The Complicity of Language in Racism and Sexism
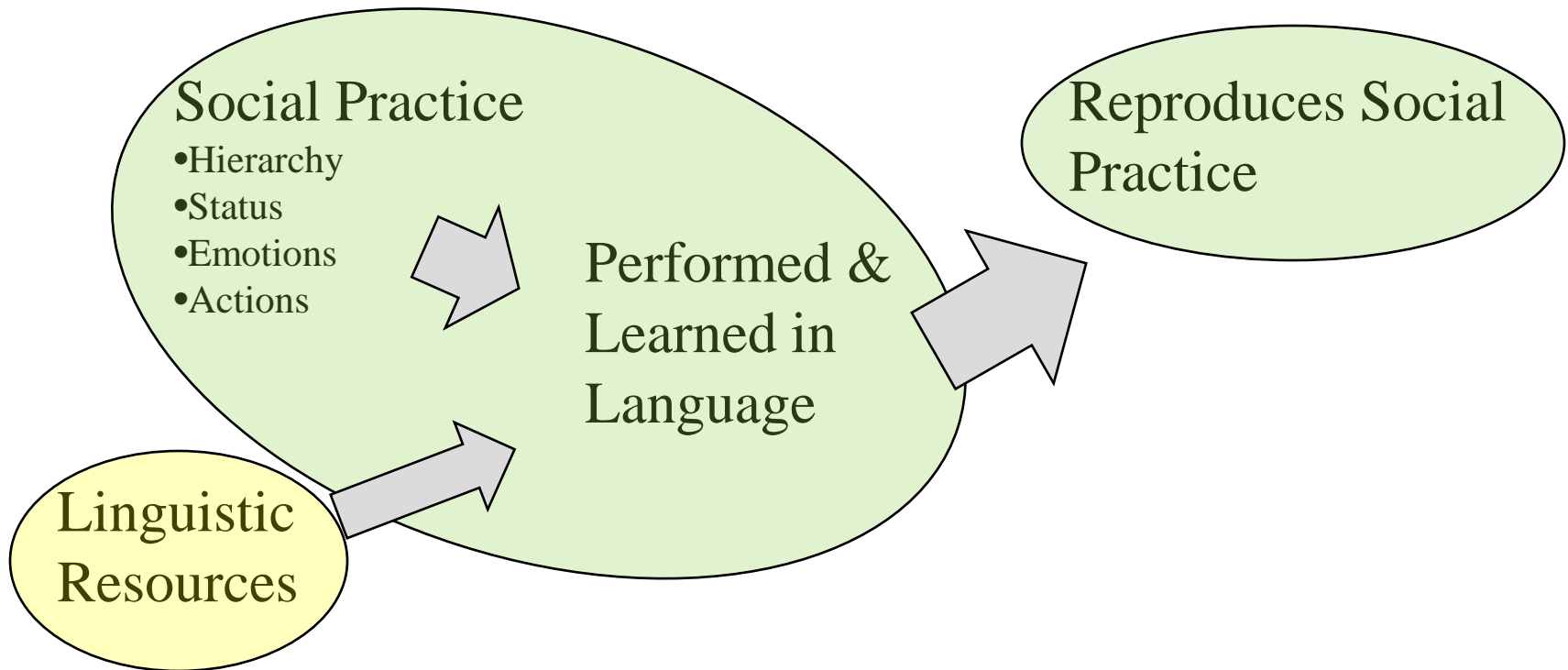
<u>or</u>

God? She is Black!

- Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*
- Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women: New Language in New Times*
- Fern Johnson, "Illusions of Equity in Language"

From this Application

- Linguistic Archeology
  - DNA of ancestral Language
  - Resistance in subtle Language structures
- The complex causality of Language

Social Practice Performed

Social Practice
- Hierarchy
- Status
- Emotions
- Actions

Performed & Learned in Language

Linguistic Resources

Reproduces Social Practice

A Problem of Causality

- Language does not *CAUSE* racism & sexism
- Racism & sexism exploit the resources of language to *PERFORM* the actions and emotions of racism & sexism
- We will
    1. isolate the resources &
    2. track their exploitation in the history of the language
- *Socio-linguistics*

