

False Double Consciousness: Hermeneutical Resources from the Rush Limbaugh Show

JEFF ENGELHARDT  & SARAH CAMPBELL

ABSTRACT *This article is a study of the interpretive resources developed by Rush Limbaugh on his radio show. Interpretive resources – also called ‘hermeneutical resources’ – are concepts, narratives, conceptual frameworks, etc. that enable subjects to make sense of themselves and their world. Much recent scholarship has explored how a community’s interpretive resources influence social interactions or character traits in the community. In Limbaugh’s transcripts, we found a pattern of what we call ‘concept doubling’, wherein terms are characterised in a way suggesting that liberals and conservatives express different concepts by their utterances of the same word form. We propose that this promotes an interpretive resource that encourages in those who use it what we call ‘false double consciousness’. We contrast the effects of false double consciousness with those of double consciousness, and we consider the interpretive resources available within false double consciousness.*

1. Introduction

Interpretive resources – also called ‘hermeneutical resources’ – are shared concepts, narratives, conceptual frameworks, ideologies, aphorisms, myths, etc. that enable subjects to make sense of themselves and their world. Much recent scholarship has explored how a community’s interpretive resources influence social interactions or character traits in the community. In Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice*,¹ for instance, she shows that the development of the concept expressed by ‘sexual harassment’ enabled women to refer to and resist a workplace injustice. She uses ‘hermeneutical injustice’ to refer to a kind of injustice wherein a community’s interpretive resources obscure experiences important to some of its members.² In *The Epistemology of Resistance*,³ Jose Medina points out that a community’s interpretive resources can shape the characters of its members. In his remarks on the trial in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example, he explains the jury’s epistemic laziness, arrogance, and closed-mindedness with respect to matters central to the trial by appeal to ‘the dominant racial ideology of the time.’⁴

In planning this article, we wanted to draw on these ideas and others about interpretive resources in an effort to help understand the influences of highly partisan and polemical political media on their listeners. There’s reason to doubt that such media sway their audiences politically – as Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella argue, ‘those most likely to be found in the audience of any partisan persuader probably already share that person’s convictions.’⁵ But this doesn’t mean that such media have no effect on how their consumers understand themselves and their world. Such

media commonly offer interpretations of current events, political figures, and trends; they develop conceptual frameworks for understanding social positions, histories, cultures, ideologies; and many rehearse narratives, slogans, etc. that advance their preferred ideologies. In short, they develop and maintain interpretive resources. We suppose that these resources shape those who use them, and we can learn about the characters of those who use these resources by studying the resources themselves.

A 2014 Pew Research Center study reports that 43% of respondents who identify as consistently conservative turn to the Rush Limbaugh Show for news.⁶ This doesn't mean of course that near half of conservatives are exposed *only* to Limbaugh's interpretive resources, that these listeners are exposed to Limbaugh regularly, or that they uncritically adopt the resources Limbaugh provides. But it does give us reason to take Limbaugh's influence seriously. It suggests that one in three conservatives has access to the interpretive resources he provides, and so may deploy them in understanding political actors, events, traditions. According to *Talkers Magazine*, 'The Bible of Talk Radio and New Talk Media', Limbaugh reached 14 million unique listeners in July 2017 and averaged just over 13 million unique listeners each week in 2016.⁷

In an effort to understand this influence, we read through 63 transcripts from The Rush Limbaugh Show website. As a place to start, we focused on instances in which Limbaugh offers relatively explicit characterisations of common terms. Almost immediately, we noticed a trend wherein Limbaugh offers two characterisations of a given term, one purporting to give the concept liberals express by the word and one alleged to be the 'real' or 'true' meaning of the word. We call this 'concept doubling'. This article – our first on Limbaugh's interpretive resources – is dedicated to understanding systematic concept doubling as an interpretive resource and its effects. In Section 3, we hypothesise that Limbaugh's concept doubling serves to erect an interpretive resource that encourages what we call 'false double consciousness' – a double consciousness in which members of an oppressing community represent themselves as oppressed by those who call them to acknowledge the oppressions from which they benefit. False double consciousness is held, we propose, in order to dismiss calls for oppressors to recognise their privileges. It is a double consciousness held with false consciousness. In Section 4, we contrast the effects of false double consciousness with the effects of double consciousness proposed by W.E.B. DuBois, Jose Medina, and Maria Lugones, and we consider the hermeneutical resources available *within* false double consciousness in light of Linda Alcoff's work on white identity. Beyond their role in helping us understand Limbaugh's influence, concept doubling and false double consciousness are independently interesting and worthy of study.

2. Methodology

Our findings are drawn from 63 transcripts from The Rush Limbaugh Show website. Our preliminary research began by looking at two days' worth of transcripts surrounding the 2016 United States Presidential Election, 7 November and 21 November 2016. In the 19 transcripts from these days (the show compiles multiple transcripts per day), we found that Limbaugh would often offer non-standard definitions for social terms, including 'race', 'racism', and 'feminism'. We compiled portfolios that focused on each of these words – averaging about six transcripts per term. While

coding transcripts for the selected words, we continued identifying social terms for which Limbaugh offered noteworthy characterisations and created portfolios for many of them. During this process, we noticed the concept doubling, and we decided to focus our coding and analysis efforts on instances of concept doubling.

