



5-9-2024

Feeling a little uneasy: A comparative discourse analysis of White and BIPOC college students' reflective writing about systemic racism

Brett Russell Coleman
Loyola University Chicago, bcoleman4@luc.edu

Caitlyn Yantis
Villanova University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/curl_pubs



Part of the [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Demography, Population, and Ecology Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Coleman, Brett Russell and Yantis, Caitlyn, "Feeling a little uneasy: A comparative discourse analysis of White and BIPOC college students' reflective writing about systemic racism" (2024). *Center for Urban Research and Learning: Publications and Other Works*. 24.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/curl_pubs/24

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centers at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Center for Urban Research and Learning: Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).
© The Author(s), 2024.

Feeling a little uneasy: A comparative discourse analysis of White and BIPOC college students' reflective writing about systemic racism

Brett Russell Coleman¹  | Caitlyn Yantis² 

¹Center for Urban Research & Learning, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA

²Department of Psychology, Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania, USA

Correspondence

Brett Russell Coleman, Center for Urban Research & Learning, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA.

Email: bcoleman4@luc.edu

Abstract

This critical discourse analysis compares the ways in which White and BIPOC college students discuss their experiences of an educational intervention meant to promote better understanding of systemic racism. We analyzed reflective writing produced by 11 White psychology students from a private liberal arts college in the eastern United States and 17 BIPOC students from a Human Services program at a public university in the western United States. White students engaged in *whiteness discourse* that distanced themselves from the realities of systemic racism and/or relieved the cognitive dissonance associated with the self- and group-image threat related to learning about systemic racism. In so doing, they unwittingly upheld white supremacy. BIPOC students, in contrast, engaged an *antiracist discourse* that employed critiques of the social systems that produce systemic racism and destabilized dominant colorblind narratives, often by drawing on lived experience. From the Critical Race Theory perspective that the *centrality of lived experience* is a legitimate lens through which to analyze racial subordination, we discuss the importance of attending to the action orientation and constructed nature of discourse in antiracist education.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Authors. *Journal of Social Issues* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

INTRODUCTION

Recent efforts by conservative lawmakers in the US to ban critical race theory (CRT) from schools is an extreme manifestation of whiteness as an epistemology grounded in a “constructed ignorance” around racism (Mitchell & Chaudhury, 2020; Richmond et al., 2024). This ignorance serves to protect White feelings as an effective technology (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013) that preserves White domination and can be seen as a strategy employed even among non- and antiracist White individuals. Both crusaders against CRT and White people who are not threatened by CRT tend to engage in rejection, denial, or ignorance of historical facts regarding racism and the prioritization of White feelings (Coleman et al., 2019). Examining the discourse employed by White individuals who are not avowed CRT critics can reveal these parallels, such that whiteness discourse can uphold White supremacy regardless of the racial attitudes of individual speakers. The use and function of whiteness discourse can be brought into sharper focus when contrasted with the antiracist discourse of Black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC). Whether they explicitly endorse antiracism or not, BIPOC are likely to be more knowledgeable than White people about the history of racism and to have been socialized to be aware of the threat of racism and the imperative to actively resist it (Hughes et al., 2006; Minniear, 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Differences between BIPOC and White people's approach to race are reflected in both public opinion and social science research on racial attitudes and knowledge. In one poll of a nationally representative sample, 84% of Black respondents indicated that school students should learn that racism is systemic, whereas only 50% of White respondents agreed (UMass Amherst Poll, 2022). Moreover, BIPOC and White people can disagree about what racism is. White people often define racism as individual acts of racial animus, whereas BIPOC are more likely to conceptualize racism in a more nuanced way as both individual and systemic (Bonam et al., 2018). Further, in recent years, public opinion polling has found that many White Americans view anti-White discrimination to be the most significant form of “racism” (e.g., Gonyea, 2017). However, interventions aimed at increasing White people's understanding of past racism and its effects on the present can increase their recognition of systemic racism (Bonam et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019). What remains unclear, however, is whether bringing White people's recognition of systemic racism in line with that of people of color necessarily gives rise to antiracist thought and action. In this project, we compare how White and BIPOC students write about their personal relationship to systemic racism following a classroom-based intervention intended to enhance their understanding of systemic racism. Examining the content and function of the discourses employed by White students and students of color can inform the development of educational interventions meant to promote antiracist thought and action as well as institutional policies meant to promote antiracism.

Divergent definitions of racism: Isolated versus systemic

Generally, BIPOC are better able than White people to recognize the complexities of racism as systemic, in part because they are more attuned to *critical historical knowledge*: awareness about perpetual systemic racism beyond isolated, interpersonal racist acts, rooted in historical policies and practices (Bonam et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2012). These divergent definitions of racism—systemic among people of color and isolated among White people—arise from distinct racial socialization and identity-relevant motives experienced by people from different racial groups in the U.S.

Racial socialization experiences

Racial socialization refers to the transmission of information regarding race, which informs individual identity development and individuals' understandings of racism generally. Racial socialization research tends to focus on transmission from adults to children, particularly within the family, but one's peers, the broader community and mass media also play a significant role in shaping people's understanding of race (Barnes, 1980; Hughes et al., 2006; Rogers et al., 2021). Racially minoritized parents report not only talking to their children about racism, but they also acknowledge that doing so prepares their children for racism they may experience (Hughes et al., 2006). Other family members, peers, and cultural sources such as music and film also provide such socialization, often in the form of *narrative identity work* that provides a counter to dominant racist narratives that frame BIPOC individuals and collectives as inferior (Case & Hunter, 2012; Minniear, 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). More recent research shows that social media can be a profound source of racial socialization generally, and especially as it relates to the intersection of racial identity development and resistance. For example, Rogers and colleagues (2021) studied the use of the social media hashtag #BlackGirlMagic. They found that Black girls interpreted messages associated with the hashtag as affirming of their intersectional identities and promoted a sense of belonging and resistance to racial and gendered oppression. Both dominant and counternarratives communicate socially and culturally important ideas, beliefs, and ideologies (Opsal, 2011; Rappaport, 1995). For BIPOC, counternarratives meant to resist racism reflect an antiracist discourse that they can draw from to push back against racist societal narratives (Trochmann et al., 2022; van Dijk, 1993).

In contrast, White parents tend to avoid talking to their children about racism because they perceive the topic to be too negative or not necessary to discuss (Abaied & Perry, 2021). This reticence to discuss racism is reinforced by colorblind discourse that dominates the popular culture and largely informs public policy and law (Feagin, 2013; Markus et al., 2000). Moreover, colorblindness diverts attention away from the violence of racism while allowing White people to avoid appearing racist. Colorblind discourse has been shown to "cloak" white supremacist ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2001), to suppress discussions of racism (Sue, 2013), and to be central to certain aspects of White identity (Helms, 2014). Most relevant to our study, White Americans tend to be inundated with implicit and explicit racist tropes throughout their development, but the influence of colorblind discourse means that they are largely unaware of how those tropes shape their inherited attitudes and beliefs (Miller, 2015). The relative silence around racism and the pervasiveness of colorblind discourse are hallmarks of White hegemony in U.S. society. The hegemonic nature of whiteness means that White individuals may simultaneously express nonracist or even antiracist sentiments *and* behave in ways that sustain and normalize racism (Feagin, 2013; Hughey, 2010; Salter et al., 2018).