Permanence and Change

- *Permanence:* Thru cultural reproduction, language resists change

- *Change:* Thru metaphor/adaptation new visions, & bring them to life

- A *dialectic*

Linguistic Res to be exploited:
Characteristics of human Language Use

- **Metaphor:** We use language metaphorically

- **Performance of Emotion:** We perform our social behavior -- action, emotion, understanding -- in language and motive

Linguistic Res to be exploited: Characteristics of our Language

- **Thingness**: Action from character; character from the nature of the thing

- **Two-valued**: categorization and polarity

Linguistic Res to be exploited: the American *Weltanschuaang*

- **Objectification:** Focus on distance and method rather than substance
- **Analysis**: Divide things into their parts
- **Alienation:** Can consider characteristics apart from personal
- **Progress:** Up is good; forward is good
- **Hierarchy:** Status & position important
- **Purity/Perfection:** We seek perfection

Aversive Racism

- Inherency of hierarchy in West

- Etymology: DNA of our Language
  - Pre-colonial uses of "black"

> "Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul. . . . Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister. . . . Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked . . . indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc."
>
> - *Oxford English Dictionary*, entries before 1600

Aversive Racism: Etymology

- Inherency of hierarchy in West

- Etymology: DNA of our Language
  - Pre-colonial uses of "black"

  "The West is a white civilization; no other civilization has made that claim. White emblemizes purity, but purity implies a purification, a removing of impurities. This is indeed part of the meaning of white; for, though scientifically the sum of all colors, to the symbolizing mind it becomes the absence of color, that which remains when color has been removed."

  - Joel Kovel, *White Racism*

Aversive Racism : Etymology

- Inherency of hierarchy in West
- Etymology: DNA of our Language
  - Pre-colonial uses of "black"
  - Pre-colonial uses of "dark"

absence of light; . . . of night; . . . place where one cannot see to find one's way; . . . hidden or unobservable; . . . place of confinement for men who have lost their reason; . . . gloomy; . . . complexion not fair; . . . absence of morality, wicked, atrocious; . . . cheerless; . . . not to be understood; . . . void of intellect.

- *Oxford English Dictionary*, entries before 1600

Aversive Racism : Etymology

- **Inherency of hierarchy in West**

- **Etymology: DNA of our Language**
  - Pre-colonial uses of "black"
  - Pre-colonial uses of "dark": graded in religion

On the first day: "And God said, let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light; that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called light Day, and the darkness he called night."

- *King James Version (1604-1611), Genesis 1:305*

Overt Racism: Colonization

- **Hierarchy of Europeans over Africans**
  - Dark Continent
  - Contrast with European "Cleanliness"

"Every group which has been the object of prejudice at some time been designated by the prejudiced dirty or smelly or both. . . . Indeed, lowest in social scale connotes the idea of dirtiest and smelliest, and untouchability sums up all these concepts in the work of aversion."

Joel Kovel, *White Racism*

Overt Racism: Colonization

- Hierarchy of Europeans over Africans
- American chattel slavery
  - Signification: The black badge
  - Character of the slave: Stereotyping
  - Day to day interaction: Separation
  - White anxieties
- White man's burden