With our focus on concept doubling for terms already in use in English, we wanted a way to track utterances or acts that might alter the concept expressed by a term already in use – by which acts Limbaugh might shape the interpretive resources available to his audience, even those expressed by terms already in use. We found help in Tyler Burge’s account of conventional linguistic meaning in ‘Intellectual Norms and Foundations of Mind.’⁸ There, Burge proposes that there are social linguistic acts that give a term’s *conventional linguistic meaning*. These acts propose a *normative characterisation* for a term; when these acts successfully establish a norm for using the relevant term, they set the term’s conventional linguistic meaning. Which sorts of acts give a normative characterisation? There are perhaps many ways to do so, but the most obvious examples are linguistic acts that explicitly purport to give a term’s definition. In addition, expressions like ‘All “T” means is M’ may give normative characterisations for a term T; or, where a term ‘X’ refers to Xs, so may ‘Every X has property F’. Normative characterisations ‘purport to give basic, “essential”, and necessarily true information about Xs’ for a term ‘X’.⁹

They [normative characterisations] are used as guides to certifying the identity of entities: something that is cited as an X but does not fulfill the condition laid down by the normative characterization will not normally be counted an X.¹⁰

Insofar as a normative characterisation sets a norm for usage, it is normatively unacceptable to use the term otherwise. It is on these grounds that it’s plausible to say that normative characterisations give a term’s conventional linguistic meaning.

We should note that Burge does not claim that a term’s conventional linguistic meaning is identical to the concept it expresses (the term’s ‘cognitive value’ in the language of that paper), but he also leaves open the possibility that ‘cognitive value’ and ‘conventional linguistic meaning’ refer to one and the same metaphysical entity. He holds on to the claim that a term’s conventional linguistic meaning is not the same as its cognitive value because we can always challenge a reigning normative characterisation. That is, we can always rationally question whether the normative characterisation that sets a term’s conventional linguistic meaning *ought to* set that term’s conventional linguistic meaning. As illustration of this eternal possibility, note that if the normative characterisation of term T is M, the questions ‘Is “T” really to be understood as expressing T?’ and ‘Is “T” really to be understood as expressing M?’ are not equivalent. But if we’re analysing linguistic acts for expressions of conceptual contents, we take it that the normative characterisations that set a term’s conventional linguistic meaning at a time are a satisfactory approximation. So, we take it that when Limbaugh attempts a normative characterisation, he’s trying to fix a concept; he’s trying to develop an interpretive resource.

3. Concept Doubling and False Double Consciousness

One engages in *concept doubling* when one (i) offers two different normative characterisations for a given term, (ii) attributes the concept expressed by one characterisation

to another group, (iii) and offers the other characterisation as, by contrast, ‘what the term *really* means’. Locutions that perform these three functions aren’t uncommon. Conceptual analysis of a term might begin, for instance, by first noting what average speakers take a term to mean and then proceeding to offer the philosophical analysis of the term. The first normative characterisation is attributed to non-philosophers and the second is offered as expressing the term’s ‘real’ meaning, with the purport that the norm set by the latter is what ought to be followed. On Rush Limbaugh’s radio show, he often attributes one characterisation to his political opponents – i.e. Democrats (as a group), liberals, individual democrats, Democratic President Barack Obama, etc. For instance, in a show entitled ‘Obama’s Version of Equality is Defined by the Lowest Common Denominator’, which aired 31 January 2014, he said this:

Obama is playing to the lowest common denominator of everybody, and he is telling them that if anybody’s got more money than you do, it’s not fair and it’s unjustified and somehow you have been ripped off or screwed, and that is his message. Let me give you a real income inequality definition, what it really is. Real income inequality is what we used to call striving and working hard to get ahead. Striving, educating ourselves, getting up and going to work, preparing, using our ambition, and, in that process, some people earned more and earned it sooner than others.¹¹

As the show’s title suggests, Limbaugh offers a characterisation alleging to express the concept associated with Obama’s uses of ‘equality’. It calls for everyone to have the same amount of money, perhaps the same small amount of money; anything else is *inequality*. But the *real* definition of the term, Limbaugh claims, doesn’t demand this; it allows rather, that those who work harder have more. According to Limbaugh, ‘equality’ out of Obama’s mouth has in its extension only states of affairs in which everyone has the same amount of money; but Limbaugh’s concept of ‘equality’ has other states of affairs in its extension.

Most instances of concept doubling were less compact and less explicit than this; more often, Limbaugh offers characterisations implicitly and over the course of his show. For the sake of brevity, we will summarise Limbaugh’s concept doubling rather than quote extensively from the transcripts; and we will summarise the doubling for only four terms – ‘racism’, ‘feminism’, ‘intersectionality’, and ‘diversity’ – rather than for all the terms we found Limbaugh doubling. (Supporting quotations for these terms, with our annotations, as well as all our coded transcripts are available online at: <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnx2aXJ0dWFsamVmZmVuZ2VsaGFyZHR8Z3g6NGYxNmZjNDNhNWJmMTk1Yw.>)

As Limbaugh characterises the concept liberals express by ‘racist’, it refers to Limbaugh himself and to anyone who ‘opposes’ Barack Obama.¹² As he characterises the ‘real’ concept expressed by ‘racism’, it has in its extension only those who support ‘segregation and explicit and invidious and horrible discrimination’.¹³

