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PLEASE, READ THE COMMENTS: EXPLORING THE RACIAL DIALECTIC OF ONLINE

RACIAL DISCOURSE

by

IFEANYICHUKWU UKPABI

Under the Direction of Rosalind Chou, PhD.

ABSTRACT

More people than ever before are living significant portions of their social lives online due to advancements in internet technology. Over the last few years, we have begun to see the most public discussions of racism increasingly occur online, to be later embedded in the public's consciousness. It is therefore important for race critical scholars to observe how digital spaces affect racial discourse in the United States. Utilizing a race critical perspective, I explore comment section reactions to counter-framing articles to examine contemporary racial discourse. Through a discourse analysis, I find that counter-framing articles initiate the racial dialectic by inviting white racial frames, thereby structuring contemporary racial discourse. My research suggests race critical scholars should explore the internet as a racialized institution and a site of racial contestation. Race critical theorist must begin to grapple with how such a racialized institution will alter the experiences of racism in social life.

INDEX WORDS: The internet, Systemic Racism, The White Racial Frame, Critical Race
        Studies

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IFEANYICHUKWU UKPABI

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to the friends, family, and faculty who made this writing possible. All of you believed in me. This document is a testament to your love. I hope to continue to be worthy of the love that you all so selflessly expressed.

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I would like to thank Dr. Wendy Simonds for her sharp edits, and even sharper advice. I am also grateful to Dr. Tomeka Davis for always having an open seat in her office, and helping me realize I already hold the intellect necessary to become a scholar. Finally, I thank my chair, Dr. Rosalind Chou, for giving me the confidence and conviction to finally sit down and write. It is through your belief in me that I realized I am a writer with important ideas to express. I hope this thesis reflects the abilities that you all saw in me.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2014, The Center for Racial Justice Innovation launched the study "Moving the Race Conversation Forward" to analyze the content of mainstream media racial discourse to "describe the major impediments to productive racial discourse in the United States" (2014). The study found that about two-thirds of media articles on race and racism "failed to include a perspective with any insight of systemic-level racism" and "focused upon racial slurs and other types of personal prejudice and individual-level racism" (Race Forward 2014). The coverage reinforces the idea that racism is simply a problem of rare and isolated individual attitudes rather than a systemic force that significantly limits the life chances of people of color. The Center, therefore, argues mainstream media coverage should take a "systemically-aware" perspective that highlights systemic racism to advance racial justice efforts in the United States (2014).

There are examples of articles that reflect the systemically-aware perspective the Center argues for in their study. For example, in 2015, *The New York Times* published the article "The Disproportionate Risks of Driving While Black" as the front-page story on its online site. The writers gathered statistical data from four states to craft a systemically-aware argument explicating how the police disproportionately target black drivers for routine traffic stops despite the fact that blacks were less likely to be found with contraband than their white counterparts (LaFraniere and Lehren 2015). The article achieves its systemically aware perspective by exemplifying what sociologist Joe Feagin terms *counter-framing*. Counter-frames involve the 'perspectives, ideologies, and epistemologies that challenge the prevailing racial hierarchy and its legitimating white racial frame' (Harvey Wingfield and Feagin 2010). The *New York Times* article is an example of counter-framing because it challenges the U.S. racial hierarchy by highlighting how police practices subjugate blacks in comparison to their white peers. The article

also counteracts the legitimating white racial frame by critiquing the idea that it the fault of blacks for their increased police interactions by illustrating how the police increase their interactions with black people because of financial incentive. Therefore, systemically-aware media depends upon counter-frames to highlight racial inequality and advance efforts of racial equality.

Counter-framing works, however, are met with ideological rejection from segments of their audiences. While quickly reviewing the comments in response to "The Disproportionate Risk of Driving While Black" article, an article that currently contains 1009 comments, the rejection of the article's systemically-aware and anti-racist counter-frames becomes apparent. One commenter replies:

> I have no doubt that in my locations minorities are targeted far more than whites, and I am not defending the mindsets that result in such an imbalance. I would like to note, however, that when small foreign sports cars zoom by me at 100 mph on crowded highways around New York – endangering everyone in selfish displays of macho – the drivers are invariably young minority males. The disproportionate risk that scenario is borne by the innocent motorists unlucky enough to be on the same road with them[1].

Despite the article's rigorous use of anti-racist counter-frames to uncover a racialized inequality, internet commenters still proclaim ways in which black Americans and people of color are at fault for their subjugated status in U.S society. The complete disregard of empirical research is not restricted to the comment above; it is a pattern repeated in the comment sections of systemically aware counter-framing media articles. The Center's study is therefore complicated by the rampant rejection of systemically-aware counter-framing articles by commenters. It is with these social occurrences in mind that I pose my research question: What can an observation

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[1] I copied all comments directly from the comment sections of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* Because of the magnitude of grammatical and mechanical errors, I decided to post all the comments without modifications. All grammatical and mechanical errors are therefore the faults of the original commenters.

of reactions to counter-framing articles reveal about contemporary racial discourse in the United States? Race critical scholars[2], with their focus on ideological and framing dimensions of systemic racism, hold the theoretical frameworks necessary to contribute to our understanding of why such ideological rejection of counter-framing would exist.

Unfortunately, race critical scholars have left racialized internet interactions largely under-theorized. It has become common knowledge that if internet users wish to use the internet while simultaneously maintaining their sanity, they should refrain from reading comment sections. While it may behoove casual internet users to avoid the comment sections, race critical scholars miss valuable opportunities to turn their critical lens to the racialized occurrences of digital space. In an overview of race and racism research in *Internet Studies*, sociologist Jessie Daniels (2012) critiques the absence of race critical understandings of internet phenomena, mainly focusing on the lack of a theoretical understanding of whiteness and systemic racism. The lack of a theoretical understanding of racism within internet phenomena is troubling considering the increasing ways in which we are all living our lives online, the continued blurring of physical and digital spaces and experiences, and the racialized nature of internet interactions. Beginning an analysis of racialized interactions within comment sections, one of the foundational interaction structures of the internet, can help to forward race critical understandings and discussions of internet phenomena.

1.1   The internet and Racialized Interactions

More people than ever before are living significant portions of their social lives online due to advancements in internet technology. Within this research, I define the internet and the

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[2] I define race critical scholarship as the theoretical body of work that understands racism as a central organizing force in social life, embedded within all U.S. social structures and institutions (Delgado & Stafancic 2012). Race critical, therefore, is a term that includes critical race theories, but without the specific emphasis on the law that unites critical race theories.

digital as "the electronic networks that connect people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval" (Daniels 2009). As of 2014, 86 percent of U.S. citizens regularly use the internet, a dramatic increase from the 14 percent of internet user when the survey began in 1995 (Pew 2014). Sixty-Four percent of U.S. citizens currently own smartphones, with 60 percent of those individuals using their smartphones primarily to access the internet (Pew 2014). It is also important to note that 74 percent of U.S. citizens are active on social media sites (Pew 2014). The internet has become a dominant form of social interaction and experience for many. It is time we turn our race critical perspectives to conceptualizing how digital spaces are fundamentally creating, altering, or conforming experiences of racism in our lives.

