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A Sociocultural Approach to Teaching about Racism

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Abstract

Drawing upon previous research which finds that a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism results in increased consciousness about racism and support for antiracist policies (Adams et al., 2008b), we designed and implemented a tutorial consistent with this approach in our Cultural Psychology courses. The tutorial presented undergraduate students with media images involving stereotypical representations of people from various racially marginalized groups. Students indicated how much racism they perceived in each image and discussed different conceptions of racism, reasons for variation in racism perception, and potential consequences of exposure to these images. The instructor then presented findings from social and cultural psychological research addressing key issues in student discussions. This presentation reinforced a systemic conception of racism and encouraged students to consider the extent to which learning about racism from the target's perspective can contribute to efforts towards social justice. Student responses were mostly consistent with the general idea that learning about racism matters, and more specifically with the proposal that a pedagogy emphasizing a sociocultural approach to racism can serve as a force for social justice.

A Sociocultural Approach to Teaching about Racism

The study of racism has been at the center of social psychology for several decades. Reflecting its importance as a focus of social psychological research, the topic of racist oppression looms large in the pedagogy of academic social psychology. In fact, most social psychology textbooks devote a separate chapter to the topic. However, a review of the best-selling social psychology textbooks indicates that standard pedagogical resources reinforce an *atomistic* conception of racism as a problem of biased individuals (Adams et al., 2008b). One indication of this atomistic construction is evident in the way social psychology textbooks name the phenomenon they study. For instance, titles of chapters in which discussion of racism appears use concepts such as *stereotyping, prejudice*, *discrimination,* or *intergroup relations,* instead of making direct references to *racism* or *oppression*. The standard reference to *stereotyping* and *prejudice* implies an individualistic understanding that locates the source of racism and oppression in individual minds and hearts, rather than in the everyday environments in which those minds and hearts reside. Besides chapter titles, an atomistic construction of racism is further evident in common topics of discussion such as different forms of racist bias (e.g. automatic and controlled bias, Devine, 1989), changing norms for racism expression (e.g. modern racism, McCohanay, 1986), and various interventions for prejudice reduction (e.g. Aronson, Stephan, Sikes, Blarney, & Snapp, 1978). Once again, the main focus in these accounts is on individual level processes rather than sociocultural phenomena. Beyond choice of topics, the atomistic construction of racism is also evident in the portrayal of topics. For instance, most textbook discussions locate the essence of automatic racism (Devine, 1989) in deeply embodied habits of individuals rather in the

environmental associations that continually shape individual habits. Following this

individualistic account of racism, most textbook accounts of antiracist action focus on

interventions to change people's prejudices or provide people with greater control over

their deeply embodied habits rather than focusing on changing the systemic

manifestations of racism that continually reshape individual habits.

Scholars propose that the atomistic construction of racism as individual-bias

within standard pedagogical resources is problematic for various reasons. First, research

reveals extensive cultural differences in perceptions of racism within U.S. society, such

that White Americans tend to perceive less racism than do people from various

historically oppressed groups (Adams, O'Brien, & Nelson, 2006; Adams, Tormala, &

O'Brien, 2006; Ai et al., 2011; Dach-Gruschow & Hong, 2006; Operario & Fiske, 2001;

Rodin, Price, Bryson, & Sanchez, 1990; USA TODAY=CNN Gallup, 2012). Researchers

suggest that one reason for these differences may be the implicit conception of racism

people draw upon when considering instances of potential racism: White Americans

prefer an atomistic conception of racism as differential treatment from hostile individuals,

while people from historically oppressed groups prefer a conception of racism as a

systematically embedded phenomenon in U.S. society (e.g. Bobo, 2001). From this

perspective, the atomistic construction of racism as a problem of individual-bias within

standard textbooks privileges White American conceptions and marginalizes the

perspective of people from historically oppressed groups.

Second, defining racism in atomistic terms as direct acts of differential treatment

by biased individuals may lead people to perceive a small role for racism in American

society. Recent work in social psychology suggests that the negative consequences of

systemic oppression are not limited to intentional or malicious acts of individuals, but also take more subtle forms (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). This research further emphasizes how people can often perpetrate subtle forms of "modern" bias without intention or awareness (e.g., Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Greenwald McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Henkel, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2006; Kawakami, Dion, & Dovido, 1999). From this perspective, such implicit or automatic manifestations of racist oppression may play a much larger role in U.S. society than many White Americans may realize.