Limbaugh’s characterisation of what liberals express by ‘feminism’ suggests a concept that refers to a movement aimed at changing human nature, especially the presumed gender essential nature of men and women.¹⁴ In addition to his concept doubling for ‘feminism’, Limbaugh develops his claims by further characterising concepts like that expressed by ‘objectification’. He gives ‘catcalling’/street harassment as paradigmatic examples from the extension of the liberal concept of ‘objectification’,

and he implies that these behaviours flow directly from men's human nature.¹⁵ Criticising objectification, then, is one way feminists aim to change human nature. The concept Limbaugh offers as an alternative for 'feminism' has something like an 'unmasking' role, revealing the 'true purpose' of feminism: 'Feminism was established so as to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream of American life.'¹⁶

Limbaugh's characterisations of the liberal concept for 'intersectionality' focus on what it entails; namely, he says it entails that one is sexist if and only if one is racist iff one is homophobic iff one is transphobic. 'If a person happens to say something that's sexist, that makes him everything else, too – racist, bigoted, homophobic, transphobic'.¹⁷ The real concept, he says, refers to a religion, such that 'it requires no evidence, it requires no proof, it requires nothing but faith. And therefore you cannot disprove it to the faithful'.¹⁸

Finally, 'diversity'. According to Limbaugh's characterisation, liberals' uses of 'diversity' refer to reducing the number of the majority – white people.¹⁹ But what 'diversity' really refers to, what diversity is revealed to be through the 'real' interpretive resource, is an attack on America, American values, 'a distinct American culture', 'common American identity'.²⁰

As these examples suggest, Limbaugh's characterisation of liberal interpretive resources focuses on criticisms – especially criticisms of sexism and racism. He seems preoccupied with how liberals conceive of conservatives. Limbaugh's liberal concepts suggest a fictional liberal perspective on the world – 'seeing the world through' these concepts – that has as its most salient feature its contempt for Limbaugh and his listeners, targeting their conservative political views and their simple human nature for undeserved criticism. He characterises the liberal conception of these criticisms in terms that make them easily dismissed – these concepts are meant to be heard as ideas that doesn't deserve critical evaluation. And, he characterises the 'real' concept expressed by these concepts in a way that reveals as veiled, unwarranted attacks – on Limbaugh and other critics of Obama, on human nature, on America – the claims in which liberals deploy their concepts.

Limbaugh's pattern of concept doubling contributes in noteworthy ways to several of the rhetorical strategies others have identified in his work. By characterising the concepts allegedly deployed by liberals as contrasting with the 'real' concepts in currency with Limbaugh and his audience, he deepens the sense of difference between liberals and conservatives.²¹ Concept doubling also contributes to the 'Balkanisation of Knowledge', wherein groups of citizens are differentiated from one another in 'what they know about, and in how they interpret social and political events'.²² Indeed, Limbaugh's concept doubling *represents* the country as Balkanised in its interpretive resources. It makes available to conservatives an interpretive resource that represents liberals as isolated from the 'real' concepts available to Limbaugh and his audience, and it represents liberals as harbouring a perspective on conservatives that unfairly accuses them of racism, objectification, sexism, and more (thanks to intersectionality).

This last manoeuvre is especially interesting to us. By characterising the liberal perspective as making unwarranted accusations against conservatives, Limbaugh gives his listeners the impression that their ways of living and thinking are 'a problem' for liberal culture. By characterising liberal culture as 'mainstream' and allied with powerful educational and media institutions, Limbaugh characterises liberal culture as *dominant*, suggesting thereby that the culture and identities of his listeners are *oppressed* by

liberals. By systematically characterising his audience's concepts and culture in terms of how they're perceived through liberals' interpretive resources, Limbaugh gives the impression that conservatives understand themselves at least partly 'through' the dominant liberal culture and its concepts. Further, by characterising the concepts of liberal culture as both known and known-to-be-distorted to Limbaugh and his audience while the 'real' concepts are unknown to the left, Limbaugh's concept doubling gives the impression that he and his listeners understand liberal culture, but liberal culture does not understand them or their culture.

Taken together, these effects of Limbaugh's concept doubling echo some of the remarks given by W.E.B. DuBois in his characterisation of *double consciousness*. DuBois describes a childhood epiphany wherein 'it dawned up [him] with a certain suddenness that [he] was different from the others' and he was 'shut out from their world by a vast veil'; thereby, he comes to hold 'all beyond [the veil] in contempt.'²³ By virtue of standing on the other side of this veil:

The Negro ... is gifted with a second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but *only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world*. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of *measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity*.²⁴

Consider also Jose Medina's remarks on the epistemic character that oppressed subjects develop from having double consciousness:

Oppressed subjects tend to feel the need of being more attentive to the perspectives of others. They have no option but to acknowledge, respect, and (to some extent) inhabit alternative perspectives, in particular the perspective of the dominant other(s). They are often encouraged and typically even forced to see reality not only through their own eyes, but also through the eyes of others whose perspectives and social locations matter more. In this way oppressed subjects accomplish the epistemic feat of maintaining active in their minds two cognitive perspectives simultaneously as they perform various tasks. This is what in race theory, following DuBois, has been called having a 'double consciousness'.²⁵

We do not claim here that Limbaugh and his listeners have a double consciousness, that they acknowledge and respect the allegedly dominant liberal culture, that they feel a need to be more attentive to the perspectives of others, that they have the peculiar sensation of double consciousness, or that they are gifted with a 'second sight'. We appeal to double consciousness, rather, because it unifies some of the noteworthy effects of Limbaugh's concept doubling and gives us a starting point for analysing the interpretive and epistemic effects of Limbaugh's concept doubling. We submit as a working hypothesis that Limbaugh's systematic concept doubling builds up an interpretive resource that is something like a distorted mirror reflection of the interpretive resources available to communities whose members do genuinely have double consciousness.