Self- and group-protective motives

In addition to distinct racial socialization experiences, White people and people of color are operating from distinct identity-relevant motives that shape their understanding of racism. The existence of systemic racism itself is a threat to the wellbeing of people of color. As such, BIPOC's identification with their own racial group is associated with a clearer and more accurate picture of racism (Branscombe et al., 1999; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Beyond recognizing racism as a means

of buffering against well-being threats, BIPOC are also more apt to critique systemic racism in society. For example, Case and Hunter (2012) describe *resistance narratives* as a type of narrative identity work that serve as “sites of critical and counterhegemonic discourse” (p. 264). Resistance narratives both reinforce oppressed people’s capacities to overcome oppression as well as promote an “idealized articulation of the world as it ought to be” (Case & Hunter, 2012, p. 264). This resistance-oriented narrative identity work draws from the lived experience of individuals and collectives to buffer BIPOC individuals from the racist tropes that shape popular discourses and dominant narratives. Indeed, one of the tenets of CRT is the *centrality of lived experience*, which acknowledges that the experience of people of color is a legitimate and appropriate lens through which to analyze racial subordination (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In sum, recognizing and critiquing systemic racism aligns with BIPOC’s identity-relevant motives to promote self- and group-wellbeing.

In contrast, White people’s rejection, denial, or ignorance of systemic racism aligns with their motives to maintain group esteem and preserve a meritocratic worldview. Unlike a conceptualization of racism as isolated, interpersonal incidents, a conceptualization of racism as systemic implicates White individuals and their groups in the production and maintenance of racial inequality. So, denying or overlooking systemic racism preserves White people’s positive, non-racist view of the self and their group (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Indeed, the stronger White people’s positive feelings about their own racial group, the more likely they are to deny current systemic racism (Bonam et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2012). Likewise, White people are motivated to deny or overlook systemic racism to preserve their belief in meritocracy—that people’s outcomes in life are merely the product of their inputs. For example, the more strongly White people endorse meritocracy, the less they acknowledge White privilege, a defining feature of systemic racism (Knowles & Lowery, 2012). These patterns reflect an *epistemologies of ignorance framework* (Bonam et al., 2018; Mills, 1997), such that White people’s inability to see systemic racism is not neutral, but functional: denial of systemic racism maintains White people’s self/group esteem as well as their meritocracy beliefs.

Research from various disciplines also shows that emotion plays an important role in the tendency for White people to deny or distance themselves from racism. When confronted with the reality of racism, especially its systemic or institutional nature, White people may respond with a range of emotions including rage, fragility, fatigue, or guilt (DiAngelo, 2018; Flynn, 2015; Ford et al., 2022; Leonardo, 2004). These emotional responses do the work of shifting the focus away from racism so as to maintain the psychological equilibrium described above. Even when antiracist education leads to greater understanding and acknowledgment of systemic racism among White people, such emotional reactions may blunt the effects of the increased awareness (Coleman et al., 2019, 2020).

Enhancing students’ understanding of systemic racism

Despite the gap in the racial worldviews of White people and BIPOC, brief interventions can increase White people’s recognition of systemic racism in the present. In one study, White participants listened to a short audio clip of a historian explaining how the federal government’s policies helped construct Black ghettos, the ramifications of which are evident today (Bonam et al., 2018). After learning about this place-based critical history (vs. listening to a control audio clip), White participants performed better on a test of critical historical knowledge which, in turn, boosted

their perceptions of current systemic racism (Bonam et al., 2018). This approach represents a shift away from the white privilege discourse that pervades much education around racism in that it focuses less on the unearned privilege associated with being White and more on the “direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137). Moving away from white privilege discourse has the potential of shifting White learners’ attention away from self-focused emotions like guilt and shame, and more towards action in solidarity with BIPOC against oppressing/privileging structures.

Such critiques of privilege pedagogies are not new. Leonardo (2004) has argued that an analysis of white privilege is incomplete if it is decoupled from white supremacy and white racial domination. Similarly, Lensmire and colleagues’ (2013) critique of McIntosh and Cleveland (1990) “knapsack” metaphor of white privilege as something to be “unpacked” suggests that privilege pedagogy is a “dead end for antiracist action” (p. 412) in that it tends to result in confession, as if confession alone were sufficient antiracist action. The intervention we describe is, in part, an attempt to put such critiques into practice. Rather than asking White learners to enumerate and emote about the ways in which they are racially privileged, the aim is to help them draw stronger connections among their own racialized lived experiences, historical processes, and contemporary manifestations of systemic racism. While this approach may risk centering White students’ experiences, we argue that it potentially upends White-centered privilege discourse by framing the BIPOC experience, which is arguably more well attuned to the reality of systemic racism as a life-shaping force, as a kind of standard to strive for. A critical examination of the discourse in students’ reflective writing can provide insight into antiracist education beyond the acquisition of knowledge and effects on perceptions of racism and provide insight into whether interventions like the one described here is an effective way to move beyond privilege pedagogy.

Although BIPOC students may be more likely at the outset to understand racism as a systemic process, critical education has the potential to contribute to their learning as well. For all students, the intervention we describe below is meant to provide an opportunity structure that promotes sociopolitical development (SPD). Watts and colleagues (2003) define SPD as “the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and the capacity for action in political and social systems necessary to interpret and resist oppression” (p. 185). Specifically, the intervention is aimed at developing students’ capacity for critical analysis of social systems through the lens of racism so as to be able to understand both its processes and outcomes. Such capacity for critical analysis relates to Freirean critical consciousness, which is thought to be the “analytic aspect” of SPD (Friere, 1973; Watts et al., 2003). For BIPOC students, the act of critical reflection upon their own racialized experiences can help them translate formal learning (e.g., in the classroom) into antiracist action (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). Furthermore, Bañales and Rivas-Drake (2022) argue that critical analysis that helps students locate the root causes of racist outcomes within social systems is one of the “key ingredients” of antiracist identity and action. Developing such critical analysis can help BIPOC students build on what they bring to the learning environment from their lived experience and develop solidarity with oppressed groups other than their own (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). In sum, interventions like the one we describe below have the potential to facilitate sociopolitical development in both White and BIPOC students, though in different ways. By examining and comparing the two groups’ discourses, we sought to understand (1) whether the intervention helped White students move beyond the privilege pedagogies that are common to teaching about racism, and (2) whether the intervention contributed both White and BIPOC students’ development of SPD in the form of antiracist thought and/or action.

The systemic racism curriculum project

The current research examines both White and BIPOC students' reflections on learning about systemic racism through a classroom-based intervention, The Systemic Racism Curriculum Project (SRCP). The SRCP is based on a participatory mapping project aimed at increasing people's understanding of the systemic nature of racism by identifying and mapping physical locations that represent systemic racism (see Dancis & Coleman, 2022 for more information about the SRCP). Connecting the abstract construct of systemic racism to a personally relevant site can help people to reflect critically on their prior (mis)education about race and to better comprehend racism's systemic and structural manifestations. Participants are asked to identify a site that both represents systemic racism and to which they have some personal connection to contribute to the map. In addition to writing a description of the site and how it represents systemic racism, they include a personal reflection on their connection to the site and the experience of participating in the project. Dancis and Coleman (2022) found that participating in the SRCP had the potential to promote "transformative dissonant encounters" with systemic racism that facilitated not only greater awareness of the pervasiveness of systemic racism among White participants, but also how their own miseducation contributes to its maintenance. However, such critical insights may only be fleeting for White people and may give way to the tendency to seek relief from the resulting cognitive dissonance by psychologically distancing themselves from the social and historical realities they learned about. People of color, on the other hand, may be more well prepared to incorporate such insights into critiques of the system given that their racial socialization is more likely to have prepared them for the realities of racism (French et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2009). Thus, the SRCP has the potential to facilitate BIPOC students' capacity for critical analysis if it affords them the opportunity to explore the intersections of lived experience, history, and racialized physical space.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In this study, we use a critical discourse analysis approach (CDA; Fairclough, 1993; van Dijk, 2019) to compare how White and BIPOC students who participated in the mapping project wrote about engaging with systemic racism. An emphasis on discourse goes beyond the cognitive and emotional processes related to acquiring knowledge and understanding of systemic racism. Rather, it views language as a social practice that accomplishes something for the speaker and reveals relations between language and power (Fairclough, 1993, 2001; Potter, 2004; van Dijk, 2019). Moreover, we use a comparative approach to highlight important differences in social position among diverse students with respect to teaching and learning about systemic racism. Our approach was informed by the "classic" CRT tenets that racism is embedded in the structures and systems of society (including language and discourse), and that lived experience is a legitimate form of knowledge useful for informing research and theory, as well as educational practices (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). We also drew from Salter and Adams' (2013) adaptation of CRT tenets for the development of a critical race psychology (CRP). Specifically, the aspects of their framework that inform our analyses are (1) that "discourses of neoliberal individualism" whitewash or obscure racism in society, and (2) that counter storytelling is useful for resisting racism. Our assumption was that participants brought to the mapping project various "representations of social worlds, values, beliefs and assumptions" (Miller, 2015, p. 140) that shaped their experience of the interven-

