the possibility of transfor-
mation both in and out of the academy, what do we lose when we allow our truths to be contained within scholarly frames that ignore how the “mind, heart, body, and soul operate collectively” (Royster, *Traces* 279)? Each time white scholars employ traditional academic discourse and the epistemologies steeped in whiteness, what is being left out? Who is being left out? What are the emotional consequences of this choice? What are other ways to write about the connection between our lived experiences and our theories? How does one come to know and act in way(s) that are transformative? Mikhail Bakhtin, in his discussion of the “classical” text, puts it this way: “Why are all the messy, disturbing, and uncertain ways of knowing, being, and becoming,” all that “protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off . . . eliminated, hidden, or moderated” in our academic prose (320)? If we continue to speak within the white sanctioned forms, then we can only think, feel, and act within its confines, perpetuating the white supremacy we hope to combat.  

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**Notes**

1. Cheryl Glenn’s *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* maps a range of silences, uncovering the power dynamics of speaking, not speaking, and being able to do so. While my focus is on the ways silence(s) undermine agency and maintain hegemonic power structures, Glenn also examines the ways that silence can be empowering when it is employed as a tactical strategy within various social contexts. See especially the “Commanding Silence” chapter in which she explores the cultural silences of American Indian groups.

2. A very common trope in early whiteness theory scholarship was to spend time defining the term “white” (“whiteness,” “white privilege,” or “white supremacy”). I chose to address the definition in a note for two reasons: 1) I agree with Ellsworth that whiteness theory has often been so preoccupied with defining whiteness that white scholars often reinscribe the notion that s/he is the “one who ‘knows’ whiteness” and gains power from this position or gets to have the “last word.” However, not to define a term also presumes a privileged position or the “unmarked, unraced, unspoken norm” (265). 2) Rather than argue with Jackson’s terminology, I have adopted his term *white supremacy* for my response and used it in the particular way Jackson defines it below. Although historically this term has wielded a variety of connotations (see Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe;
see also Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical*), Jackson, drawing on the work of Charles Mills and Maulana Karenga, chose this term to emphasize how white supremacy is more than white privilege: "White supremacy" can be defined as "political, economic, and cultural systems in which 'whites are overwhelmingly in control of power and material resources, where notions of white superiority are widespread, and where relations of white dominance and nonwhite subordination are daily reenacted across a wide variety of institutions and social settings'” (604).

Like Jackson, though, I also use "whiteness" and "white privilege" throughout my response. For a more detailed overview of the terms, see, for example, Keating; Giroux; Kincheloe.

3. While "transformation" is a problematic term that requires interrogation as we've seen especially in critical pedagogies, I'm adopting Kristie Fleckenstein's definition: "Change radical enough to rewrite the rules supporting a particular arrangement of culture" (761). This definition seems appropriate given the academic discourse tenets I focus on throughout my response. However, it's also important to include individual changes that accompany social changes. I'm thinking of Anderson and MacCurdy's notion of healing in *Writing and Healing*. [Healing] is a "change from singular self, frozen in time by a moment of unspeakable experience, to a more fluid, more narratively able, more socially integrated self" (7). I also like bell hooks' notion that a transformation of consciousness is the shift from, for example, "I am a feminist" to "I advocate feminism" (*Feminist Theory* 31). According to hooks, this shift represents a political commitment, an act of will rather than preconceived "notions of identity, role, or behavior" (29).

4. While I might list several more identity characteristics than "white woman" in order to locate myself within the social and cultural forces that shape me, I'm focusing on the two that seem most relevant for this response.

5. A "stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" that "challenges the divided logos of Western civilization (*Rhetorical* 25, 26); "its purpose is to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally" (25). As a "trope of interpretive invention," rhetorical listening focuses on "listening with intent" instead of "for intent of an author" and "locates a text as part of larger cultural logics" (46). In other words, rhetorical listening helps me to better account for what is/isn't being said and to pay closer attention to what I might not be hearing or listening for (in the text and myself) as I read and write about white privilege.

6. Thanks to Bill Endres for helping me to better articulate this key issue.

7. Academic discourse, of course, is not a monolithic thing; however, there are certain persistent features that are linked to the term. For my purposes in this response, I'm using Thaiss and Zawacki's definition from their book *Engaged Writers & Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*:
1) Clear evidence in writing that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study; 2) The dominance of reason over emotion or sensual perception; and 3) An imagined reader who is coolly rationale, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response. (6-7)


9. I slip into “we” occasionally in my response, assuming a more specific audience of white scholars such as myself who work on whiteness scholarship.

10. This note represents a “do as I say, not as I do” moment. Given the space limitations and nature of my response, I did not enact “embodied writing” throughout the article. However, I want to point to what I consider a few excellent examples of embodied academic writing: Jane E. Hindman, “Making Writing Matter”; Will Banks, “Written through the Body”; Richard E. Miller, “The Nervous System”; Carolyn Ellis, The Ethnographic I; Sarah Amira De La Garza, Maria Speaks; Nancy Mairs, Waist-High in the World; Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” and Tilly Warnock, “Bringing Over Yonder Over Here.”

11. I would like to thank Bill Endres, Daylanne Markwardt, and Roxanne Mountford for their thoughtful readings and encouragement during the drafting and revising of this article. I’d also like to thank Tracey Menten for her patience, listening to me ramble incessantly about my ideas even when she wanted to watch the Kathy Griffin: Life on the D-List marathon.

Works Cited


In Search of the Unstated:
The Enthymeme and/or Whiteness

Krista Ratcliffe

I am pleased to be responding to Matthew Jackson’s article. Not only am I fascinated with the enthymeme as rhetorical tactic and with whiteness