Where a community's members have genuine double consciousness, typical community members have access to the dominant culture and many of the concepts that

shape it. Indeed, as Medina notes, oppressed subjects may be *forced* to understand the dominant culture, insofar as misreading the dominant culture can lead to violence or death. Importantly, the members of such communities shall have access to the dominant culture's perspectives *on the subordinate community itself*; they shall be aware that the dominant community 'sees' their community as *other*, as looking upon them with an amused contempt and pity, as being a problem.²⁶ Accurate awareness, however conscious, of this other culture and its perspectives on the subordinate community are what enable an epiphany of double consciousness, wherein one can come to realise that they are different from the members of the dominant culture and shut out from it as if by a veil. Having continued access to the dominant culture, a community whose members have genuine double consciousness (i) know the concepts of the dominant culture and know they are unknown within that culture; (ii) they are able to see themselves through – and, plausibly, in contrast to – that culture, and (iii) they are aware that they are 'a problem' for that culture. In our view, the interpretive resource that Limbaugh erects with his concept doubling creates an ersatz or straw man liberal culture with respect to which the culture of his listeners has these last three features. That is, Limbaugh's liberal culture presents to his listeners a dominant culture that sees them as other, from which they are shut out, that holds them in contempt and pity; and, it represents the culture of Limbaugh's listeners as knowing and understanding the dominant liberal culture while remaining unknown within it, as seeing themselves through that culture and in contrast to it, and as aware that they are a problem for that culture. Since the dominant liberal community Limbaugh represents to his listeners is inaccurate with respect to liberal culture and since there's little reason to suppose that Limbaugh's listeners are compelled by threat of violence to have an accurate understanding of any dominant liberal culture, we say that whatever double consciousness one may come to possess by accessing the interpretive resource Limbaugh erects in this way is a *false* double consciousness. There is no such culture as the one represented as dominant in this double consciousness.

Beyond its being unnecessary for Limbaugh's listeners to have an accurate understanding of liberal concepts and identities, it may also be *necessary* for them to have an *inaccurate* understanding of liberal culture. Medina characterises a *need to not know* as part of 'the cognitive predicament of the privileged', wherein ignorance 'functions as a defense mechanism that is used to preserve privilege.'²⁷ Medina continues:

As a defense mechanism, those in a position of privilege are often encouraged to hide their heads in the sand like ostriches with respect to certain aspects, pre-suppositions, or consequences of the oppression that sustains their privilege.²⁸

As a salient example of such defence mechanisms in action, Medina offers the ideologies of *colour-blindness* and *gender-blindness* in American culture. These ideologies purport to be disavowing or undermining racism or sexism by disavowing the race- and gender-based prejudices that individuals in a racist, sexist society commonly hold. But while it is certainly better to reject these prejudices than to endorse them, by refusing to acknowledge races and genders, these ideologies refuse to acknowledge the damage done by racism and sexism in American culture. For the whites and men who benefit from the multiform privileges of racism and sexism, colour-blindness and gender-blindness enable them to ignore the race- and gender-based oppressions that sustain their privileges.

We can see Limbaugh overtly endorsing gender-blindness in the transcript for his 30 May show, ‘What I’ve Realized About Identity Politics’. There, Limbaugh describes a discussion he had with an unnamed ‘very accomplished woman who was one of the first in her field to do what she did’. He reports to his audience that he told her, ‘You know, aside from the obvious, I don’t see you as a woman. Why are your accomplishments in any way linked to the fact that you’re a woman?’²⁹ According to Pew Research’s News Media Consumption Survey, men make up 72% of Limbaugh’s audience.³⁰ Given that almost three quarters of Limbaugh’s audience presumably benefit from gender-based oppression, it wouldn’t be surprising if Limbaugh’s gender-blind ideology helps support their ‘need to not know’ the facts about sexism and its relation to their own privilege.