tion. Therefore, we assumed at the outset that White and BIPOC students would write differently about their experience with the mapping project given that they are likely starting from different places with regard to understanding racism as a systemic process. Investigating the different discourses employed by the two groups, and differences in what those discourses do, can inform the development of educational interventions meant to promote antiracist thought and action, and other institutional policies meant to promote antiracism.

Authors' positionalities

Engaging in critical analyses of our students' writing means that our own subjectivities as individuals and scholars inform our work. I (Brett) developed the SRCP while teaching at a predominantly White institution, but in a program that had more racial diversity. As a Biracial, Black and Jewish American, I was socialized in more racially integrated spaces than the average American and have had to balance being simultaneously subjected to racism in all of its forms and racially and phenotypically privileged relative to many of my peers. I bring to these analyses an intimate understanding of whiteness, a desire to hold White people accountable in a way that respects their humanity, and an interest in developing better answers to White people's questions about how to be better allies. I (Caitlyn) am a White American, heterosexual woman who was socialized in predominantly White, middle-class contexts. I implemented the SRCP in my (elective) class at a predominantly White, private college. Thus, my socialization experiences likely align with many of our White participants. I identify as a race scholar as well as someone who is continually working toward antiracist allyship. In turn, my aim in this project was to develop and communicate strategies for White people, including my current and future White students, to effectively engage with systemic racism and racial privilege in ways that support racially minoritized people.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 11 White, not Hispanic psychology students from a private liberal arts college in the eastern United States and 17 BIPOC students from a Human Services program at a public university in the western United States. White participants were enrolled in an elective psychology course, *The Psychology of Power and Privilege*, at an undergraduate only institution with fewer than 2000 students, 58% of whom are White. BIPOC participants were enrolled in a required course called *Inequity in U.S. Policies and Institutions* at an institution with approximately 13,000 students, 71% of whom are White. White participants included nine women and two men ranging in age from 19 to 22 years old, with an average of 20.6 years. BIPOC participants included three men and 14 women ranging in age from 18 to 24 years old, with an average age of 21.3 years. Eight participants identified as Latina/o, five as East Asian, two as Black, one as Black/White Biracial, and one as Arab. Importantly, the different institutional and pedagogical contexts matter for what we found. The Human Services program in which BIPOC students were enrolled had a more explicit focus on social justice and systems than the more mainstream psychology program the White students were enrolled in.

Materials and procedure

Students learned about the required mapping assignment and accompanying individual reflection assignment at the start of the semester. Toward the end of the semester, we sent students an optional online survey that included informed consent to use their de-identified reflections for research purposes, as well as demographics and racial attitude questions (not analyzed here). We as the researchers were also responsible for assigning students' grades for both the required assignment and the course, so we did not analyze the consent or other survey data until after final grades were submitted. We informed participants of this process on the consent form so they were aware that their decision about participating would not impact their grade. After submitting final grades for our courses, we anonymized consenting participants' reflections before beginning analyses.

Mapping systemic racism assignment instructions

All participants learned about the Revealing Systemic Racism interactive mapping project and were tasked with contributing to the map themselves. Thus, participants had to select a location that they were personally connected to and research how it represents systemic racism. Their research included relevant historical and/or social indicator data as well as at least one representative image for their site. Participants then had to create and submit an entry for their site so it could be added to the map, which included a summary of the data they gathered, an explanation of how the site represents systemic racism, and their selected image to represent the site. White participants completed the mapping assignment with other classmates in groups of 4–5, whereas BIPOC participants completed the mapping assignment individually.

Individual reflection assignment instructions

All participants completed individual reflections about their experience completing the mapping systemic racism assignment, although the specific instructions varied slightly in each class. In the class in which BIPOC students were enrolled, they were instructed to (1) explain their personal connection to the site, (2) describe their thoughts and feelings about the information they gathered on that site, (3) to explain why they chose the site, and (4) what it made them think and feel to study the site. In the class in which White participants were enrolled, they were instructed to (a) summarize their chosen site and its connection to systemic racism, (b) describe how completing the mapping assignment gave them a better understanding of systemic racism, (c) describe how completing the mapping assignment gave them a better understanding of the psychology of power and/or privilege (consistent with course content), and (d) describe their personal reactions to learning about their site and its connections to systemic racism, power, and/or privilege.

Analyses

Discourse analysis (DA) frames discourse as “the key to understanding interaction and social life” (Potter, 2004, p. 609). From a critical perspective, discourse can operate both as a mechanism of social control and of liberation (van Dijk, 1995). Thus, we employ critical discourse analysis (CDA),

which “examines the connections between discourse and power” (Fernandez, 2018, p. 298). Our analyses emphasize two key aspects of discourse: its action orientation, or what discourse does, and its constructed nature, or “the way discourse constructs and stabilizes versions of the world” (Potter, 2004, p. 610). Additionally, we frame the discourses we analyze as situated, meaning that language as it is actually used in a given context is always aimed at a particular audience (Gee, 2014). For the purpose of our analyses, we assumed an intended audience of ourselves as professors and others in a “liberal” academic setting where proficiency with the rhetoric (if not the deeds) of antiracism are increasingly expected.

The initial stage of our analysis involved reading and re-reading students’ individual reflection assignments, identifying key words and phrases that demonstrate differences in the way White versus BIPOC students discussed their relationship to systemic racism, and sorting text relevant to those differences from irrelevant text. For example, White student’s writing tended to be characterized by such keywords and phrases as “disappointed,” “hoping to overcome those feelings,” and “felt a little uneasy.” BIPOC students’ writing tended to include such keywords and phrases as, “not providing the right resources,” “systemic racism further persists,” and “intersections between race and education.” This stage produced two broad themes: (1) White students engaged in discourse meant to distance themselves from the realities of systemic racism, and/or to relieve the cognitive dissonance associated with learning about such realities, and (2) BIPOC students, on the other hand, engaged in critiques of the social systems that produced the racism they studied, often drawing on lived experience.

The next stage of analysis involved looking more closely within the broad themes to further examine differences between White and BIPOC students’ writing about their experiences of learning about systemic racism. We “sifted through” the relevant text for key words and phrases that revealed differences between the two groups’ thinking, discussing the contours of those differences in terms of the what the discourse does and how it constructs or stabilizes the world, and annotating the segments based on our discussions. We also applied theoretical concepts from CRT and CRP, as well as epistemologies of ignorance, as lenses through which to interpret emergent themes as they relate to discourse. Applying multiple theoretical frameworks alongside of discourse theory, or theory triangulation, contributed to the trustworthiness of our analyses. Trustworthiness was also ensured by investigator triangulation; we evaluated the data and emergent themes separately and reconciled differences in our interpretations during our discussions of what we found (Denzin, 2009; Fusch et al., 2018). This process allowed us to construct three themes that compare and contrast the two groups’ divergent discourses around systemic racism. Those were, sadness and fatalism versus questioning the system, hoping for change versus identifying societal failures, and recognizing privilege versus exposing White hegemony. We describe these below, followed by a discussion of *whiteness discourse* and *antiracist discourse*.