Racism over the Centuries

- Chattel slavery to scientific racism
- Scientific racism to political racism
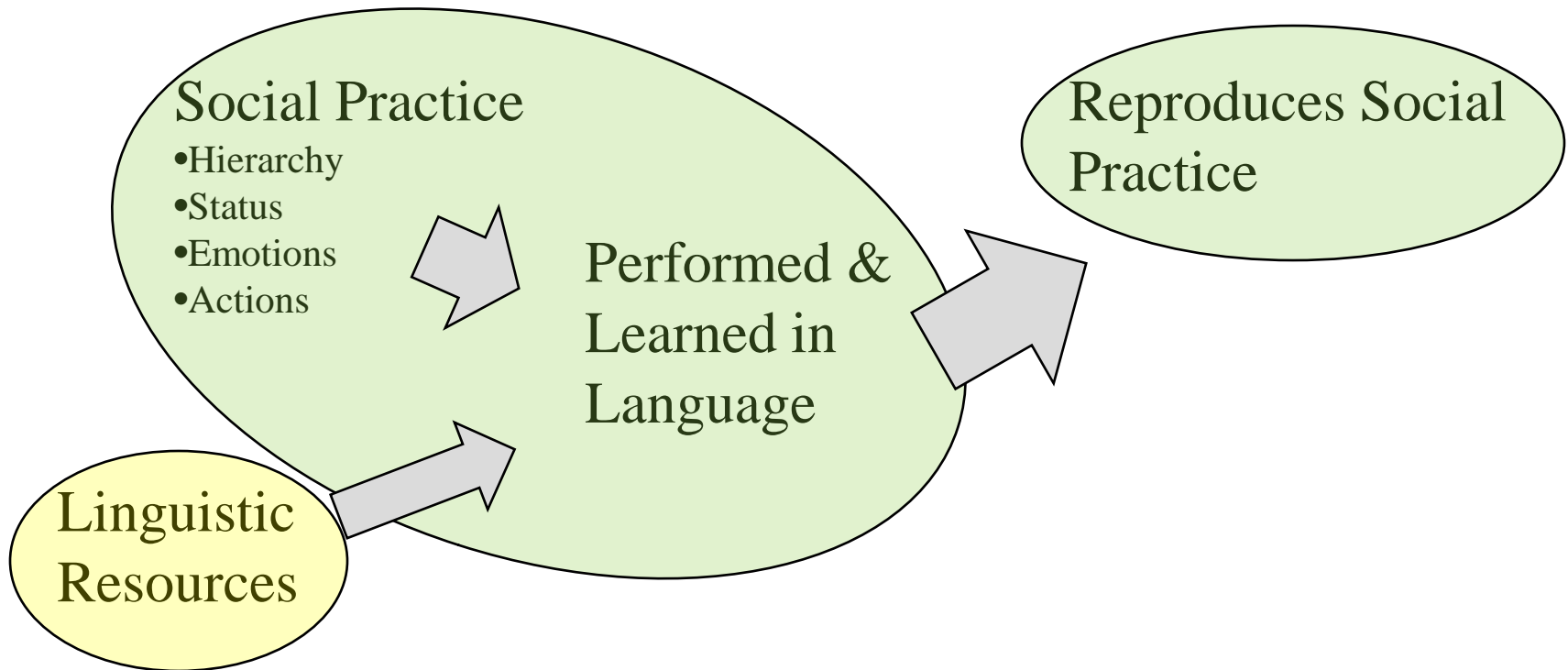- Political racism to Aversive racism

Aversive Racism

Language replicates across centuries

- ### Character of Language Use structures response
  - Understanding travels in metaphor
  - Emotion impacted in language

- ### Character of Our Language facilitates aversion
  - Alienation of characteristic from personality
  - 2 valued: black/white dichotomy

- ### Our cultural performance of *Aversive racism*

Social Practice Performed

Social Practice
- Hierarchy
- Status
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Performed & Learned in Language

Reproduces Social Practice

Linguistic Resources

Timeline of Aversive Racism

- Bring into16th century: Meaning of Black and Dark

- 16th century (cultural fixing of post-medieval Europe):
  - Creation of Colonialism and Slavery
  - Facilitated thru character of Language

- To today:
  - Evolution of cultural form
  - reinscription of Linguistic character