Finally, to the extent that standard approaches lead people to perceive less racism in U.S. society, they might also lead to less support for antiracist policies or willingness to participate in collective action against racist injustice. From this perspective, standard approaches to teaching about racism may unwittingly serve as sociocultural affordances to deny the extent of past or present racism and to maintain an unjust status quo.

A Sociocultural Approach

As an alternative to standard accounts, Adams and colleagues (Adams et al., 2008a; Adams et al, 2008b) have a proposed a sociocultural approach to the study and pedagogy of racism. Rather than a case of individual-bias, a sociocultural approach conceptualizes racism as a systemic phenomenon embedded in U.S. society. This approach serves as a potential corrective to limitations of standard accounts we previously discussed in several ways.

First, a sociocultural approach resonates with the understandings and experiences of people from historically oppressed—as opposed to dominant—groups. More generally, this approach addresses the topic of oppression from ''the target's

perspective'' (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Swim & Stangor, 1998). By adopting the target's perspective, a sociocultural approach illuminates the extent to which systemic oppression can have negative consequences even in the absence of intentional acts of differential treatment (see Major & O'Brien, 2005). For instance, social psychological research suggests that the mere knowledge of systemic oppression can be sufficient to harm potential targets of oppression by leading to academic underperformance (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002) or decreased well being (Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2003). In this regard, a sociocultural approach that is grounded in the *perspectives of the oppressed* (Martín-Baró, 1994) promotes greater attention to a broader range of systemic oppression and associated suffering than do standard accounts.

Second, unlike atomistic constructions that limit the range of racism to individual acts of malice or discrimination—and hence imply that racism and oppression are relatively rare or "abnormal" occurrences—a sociocultural approach that adopts the target's perspective suggests that racism and oppression occupy a much larger place in U.S. society than most people realize. Rather than locating the essence of racism in individual bias, a sociocultural approach locates the essence of racism in the "biased" stuff of everyday worlds such as sanitized representations of U.S. history (e.g. Salter & Adams, 2012), dehumanizing stereotypes regarding race (e.g. Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008), or ethnocentric conceptions of merit (e.g. Croizet, 2008), national identity (e.g. Devos & Banaji, 2005) and official holidays (e.g. Kurtiş, Adams, & Bird, 2010). As such, this approach helps to reveal the typically invisible, ideological bases of everyday reality that scaffold individual experience in ways that reflect and reproduce the legacy of historical oppression, regardless of individual intention or awareness.

Finally, by revealing the extent of racist oppression in U.S. society and highlighting harmful effects of past and present racism on historically oppressed groups, a sociocultural approach to racism has the potential to increase greater awareness of and willingness to combat racism. Without relieving individuals of responsibility for their actions, a sociocultural approach to racism further directs efforts at change to environmental affordances that guide individual experience.

Adams and colleagues (Adams et al, 2008b) examined the implications of standard versus sociocultural approaches to teaching about racism in two studies. In particular, they randomly assigned a sample of White American, *Introduction to Psychology* students to one of two tutorials about racism: a standard tutorial that drew upon textbook presentations and a sociocultural tutorial that drew upon the sociocultural account of racism. They then compared the effectiveness of these tutorials in raising consciousness about the extent of racism in American society. Findings revealed that relative to the standard tutorial, the sociocultural tutorial led to greater perception of racism, greater support for anti-racist policies and a tendency to define racism as a more systemic phenomenon. One implication of this research is that the standard portrayal of racism may fail to increase awareness of racism and endorsement of anti-racist policies. Alternatively, a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism may increase awareness of racism and endorsement of anti-racist policies.

Teaching about Racism in Cultural Psychology Courses

Drawing upon these insights, we designed a tutorial on racism and oppression in a manner consistent with a sociocultural approach, which we implemented in the Cultural Psychology courses we teach at our respective universities. Before describing the tutorial,

some contextual information regarding the course might be useful.