A focus on the internet usage, however, can obscure the significance of how the internet is accessed and how digital spaces are experienced. Mobile internet access through 'smartphones' has created conditions of continuous internet access, fundamentally altering the relationship between digital spaces and physical experiences (Davis 2012; Jurgenson 2012). Racism scholars have largely failed to account for how the digital and the physical have imploded and augmented each other - no longer functioning as separate experiences for the people who use them (Jurgenson 2012). Nathan Jurgenson has proposed the concept of *augmented reality,* which he defines as "a larger conceptual perspective that views our reality as the byproduct of the enmeshing of the on and offline" (2012:84). The augmented reality concept contrasts earlier conceptions of *virtual reality:* virtual reality entails that software and hardware technologies constructs separate social worlds while augmented reality considers the conjunction of physical and digital realities (Jurgenson 2012). The augmented reality concept examines how our offline histories, social locations, and epistemologies shape how individuals behave online

while simultaneously considering how our experiences online simultaneously affect our lives offline (Jurgenson 2012).

Online and offline experiences are intricately linked, and race researchers are beginning to highlight the connection between online and offline experiences of racism. Race researchers find that internet use is not free from experiences of racism. Studies have found that the social media site Myspace experienced white flight due to racialized and class-based language used to differentiate and label Myspace as an 'unsafe' community to devalue it in relationship to a constructed 'safer' and whiter Facebook (boyd 2011, Watkins 2010). An other study illustrates that African American college students' online experiences reflect perceptions of racialized discrimination and campus tensions (Tynes, Rose, and Markoe 2013). Studies also demonstrate how color-blind racial attitudes, ethno-racial identities, and communities carry over to digital realms of the internet. (Tynes & Markoe 2010; Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao 2009; Parker & Song 2006). Contemporary race researchers have begun to move beyond the initial conceptualizations of the internet as a place of de-racialized "identity play," to the idea of the internet as a space that mirrors and reflects contemporary racist structures and institutions (Nakamura 2008; Daniels 2009).

Sociologist Jessie Daniels has led the race critical exploration of internet phenomena, originating with her text *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights*. Within the text, Daniels explores "the connection between extremist white supremacy and more mundane expressions of white identity and the white racial frame" to reveal how white supremacy online subverts "civil rights and values of racial equality with overtly racist and anti-Semitic speech" (Daniels 2009:24). In her comprehensive text, Daniels research underscores how young and non-race critical individuals were easily fooled by "cloaked" white supremacist

sites that were readily accessible within the information landscape of the internet, directly harming the goals of civil rights and racial equality (2009). Daniels' text is highly useful for race critical scholars as it provides conceptualizations of internet phenomena, definitions, and methodologies significant for researching the digital interactions. However, Daniels focuses her study on investigating explicitly extremist white supremacist expressions and websites and their links to broader articulations and realities of systemic racism. This line of research can be aided by applying the analytical and theoretical tools of race critical scholars to the internet phenomena of comment sections, a call that Daniels has put forth herself in her research (Daniels 2012).

Over the last few years, we have begun to see the most public discussions of racism – Black Lives Matter and police brutality, immigration policy, environmental racism, racist economic deprivation and reparations – increasingly occur online, to be later embedded in the public's consciousness. Race critical perspectives offer the theoretical tools and frameworks necessary to ponder the questions concerning the intersections of race, racism, and the internet. However, if scholars continue to ignore the digital as a central space of contemporary life, we run the risk of our theories being incapable of deliberating how racialized ideologies and experiences of racism continue to produce inequalities that disadvantage communities of color. My research seeks to generate race critical theory on racialized digital interactions to understand better how the internet is retaining or altering experiences of racism.

2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Race critical scholars, in their various disciplines, possess the critical framework necessary to grapple with how race and racism functions in digital experiences and spaces. While current research on race and the internet considers racialized occurrences in digital spaces, few of the research published ponders a larger theoretical argument as to how and why racism occurs in digital spaces. To think more critically about the issue of digital racism, I draw from race critical theorists to craft an understanding of systemic racism, white supremacy, and racial ideology required for critical exploration of racism and racialized inequality within comment sections.

2.1   Systemic Racism and White Supremacy

Race critical scholars understand racism as a central organizing force in social life. Within a race critical perspective, racism is understood as an ordinary, foundational, and embedded feature of U.S. social structures and institutions (Delgado & Stafancic 2012). Racism is not viewed as a societal aberration or an individual psychological ill, but a "foundational, large-scale and inescapable hierarchical system of US racial oppression devised and maintained by whites and directed at people of color" (Feagin 2006: 37). Racism is theorized as systemic because it produces "foundational, enveloping and persisting structures, mechanisms and operations of racial oppression that have fundamentally shaped the USA past and present" (Feagin 2013: 932). Race critical perspectives thus push us to view racism as a fundamental shaper of the material, social, and ideological realities for people of color and whites within the United States and abroad (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2006). Through a race critical lens, we begin to realize the significance of systemic racism in producing racialized inequality in the lives of people of color in the United States and abroad.

Race critical theorists move us beyond discussions of individualized racial prejudice by centering white supremacy as a central component of systemic racism. In her overview of race and internet studies, Daniels stresses that many scholars "measure individual levels of prejudice," neglecting the oppression that systemic racism creates for the lives of people of color (2012). Race critical scholars avoid this neglect by understanding the symbiotic relationship between systemic racism and white supremacy. Systemic racism provides material and symbolic privileges to whites, allowing for the perpetuation of white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva 2001 Feagin 2006). Because systemic racism benefits whites directly, whites have no incentive to alter the racist hierarchy that directly privileges them (Delgado & Stafancic 2012). White supremacy thus contributes and maintains racialized economic exploitation by affording whites greater economic mobility, wealth accumulation, socioeconomic status, and symbolic superiority - in direct oppression of blacks and other people of color (Feagin 2006; Bonilla-Silva 1997, Shapiro 2005).

White supremacy is reinforced through homogenous whiteness that excludes blacks and people of color while appearing neutral. Bonilla-Silva's concept *white habitus* focuses in on the racialized characteristics of "deep cultural conditioning that reproduces and legitimates social formations" that normalize the tremendous level of racial segregation and isolation in white lives (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006). Due to widespread racial segregation, whiteness becomes normalized and invisible for whites, while those who are racialized as 'other' are seen as different and inferior (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006). Despite this widespread racial segregation, many whites view the racial isolation as ordinary, unremarkable, and unracialized. White habitus contributes to widely different views about the implications of systemic racism,

whiteness, and white supremacy as inequality producing forces within social life (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006).