But Limbaugh doesn’t stop at the gender-blind ideology. In addition to refusing to acknowledge that his interlocutor’s accomplishments include that she likely overcame sexist oppression in her field, he claims that to acknowledge the sexist oppression (likely) in her field is ‘a way to actually be critical of the country, not celebratory of it.’ He continues:

The reason for celebrating all of these minorities – women, African-Americans, pick your minority – who do something that hasn’t been done by somebody in that group before? The media goes nuts. It’s one of the greatest things in the world! At the root of that is that America’s unjust, that America is unfair, and that America discriminates, and that America is biased and bigoted and whatever. ... It is a way of actually denigrating the country by saying that somebody finally did it.³¹

Limbaugh (again) characterises recognition of sexist, racist, ‘you pick’ oppression as a veiled attack on ‘America’, on his audience’s culture. In our view, this is contributing to the interpretive resource associated with false double consciousness: that media celebrate individuals who overcome oppression is further evidence that the dominant culture oppresses conservatives, holds them in contempt, sees them as a problem to be overcome. Whereas the gender-blind and colour-blind ideologies serve the privileged need to now know by enabling them to *ignore* the oppressions that support their privilege, false double consciousness further feeds this need by enabling the privileged to conceptualise references to those oppressions as evidence that there is a vicious, wrongheaded, anti-American culture *that oppresses them*. A 2017 report conducted by Nielsen Scarborough found that 90.5% of listeners tuned into Limbaugh’s segments on WOR-AM are White-non-Hispanic.³² False double consciousness allows these beneficiaries of race- and gender-based oppressions not only to ignore that they benefit from oppression but also to charge that they suffer from oppression themselves. Presumably, this allows them to deny that they are privileged in the first place – undercutting the question of whether their privileges are maintained by oppression. Moreover, false double consciousness enables Limbaugh’s listeners to quell any anxieties they may have about their own accomplishments by appeal to this oppression, to attribute media-reported evidence of racism, sexism, and other oppressions to the dominant culture’s oppressive aims, and so on.

In this sense, we want our term ‘false double consciousness’ to draw on the well-known concept *false consciousness* often associated with Marx’s concept of *ideology*. There are many characterisations of *false consciousness*; we would like to draw on some

core senses of the concept without wading into the literature here. We take Jonathan Wolff's criteria: an ideology is held with a false consciousness when it is (i) widely held in a society, (ii) held for reasons other than its truth or appearance of truth (e.g. in order to relieve anxiety or to maintain a self-identity), (iii) beneficial to the stability of the society in which it is widespread (especially to the oppressive structures of that society) when it is prevalent, and (iv) beneficial to the society in which it is held because it apparently legitimates that society.³³ Note, however, that what we're talking about here is not obviously an ideology (though various ideologies are of course at play in Limbaugh's rhetoric); we're more comfortable calling the interpretive resource built by Limbaugh's concept doubling simply an 'interpretive resource' or a 'hermeneutical resource'. We think nonetheless that referencing false consciousness is appropriate here. We propose that among Limbaugh's listeners, this resource is (i) widely taken up and used, (ii) held and used for reasons other than truth or probability of being true – rather, as noted above, it serves the need of the privileged to *not know*, (iii) beneficial to the stability of race- and gender-based oppressive systems and ideologies when widespread, and (iv) beneficial to those systems and ideologies because it legitimates them – in this case, it undercuts and reverses criticisms of racism, sexism, etc. We do not, however, aim to argue for these points here. We note them in explanation of our terminology; to defend them would require a different article.

Below, we propose to consider what effects this sort of concept doubling has on the epistemic character of Limbaugh's listeners. What does an epistemic environment in which false double consciousness is constructed, maintained, and encouraged do to its inhabitants?

4. False Double Consciousness, Resistant Perception, Interpretive Paralysis

In determining what effects Limbaugh's false double consciousness may have on those who take it up, it's helpful to have a point of contrast. Analyses of double consciousness and the epistemic character it encourages provide an obvious starting point.

In his discussion of double consciousness, Medina claims that it encourages the epistemic virtue of open-mindedness. Because double consciousness involves inhabiting to some extent the perspective of the dominant culture and taking it seriously, 'the epistemic perspective of oppressed subjects often exhibits a characteristic kind of hybridity, inclusivity, and open-mindedness...'³⁴ In his readings of DuBois and Patricia Hill Collins, Medina finds further epistemic characteristics growing out of double consciousness. To DuBois's claim that 'the Negro is ... born with a veil, and gifted with second sight'³⁵, Medina attributes reference to 'an alternative way of seeing, a *resistant perception* alongside the dominant perception he has internalised.'³⁶ Medina reads in Patricia Hill Collins an expansion on this resistant perception.

Collins finds the critical payoff and subversive potential of double consciousness in allowing the subject to take critical distance from the dominant perspective, for once you have two cognitive perspectives available to you – that of mainstream culture and that of the oppressed – you can comparatively evaluate them and look at one from the perspective of the other.³⁷

By inhabiting both the dominant perspective on the oppressed community and the perspective of the oppressed community, the subject with double consciousness is in a position to evaluate each. For Collins, this is the resistant perception available to black women – they can see the oppressive community ‘from the outside’, exposing its oppressive perception, and thereby allowing them to ‘generate self-representations that enable them to resist the demeaning racist and sexist images of black femininity in the white world.’³⁸

In application to Limbaugh’s *false* double consciousness, perhaps we should expect that those who take it up are open-minded and possess resistant perception. The perspective of the listener with Limbaughian false double consciousness includes the perspective of Limbaugh’s oppressing liberals; and, more generally, he is open to the perspectives of those outside his community. He is in a position to critically evaluate both the liberal perspective on his community and the perspective of the (allegedly) oppressed community on Limbaugh’s liberal community.