RESULTS

The initial stage of analysis produced two broad themes that demarcate the differences between White and BIPOC students’ writing about, and relationship to, systemic racism. White students engaged in discourse that distanced themselves from the realities of systemic racism, and/or relieved the cognitive dissonance associated with learning about such realities. They did so by expressing feelings of sadness and fatalism, hoping for change in the future, and recognizing their racial privilege. In contrast, BIPOC students engaged in critiques of the social systems that produced the racism they studied, often drawing on lived experience. They challenged

popular discourse around racism, and linked racism to White ignorance and hegemony, economic exploitation, and historical processes. While these differences were stark with little variation, there were also a few examples in which hegemonic discourses may have operated in BIPOC students' writing. Similarly, White students' writing also contained some contestation of hegemonic discourses, demonstrating at least the possibility of moving beyond such discourses towards antiracist praxis.

From a CDA perspective, the language choices people make reflect and reproduce societal representations and beliefs (Fairclough, 2001), and comparing White people's and BIPOC's language choices around racism can reveal the operation of different ideologies. Broadly speaking, BIPOC students' writing tended to reflect a more collectivist worldview relative to their White counterparts who tended to emphasize their individual emotional experience. These differences may have been heightened by the different course contexts. Psychology as a discipline tends to be more individually focused, whereas the course the BIPOC students were in was explicitly more focused on social structures and systems. A BIPOC student who identified as an Iraqi Arab woman chose the city of New Orleans, where she once lived, for her contribution to the mapping project. She began her write up by contrasting the popular imagination with the reality of systemic racism:

When many think of New Orleans, the first thing that may come to mind is the Big Easy, a city known for its lively music, bustling life, and Mardi Gras... But New Orleans suffers from systemic racism that has created income and racial disparities for the black community.

In contrast, White participants' writing was more self-focused, describing feelings of sadness or fatigue and lamenting one's own racial privilege as a barrier to responding to systemic racism:

In a sense, I almost feel a little jaded and desensitized when it comes to this topic. I know it's cliché to say at this point, but I'm just tired.

For White participants, this distancing discourse served to stabilize a sense of oneself as both knowledgeable and innocent with regard to racism, whereas the critiques employed by BIPOC participants served to destabilize popular narratives. The Iraqi Arab woman's attribution of "suffering" to an entire city represents this distinction, compared to White students who framed *themselves* as suffering from having to think about racism. These examples reflect CRT and CRP tenets. The Iraqi Arab woman's framing of New Orleans as a manifestation of systemic racism rather than "The Big Easy" can be framed as a counter story in that it rejects the way the popular imagination ignores racism. The White students' focus on their own individual feelings, on the other hand, demonstrates how individualism discourse can obscure the focus on systemic racism.

Sadness and fatalism versus questioning the system

The fact that learning about systemic racism is emotionally challenging for White people is well established in the research literature (e.g., Bonam et al., 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Flynn, 2015). The ways in which White people invoke emotions when discussing racism is revelatory when contrasted with BIPOC discourse. White participants' writing demonstrated a pattern in which

participants expressed sadness for the victims of racism, a sense of overwhelm, and fatalism. A White male participant described himself as “disappointed, but not surprised,” and went on to state that “racism (and sexism, homophobia, etc.) is so deeply entrenched in so many aspects of our society, every time I hear about more it sort of loses its impact.” By claiming not to be surprised, he positions himself as knowledgeable enough to relieve the tension of disappointment. That is, simply knowing about systemic racism means that his disappointment need not be addressed by affirmative, antiracist action. The rest of his statement does additional distancing work. Invoking “sexism, homophobia, etc.” dilutes the focus on race, while the imagery of entrenchment suggests that the problem is too intractable to be acted upon. Then, by claiming he is decreasingly impacted, he further distances himself from the imperative of antiracism. Other White participants similarly claimed to be “saddened” or “disheartened,” and used fatalistic terms like “ingrained” to describe systemic racism. While expressing such emotions may be framed as empathetic acknowledgment of the emotional experience of BIPOC, the juxtaposition of sadness and fatalism reveals something more about White discourses around race. White subjectivities are grounded in a history of theft of BIPOC land, labor, and wealth (Casey, 2016; Coates, 2014; Harris, 1993); thus, it is not surprising that negative emotions around racism would also be coopted and repurposed for the protection of White feelings.

In contrast, BIPOC participants rarely invoked their own personal feelings and were more focused on the role of history and social systems in generating and sustaining systemic racism. A Black woman who wrote about residential segregation in the rural Georgia town where she grew up stated that, “Even though Black and White people get along great in the town, there are still invisible lines that divide the city.” Her use of the word “still” is at variance with the fatalistic ways White participants talked about the entrenched or ingrained nature of racism. It implies the existence of historically rooted patterns and contributes to a critique of social systems that allow such patterns to exist even when interracial relations are good. The understanding of the historical antecedents to present day systemic racism was one of the goals of the mapping project intervention. Not only did BIPOC students appear more well prepared to make those connections, but they did so with a greater sense of urgency for antiracist action compared to White students. An Asian-American woman discussed racial discrimination against Asian descended people in Seattle for her contribution to the map, focusing mainly on the intersections of racial and economic inequality. She concluded her essay with:

Studying history allows us to understand our dark past and can help provide an insight to the present day. Currently there has been a widespread of racial discrimination against Asian-Americans ever since the outbreak of COVID-19. Immigrants and refugee community leaders have stated that there has been an increase in bias and harassment within the community. If we do not address this issue and create policies to protect Asian-Americans then history might just repeat itself.

Her use of “us,” “our,” and “we” shifts the responsibility of understanding from the individual to the societal level. The dark past she refers to is all of ours, and she links that dark past to present-day manifestations of anti-Asian racism and ends with a specific imperative for antiracist action in the form of policy. In contrast to the self-focused and self-protective nature of White participants’ writing, hers is a critique of societal failure to protect vulnerable populations rather than individuals’ feelings. However, we must also acknowledge the messiness of discourse in that her framing of racism as a “dark past” may represent the hegemonic view that racism no longer has any significant contemporary presence. While BIPOC may be more well versed in antiracist

discourse, they may also simultaneously draw from a popular discourse dominated by a white worldview.

Through the lenses of CRT and CRP, this theme demonstrates how the two groups drew from divergent discourses that both emanate from experiences in a society that is profoundly shaped by racism. White students' concern with psychological comfort reflects "neoliberal individualism" (Salter & Adams, 2013) and includes maneuvers to replace concern for BIPOC with concern for one's own wellbeing. These moves at the individual level are reflective of White people's relationship to racism on the collective level. For example, the way White participants expressed concern for the victims of racism then quickly distanced themselves by invoking their own emotional experience parallels the way trends in Google searches showed a spike in interest in antiracism shortly after the murder of George Floyd, and then a steep decline shortly after (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). On the other hand, BIPOC students' focus on critiques of social systems depends on an understanding of racism as a systemic process, not merely an individual phenomenon, that requires policy intervention rather than merely changes in individual attitudes.

Hoping for change versus identifying societal failures

The example above demonstrates that BIPOC students tended to be more explicit in identifying systemic racism as a societal failure. For White participants, that failure was implied not only by feelings of disappointment and grief, but also by expressions of hope that things would change in the future. Expressions of hope reflect the popular American discourse around progress and the "American Dream" narrative (Dhillon, 2021). White participants invoked that narrative, for example, by hoping "that police departments take bias training and education about their role in systemic racism seriously so that this institution changes for the better." As Maanvi Dhillon (2021) points out in her analysis of Ta-Nehisi Coates' writing, hope is "two pronged": whereas those who are privileged by race (or other social categories and processes) may rely on the hope of a general societal progress, Black Americans (and other racially marginalized people) should not rely specifically on "a hope that is conditional on ending racism in America" (Dhillon, 2021, p. 2). When White participants invoked hope in their writing, it was focused on their own emotional wellbeing even when paired with allusions to antiracist action:

I'm hoping to overcome those feelings and work on becoming a better anti-racist ally going forward with some of the strategies and information I've learned in this class.