Wendy Moore continues the critique of homogenous whiteness through her concept of *Institutional White Space* (2008). Moore's ethnographic examination of "the deep racial structures, racialized everyday practices, and racial ideologies and discursive frames" of law school curriculum and experiences reveals a legal education built on 1) racialized exclusion 2) covert signifiers of white supremacy and privilege, and 3) racialized institutional cultural practices that constructs what Moore terms *white institutional space* (Moore 2008:5). The mechanisms of white institutional space "operate recursively and in conjunction with each other to enforce and reproduce the racial structure and culture" of white supremacy "without the need for enforced racial exclusion or open racial animus" (Moore 2008:28). The concepts of *white habitus* and *institutional white space* illustrate how homogenous whiteness acts as racist exclusion that reproduces white supremacy while simultaneously appearing normal.

Race critical literature, with its focus on systemic racism and white supremacy, reveals how racist institutions create consequences for the contemporary lives of whites and people of color. Because systemic racism is a foundational and endemic component of social life, racialized inequality infects major institutions, perpetuating a racist hierarchy across all areas of social life. For example, scholars have turned their attention to how racist laws and policies endemic to the US segregate and subjugate racial groups in a racist hierarchy (Davis and Graham 1995; Lopez 2006; Moore 2008). Others have focused on how a white-controlled media structure systematically pathologizes and dehumanizes people of color, while simultaneously normalizing whiteness (Vera and Gordon 2003). It is through white supremacy that the material and symbolic subjugation of people of color are deeply tied to the material and symbolic privileges of

whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Race critical literature underscores the importance of a perspective sensitive to systemic racism and white supremacy in analyzing the experiences of whites and people of color. When turning our attention to the internet, we cannot simply ignore the centrality of systemic racism and white supremacy as an organizing force of social experience. My research, therefore, seeks to understand how systemic racism and white supremacy contributes to an internet landscape rife with racialized interactions.

2.2 The White Racial Frame and the Racial Dialectic

Race critical scholars theorize how racial ideologies work in concert with systemic racism to produce racialized inequality. The particular definitions of race and experiences of racism are not constant across sociohistorical context; race and racism are particularly animated through the specific racialized ideologies of a sociohistorical context (Goldberg 1993; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Delgado & Stafancic 2012). Racial ideologies are the broad and racialized mental and moral framework used by actors to explain, justify, and perpetuate racial inequality and racism (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Racialized ideologies attach racialized meaning onto bodies, naturalize racialized differentiations, and normalize racial inequality (Goldberg 1993; Bonilla-Silva 2003). Racial ideology is central to the maintenance of systemic racism because it provides the mental, cultural, and moral rationality that allows whites to maintain the privileged position in a white supremacist social hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2015).

Racialized ideology becomes legible through racialized discourses, or "all racialized expressions – beliefs and verbal outburst, acts and their consequences, and principles upon which racialized institutions are based" (Goldberg 1993:41). Racialized discourse is important because the racialized expressions reveal the "historical formation and logics of racial thinking and reference" that construct racialized ideology (Goldberg 1993:42). For example, racialized

discourse of black people during American Slavery constructed a racialized ideology that understood blacks as innately lazy and innately primitive - justifying the systemic racist structures of enslavement, dehumanization, terrorism, violence, and subjugation (Hall 2013).

Joe Feagin's concept of *the white racial frame* focuses in on how racialized ideology perpetuates white supremacy. The white racial frame is the "broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" (2012:3). Historically and contemporarily, the white racial frame has been a dominant frame for white Americans in rationalizing systemic racism and their privileged status in a white supremacist racist social order (Feagin 2006). Sociologist Harvey Wingfield, along with Feagin, augments *the white racial frame* with the concepts of *hard racial framing* and *soft racial framing* to add nuance to the ways frames reinforce white supremacy. Hard racial framing expresses overtly racist commentary, imagery, and language in public in which whites are inherently superior to blacks and other races and is understood as more "emotional and gut level," denoting a stronger disgust and disdain towards people of color (Harvey Wingfield and Feagin 2010; 2012).

Soft racial frames, however, relies on less overt language that downplays, ignores, or eliminates systemic racial inequality through language and imagery (Harvey Wingfield and Feagin 2010). Soft racial frames resemble the color-blind frames outlined by Bonilla-Silva as they both justify contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of non-racial dynamics or through covert language. Color-Blind Ideology rose in popularity in the 1980's due to three basic ideas held by whites: 1) the assumption that civil rights laws ended racism, 2) if racial inequality persist, it is because blacks have failed to take advantage of the opportunities granted by the civil rights revolution, and 3) racism is over, therefore, there is no need for affirmative action or color-

conscious policies that could amend racial inequality (Brown et al. 2003). Bonilla-Silva conceptualizes color-blind ideology as comprised of four dominant frames: 1) *Abstract liberalism* decontextualizes racial inequality through extending principles of liberalism, 2) *Cultural racism* relies on culturally based arguments to explain the status of people of color, 3) *Naturalization* explains away racial segregation as a natural occurrence, and 4) *Minimization* suggests racism is not a major factor affecting the lives of people of color (Bonilla Silva 2001; 2010).

The white racial frame, composed of hard and soft racial framing, is confrontational yet fluid, capable of providing convenient interpretations for whites and others to justify rampant racial inequality (Wingfield & Feagin 2012; Feagin 2012). It is through the white racial frame that widespread racial inequality is interpreted as normal, insignificant, or the fault of racial minorities (Feagin 2012). The white racial frame, however, combats with racial *counter-framing* to structure public discourses of race, what Harvey Wingfield and Feagin term *the racial dialectic.* Counter-framing acts as the opposite of the white racial frame, comprised of "the perspectives, ideologies, and epistemologies that challenge the prevailing racial hierarchy and its legitimating white racial frame (Harvey Wingfield and Feagin 2012; Feagin 2013). The white racial frame and counter-framing interact to create the *racial dialectic,* structuring racial discourse and ideology in the contemporary United States. The concepts of the white racial frame and the racial dialectic will inform my analysis of racialized comment section racial discourse.

3   METHODOLOGY

Utilizing a race critical perspective, I performed a critical discourse analysis of comment sections interactions to examine what they reveal about contemporary racial discourse. Discourse analysis examines discourses, or the "groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking", to explore how ideas construct the power relationships of the socio-historical realities in which we are embedded (Rose 2012:190; Foucault 1995). Thus, I examine the racialized discourses, or "all racialized expressions" within comment section interactions to better understand how racial ideology seek to rationalize, justify, maintain, or support counter-framing arguments.