But it’s doubtful that Limbaugh and his listeners are open-minded to the liberal perspective, and it doesn’t seem right to credit Limbaugh with encouraging his listeners to critically evaluate their own community. Further, to the extent that Limbaugh encourages his listeners to critically evaluate *any* culture at all, he offers facile criticisms of a straw man version of American liberal culture. For DuBois, the subject with double consciousness feels the pull of both perspectives, has ‘two unreconciled strivings’ and ‘two warring ideals in one dark body’.³⁹ Limbaugh’s false double consciousness doesn’t call one to strive for the ideals of Limbaugh’s liberal culture. The ideals of Limbaugh’s liberal culture are threatening or ridiculous effigies of the ideals one in fact finds in liberal culture in the US and toward which Limbaugh’s listeners just might feel pulled; Limbaugh’s liberal concepts are, of course, set up for the purpose of being dismissed with little to no critical evaluation. As we suggested at the end of the last section, this false double consciousness isn’t ‘meant’ to encourage diligent consideration of liberal ideals for the sake of reconciling them with conservative ideals; its purpose, rather, is to enable Limbaugh’s gender- and race-privileged listeners to *not know* that their privileges are supported by systems of oppression. The subject with false double consciousness is not meant to feel two unreconciled strivings or two warring ideals. On the contrary, false double consciousness is meant to help one dismiss the ideals and strivings associated with one of the perspectives – the subject with false double consciousness is *never* to feel his ‘twoness’.

In Medina’s view, a double consciousness needn’t endow one with open-mindedness or resistant perception. Indeed, he says that if the perspectives in one’s double consciousness aren’t both critically engaged, or if one perspective dominates the other, we shouldn’t expect it to endow epistemic virtues or other cognitive benefits.⁴⁰ Quite plausibly, Limbaugh’s false double consciousness *ensures* these shortcomings. He discourages critical engagement with either perspective, refusing to acknowledge merits in the liberal perspective and thereby refusing to acknowledge and engage with criticisms of the conservative perspective. Moreover, false double consciousness is set up *so that* one perspective will ‘dominate’ the other: where the two perspectives conflict – and they’re presented as always in conflict – the conservative perspective is always presented as right while the liberal perspective is presented as so clearly wrong that it shouldn’t even be engaged.

For those with DuBoisian double consciousness, the danger is that the oppressor's perspective will dominate the perspective of the oppressed. As Maria Lugones puts it:

I have tended to think it unhealthy for oppressed peoples to obsess over the oppressors' perception of their subjectivity. One becomes both fascinated by it and overwhelmed by its power. Understanding the extent to which we have internalized it paralyzes one.⁴¹

In false double consciousness, it is the perspective represented as oppressed that dominates and overpowers the perspective represented as oppressive. But of course, the perspective represented as oppressed in false double consciousness is *in fact* the perspective of the oppressors, of those who benefit from oppression. We might say simply that those with Limbaugh's false double consciousness never fully escape the power of the oppressive perspective, even when they represent that perspective as oppressed.

And yet, the subject with this false double consciousness does seem encouraged to view himself through the perspective of Limbaugh's liberal culture, to 'measure his soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'.⁴² Indeed, Limbaugh's repeated return to characterising the liberal perspective on the conservative perspective may be an obsession with the liberal perception of conservative subjectivity. He returns again and again to note that this perspective on the 'common American identity' sees it as racist, sexist, oppressive. And he rejects this perspective again and again. It is taken up *in order to be* rejected, almost like an assumption for *reductio*. To reject this perspective on American culture and identity along with the perspective *tout court* is to reject the perspective that would acknowledge that gender and race privileges are founded on gender and racial oppression. Seeing the charges that one benefits from oppression as from a perspective that is easily and thoroughly dismissed is a way to dismiss those charges. It is a way to preserve privilege. And, as we saw above, it allows Limbaugh and his audience to characterise those charges as themselves oppressive.

Is this resistance to the fictional liberal culture evidence that this false double consciousness endows its bearers with resistant perception? The liberal culture Limbaugh represents characterises Limbaugh and his audience as racists, sexists, oppressors. Limbaugh encourages his audience to reject these characterisations in favour of the characterisations he offers as alternatives: 'income inequality' just refers to the fact that some people have more because they work harder; 'racism' refers only to segregation and explicit discrimination; 'feminism' refers to a movement aimed at giving 'unattractive women' access to mainstream American life; 'intersectionality' is a religion and 'diversity' is a thinly veiled attack on America. In thus resisting Limbaugh's liberal culture's representations of the patriarchal, white supremacist ideology of Limbaugh and his listeners, perhaps this false double consciousness is indeed enabling a kind of resistant perception. They are generating self-representations that resist the images of their ideology propagated in (Limbaugh's representation of) liberal culture.

Perhaps false double consciousness does enable resistant perception, then, but it's doubtful that this resistant perception is liberating. We should ask whether the self-representations generated in this resistant perception help those they represent to overcome their oppression. But if their oppression isn't actual but rather a relic of the same false double consciousness that enables this resistant perception, then it's unclear

whether these self-representations even *could be* liberating. We can't give a full argument for a position here (we hope to do so in a follow-up article), but we offer some reasons to find it doubtful that these representations are productive for those they represent. They seem to represent conservative culture as *nothing more than not guilty* of the frivolous charges brought against it by Limbaugh's fictional liberal culture. It's not segregationist and therefore not racist; it's not sexist because feminism is merely a rouse perpetrated by unattractive women; it's not for intersectionality because intersectionality is held dogmatically, and it's not for diversity because calls for diversity are really attacks on America. Perhaps this resistant perception discloses a culture that values hard work – at least, it's a culture that accepts a concept of 'income inequality' that poses as *not discouraging* hard work, in contrast to the fictional liberal concept. But this is little to build a healthy self-conception on. In our view, the view of conservative culture Limbaugh pushes is impoverished and unhelpful. It represents conservatism as having little to it except that it *isn't* what Limbaugh's fictional liberal culture says of it.