Although approaches vary, the version of the Cultural Psychology course we taught had four organizing themes. The first theme concerned *diversity in psychological functioning.* Most studies in psychology are based on a limited range of the world's people: typically young, middle-class, college students of European descent living in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (i.e., WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) settings. Accordingly, one goal of the course was to consider what happens when the same studies are conducted with more representative samples in majority-world settings—that is, among people associated with the "developing world" who represent the majority of humankind (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1995). The second theme addressed *cultural foundations of psychological experience*. Here our goal was to examine the extent to which patterns of psychological experience—like self-enhancement, romantic love, or an open approach to friendship—are not "just natural", but instead are products of particular constructions of reality. The third theme concerned *cultural foundations of psychological science*. In other words, we explored the extent to which psychological science—despite its claims to universality, objectivity and value-neutrality—is in fact itself a cultural product that reflects the understandings and beliefs of its producers (see Salter & Adams, 2013a). Finally, the fourth theme emphasized *global social justice.* Although the course primarily focused on the conceptual contributions of cultural psychology, this fourth theme emphasized the extent to which cultural psychology has practical, real-world relevance**,** and can illuminate ways of being that serve broad interests of humanity (see Kurtiş & Adams, 2013).

Throughout the semester, we applied these themes to diverse psychological

phenomena such as self and identity, development, perception and cognition, emotion, motivation, relationship, and health. The last unit of the course dealt with racism and oppression. Each course adopted the standard social psychology textbook for teaching cultural psychology (Heine, 2011, *2ⁿᵈ Edition*). Subject matter relevant to racism and oppression in this textbook appears in the "multicultural worlds" chapter as one of the four chapter objectives: (1) appreciate the problems that acculturation research has to deal with, (2) learn about how people acculturate and what affects how they do that, (3) learn about how multicultural people deal with different self-concepts, and (4) see the far-reaching implications of discrimination. While the chapter highlights the psychological consequences for targets of discrimination, the textbook does not define racism or discuss the cultural (re)production of oppression as a central theme. Therefore, we sequentially developed a sociocultural tutorial on racism and oppression to supplement the textbook. The third author (Glenn Adams) provided the conceptual framework for the course and the tutorial on teaching about racism. The second author (Phia Salter) designed the interactive in-class activity and selected materials for the tutorial. The first author (Tuğçe Kurtiş) adapted the activity and materials and implemented the version of the tutorial we describe below.

A Tutorial on Racism and Oppression

Part 1: In-class activity and discussion. On the first day of the unit, students participated in an interactive class exercise examining their perceptions of racism in ambiguous events. The first part of the tutorial involved a class activity in which the instructor presented students with nine controversial images from mainstream media involving stereotypical representations of people from various racially marginalized

groups and asked them how much racism they perceived in each image. She informed

students that there is not a single correct answer to these questions, encouraged

expression of divergent ideas, and asked students to stand by one of the four response

options placed on four walls of the classroom (e.g. "Strongly Disagree", "Somewhat

Disagree", "Somewhat Agree", "Strongly Agree") to indicate their response. Students

reported their perceptions by standing next of the one of the signs and discussed their

rationale for their ratings.

This activity generated a highly engaged form of collaborative inquiry into

different conceptions of racism, reasons for variation in perceptions of racism, and

potential consequences of exposure to these images. Three key features of the

pedagogical method are worthy of mention here. First, the activity was *dialogical*. It built

on dialogue between learners in a collaborative setting. Even students who did not

verbally express their opinions participated in the co-construction of meaning and

knowledge by physically taking a stand on the topic. Second, the activity was *critically*

reflexive. It encouraged students to critically examine their perceptions and understanding

of the social world, and the potential origins and consequences of these perceptions and

actions from a broader perspective. Finally, this approach was *dynamic*. Students not only

physically moved around the classroom from one sign to another upon hearing each

other's insights and perceptions, but also experienced first hand how perceptions and

opinions may vary in light of different or new knowledge. In a Freirean (1970) sense, the

activity opened up the students to new knowledge and a new way of perceiving social

reality.