The internet is a vast place that contains many sites with comment sections; therefore, I constructed parameters to narrow the scope of my research. I limited my research to only online sites of mainstream journalism outlets. I use the Pew "Digital: Top 50 Online News Entities," a study that ordered the most popular online news sites by number of unique visitors and average minutes per visits, to define "mainstream." I narrowed my sampling selection frame to the top 15 sites. My research is interested in professional journalism and not punditry, therefore, I limited my parameters to include journalism sites. Using the Pew study, I chose the top two visited journalism sites: *The New York Times and The Washington Post.* The Center for Racial Justice Innovation also ranks *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* as the two national papers with the highest percentage of systemically aware articles (2014).

I further narrowed my research by explicitly examining the comment sections of articles that explicitly counter-frame against racism in their writing by citing social science literature. I then analyzed the comments sections responses of 20 counter-framing articles, 10 from the New York Times outlets and 10 from the Washington Post. Because I am interested in contemporary

racialized discourse and ideology, I limited my searches to the last two years – 2015 and 2016 –

which also mark the last years of the Obama presidency. I then used NVivo 10.0 to code and

analyze racialized discourse to uncover themes of the white racial frame and the racial dialectic;

I strove to pay attention to emergent themes of racist framing that may arise.

There are limitations present in my research. It is important to note my research only

observes the comment sections of two prestigious news organizations – The *New York Times* and

the *Washington Post*. The prestigious sites influenced the content I analyzed and the results I

found. Future research should explore a wider variety of websites to understand better how

racialized comment sections differ by the audience of their sites The counter-framing articles I

analyzed overwhelmingly examined the experiences of black people with racism. Unfortunately,

the data analyzed does not adequately address the experiences of other racialized groups. The

lack of articles analyzing the racism experienced by non-black racialized groups represents a

broader problem in journalism, and segments of sociology, with conceptualizing systemic racism

outside of the white-black binary. There has certainly been growth in sociology as a discipline

towards theorizing how systemic racism affects the lives of non-black racialized groups (Valdez

2017). However, more work can be done to broaden the theoretical analysis of how non-black

racialized groups are affected by systemic racism in digital spaces. Further research can only

improve through greater consideration of the racialized experiences of non-black racialized

groups.

While my analysis of comment sections reactions to counter-framing arguments can shed

light on racial ideology, comment section moderation can present some limitations. Comment

section moderation occurs when a site hires a moderator to evaluate the content of comment

sections before it is placed online, usually to combat and delete the most extremist racist

language and expressions (Hughey and Daniels 2013). This practice is likely to affect only the

most extreme and offensive comments, but unlikely to have an impact on the commonplace

racialized discourse that underscores the frames of white supremacy. As Jessie Daniels has

noted in her text *Cyber Racism*, many people in her study could not correctly identify racist

discourse that reproduces racial inequality (2009). Also, despite the existence of moderation,

comment sections are still plagued by white supremacist ideologies. As a researcher observing

digital interactions to examine what these interactions can reveal about contemporary racialized

ideologies and frames of white supremacy, I am interested, as Hughey and Daniels are, in the

"comments – supposedly tame and free of racist intent and/or content – that find their way to the

public, past the gatekeepers" (2013:335).

4   FINDINGS

My analysis of comment section reactions to counter-framing article reveals a diverse collection of racialized expressions that I characterize as white racial frames. My findings indicate white racial framing comments co-exist with the counter-framing articles. My analysis demonstrates that counter-framing arguments had little effect in undermining the existence of white racial framing within comment sections. Systemic racism theory explains that the persistence of white racial framing in comment sections exemplifies the fluidity and tenacity of the white racial frame in justifying racial inequality through the rejection of counter-framing arguments.

In this section, I highlight how the white racial frames contest counter-frames in comment sections. The white racial frame is the "broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" that supports and maintains white supremacy and systemic racism (Feagin 2013). While the white racial frames within comment sections were diverse in content and attributes, the white racial framing in my analysis reflected well-documented ideas from race critical literature. I use the ideas of Bonilla-Silva and other race critical theorists to help structure my findings into five thematic sub-sections. Despite this thematic organization, it is important to note that individuals are multi-framers in their understanding of racism, often switching back and forth between a wide variety of frames to justify systemic racism (Feagin 2013). Therefore, my thematic sub-sections function schematically to help us understand the diversity of white racial framing, rather than rigid practices incapable of overlap. I divide the comments analyzed into five thematic frames to explicate better different prominent qualities of white racial framing that appeared in my

analysis: ***Cultural Racism, Abstract Liberalism, Minimization, Objective Racism, and Reverse Racism***.

 Cultural racism frames fix presumed inferior cultural practices and pathologies onto blacks and other people of color to delegitimize counter-framing arguments (Bonilla-Silva 2010). ***Abstract liberal*** frames offer decontextualized principles of fairness and equality regarding racial matters to disregard counter-framing arguments (Bonilla-Silva 1997). ***Minimization*** frames decline counter-framing arguments by diminishing the significance of racism as a central organizing principle in U.S. life (Bonilla-Silva 2010). ***Objective Racism*** frames disqualify counter-framing arguments by assigning subjectivity to people of color while claiming ownership of science and rational thought for whites exclusively (Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi 2008). Lastly, ***Reverse Racism*** frames understand whites as the true victims of racism, inverting the racial hierarchy highlighted by counter-framing arguments. People are multi-framers who use multiple frames to justify racial inequality. However, I found these frames to be distinctive enough to warrant individual attention and discussion. All the white racial frames discussed in my analysis work together to reject counter-frames and maintain white supremacy and systemic racism in the United States.

 In my analysis, hard racial frames were less common than soft racial framing. However, hard racial framing was more common in the comment sections of the *Washington Post* than the *New York Times*, revealing how an attentive comment moderator can alter the composition of comment section discourse. However, as I note in my theoretical framework section, comment moderation only seemed to clean away the most overtly racist commentary, leaving plenty evidence of soft and color-blind framing.

4.1   Cultural Racism

Cultural racism frames fix presumed inferior cultural practices and pathologies onto blacks and other people of color to delegitimize counter-framing arguments (Bonilla-Silva 2010). In my analysis, commenters rely on culturally racist frames the most to dismantle counter-framing arguments. Cultural racism frames argue the centrality of black pathologies as the main cause of the lower status of black people in the United States. Cultural racism frames negate counter-framing arguments by centering discussions on the false pathologies of black people and other people of color.

Commenters who utilized cultural racist frames frequently multi-framed between hard and soft dimension in my analysis. Hard cultural racist frames tended towards differentiating black people as distinctly different from whites through ideas of *biologization*. Biologization interpretations emphasize on biological understandings of culture as fixed onto black people, painting blacks as frightening and inherently criminal in comparison to "normal and law-abiding" whites.