This participant suggests that her own feelings are the barrier to antiracism, and her hope is only vaguely for the use of "strategies and information." That being said, her statement can also be interpreted as a sincere expression of desire to engage in antiracist action, representing the possibility that further education and opportunity for action may lead her to destabilize and contest dominant discourses around racism (Mason, 2016).

BIPOC students' writing resonated more with Coates' perspective in that it was largely devoid of such expressions of hope. Instead, their writing offered critiques that identified systemic processes such as economic exploitation and locating the roots of systemic racism in historical processes by making such attributions as "these historical practices created a system of racist economic inequality." A student who identified as a Black woman wrote about a historically Black neighborhood in Seattle where her family had lived. She ascribed the predominance of Black people in the neighborhood to:

previous discrimination policies and practices similar to how recent day suburban housing developments come with restrictions of what you can do to your home, such as lawn maintenance and house color.

Another student who identified as an Asian woman also wrote about residential segregation as an example of the intersection of race and class, and the manifestation of historical processes, claiming:

neighborhoods that were redlined or graded as “Hazardous” are severely under sourced and have greater economic inequality than White neighborhoods that had “Best” grades.

If there is hope to be had in the BIPOC experience, it is a critical hope that emanates from the struggle against oppression rather than wishful thinking that such oppression will end when oppressors finally see the light, and is grounded in critical analysis such as is evident in BIPOC students’ writing (Coates, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). For BIPOC, such critiques of the system do the work of challenging popular narratives like the “American Dream” by countering that narrative with a resistance-oriented perspective of those whose access to the dream is less than assured (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). White students’ writing, on the other hand, was more akin to what Duncan-Andrade (2010) calls “mythical hope” in that it was largely devoid of recognition for the possibility of radical change resulting from resistance. In the absence of such recognition, White students’ feelings seemed to obscure rather than catalyze the antiracist thought and action (Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014).

Recognizing privilege versus Exposing White hegemony

Another way that White participants relieved the cognitive dissonance related to learning about systemic racism was to recognize their racial privilege. The male student cited above who claimed diminishing impact of repeated exposure to stories of racism went on to say:

Of course, I also recognize that my tempered or diluted emotional response may partially be because of my privileged identity; I don’t need to feel strongly about it because it “doesn’t affect me”, or at least not in the same way.

The term “recognize,” as used here, means to acknowledge the existence of something. Such acknowledgment in this context does the work of bolstering his state of racial stasis by explaining that his privilege allows him to have a muted response to learning about systemic racism. While on the surface such recognition may seem like enlightened racial thinking, in fact it only sustains his inaction in response to his privilege, as opposed to, for example, using his privilege to act against the ways in which racism is ingrained in systems and structures. He states rather bluntly that he does not need to feel strongly, then puts further distance between himself and the recognized privilege through the use of scare quotes around the phrase “doesn’t affect me.” By concluding with “or at least not in the same way,” he admits that systemic racism does indeed affect him. But since he already established that he is not responsible for feeling strongly, there is no need for further introspection or antiracist action. Other White participants delved more deeply into the meaning

of their privilege, for example, by claiming to understand “how much power and privilege White people have in our society” as a result of participating in the mapping project. A White woman participant wrote:

For me, this research emphasized the privilege that I have simply walking down the street. I have never once worried that a police officer is going to think that I am acting suspiciously or that they might try to stop and search me. It is a privilege to not have to worry about what others will assume about me based solely on my race.

Although she invokes how treacherous the experience “simply walking down the street” can be for many BIPOC, her statement is not as empathetic as it may appear. She remains self-focused on her own lack of concern during such mundane activities. Thus, her sense of racial privilege is reinforced, or “emphasized.”

These examples demonstrate both the pervasiveness and shortcomings of privilege pedagogies. Contemporary White learners may more aware of their racial privilege than in the past, and/or may be quicker to deploy such rhetoric when they think it is expected of them. But proficiency with White privilege discourse does not necessarily equate to proficiency with antiracist discourse (Lensmire et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2004). To the extent that identifying or even confessing one’s racial privilege can be promotive of antiracism, more introspective work is required to identify how one’s well-intentioned thinking about racial privilege can still be bound up in discourses meant to preserve White comfort and innocence. One White student demonstrated this kind of introspection in a way that stood out from other White student’s writing:

It was a little uncomfortable to confront the realities of the privileges I face as a White person, as it makes systemic racism an issue that impacts me personally, rather than one only effecting minorities. In confronting this I have changed my perspective and been able to view Systemic racism in a new light, I now feel more responsible than ever to understand and work to unravel American systems of injustice.

While this student’s statement begins with a consideration of her own discomfort and takes on a confessional tone, it quickly shifts to an acknowledgement that systemic racism also affects White people, and that she is rethinking her perspective and sense of responsibility. This student may have simply written what she thought was expected of her, which would reflect the shortcomings of privilege pedagogies. However, to the extent that her perspective has truly been changed, she may have demonstrated a better understanding that her privilege emanates from the same systems and structures that oppress BIPOC (Leonardo, 2004).

BIPOC participants more often invoked lived experience in their reflective writing, which we contrast with White participants’ focus on their own emotional states. In doing so, BIPOC participants offered critiques of the specific social systems represented by their map sites that contribute to the maintenance of systemic racism. Educational systems were a frequent target in their writing, and they often pointed to specific technologies of racism (la paperson, 2017) represented by school policies and practices, ranging from English language learner programs to funding policy. A Latino man discussed the poor conditions at the elementary school he attended after migrating to the US as a young child:

[The poor conditions] could be attributed to property taxes and revenue from the neighborhood not being enough to renovate the school, but this just highlights how structures work together in creating the systemic racist issue [the school] has.

Although he is discussing an intensely formative time in his life, his writing is strikingly devoid of emotional self-focus when compared to that of White participants. Instead, there is an emphasis on interlocking systems tied to economic policies that create and sustain systemic racism. For BIPOC students, identifying the ways in which “structures work together” to create systemic racism is part of a process of becoming critically conscious. It is an essential part of development for BIPOC people to become aware that many of their challenges in life are not self-produced, but system driven. Whereas White participants’ experience with the mapping project largely invoked emotional introspection, BIPOC participants took the opportunity to develop their capacities for critique of systems and structures. Indeed, the Latino participant concluded his essay by saying he chose his school for the mapping site to make systemic racism more “visible” because “it is in many of our institutions and sometimes is not clear until we do more digging.” The effort to expose and clarify the workings of systemic racism through “digging” stands in sharp contrast to White participants’ self-focused writing, which served to maintain their psychological comfort. A key way that BIPOC students “dug” more deeply into systemic racism was to relate processes associated with it to the cultural, political, and economic dominance of White people, or White *hegemony* (Hughey, 2010). Compared to White students’ privilege discourse, BIPOC students offered a more nuanced understanding of systemic racism as a vicious cycle that “has created decision-making positions to be occupied and controlled by white western civilians.” In questioning such systems as public education, they offered critiques such as, “the numbers do not lie and we cannot ignore that they show inequities in funding and which students are a priority.” And perhaps most relevant to the goals of the mapping assignment, they linked modern-day systemic racism to historical processes. A woman who identified as Filipina stated:

If institutions began with that type of mentality and leadership, it’s for a fact that the customs and ways they do things will barely change because it’s engraved into the system. It may not be physically engraved, but it is definitely passed down to the next person in charge, mentally.