Figure 1 illustrates one of the media cases that afforded greater perception of

racism relative to the other eight cases included in the activity. It features two similar

photographs side by side. The first is a photograph showing a Black man wading through

chest-deep water with grocery store merchandise and describes this action as "looting" a

grocery store. The second is a photo showing two White people in a similar situation and

describes this action as "finding" food from a local grocery store (Kinney, 2005;

Washington, 2005). Most students in the classroom "strongly" or "somehow" agreed that

this example involved an element of racism. One reason for this might be due to the fact

that the juxtaposition of these two photos with the differential representation of similar

actions provided a "clearer" case of media bias than some of the other media images

presented to students in isolation.
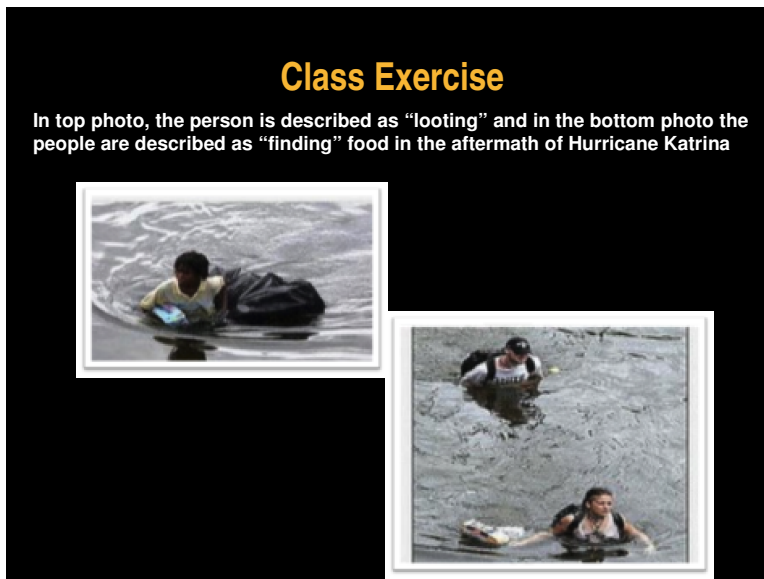
Figure 1. Hurricane Katrina

Figure 2 illustrates another case that afforded moderate to high perception of

racism on average. It features a Mexican themed sorority party at Penn State University

where students are wearing ponchos, sombreros, fake moustaches and holding signs that

say "will mow lawn for weed + beer" and "I don't cut grass, I smoke it." While the

majority of students agreed with the offensive and insensitive character of these signs, a group of students, some of whom self-identified as members of sororities or fraternities, refused to label this incident as a case of racism and suggested that these parties provide occasions for students to *just have some fun* with *no bad intentions*. Others refuted the possibility of racism on the grounds that a sorority or fraternity party with the theme of "rednecks" would involve similarly offensive or insensitive caricatures of White Southerners, implying once again that the main motivation of such cases would be more aptly characterized as having fun, rather than displaying racist bigotry.
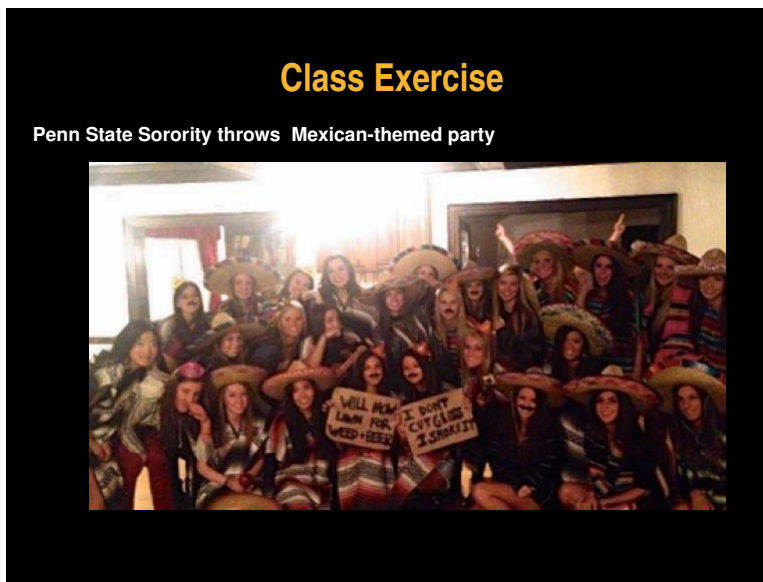
Figure 2. Mexican Themed Sorority Party