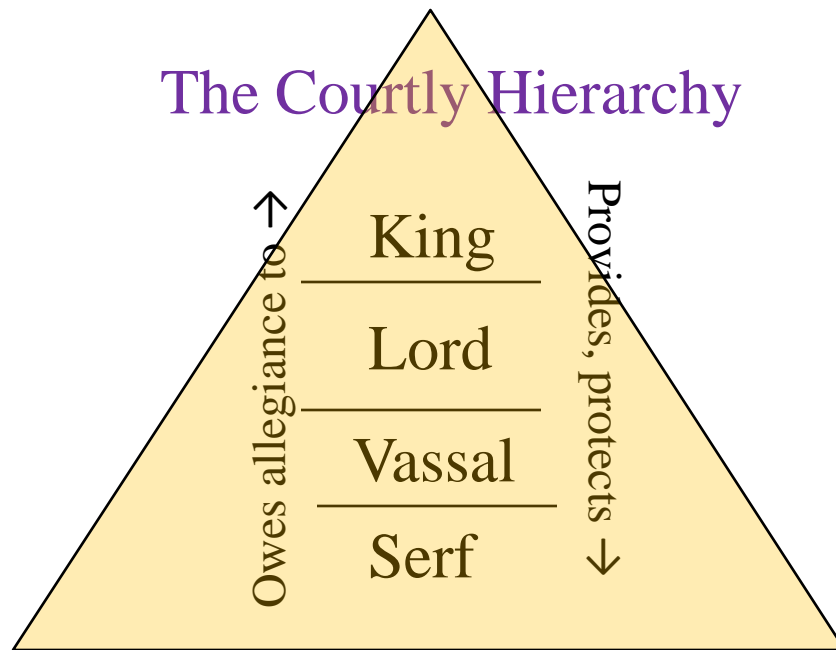# Sexism: Etymology

- **Emergence of gender**
  - Old English (c10th century)
    - » *wif* = female
    - » *carl* = male
    - » *mann* = a human being
    - » *wifman* = adult female person
    - » *Carlman* = adult male person
    - » *waepman* = adult male person

Sexism: Culturally

■ 16th century Europe: Hierarchicalism
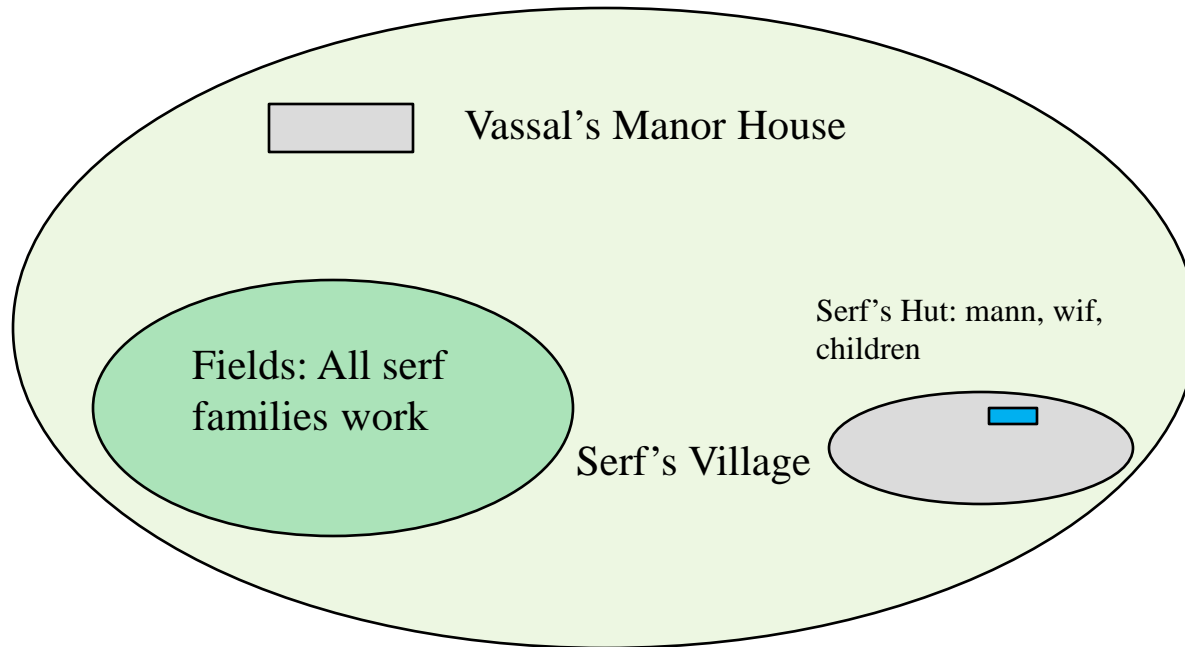
The Courtly Hierarchy

Owes allegiance to ↑

King

Lord

Vassal

Serf

Provides, protects ↓

Inverse pyramid of power

A hierarchical culture

Performed in terms of address

Geographic Inscription of Hierarchy

Vassal's Manor House

Fields: All serf families work

Serf's Hut: mann, wif, children

Serf's Village

Sexism: Cultural Hierarchialism

- **Principle spread through society**
  - Through the emerging political system
  - Through the Church
  - Through the family
- **Marked in institutions by 17th Century**
  - Positive law
  - Religious practice
  - Language development