We take it that Linda Alcoff's remarks on white identity are illuminating here:

Many race theorists have argued that antiracist struggles require whites' acknowledgement that they are *white*; that is, that their experience, perceptions, and economic position have been profoundly affected by being constituted as white. . . . Part of white privilege has been precisely whites' ability to ignore the ways white racial identity has benefited them. But what is it to acknowledge one's whiteness? Is it to acknowledge that one is inherently tied to structures of domination and oppression, that one is irrevocably on the wrong side? In other words, can the acknowledgement of whiteness produce only self-criticism, even shame and self-loathing? Is it possible to feel okay about being white?⁴³

In our reading, the representation of conservative culture that emerges from Limbaugh's false double consciousness – the culture oppressed by Limbaugh's fictional liberal culture – is a culture refusing to acknowledge its privileges and refusing to acknowledge that those privileges are founded upon race- and gender-based oppression. This culture and its refusals are shaped by the accusations of oppression – racist, sexist, etc. – made from the fictional perspective of the oppressing liberal culture. This fictional oppressing culture characterises conservative culture as 'irrevocably on the wrong side', as *having nothing more to it* than its privileges and associated oppressions. The fictional oppressing culture thus calls conservatives to acknowledge their privileges in a way that produces 'only self-criticism, even shame and self-loathing.' Limbaugh sometimes refers to these feelings explicitly.

And the real point of this article [about erasure of the African-American origins of American barbecue, in *The Guardian*] is that anybody that has anything to do with white America should feel just tremendous guilt and should not have a minute of enjoyment over a single crumb of your existence.⁴⁴

With this narrow representation of the liberal perspective, and with conservative culture in false double consciousness represented through the interpretive resources attributed to this liberal culture, the representations of conservative culture in false double consciousness must also be narrow.

Indeed, false double consciousness leaves conservatives with no interpretive resources of their own for shaping an identity. All they can do, rather, is accept the shameful, self-loathing representations provided by Limbaugh's liberals or reject them. To acknowledge the privileges of patriarchy and white supremacy in this false double consciousness is to accept a self-representation that calls for nothing more than shame and self-loathing. Limbaugh's representation of conservative culture of course rejects these representations. But in Limbaugh's false double consciousness, this rejection doesn't restore whiteness or masculinity or the other social positions that confer privileges on Limbaugh's audience to positions of privilege and dominance. It can't: that would undermine the central conceit of false double consciousness itself, namely, that these social positions are not privileged but oppressed. Moreover, without any critical engagement of these privileged positions in false double consciousness, they plausibly remain 'invisible': They are the normal and default positions of the culture, unrecognised as social positions at all and providing no distinctive resources for self-representation.⁴⁵ Without any interpretive resources of their own, then, and under the constraint of maintaining that they are oppressed by liberal calls to acknowledge their privileges, Limbaugh's conservatives are represented as little more than *those who are wrongly accused of racism, sexism, etc. by oppressive liberals*. In using false double consciousness as a way to refuse to acknowledge race- and gender-based privileges and their relations to oppression, Limbaugh has ended up representing conservative culture as having nothing more than to it than that it is wrongly called to make these acknowledgements. His conservatism is constrained by and defined against the fictional liberals' false accusations.

In light of these points, return to Maria Lugones's remarks on the potential paralysis when one perspective in double consciousness dominates another. The conservative culture that emerges from Limbaugh's false double consciousness does seem to obsess over the liberal perspective that Limbaugh represents as dominant, and this does seem to be unhealthy. In that this conservative culture's self-representations are determined almost entirely by the representations proffered by Limbaugh's fictional liberal culture, we might say that the conservative culture has internalised the fictional liberal perspective; insofar as this culture has no further resources for self-understanding, and insofar as Limbaugh's false double consciousness nearly forecloses the possibility of critical engagement with either perspective, it does seem as though this culture is hermeneutically and epistemically paralysed. Of course, conservatives may appeal to resources beyond false double consciousness and beyond what Limbaugh provides, but within the interpretive resource of false double consciousness, conservatives are in interpretive paralysis.

5. Conclusion

In false double consciousness, a privileged and oppressing group represents themselves as dis-privileged and oppressed either by claims that they are privileged/oppressive or by calls for them to acknowledge their privilege/oppression. Our analysis of transcripts from the Rush Limbaugh Show found that Limbaugh often engages in what we called 'concept doubling'; our analysis of his concept doubling proposes that it creates an interpretive resource that encourages false double consciousness in those who use it.

The interpretive resource Limbaugh has created and maintains represents a liberal community as continually making easily dismissed accusations of racism, sexism, transphobia. Limbaugh represents his audience – who are predominantly middle-class white men – as dis-privileged and oppressed by these accusations or by the groups who make them.