Soft cultural racism frames were not biological but still constructed black inferiority by fixating on a presumed inferior black culture. Many soft cultural racism frames can be characterized through *innateness* interpretations*,* which fix pathological cultural norms and practices onto black bodies to differentiate them from white people. Other cultural racism frames focused on *inferior enculturation* narratives, where whites construct an inferior and rigid black culture that they then claim produces deviant black people. Soft cultural racism framers also used *model minority* narratives, where the imagined cultural successes of an other racial or ethnic group were manipulated to frame blacks as inferior culturally. Soft cultural racism framers

consequently sculpt an interpretation of blacks as culturally inferior "others" who deserve their

racial subjugation.

Hard racial framing most commonly appeared as cultural racism frames in my analysis.

Comment sections, despite their moderation, still contained instances of hard racial framing,

where black people are understood as inherently inferior to whites. In response to the *New York*

Times article "The Disproportionate Risks of Driving while Black," an untitled commenter

replies:

> OBEY AND ABIDE all laws because We the People (of ALL Racers) will not let you
> THUGS AND HOODLUMS "graduate" from the EPIDEMIC of Violent and THIEVING
> crimes by Blacks vs YOUR OWN RACE(um.umum..um.um um ! to escalate to you
> people yes, YOU PEOPLE primarily (Fact!) preying on innocent others as WE will
> STAND OUR GROUND(U know)[3]!

This quote reflects many of the hard racial frames found within comment sections. It is highly

emotive, with a lot of capitalization that denotes yelling. The comment also contains

misspellings and little logical consistency, reflecting the blind anger of hard cultural racism

framers. The erratic speech of these commenters underscores the centrality of high emotions to

the white racial frame. Hard cultural racism frames also work through ***biologization***

interpretations*.* Biologization interpretations understand black people through fixing frightening,

inherently criminal traits onto black people (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Black people are interpreted

through the stereotypes of "thugs" and "hoodlums," painting blacks as people inherently crime

prone. Hard cultural racism frames also resemble biological thinking by treating culture as

something inheritable, passed down from generation to generation either through socialization

genetics. The biological understanding of race is present in commenter's hhodges1 response to

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[3] I copied all comments in my thesis directly from the comment sections of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* Because of the magnitude of grammatical and mechanical errors, I decided to post all the comments without modifications. All grammatical and mechanical errors are therefore the faults of the original commenters.

the *Washington Post* article "A course originally called "The Problem of Whiteness" returns to Arizona State":

> And over time that assimilation will happen. The dilution of the black gene via racial intermarriage nearly assures that eventually blackness will disappear. Throwbacks still happen, but color differences tend to breed away.

Biologization interpretations see racist stereotypes as natural to the endowment of black people (Bonilla Silva 1997). Race critical scholars debunk biological understandings of race by illustrating the lack of genetic coherence between racial categories and racialized individuals (Roberts 2011; Yudell 2014). Variation in racial categories across countries is due to differential socio-historical experiences with colonization and enslavement, not a difference in biology (Delgado and Stefanicic 2012; Omi and Winant 2015). Biologization of race interpretations, however, allows framers like hhodges1 to view blacks as pathological "others." The interpretation of blacks as "others" naturalizes the inferior status of blacks in a racist hierarchy, removing systemic racism as the culprit of racial inequality.

Cultural racist frames more commonly appear soft in my analysis, where black culture is routinely interpreted through ***innateness*** stereotypes*.* Innateness stereotypes denote black culture as rigid, unchanging, and inseparable from black bodies. In articles that specifically explored institutional racism in relationship to the criminal justice system, innateness stereotypes particularly flourished. For example, In the *New York Times* article "Chicago Police Department plagued by Systemic Racism," commenter Cousin Eddie Paquepssee replies:

> The real issues and questions that plaque our inner city's will never be spoke of. So create a 'task force' to conclude that African Americans had so much more contact with the police in an area where African Americans commit so much more crime.... Your Kidding ! We are all forbidden from suggesting these communities have been destroyed by broken families, fatherless children, and a self destructing cycle of government dependency…… So lets go back to pretending it's the cops fault….

Cousin Eddie reflects innateness stereotypes through his interpretation of black people as inherently more criminal. The innate criminality stereotype depicts black communities as distinctly pathological in nature. Cousin Eddie Paquepssee rejects the articles' thesis that blacks suffer from disproportionate targeting from their police. Cousin Eddie employs the stereotype that African Americans simply "commit so much more crime." The comment reflects the emotional aspects of the white racial frame in its rejections – displaying high affect and expiration in the phrase "your kidding" to ridicule the thesis of the argument. Cousin Eddie Paquepssee then begins to list a flurry of cultural racist stereotypes, like "broken families" and "fatherless children," to justify his comment that black people are different. Innateness stereotypes depend upon othering to justify the racist conditions suffered by black people.

The culturally racist innateness and biologization stereotypes sanction the inclination to continue institutional discrimination that disproportionately affects people of color. The inclination to rely on institutions such as the police are evident in commenter jamaltimore's reply in the *Washington Post* article "Poor White Kids are less likely to got to Prison than Rich Black Kids":

> wow even rich black kids are more likely to be criminals… looks to be sad but true that even removing the poverty excuse and black kids are more likely to be criminals. Need to stop catering to this crowd and the excuses used for their inability to prosper in the best country in the world.

Because white racial frames interpret black people as innately criminal, the police are never at fault. The idea leads to an uncritical and very sympathetic view of the police. This uncritical view of the police pervades cultural racism frames. These ideas create no incentive to change the behaviors or actions of the police, despite arguments that they disproportionately affect the lives of black people negatively.

Cultural racism frames also work through ***inferior enculturation*** stereotypes**,** where black people are presumed to be socialized within an inferior culture. The Inferior enculturation stereotype affixes cultural inferiority to places of socialization, such as neighborhoods or schools. The commenter Sligo's reply to how public schools are beginning to resegregate, in "Why a Housing Scheme founded in Racism is making a Resurgence Today," reflects the idea of inferior enculturation:

> This is one very superficial article. Public schools have failed to integrate because they don't offer an acceptable level of safety to all kids. Kids from tougher neighborhoods growing up with drug addition, sex abuse, prostitution, beatings, etc. act out (oftentimes very violently) in the classroom. Public schools and local governments do not offer real solutions to get these kids help and remove them from the classroom until they get "better" (or get to a foster home). So more affluent families choose to go private or move to the burbs, which is de fact segregation.

Sligo presents a situation where black people are automatically growing up in neighborhoods where they are subjected to "drug addiction, sex abuse, prostitution, beatings" which harden them into criminals. The inferior enculturation stereotype differentiates black children as more violent in comparison to their white peers. Thus, Sligo ignores the article's central argument that white racism shapes racial segregation to spotlight presumed pathological socialization. Inferior enculturation stereotypes paint black culture as inferior, thus justifying widespread racial segregation that allows whites access to better resourced white-only schools and neighborhoods.