Sexism: Linguistic Performance

- Vocabulary developed

- Day-to-day structures for exchange

- Dual structure for English

- Celebratory Occasions

Sexism: Religious Performance

■ Mythic origin: The creation story

Early Hebrew terminology

– **'adham** -- a human being; a protohuman; androgynous

– **'ish** -- human male

– **'ishshah** -- human female

Sexism: Religious Performance

- The creation story
- Gendering of the Fall

"Catalysts in a cosmic struggle between evil and good, women are defined as extremes of the sexuality men experience, whore or virgin, agent of Satan or mother of God."

Miller and Swift, *Words and Women*

Sexism: Religious Performance

- The creation story

- Gendering of the Fall

- Gendering of the family: the Biblical injunction

(King James Version, 1604-11)

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." *Ephesians 5:22-23*

Sexism: Linguistic Inscription

- Gendered day-to-day performance
  - To praise characteristics

> "The broad range of positive characteristics used to define males could be used to define females too, of course, but they are not."
>
> Miller and Swift

Gendered Language: Even Today

- **Gendered day-to-day performance**
  - To praise
  - To mark gender approval and disapproval

> "When parents or teachers tell a boy not to cry because it isn't 'manly' or praise a girl for her 'feminine' way of dressing, they are using the words manly and feminine to reinforce the categories our culture has assigned to males and females."
>
> – Miller and Swift

Sexism: Linguistic Inscription

- Gendered day-to-day performance
  - To praise
  - To mark gender approval and disapproval
  - Mode of address performs hierarchy

"Children, servants, and other presumed inferiors are apt to be first-named by adults and employers and by anyone else who is older, richer, or otherwise assumed to be superior."

Miller and Swift

Sexism: Linguistic Inscription

- Gendered day-to-day performance
  - To praise
  - To mark gender approval and disapproval
  - Mode of address performs hierarchy
- Culturally, linguistic performance turns sexual difference into gender normality

> "Role assignment . . . is extended to other areas which vary from one culture to another."
>
> Miller and Swift, Words and Women

Causality of Sexism

- Etymologically: Language learns to gender
- Cultural tradition inscribed into language
  - Day-to-day performance
  - Religion as mythic origin
- Language performance reinscribes normality/deviance
- Thus, legacy of Western hierachialism

Johnson Corollary: Performing Hierarchy

- *Hierarchy performed* in language codes
- Thus, performance *signifies* our place in hierarchy
- And social mobility requires *re-coding*

Johnson Corollary: Problem of Identity

- **Identity: A personal and social process**
  - Individual identity: Who am I?
    - » Beyond partial inclusion
  - Social identity: Who are we?
    - » Mark and celebrate our community

- **How do we manage the tension?**

Johnson Corollary: Dilemmae of Hierarchy and Identity

- For the individual: Identity
- For the Teacher: Power of hierarchy for advancement

Johnson Corollary: Postures

- **Language as badge of inferiority**
  - Language "codes": Women's language; Black language

- **Postures for coping**
  - Posture 1: coded languages inferior

"No illusions here. Female and black language varieties are separate and unequal, their users frozen into the inferior status of the social order."

- Fern Johnson

Johnson Corollary : Postures

- **Language as badge of inferiority**
  - Language "codes"
- **Postures for coping**
  - Posture 1: coded languages inferior
  - Posture 2: acceptable alternative codes

> "Over time, say type 2 advocates, the imprints of these different language varieties in the lower strata will wear away, giving over to social recognition of the viability and desirability of language pluralism. This, of course, is blind idealism."
>
> – Fern Johnson

Johnson Corollary : Postures

- **Language as badge of inferiority**
  - Language "codes"
- **Postures for coping**
  - Posture 1: coded languages inferior
  - Posture 2: acceptable alternative codes
  - Posture 3: Code switching and identity

"The places for speaking . . . view of language realizes the worst fears."

- Fern Johnson

Johnson Corollary: The Teacher's Burden

■ The Dilemma of language performance

1. Teach the language of status; My home is gone!

2. Level the language difference; How do I advance?

3. Educate into multiple worlds; Who am I?