Figure 3 illustrates a case where in which the majority of students did not perceive racism. It features celebrity figure Paris Hilton wearing a "seductive squaw" outfit for Halloween. The majority of students in the class argued that Halloween is a time where "people dress up as different characters or people not to be racist but because they either just simply like the outfit or trying to be cute".
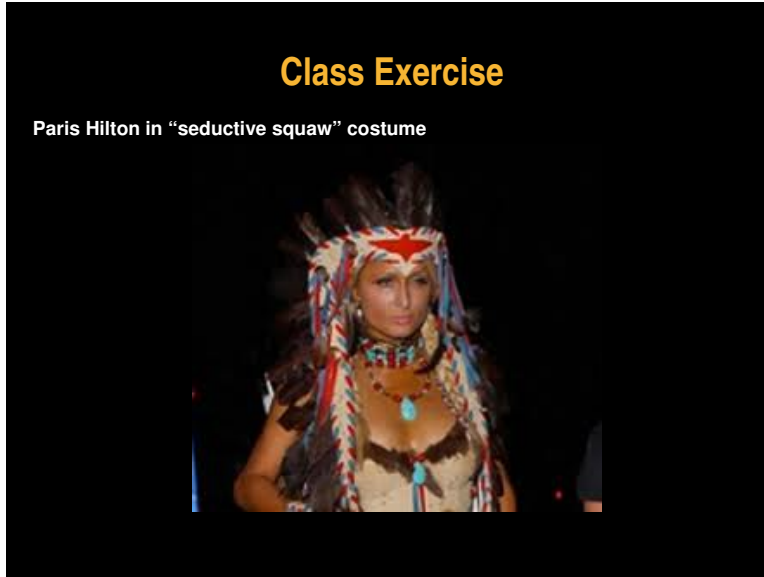
Figure 3. Paris Hilton at Halloween

Figure 4 illustrates another case where perceptions of racism were relatively minimal. It features two sports team logos: Cleveland Indians and The Washington Redskins. As in the case of Halloween outfits, a large number of students thought claims of racism were "out of context" and having these figures as sports team logos were ways of recognizing and celebrating Indigenous Peoples. One reason for the relative absence of racism perception in this and the previous case might be that both images concern stereotypical representations of Indigenous Peoples, who remain relatively invisible in mainstream U.S. culture except in the form of brand images, Hollywood figures, or school mascots (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008). Another reason for students' low levels of racism perception in response to these cases might be the relative absence of Indigenous voices in academic contexts, including our own classrooms and departments.

Figure 4. Sports Logos
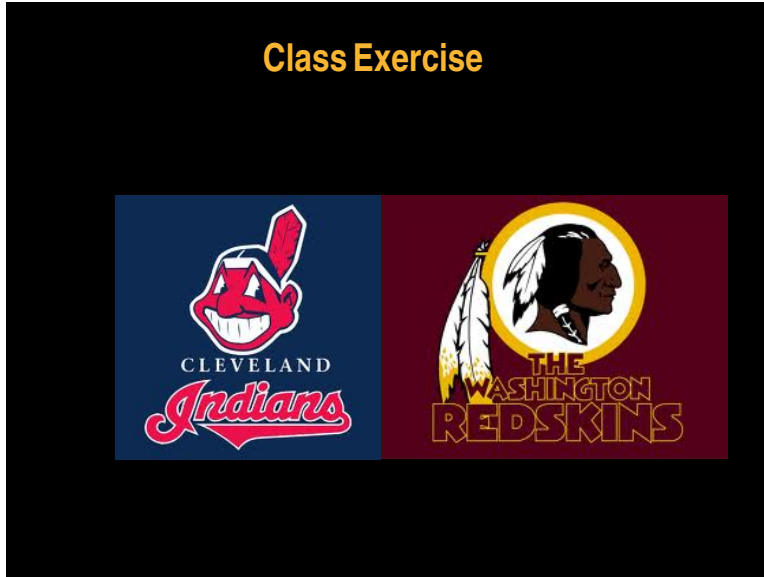
Finally, Figure 5 features a case in which a major change occurred in student responses. The students first saw a cover of Vogue magazine featuring basketball player LeBron James with model Giselle Bundchen. While the majority of students perceived little to no element of racism in the magazine cover itself, responses rapidly shifted when the image was presented side by side with a famous World War I propaganda poster that appears remarkably similar. While some students expressed "shock" and moved from "strongly disagree" to "somehow agree" or "strongly agree" signs, others maintained the position that referring to basketball players as "beasts" serves as a "compliment" rather than a racial offense.