Cultural racism frames commonly utilize ***model minority*** narratives where the imagined cultural successes of an other minority group are used to highlight the supposed cultural failures of black people. In the text *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism,* Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin articulate the model minority concept (2015). Chou and Feagin provide an exhaustive account of how the myth of the model minority interprets Asian Americans as homogenously culturally superior. Model minority narratives mask discrimination

and racism faced by Asian Americans and further denigrate other people of color, particularly

black Americans (2015). While their text focuses specifically on how the model minority myth

centers Asian Americans, the comments I analyzed used a host of minority groups to paint black

people as uniquely culturally deficient. For example, In response to the *New York Times* article

"American Racism in the 'White Frame'," commenter Hunter Perlman replies:

> I largely refute the notion that pro-white bias is primarily a product of the benefits that whites received from racist policies (slavery, Jim Crow, etc). Jews, Irish Catholics, and (more recently) Asians have arrived in America penniless and faced discrimination and were even targeted by the KKK. These groups have since matched and often outperformed their WASP counterparts.

Perlman wields the model minority myth to illustrate black people as uniquely deficient. Perlman

constructs rigid stereotypes of successful ethnic groups to erase the vast heterogeneity of the

ethnic groups listed. Perlman thus utilizes the simplistic representations of successful minority

groups to justify the inferior position of blacks in the racist hierarchy. There is a similar

sentiment from commenter Tim W S.E in response to the *New York Times* article "How Racism

Doomed Baltimore":

> Generations of minorities were "trapped" in the slums of lower Manhattan. They "escaped" using the same route. Hard work, placing value on education and most importantly, making sacrifices for their children. No amount of government money or societal self flagellation is going to change behavior.

The model minority narrative permits Tim W S.E to paint black people as uniquely deficient

because he claims other minority groups were able to "escape" similar conditions. The comment

then ends his rejection of the article's argument with a cultural racist focus on "behavior." The

model minority stereotypes allow Tim W S.E to avoid engaging with the article's thesis that

highlights the historical systemic racism conditions that uniquely disadvantaged black people.

Cultural racism frames construct cultural pathologies to paint black people and other

people of color as uniquely culturally deficient. Whites use cultural racism frames to justify the

inferior status blacks are forced to endure in the United States. Thus, Cultural racism frames contest counter-framing arguments by blaming black people for their subjugated status within the United States. Cultural racism frames thereby maintain racial oppression by representing black people and black culture as uniquely deficient.

4.2   Abstract Liberalism Frames

Abstract liberal frames offer decontextualized principles of fairness and equality regarding racial matters to disregard counter-framing arguments (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Abstract liberal frames focus on abstractions to construct a false sense of racial equality, particularly through a focus on individuals or institutions. Abstract liberal frames contest counter-framing arguments by erasing the particularities of injustices that systemic racism creates for black people and other people of color. Abstract liberal frames, therefore, eliminate the need for unique solutions to amend racial injustice against black people and other people of color in the United States.

Thematically, abstract liberal frames were soft in my analysis. Abstract liberal frames are particularly soft because they are a major component of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). A common characteristic of abstract frames were *equalization* interpretations, where the life histories and present day realities of blacks and other people of color were equated with those of whites to ignore the particular effects of systemic racism on the lives of people of color. Abstract liberal frames present *neutral racism* narratives, where racism is framed as individual prejudice, rather than a systemic force that disadvantages people of color while privileging whites. Abstract liberal frames also invoke *just institutions* images, where institutions are understood as producers of equality and justice for all people, rather than sites of institutional racism. Thus, abstract liberalism leads whites to the racialized inclination to *erase racialized difference*, where

the lives of people of color are ignored by expunging the existence of racialized inequalities caused by systemic racism.

Equalization narratives occur when the life histories and present day realities of black people and white people are equated, ignoring how systemic racism produces unique inequalities for people of color. For example, in the *New York Times* article "272 Slaves were sold to save Georgetown. What does it owe their Descendants?", commenter Arlene Herrng replies:

> "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country"   John Fitzgerald Kennedy   Where are all stories about young men and women of every race serving their country in Uniform, some paying the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy or spending long periods away from home and family or whose bodies are used up in that service? Thousands and Thousands of young men and women whose hips need to be replaced at 48 and younger from being deployed via helicopter in full gear, repeatedly, old men by the age of 48. What about their stories? This is the new cause celebrant while everything else that ails our country takes a back seat. I want to hear those stories written by NYT contributors who take the time to write heartrending stories of how those deployments effect the wive and children, the trauma those children go through every time their parent is deployed. The nightmares in the middle of the night. The stress and the loneliness they endure.

Arlene Herrng's equalization narrative presents "young men and women of every race serving their country" to argue how all racial groups made equal sacrifices to aid the country. The equalizing interpretation rejects the existence of systemic racism by obfuscating the particularities of black injustices and inequality. However, equalization narratives seek to ignore particularities, as demonstrated in Mary's comment in response to the *New York Times'* article "How America Tolerates Racism in Jury Selection":

> And how often are whites or blacks, women or men, gays or straights, Muslims or Christians, etc. dismissed because the defense strikes them? I guess we don't want to talk about that, it only matters if blacks are dismissed? The NYTimes has completely lost its perspective on race. Guess it feeds some progressive mantra to keep racism front and center, whether it exists or not. But from where I sit, the racism in America is firmly seated in the plush offices of the NYTimes.

The presence of systemic racism is erased because of a belief that all groups are equally oppressed in the same way. Equalization interpretations thus use others groups not as a source of empathy, but to ultimately dismiss the particular concerns of black people. Thus, white supremacist racial hierarchy is maintained, and counter-framing arguments are nullified.

Abstract Liberal frames also advance **neutral racism** narratives in which racism is understood as individual prejudice everyone is equally capable of executing. Neutral racism narratives allow whites to ignore that racism is a systemic force that disadvantages people of color while privileging white people. We can see this interpretation of neutral racism in commenter Nav Pradeepan's response to the *New York Times'* article "How Liberalism and Racism Are Wed":

> It appears to me that every ethnic group, perhaps every person, race, nationality, culture has its own hierarchy of who is better and who is lesser. No one is free from the norms imprinted on them by the previous generations or the beliefs built up through their own experiences, which are theirs alone. The trick is to figure out how to make people aware of their thinking and motivate them to change what is harmful to others and whole societies. That requires some open mindedness and liberal thinking, I would say

Nav Pradeepan begins by presenting a decontextualized understanding of racism that exist in every culture, ignoring that the article argues for the existence of systemic racism in the United States. Pradeepan understands racism as an individual-level phenomenon for which we all share equal culpability, rather than a systemic force that creates disadvantages for people of color and advantages for whites. Thus, whites who understand racism as neutral can focus on castigating individuals instead of thinking about a structural phenomenon in which whites are directly implicated. Neutral racism accounts allow whites to appear equal to other in their contribution to racial inequality, instead of people who are privileged in a white supremacist racial hierarchy.