We think it plausible that various other privileged communities have interpretive resources that encourage false double consciousness. Wherever a privileged community represents themselves as oppressed by those who point out their privileges, we expect there are shades of false double consciousness. There are reasons to think erecting interpretive resources that encourage false double consciousness is dangerous for a community's 'hermeneutical health'. Insofar as false double consciousness is taken up as a way for the oppressing group to refuse to acknowledge their oppression, it seems to discourage critical engagement with either of its component perspectives. Thus, it is at least an unproductive double consciousness.

Moreover, there is danger that representation of the community represented as oppressive in false double consciousness will be unobvious, unsophisticated, uncharitable. After all, the 'point' of these representations is to set up straw man versions of legitimate calls to recognise privilege; these representations succeed in false double consciousness *by virtue of* being uncharitable. Since the community taking up false double consciousness builds their self-representations as oppressed from this straw man perspective, these impoverished representations serve, in turn, to impoverish the community's self-representations. False double consciousness can lead them to a state in which their resources for self-understanding are paralytically limited. As we saw above, within false double consciousness, Limbaugh's conservatives are limited to representing themselves as a community with little more to unify them than that they are falsely accused of being oppressive. This is interpretive paralysis.⁴⁶

Jeff Engelhardt, Dickinson College, Philosophy, PO Box 1773, Carlisle, PA 17013-2896, USA. jjengelhardt@gmail.com

NOTES

- 1 Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 147–176.
- 2 Fricker op. cit., pp. 149–152.
- 3 Jose Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 64–75.
- 4 Medina op. cit., p. 68.
- 5 Kathleen Hall Jamieson & Joseph N. Cappella, *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 75.
- 6 <http://www.journalism.org/interactives/media-polarization/table/consistently-conservative/>
- 7 <http://www.talkers.com/top-talk-audiences/>
- 8 Tyler Burge, 'Intellectual norms and foundations of mind' in *Foundations of Mind: Philosophical Essays, Volume 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 254–274.
- 9 Burge op. cit., p. 259.
- 10 Burge op. cit., p. 259.

- 11 Campbell & Engelhardt, 'Annotated transcripts from the Rush Limbaugh Show'. Hosted at <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbmX2aXJ0dWFsamVmZmVuZ2VsaGFyZHR8Z3g6NGYxNmZjNDNhNWJmMTk1Yw>, p. 107.
- 12 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 40.
- 13 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 68.
- 14 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., pp. 206, 208, 208, 211.
- 15 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., pp. 204, 211.
- 16 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 172.
- 17 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 181.
- 18 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 181.
- 19 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 46.
- 20 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., pp. 39, 252, 230.
- 21 Jamieson & Cappella op. cit. pp. 3, 16, 177–184.
- 22 Jamieson & Cappella op. cit. p. 212.
- 23 W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Bensenville, IL: Lushena Press, 1903/2000), p. 2.
- 24 DuBois op. cit., p. 3, emphases added.
- 25 Medina op. cit., p. 44.
- 26 DuBois op. cit., pp. 1–3.
- 27 Medina op. cit., p. 34.
- 28 Medina op. cit., p. 35.
- 29 Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 248.
- 30 <http://www.pewresearch.org/2009/02/03/limbaugh-holds-onto-his-niche-conservative-men/>
- 31 Campbell and Engelhardt op. cit., p. 248.
- 32 It's not easy to find recent and reliable data on the racial composition of the Show's listeners. This report prepared by a friend of the authors is reliable and recent, but it is limited to the one station, WOR-AM in New York. Jamieson and Cappella note that in the 2004 *National Annenberg Election Study*, 92.9% of Limbaugh's audience were white (Jamieson & Cappella op. cit., p. 92).
- 33 Jonathan Wolff 'The problem of Ideology II', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 70 (1996): 229–241, at pp. 231–234.
- 34 Medina op. cit., p. 44.
- 35 DuBois op. cit., p. 3.
- 36 Medina op. cit., p. 193, emphasis in original.
- 37 Medina op. cit., p. 194.
- 38 Medina op. cit., pp. 193–4.
- 39 DuBois op. cit., p. 3.
- 40 Medina op. cit., pp. 194–5.
- 41 Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), p. 156.
- 42 DuBois op. cit., p. 3.
- 43 Linda Alcoff, 'What should white people do?', *Hypatia* 13(3): 6–26, at p. 8.
- 44 Campbell and Engelhardt op. cit., p. 224.
- 45 Limbaugh approvingly cites Kurt Schlichter's characterisation of conservative resistance to liberal calls for diversity as a 'rebellion of the normal': 'what they [liberals] think is that there's a normal America that's typified and represented by the majority, and then the oddballs and the kooks and the freaks. And the kooks and the freaks and the oddballs are tired of being kooks, oddballs, and freaks. They want the way they are — the things they believe — to become what is normal, and there is a resistance to that as normal, and that's what the election [of Donald Trump to president in 2016] was about in part. So they — the left — look at this as a rebellion of the normal, and it cannot be allowed to grow' (Campbell & Engelhardt op. cit., p. 264).
- 46 We'd like to thank Chauncey Maher and Dan Schubert for helpful conversations related to the content of the article. We're grateful to Dickinson College for a Student-Faculty Research Grant that gave us the time and opportunity to work on this project.