Figure 5. Vogue Cover

To summarize, the activity provided students with opportunities to engage in critical dialogue, examine their different perceptions and responses to social reality, and learn from each other's perspectives and insights. The majority of students also indicated experiencing a high level of enjoyment and engagement, and recommended the inclusion of more activities of this nature in future versions of the course.

Part 2: Online reflection. As a follow-up to the class discussion, the instructor next asked students to reflect on the class activity and post their responses on the course site. A key point of controversy that became evident in both class discussions and online reflections concerned the role of intention. Students debated whether an action or actor can be qualified as racist even if there was no conscious intention to discriminate. Below is an excerpt from a student who claimed that regardless of historical context or problematic associations, an image or situation cannot qualify as racism unless it reflects malicious intention:

"For me a lot of the images came down to intent. Was this image or were the

words spoken with some form of malice behind them? For example if I used the

phrase "hip hip hooray" or said "rule of thumb" more than likely no one would

take offense. However the context behind these phrases is quite dark. Hip hip

hooray is an old Nazi war cry and rule of thumb was a phrase that meant a man

could beat his wife with any stick as long as it was not thicker than his thumb.

These phrases seem commonplace to me and I am not a wife beater nor Nazi

supporter. The difference is intent. When I say hip hip hooray I do not mean it in

the context of support[ing] nazism more than likely it's a celebratory phrase.

Does racism still exist? I think so. What defines racism? I believe it's intent"

Other students challenged this view and proposed that an image or situation can still

qualify as racism even without the conscious awareness or malicious intention of their

producers:

"I personally do not think that something cannot be racist without the intent to be

racist. For example, I do not think that Paris Hilton is racist simply because of

the Halloween costume that she chose to wear. I don't even know if she personally

understood the racism behind it, but it does not change the fact that the

Americanized, stereotypical outfit that she wore labeled as a seductive squaw is

racist. The problem is, until people are willing to address it and face it instead of

blowing it off, people won't know that things like that are not okay. Many people

do and say racist things out of pure ignorance, not because they are inherently

racist, but that won't change until people stop letting ignorance fly as an excuse

for racism."

Related to the topic of intention was the role of ignorance in racism judgments.

For instance, one student made the observation that knowledge of history accounted for differences in judgments of racism and pointed out that racism and ignorance (of history) often go hand in hand:

> *"The thing I'd like to mention…was how my perception immediately changed and also how other students' opinion changed after getting more historical background information on the photo. It's amazing how racism and ignorance go hand in hand. You can be considered a racist until informed. That was one of things that really really stood out to me."*

More generally, students who perceived greater racism in these media images often emphasized the role that historical knowledge played in their judgments. The following excerpt from another student illustrates this point:

> *"Without having prior knowledge of a lot of the historical background associated with racism, it can be hard to see the racism in certain things. For example, if the picture of the ape and the woman was never shown, no one would have thought twice about the magazine cover of Lebron James, or if you had no real historical knowledge concerning the treatment of the Native American women by the White European men, you would not know that dressing up as a Native American woman and calling it a "seductive squaw" is completely tied to the oppression, rape, removal, and murder of Native American women. It is important that we educate ourselves and stop ignoring racism and writing it off as "just having fun", because until we do, these images, stereotypes, and other racist things, whether blatant or masked, will continue to persist."*