Another theme of abstract liberal frames is the idea of the **just institution,** where all U.S. institutions are interpreted as bedrocks of equal and unprejudiced treatment for all people. Just

institution explanations ignore the vast institutional inequalities created by institutional racism.

For example, in response to the *New York Times*' article "272 Slaves were Sold to save

Georgetown. What does it Owe their Descendants?", commenter G. Piper replies:

> This article, as well as any article discussing slave reparations is without merit.   The slave trade was not illegal until a quarter of a century later. You cannot indict, hold liable or extort through legal proceedings people or organizations that performed acts that are today considered illegal, reprehensible, barbaric or any other title you wish to place an on it if the act was not illegal at the time it was performed. Liken this to a city issuing speeding tickets for drivers doing 55 mph on a highway yesterday just because today they chose to change the speed limit to 35.   Now let's add that African tribes captured people's from other tribes and traded them to the slavers. If you proceed with the reparations argument, then let's discuss this aspect as well. Or is it only about getting $$$?

G. Piper portrays the law as a just institution to nullify the disproportionate ways that systemic

racism creates unique inequalities for black people. Inequalities in wealth and widespread racial

segregation affect who has access to quality education. However, G. Piper's unfaltering trust in

just institutions erases institutionalized racial inequality. G. Piper presents the law as an

unfathomable institution. Thus leaps in logic, such as equating slavery with a speeding ticket, are

possible because the just institution symbol can never be unjust. Just institutions elucidations

also climb to the highest level of the law, as we see in this short comment in response to campus

protest against systemic racism at schools, "I must have missed the paragraph in the bill of rights

that excluded the right not to be offended." The Bill of Rights becomes a just institution that

allows immediate rejection of the legitimate concerns of black and PoC students on a campus

rife with the relics and realities of systemic racism. Commenters employ just institutions

narratives to eliminate counter-framing critiques through a blind trust in impartiality.

Just Institutions do not only cover political institutions but include economic institutions

as well. The myth of just institutions interprets financial institutions as creators of equal

outcomes for all, despite their predilection for racial discrimination. For example, in response to

the *Washington Post* article "Why a Housing Scheme Founded in Racism is Making a

Resurgence Today," commenter wosieay replies:

> Housing markets are just like any other market, in that, if there's a demand for something, there will be someone to fill it. These are, after all, businesses. There is no such thing as "fairness" when it comes to business, because the "business of business, is business." This is why it's necessary to regulate business activity. To say that business can self regulate is a joke. And no matter what we do to make some business behavior illegal, people will always find a way around it, as long as there is a demand to fill.

Understanding housing markets as unfair for all people ignores the particularities of how the

housing market disproportionately affects the lives of black people. The interpretation of markets

as just institutions erases how housing markets permit whites access to wealth development

through their homes – a privilege denied to blacks in racially segregated neighborhoods (Shapiro

2003). The narrative of just institutions also erases how the subprime mortgage crisis

disproportionately targeted blacks through institutional racism (Price 2010). The narrative

"business of business, is business" erases how housing markets function through systemic racism

that disproportionately affects the lives of black people and other people of color. However, just

institution narratives ignore the injustices caused by institutional racism.

Abstract frames, therefore, lead to the racialized inclination to ***erase racialized***

differences between groups of people. Erasure of racialized difference reactions discount the

unique lived experience of people of color to obscure how systemic racism sculpts the lives of

people of color in the United States. For example, commenter quantumhunter in response to the

New York Times article "How Liberalism and Racism Are Wed":

> The fact that "Black Studies,"Latino Studies" and "Women's Studies" is being taught and "affirmative action" is policy at most highly liberal Colleges and Universities in this country is proof that all races, religions and genders aren't perceived as equal by liberals. These programs are having the exact opposite effect as intended - they are outlining the differences between everyone, and not focusing on e pluribus unum - "out of many, one."

Quantumhunter's comment illustrates how abstract liberal frames erase the particularities of people's lived experiences. Quantumhunter's reply erases difference by othering the particular inequalities highlighted by women and ethnic studies curriculum. In doing so, Quantumhunter positions the white male as legitimate and normal. Thus, abstraction seeks to place white masculinity as the norm and erase the particularities of other people.

Abstract liberal frames function to obscure the specific injustices that systemic racism creates for black people by crafting ahistorical and decontextualized narratives of equality and fairness in the United States. Abstract liberal frames contest counter-framing arguments by expunging the particularities of racial oppression caused by systemic racism. Abstract liberal frames thereby maintain systemic racism by obfuscating the existence of racial inequality in the lives of blacks and people of color.

4.3   Minimization Frames

Minimization frames decline counter-framing arguments by diminishing the significance of racism as a central organizing principle in U.S. life (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Minimization frames work to paint racism as inconsequential by diminishing racial oppression of the past and the present. Minimization frames reject counter-framing arguments by highlighting unracialized factors as the true source of inequality in the United States. Minimization frames, therefore, curtail solutions to overcome rampant racial inequality that exists for black people and other people of color in the United States

Minimization frames are soft, as they are a major component of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Minimization frames present narratives of *forgotten history* that ignore the historical roots of systemic racism to force blacks and other people of color to disregard racism. Other Minimization framers present histories of *widespread suffering* to diminish the effects of

systemic racism on the lives of blacks and other people of color. Minimization frames utilize "***not all whites***" reactions to belittle the centrality of white supremacy to systemic racism and racialized inequality. Minimization frames, therefore, lead to the racialized inclination to interpret ***race as insignificant*** and not a consequential system of inequality in the United States.

Many commenters minimized the historical roots of systemic racism through narratives of ***forgotten history***. Forgotten history narratives propose we disregard our past and move on to properly heal as a country. Collective forgetting of the racist past is central to white Americans upholding white supremacy and systemic racism (Feagin 2006). Particularly in relationship to U.S. slavery or Jim Crow discrimination, many whites sought to create forgotten history narratives to disregard the historical roots of contemporary systemic racism (Feagin 2000; Lavelle 2015). For example, here is commenter JHP Naples responding to *New York Times* article "272 Slaves were Sold to Save Georgetown. What does it Owe their Descendants?", who states that the United States owes black people "Nothing. slavery was legal then, and it was an accepted practice, allowed so the Constitution could be ratified. Forget about it, it is history and can't be rewritten." U.S. slavery is ignored because it is perceived as history, and history is interpreted as something to stay in the past. However, the idea of forgetting history ignores how U.S. slavery is foundational to the legacy of racial oppression that pervades the lives of many people of color today. Forgotten history narratives find their strength through the minimization of racist injustice at the hands of white supremacy in U.S history.