The author of this quote demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how power works through institutions and the role of individuals within those institutional arrangements. Her use of the term “engraved” invokes similar imagery as the terminology used by White students (i.e., “ingrained”), but the term arguably does different work here. For White students, pointing to the ingrained nature of racism foreclosed further discussion. This student, on the other hand, employed this kind of terminology to expose the ways White hegemony is maintained and “passed down” through institutions. Furthermore, she does so not with lamentation but certainty with the phrase, “it is for a fact.”

DISCUSSION

The aim of the SRCP was to promote greater understanding of racism as a systemic process that has contemporary, material manifestations. For all students, it is intended to promote SPD by facilitating students’ capacity to critically analyze the ways that social systems and structures

sustain racism in society. And for White students specifically, the SRCP is an attempt to move beyond privilege pedagogy and facilitate greater capacity for antiracist thought and action. We analyzed discourses in students' writing in order to evaluate how effective the intervention was at achieving these goals. Our analysis explored two distinct and divergent discourses present in students' writing about systemic racism. White students engaged in what might be called *whiteness discourse* that distanced themselves from the realities of systemic racism and/or relieved the cognitive dissonance associated with the self- and group-image threat related to learning about systemic racism. BIPOC students' writing, on the other hand, reflected an *antiracist discourse* that employed critiques of the social systems that produced the racism they studied, often drawing on lived experience. Here, we discuss these differences from a critical perspective that assumes that discourse can operate both as a mechanism of social control and of liberation (van Dijk, 1995), and we apply two key aspects of discourse: (1) its action orientation, or what discourse does, and (2) its constructed nature, or "the way discourse constructs and stabilizes versions of the world" (Potter, 2004, p. 610). Overall, our findings suggest that the SRCP may have been more effective in promoting BIPOC students' SPD than it was in moving White students beyond privilege pedagogies.

Whiteness versus antiracist discourse

Starting with the two broad themes from our analyses, it is evident that White and BIPOC students' writing accomplished very different goals. While contemporary White university students may be more exposed to antiracism than in the past, especially since the unrest of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, analyzing their discourse shows the persistence of a dominant ideology rooted in whiteness that contradicts the aims of antiracist education. By psychologically distancing themselves from systemic racism, White students implicitly engaged in the rhetorical equivalent of claiming that because they are not personally implicated in racism of the past, they are not personally responsible today. Furthermore, by seeking to relieve the cognitive dissonance associated with exploring mappable examples of systemic racism, they effectively prioritized their own psychological comfort even while expressing empathy for those subjected to racism. Unbeknownst to them, the whiteness discourse they employed subtly reinforced White supremacy (Efird et al., 2024; Trochman et al., 2022; van Dijk, 1993). This finding suggests that the SRCP may not have been particularly effective at moving White students beyond the confessional "dead end" of privilege pedagogies (Lensmire et al., 2013). The fact that White students so often discussed White privilege suggests they may have been steeped in privilege pedagogies prior to this intervention and were not well attuned to White supremacy (rather than privilege) as the main driver of the inequities they studied in the context of the mapping project (Lensmire et al., 2013). The intervention may have been more effective had it more explicitly asked students to look beyond privilege and identify the operation of white supremacy in the sites they mapped.

The antiracist discourse evident in BIPOC students' writing demonstrated the capacity for discourse to resist racism and other forms of oppression. BIPOC from White-dominated societies like the US are more likely than their White counterparts to have been socialized to be aware of and prepared for racism, to understand racism as a social system, and to engage in counter narratives meant to resist racism (French et al., 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Thornhill, 2016). The antiracist discourse present in BIPOC student's writing was marked by critiques of the systems that produce racism, largely by linking contemporary systemic racism to its historical roots. They tended to frame racism more in terms of societal failure than White students who vaguely hoped

for social change so that they may feel less anguished. While antiracist discourse is arguably essential for BIPOC psychological wellbeing, it is notable that BIPOC students' writing contained far less overt reference to personal wellbeing than that of the White students. The process of developing an antiracist identity among BIPOC students, in part, depends on developing knowledge about oppression beyond that which they may experience personally, leading to concern for and solidarity with other oppressed groups (Bañales & Rivas-Drake, 2022). The relative lack of self-focus in their writing may mean that the SRCP made greater contribution to their critical consciousness development than it did for the White students. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that BIPOC students came to the learning environment with higher levels of SPD due to their prior socialization experiences. Additionally, BIPOC students were enrolled in an academic program with a more explicit focus on social justice than the White students. Therefore, the differences in the groups' writing may also reflect different perceptions of what students thought was expected of them in their reflection pieces (Gee, 2014). Assuming that discourse, as a form of social cognition (van Dijk, 2019), accomplishes something for the speaker psychologically, it is worth further unpacking the broad differences we outlined above. What is accomplished by these divergent discourses, and what are the implications for antiracist education for both White and BIPOC learners?

Acting and (de)constructing: What discourse does

It is worth noting that whiteness discourse as we described it above is not necessarily *racist* discourse. Racist discourse expresses, in talk or text, racist ideologies grounded in an "Us" versus "Them" mentality on the basis of race. It may vary in its explicitness or "semantic and stylistic strategies" but is oriented towards maintaining White supremacy and the subordinate status of racial others (van Dijk, 2019). We argue that the whiteness discourse we describe here is adjacent to racist discourse in that both can function to maintain White supremacy. However, they differ in that those who employ the kind of whiteness discourse we describe may do so with the intention of expressing nonracist (and perhaps antiracist) sentiments. That is, there is no evidence that the White students in this study thought of themselves as superior to BIPOC. Yet, they discursively prioritized their own psychological comfort. This speaks to the power of dominant discourses to operate through people's speech, to do ideological work that contradicts the speaker's intentions, and to largely go unnoticed by said speakers (Martin-Baro, 1994; Minniear, 2022; Montenegro, 2002). This discursive distinction reflects an ideological and structural distinction of "racism by intent" versus "racism by consequence" (Guess, 2006). The mapping project intervention that produced the data for this study was partly intended to promote White students' understanding that racist intentions need not be present for there to be racist consequences (Dancis & Coleman, 2022). However, it did not adequately account for the powerful role of whiteness discourse in protecting White people from the discomfort of acknowledging that their own words and actions may have racist consequences despite their intentions.

In seeking to avoid or relieve the discomfort of thinking about the racist consequences of history and social systems, White students' writing served to "stabilize" (Potter, 2004) a White supremacist version of the world in which White people's psychological comfort is paramount. In contrast, the antiracist discourse of BIPOC students has the potential to destabilize a White supremacist world order. For BIPOC students, the mapping assignment represented an opportunity to practice such destabilizing critique as a form of engagement with a racist version of the world, rather than a retreat from it (Butler, 2001). Whereas White students' writing tended to

invoke their personal feelings, thus separating themselves from the racism they studied, BIPOC students tended to invoke collective or societal responsibility to address systemic racism. That, combined with drawing on their lived experience and exposing White hegemony, demonstrates an antiracist discourse that counters whiteness discourse, which frames systemic racism as too entrenched to resolve. It alludes to at least the possibility of a “new world in the wake of the apocalypse of white domination” (Mitchell & Chaudhury, 2020, p. 327). In that sense, the context of the SRCP may have been validating of BIPOC students’ antiracist discourse within the broader social context in which antiracist resistance has historically been risky (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). It is somewhat ironic that BIPOC students’ antiracist discourse contains that latent hope for such a world, while White students’ expressions of hope (e.g., to become better “allies”) tended to reinforce the hegemonic Whiteness standing in the way.