A third important point of debate involved the perspective (e.g. dominant or

oppressed group) from which students approached the task. Most students who argued

against racism did so on the basis of their sense that there was no malicious intent in the

actors producing these images. For instance, here is a case where a student argued that

rather than a potential case of racism, the use of Indigenous mascots in sports teams

constitutes a way of honoring Indigenous Peoples:

> **"***I think that people sometimes try and make objects or events more than it really*
>
> *is. For example the team logos, the Cleveland Indians and Washington*
>
> *Redskins… someone in class made a really great point that teams choose their*
>
> *logo to represent them through traits such as honor, bravery, strength. I don't*
>
> *think you can take it as more than it is."*

In contrast, students who perceived higher levels of racism throughout different images

tended to evaluate these images from the target's perspective. For example, the following

student points out how refusal to adopt the target's perspective or recognize the harm

done by racist stereotypes serves to perpetuate racist oppression.

> *"There was so much discrepancy between our opinions, but I took away two*
>
> *significant points from our discussion. First, if the culture represented in an*
>
> *image or drawing is offended by it, it is important to give them the voice to claim*
>
> *it as a negative representation of themselves against popular opinion. The second*
>
> *is that some things portraying racism come from ignorance and insensitivity.*
>
> *Many said that this explained the action but not necessarily excused it. While*
>
> *ignorance may explain it, it should not be an excuse. With a world based on*
>
> *colonization that was justified by sexualization and exotification of "others"*
>
> *understanding that our ignorance of these images of non-truths harms others*

should teach us what is racist and what is not. Refusal to accept the ways others

are harmed by stereotypes perpetuates racism"

To summarize, students' online reflections, resonating with their in-class discussions, revealed major differences in understandings of racism (e.g. racism based on or regardless of intent), possible reasons for variation in racism perception (e.g. "playing the race card" or "ignorance") and potential strategies for addressing racism in US society (e.g. "more education on the history of oppression" or "learning how to not get hung up on it").

Part 3: In-class presentation of research. The third part of the tutorial exposed students to social and cultural psychological research responding to key issues that emerged in classroom and online discussions. Consistent with a sociocultural approach, this last section of the tutorial introduced the course definition of racism (see Salter & Adams, 2013b):

Racism consists of explicit and implicit patterns of historically derived and selected ideas and their embodiment in institutions, practices, and artifacts; systems of racism may, on one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action.

This definition reinforced a systemic conception of racism impacting the experiences of people from both racially oppressed and dominant groups. Utilizing several research examples, course lecture materials encouraged students to further consider the extent to which learning about racism from the target's perspective could contribute to efforts toward social justice.

The first line of research the instructor presented examines sources of group

differences in perceptions of racism. Observers consistently note that White Americans

tend to perceive less racism in U.S. society than do people from various historically

oppressed groups (e.g. Adams et al., 2006; Newport, 2012; Operario & Fiske, 2001;

Rodin et al., 1990). Mainstream accounts often attempt to explain this difference by

focusing on oppressed groups (e.g. see Wise, 2006 on "playing the race card"). Yet,

research from a sociocultural perspective adapts the targets' perspective and shifts the

focus of explanation from racially oppressed to racially dominant groups. In other words,

a sociocultural approach examines reasons for White Americans' relatively lower levels

of racism perception in U.S. society. As we previously noted, one reason for group

differences in perceptions of racism involves conceptualizations of racism. Atomistic, as

opposed to systemic, constructions of racism are more prevalent among White Americans

relative to people from historically oppressed groups, which might account for White

American tendencies to see less racism in U.S. society. Another reason for differences in

perception of racism—resonating with student insights— concerns differential

knowledge of racist history. Studies suggest that White Americans may perceive less

racism in contemporary U.S. society because of their ignorance about historically

documented incidents of racism (Nelson, Adams, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2010; Nelson,

Adams, & Salter, 2013). Finally, scholars suggest that another reason for group

differences in racism perception concerns identity-defensive motivations among racially

dominant groups to deny racism (e.g. Adams et al., 2006b). In summary, the literature on

group differences in racism perception serves to both "normalize" tendencies among

historically oppressed groups to perceive greater racism and "denaturalize" tendencies

among racially dominant groups to deny racism (Adams & Salter, 2007).