However, we should not assume that antiracist education for White people is hopeless. The extent to which White learners may be more prone to self-focused, emotional responses to learning about systemic racism may represent an opportunity for antiracist educators. White students’ expressions of sympathy for the oppression of BIPOC may be transformed into empathy if they are afforded more opportunities to learn about the ways in which they are also harmed by racism (McGhee, 2021). Interventions like the SRCP might be adapted specifically for that purpose, offering White students an opportunity structure to explore the ways in which white guilt can be productive if channeled into not only empathy but antiracist action. For students like the one in this study who expressed hopeful desires to be better allies, that would entail promoting a kind of critical consciousness that recognizes the difference between working *for* oppressed people of color and working *with* them in solidarity (Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014).

Implications for antiracist education

The results of our analyses demonstrate the importance of attending to discourse in the context of antiracist education. Generally, when learning to talk, people are fundamentally “learning a culture, and language provides the categories and terms for understanding self and others” (Potter, 2004, p. 607). From a CDA perspective, this means that people occupying vastly different social positions may communicate very different things, to themselves and others, even when using similar terms. When speaking or writing about racism, categories and terms of understanding depend largely on one’s position in relation to the centrality of racism to American life; that is whether one is privileged or subjugated by racism, and whether one has been socialized to be psychologically invested in the maintenance of racist systems or to resist and destabilize them (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; van Dijk, 2019). While the SRCP mapping project was intended to help students understand the pervasiveness of systemic (as opposed to individual) racism even in their own lives, the divergent discourses we revealed show that BIPOC students were more well prepared to receive the lesson. While there is no evidence that the White students held explicitly racist views, the whiteness discourse they employed did the work of White supremacy nonetheless by prioritizing their psychological comfort. While we should not expect White students to proficiently engage in the same kind of resistance-oriented antiracist discourse as the BIPOC students, it may have been beneficial for them to engage in further reflection on their own use of language and where they draw their terms and categories from when speaking or writing.

Our findings suggest that White participants may have been well exposed to privilege pedagogies prior to participating in the SRCP, and they may have been poised to interpret the mapping assignment in that vein. Their tendencies to focus on psychological discomfort and distancing

themselves from racism reflects the shortcomings of that approach. Previous research related to the SRCP has emphasized the importance of moving White learners beyond guilt and other emotional responses to learning about systemic racism to a more proactive antiracist stance (Coleman et al., 2019; Dancis & Coleman, 2022). One way to do that may be to give them opportunities to see how dominant discourses (i.e., whiteness discourse) operate in ways that may be contrary to their intentions. If White learners were able to apprehend how racism has shaped not only the material conditions of their lives, but also penetrates their very psyches, they may be more motivated to adopt proactively antiracist thoughts and behaviors. More explicit instruction to think critically about their own emotional responses may have been more effective. Although some White students expressed empathy for BIPOC, empathy alone is “not sufficient for inspiring proracial justice behaviors” (Spanierman & Cabrera, 2014 p. 18). Beyond empathy lies the possibility of “autopathy,” putting oneself in a position to actually experience what the oppressed and marginalized experience (Vera, Feagin & Gordon, 1995). We hoped that asking students to map examples of systemic racism would give White students the opportunity to see history (and contemporary disparities) through the eyes of the oppressed. However, it appears our hope was largely insufficient in the absence of more explicit instruction to view the assignment that way.

Limitations

The findings of this study reflect the ways in which participants drew from broad discourses present in the settings and cultures in which they were embedded. In that sense, these findings are specific manifestations of general discourses often employed by groups of people. Interpretations of these findings should also take into account that participants were responding to an educational intervention that took place in a college course. It is possible that they would have responded differently in different contexts or to different audiences. Finally, our interpretations of these results are not meant to suggest that either White people or BIPOC are “locked into” the disparate discourses we described. While we used the constructions “White” and “BIPOC” to distinguish among groups of people with vastly different positionalities, it is possible that individual White people may very well engage in antiracist discourse and that individual BIPOC may engage in whiteness discourse. As neither group is a monolith, more research on the ways in which the roles might be reversed is warranted.

ORCID

Brett Russell Coleman  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2056-1799>

Caitlyn Yantis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1248-1898>

REFERENCES

- Abiaed, J. L., & Perry, S. (2021). Socialization of racial ideology by White parents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 27*(3), 431–440. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000454>
- Bañales, J., & Rivas-Drake, D. (2022). Showing up: A theoretical model of anti-racist identity and action for Latinx youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 32*(3), 999–1019. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12747>
- Barnes, E. J. (1980). The Black community as a source of positive self-concept for Black children: A theoretical perspective. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (pp. 667–692). Harper & Row.
- Bonam, C. M., Vinodharen, N. D., Coleman, B. R., & Salter, P. (2018). Ignoring history, denying racism: Mounting evidence for the Marley hypothesis and epistemologies of ignorance. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 10*(2), 257–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617751583>

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001). *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era*. Lynne Rienner.
- Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T., & Harvey, R. D. (1999). Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(1), 135–149. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.1.135>
- Butler, J. (2001). What is critique? An essay on Foucault's virtue. In D. Ingram (Ed.) *The Political* (pp. 212–226). Blackwell.
- Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2012). Counterspaces: A unit of analysis for understanding the role of settings in marginalized individuals' adaptive responses to oppression. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1–2), 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-012-9497-7>
- Casey, Z. A. (2016). *A pedagogy of anticapitalist antiracism: Whiteness, neoliberalism, and resistance in education*. State University of New York Press.
- Coates, T. (2014). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*, 313, 54–71.
- Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me*. Spiegel & Grau.
- Coleman, B. R., Bonam, C. M., & Yantis, C. (2019). "I thought ghettos just happened": White Americans' responses to learning about place-based critical history. In P. S. Salter, & S. Mukherjee (Eds.), *History and collective memory from the margins: A global perspective*. Nova Science Publishers.
- Coleman, B. R., Collins, C., & Bonam, C. M. (2020). Interrogating whiteness in the context of community research and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 67(3–4), 486–504. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12473>
- Dancis, J., & Coleman, B. R. (2022). Transformative dissonant encounters: Opportunities for cultivating antiracism in White nursing students. *Nursing Inquiry*, 29(1), e12447. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12447>
- Denzin, N. K. (2009). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (3rd ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Dhillon, M. (2021). Understanding Ta-Nehisi Coates' rejection of hope. *Journal of Integrative Research & Reflection*, 4, 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.15353/jirr.v4.1930>
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. (2010). Note to educators: Hope required when growing roses in concrete. In G. Brion-Meisels, K. Cooper, S. Deckman, C. Dobbs, C. Francois, T. Nikndiwe, & C. Shalaby (Eds.), *Humanizing education: Critical alternatives to reform* (pp. 231–243). Harvard education Publishing Group.
- Efird, C. R., Wilkins, C. L., & Versey, H. S. (2024). Whiteness hurts society: How whiteness shapes mental, physical, and social health outcomes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 80(1), 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12598>
- Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 133–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002002>
- Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 5(11), 121–138.
- Feagin, J. R. (2013). *The white racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing*. Routledge.
- Fernández, J. S. (2018). Decolonial pedagogy in community psychology: White students disrupting white innocence via a family portrait assignment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 62(3–4), 294–305. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12282>
- Flynn Jr, J. E. (2015). White fatigue: Naming the challenge in moving from an individual to a systemic understanding of racism. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 17, 115–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2015.1048341>
- Ford, B. Q., Green, D. J., & Gross, J. J. (2022). White fragility: An emotion regulation perspective. *American Psychologist*, 77(4), 510–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000968>
- French, S. E., Coleman, B. R., & DiLorenzo, M. (2013). The role of racial-ethnic socialization on the development of racial-ethnic identity: A tale of three race-ethnicities. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 13, 1–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2012.747438>
- Friere, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. Seabury Press.
- Fusch, P., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. (2018). Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Sustainable Social Change*, 10(1), 2.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*. Routledge.
- Gonyea, D. (2017, October 24). *Majority of white Americans say they believe whites face discrimination*. NPR. Retrieved February 14, 2023, from <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559604836/majority-of-white-americans-think-theyre-discriminated-against>
- Guess, T. J. (2006). The social construction of whiteness: Racism by intent, racism by consequence. *Critical Sociology*, 32(4), 649–673. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916306779155199>

- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 1707–1791.
- Helms, J. E. (2014, June). *A review of White racial identity theory*. In *Psychology Serving Humanity: Proceedings of the 30th International Congress of Psychology: Volume 2: Western Psychology (Vol. 2, p. 12)*. Psychology Press.
- Hughes, D., Rodriguez, J., Smith, E. P., Johnson, D. J., Stevenson, H. C., & Spicer, P. (2006). Parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices: A review of research and directions for future study. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(5), 747–770. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.747>
- Hughes, D., Witherspoon, D., Rivas-Drake, D., & West-Bey, N. (2009). Received ethnic = racial socialization messages and youths academic and behavioral outcomes: Examining the mediating role of ethnic identity and self-esteem. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15, 112–124. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015509>
- Hughey, M. W. (2010). The (dis)similarities of white racial identities: The conceptual framework of 'hegemonic whiteness'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33, 1289–1309.
- Knowles, E. D., & Lowery, B. S. (2012). Meritocracy, self-concerns, and whites' denial of racial inequity. *Self and Identity*, 11(2), 202–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2010.542015>
- la paperson. (2017). *A third university is possible*. Minnesota Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863>
- Lensmire, T., McManimon, S., Tierney, J. D., Lee-Nichols, M., Casey, Z., Lensmire, A., & Davis, B. (2013). McIntosh as synecdoche: How teacher education's focus on white privilege undermines antiracism. *Harvard Educational Review*, 83(3), 410–431.
- Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36(2), 137–152. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2004.00057.x>
- Leonardo, Z., & Zembylas, M. (2013). Whiteness as technology of affect: Implications for educational praxis. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(1), 150–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2013.750539>
- Markus, H. R., Steele, C. M., & Steele, D. M. (2000). Colorblindness as a barrier to inclusion: Assimilation and nonimmigrant minorities. *Daedalus*, 129(4), 233–259.
- Martin-Baró, I. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Harvard University Press.
- Mason, A. M. (2016). Taking time, breaking codes: Moments in white teacher candidates' exploration of racism and teacher identity. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(8), 1045–1058. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1174899>
- McGhee, H. C. (2021). *The sum of us: What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together*. One World.
- McIntosh, P., & Cleveland, C. (1990). White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack [Documents]. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.30714426>
- Miller, E. T. (2015). Discourses of whiteness and blackness: An ethnographic study of three young children learning to be white. *Ethnography and Education*, 10(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2014.960437>
- Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract*. Cornell University Press.
- Minnear, M. J. (2022). The role of counter-narratives in resisting the deficit model of families for BIPOC families. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 40(3), 967–995. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407221123095>
- Mitchell, A., & Chaudhury, A. (2020). Worlding beyond 'the' 'end' of 'the world': White apocalyptic visions and BIPOC futurisms. *International Relations*, 34(3), 309–332. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117820948936>
- Montenegro, M. (2002). Ideology and community social psychology: Theoretical considerations and practical implications. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(4), 511–527. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015807918026>
- Nelson, J. C., Adams, G., & Salter, P. S. (2012). The Marley hypothesis: Denial of racism reflects ignorance of history. *Psychological Science*, 24(2), 213–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612451466>
- Opsal, T. D. (2011). Women disrupting a marginalized identity: Subverting the parolee identity through narrative. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 40(2), 135–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912/41610384995>
- Potter, J. (2004). *Discourse analysis*. SAGE Publications, Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781848608184>
- Rappaport, J. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology. Special Issue: Empowerment Theory, Research, and Application*, 23(5), 795–807. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506992>
- Richmond, B. S., Toosi, N. R., Wellman, J. D., & Wilkins, C. L. (2024). Ignorance of critical race theory predicts White Americans' opposition to it. *Journal of Social Issues*, 80(1), 240–271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12601>

- Rogers, L. O., Butler Barnes, S., Sahaguian, L., Padilla, D., & Minor, I. (2021). #BlackGirlMagic: Using multiple data sources to learn about Black adolescent girls' identities, intersectionality, and media socialization. *Journal of Social Issues*, 77(4), 1282–1304.
- Salter, P., & Adams, G. (2013). Toward a critical race psychology. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(11), 781–793. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12068>
- Salter, P. S., Adams, G., & Perez, M. J. (2018). Racism in the structure of everyday worlds: A cultural-psychological perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27, 150–155.
- Sellers, R. M., & Shelton, J. N. (2003). The role of racial identity in perceived racial discrimination. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(5), 1079–1092. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.1079>
- Solórzano, D. G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 24(3), 5–19.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>
- Spanierman, L. B., & Cabrera, N. (2014). Emotions of white racism and antiracism. In Watson, V., Howard-Wagner, D., & Spanierman, L.B. (Eds.). *Unveiling whiteness in the 21st century: Global manifestations, transdisciplinary interventions*. Lexington Books.
- Sue, D. W. (2013). Race talk: The psychology of racial dialogues. *American Psychologist*, 68(8), 663. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0033681>
- Thornhill, T. E. (2016). Resistance and assent: How racial socialization shapes Black students' experience learning African American history in high school. *Urban Education*, 51(9), 1126–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914566094>
- Trochmann, M. B., Viswanath, S., Puello, S., & Larson, S. J. (2022). Resistance or reinforcement? A critical discourse analysis of racism and anti-blackness in public administration scholarship. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 44(2), 158–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2021.1918990>
- University of Massachusetts Amherst. (2022, January 14). Toplines and Crosstabs December 2021 National Poll: CRT & Race in America [Press release]. <https://polsci.umass.edu/toplines-and-crosstabs-december-2021-national-poll-crt-race-america>
- Unzueta, M. M., & Lowery, B. S. (2008). Defining racism safely: The role of self-image maintenance on white Americans' conceptions of racism. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 44(6), 1491–1497. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.07.011>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2019). Ideologies, racism, discourse: Debates on immigration and ethnic issues. In J. ter Wal & M. Verkuyten (Eds.) *Comparative perspectives on racism* (pp. 91–115). Routledge.
- Vera, H., Feagin, J. R., & Gordon, A. (1995). Superior intellect?: Sincere fictions of the white self. *Journal of Negro Education*, 295–306. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967210>
- Watts, R. J., Williams, N. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(1-2), 185–194.
- Wray-Lake, L., Halgunseth, L., & Witherspoon, D. P. (2022). Good trouble, necessary trouble: Expanding thinking and research on youth of color's resistance to oppression. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 32(3), 949–958. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12789>

How to cite this article: Coleman, B. R., & Yantis, C. (2024). Feeling a little uneasy: A comparative discourse analysis of White and BIPOC college students' reflective writing about systemic racism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 80, 473–495. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12612>

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Brett Russell Coleman is an Assistant Research Professor at the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University Chicago. His research is transdisciplinary and primarily addresses the context and consequences of racial identity and racial socialization at multiple levels and life stages, including individual identity development among youth of color, whiteness and knowledge of racism as a systemic process, and the role of neoliberal ideology in youth development policy and practice. Much of his work is informed by lived experience, including over two decades working in urban youth development spaces in Chicago. Dr. Coleman received his PhD in Community & Prevention Research from the Department of Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Caitlyn Yantis is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Villanova University. Her research examines how people learn about, think about, and talk with others about race, racism, diversity, and privilege. Dr. Yantis earned her Ph.D. and M.A. in Social Psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago after earning her M.S. in Experimental Psychology at DePaul University and B.S. in Psychology at the University of Mary Washington.