Following the discussion on group differences in perceptions of racism, the

instructor next presented findings of research examining effects of exposure to

stereotypical representations among historically oppressed groups. While there is an

abundance of work on this topic within social and cultural psychology, the instructor

focused on research examining the psychological consequences of exposure to media

representations included in the class activity. One example comes from a study in which

researchers exposed Native American high school students to media representations of

Native Americans (e.g. the "Chief Wahoo" mascot of the Cleveland Indians or the

Disney's animated film character Pocahantas) and examined consequences for measures

of well-being (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008). Students exposed to these

representations reported lower self-esteem (in one study) and mentioned the domain of

achievement less often when describing future possible selves (in another study) than did

students in a no-representation control condition. The authors suggest these negative

outcomes might be due to social identity threat: a burden of concerns about one's position

in society that cause harm even in the absence of differential or discriminatory treatment.

Finally, the instructor presented findings of research examining effects of

exposure to stereotypical representations among racially dominant groups. This particular

example of research made contact with the cover of the Vogue magazine included in the

class activity. In a series of experimental studies, researchers have illustrated the subtle

persistence of historical associations linking African Americans to apes (Goff, Eberhardt,

Williams, & Jackson, 2008). The researchers further revealed how this association

increases people's justification of violence against African American suspects. Finally, in

an archival study of actual criminal cases, the researchers have found that news articles

about African Americans convicted of capital crime contain more ape-relevant language than news articles about European American convicts, and that those convicts who are described as more apelike in news articles are more likely to be executed by the state than those who are not. Together, the findings of their research suggest how the subtle persistence of these historical associations (such as the one in the Vogue cover) can enhance dehumanization and stereotyping, even in the absence of conscious awareness, and lead to real-world social injustice.

Following this presentation of research, the instructor concluded the unit with an exploration of possibilities for social change. She provided students with examples of resistance and collective action for social change among racially marginalized groups as well as examples of resistance and collective action for social change on university campuses. In particular, she highlighted the "We're a culture, not a costume" poster campaign initiated by students at Ohio University that challenges dressing up as racial stereotypes for Halloween. A key point in this broader discussion was the idea that while racism and oppression are systemic phenomena embedded in broader society, individual agents may reproduce, resist, or alter those phenomena via personal and collective action.

Discussion

Drawing upon theory and research examining the implications of standard versus sociocultural approaches to teaching about racism, we designed and implemented a sociocultural tutorial in our Cultural Psychology courses to demonstrate the cultural (re)production of racial oppression in context and everyday action. This tutorial consisted of three parts: (a) an interactive class activity that examined perceptions of racism in media representations, (b) individual reflections on definitions of racism, variation in

perceptions of racism, and consequences of racist stereotypes that students shared with all course participants via the course site, and (c) presentation of research by the course instructor that addressed insights from research utilizing a sociocultural approach to the study of racism. While the question of the tutorial's effectiveness on student outcomes awaits further research, students' responses were generally consistent with the general idea that learning about racism matters, and more specifically, with the proposal that a pedagogy emphasizing a sociocultural approach to racism can serve as a force for liberation.

Standard pedagogies of racism in psychology might serve as "epistemologies of ignorance" (Mills, 1997) —defined as forms of knowing that afford lack of consciousness (and therefore inaction) about disturbing facts (e.g. past injustice and oppression in contemporary society). In contrast, a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism might serve as a tool for social justice for three main reasons. First, a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism can raise consciousness about the pervasiveness of racism within U.S. society, rather than occluding or minimizing it. If there is no problem, then there is little reason to work towards solutions or change. Second, this approach may alert students to real-world ramifications of systemic oppression among both racially marginalized and dominant groups, and gain a greater appreciation for the perspectives and experiences of historically oppressed groups than do most standard accounts. By advocating the conscious adoption of the perspective of the oppressed, a sociocultural approach in the classroom encourages students to critically reflect on the exclusive and blind acceptance of viewpoints grounded in dominant group experiences. This is important when explaining psychological phenomena in general, but perhaps especially when explaining racism and oppression. Finally, rather than an

emphasis on "knowing one's place" and "getting along" (see Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, &

Tredoux, 2010), a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism can encourage

students to engage in personal and collective action for social justice.

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