Forgotten history narratives are important to minimization framers because they lead to the racialized inclination of rejecting reparations. We can see this rejection of possible solution by commenter John Blood response from the *New York Times* article "American Racism in the 'White Frame'":

Yes, I think you should spend the rest of your working life paying money to victims who are long gone for crimes done to them by humans who are long gone. You may as well just pay everybody because if you go back in anybody's genealogical tree far enough you will eventually find somebody who suffered a great injustice. My great grandmother was full blood Cherokee. I even have pictures. I look forward to your reparation check

The commenter expunges racial injustice as a phenomenon of the past, ignoring the article's argument that past racism contributes to contemporary racial inequality. But locating racial harm in the past allows the commenter to minimize the need for reparations, rejecting the solution without consideration. Thus, narratives of forgotten history are attempts to minimize the inequities created by systemic racism and ignore possible solutions to injustices disproportionately suffered by people of color.

Minimization framers present narratives *widespread suffering* to underrate the plights of black Americans in the United States Widespread suffering minimizes by putting forth the idea that since all people have suffered throughout history, why pay particular attention to the experiences of black people? We can see the demonstration of a widespread suffering narrative in commenter Newbury Park's response from the *New York Times* "272 Slaves were Sold to Save Georgetown. What does it Owe their Descendants?":

While we're at it why don't we make amends to the Native Americans that were slaughtered by earlier generations of invading immigrant, harder working than lazy native born peoples immigrant settlers. Then work our way back to the 100,000's of English disposed of their land by the French Norman invaders, and the lily white English massacred and sold as slaves by the Vikings and let's not let off the hook those slightly darker hued Romans who slaughtered and enslaved millions of those evil Nordic northern and Western Europeans for several hundred years AND the now sacred victim Arab Semites that ran the black slave trade in Africa. Well wait a minute, Arabs still sell and hold slaves so .... No??!!!! Why not? Oh, that's right one can't buy any votes in the next election by sobbing yet again about those long gone tragedies.

Newbury Park minimizes the racist conditions suffered by contemporary black people by maximizing the suffering of various historical groups. This maximization ignores how the

specific socio-historical context of U.S. systemic racism contributes to contemporary experiences

of inequality for black people and other people of color.

Minimization frames diminish white supremacy through "***not all white people***" reactions.

"Not all white people" interpretations understand that there are "bad" white people, but argue

that it is wrong to include all white people as responsible for racism. We can see the

interpretation of not all white people in the response of commenter Carla to the *New York Times*

article "Noam Chomsky on the Roots of American Racism":

> I'm bothered by Chomsky's repeated use of the pronoun "we," as if every white American was/is implicated in the establishment of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and continued discrimination against blacks.   I was born with an affinity for black people. My very best friend - until she moved away in 4th grade - was black, and I have many friends of color today. I am extremely fortunate to have grown up in a small town in southeastern Kansas where we had an amazing multicultural mix of people for a town of 10,000 in the middle of "nowhere." We all truly got along really well, accepted one another unconditionally, and celebrated our differences and the serendipitous
>
> amalgamation that brought us all together in that place.   My whole life I have been adamantly opposed to discrimination, especially based merely on the color of a person's skin. I am a devout practitioner of the Golden Rule. I can't even relate to people who discriminate against others. Thus, I don't feel a part of Chomsky's
>
> "we."   Nevertheless, it is painfully obvious, and regrettably understandable, that we still have enormous obstacles to overcome with respect to race relations in the US. As unsophisticated as it may seem, I believe it starts with an open heart and a simple conversation. Howard Schultz isn't so far from wrong. Those who deride his "Race Together" conversations might do well to examine themselves if they think it's such a bad idea.

Carla's response illustrates how the "not all white people" reaction works by minimizing white

supremacy as central to systemic racism. Carla continuously notes her discomfort with the use of

"we" to separate herself from whiteness. Carla professes alleged affinity and relationships with

black people to distinguish herself as a "good" white person. However, Carla minimizes systemic

racism as an individual phenomenon she can overcome rather than a structural system that

implicates us all, despite our individual intentions or desires. Systemic racism is a hierarchical

system that places white people at the top and black people at the bottom (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

Thus, systemic racism works together with white supremacy to provide material and symbolic

privileges to white people and penalties for people of color. Whiteness is not something one

person can exempt themselves from, but the "not all white people" reactions seek to do so

anyway – minimizing the existence of systemic racism while it seeks its exemption.

Minimization frames ultimately lead to the racialized inclination to understand *race as

insignificant*. Understanding race as insignificant treats other social categories of inequality as

more consequential than race. Amir sees race as insignificant in his comment below, left in

response to the *New York Times* article "Noam Chomsky on the Roots of American Racism":

> kid u need to stop drinking the zionist cool aid and accept the fact this is a class issue and
> not a race one. Just as many if not more poor whites have been crapped on repeatedly by
> the zionist elite establishment that runs this and other western nations. Race baiting only
> makes things worse and keeps us all divided from who the real enemy is. And i say this
> as a black man with his eyes finally open.

Amir immediately claims that the true cause of the problem is class, not race. Because race is

made insignificant, any discussion of racism is considered "race-baiting" that divides people.

'Race as insignificant' interpretations ignore how race intersects with other forms of oppression

to produce unique effects for the lives of people of color, what Patricia Hill Collins terms *matrix

of domination* (Hill Collins 1990). Collins theorizes social inequalities are caused by systems of

race and class, along with issues of gender, sex, age, etc., because all forms of oppression have

multiple dimensions. Class does not negate systemic racism but works in tandem to affects the

lives of people of color uniquely.

Commenters invoke the image of Barack Obama to initiate race as insignificant

narratives and minimize the presence of systemic racism. For example, the untitled commenter's

response to the *Washington Post* article "Researchers have Found Strong Evidence that Racism

Helps the G.O.P Win":

> The elephant in the room with all this institutional and systemic racism is Barak Obama .
> The TWICE ELECTED president of the US of A. How did this happen? This should be
> totally impossible with the endless barriers those nasty racists construct. Why can't you
> do that? They didn't stop him did they? Didn't even slow him down one bit. He is the
> king. The highest office in the land of the greatest racist nation in the history of the free
> world. He must be superman. Maybe he had some other kind of privilege that you don't
> have? Maybe you need to come up with another basket of excuses that explain that?

Barack Obama's image is brandished as proof that racism does not exist. However, race as

insignificant arguments take a hyper-individualist point of view and does not understand racism

as a systemic and structural phenomenon. Obama's image is invoked to deny systemic racism as

a form of oppression in the United States.

Minimization frames contest counter-framing arguments by diminishing how racial

inequality structures the lives of blacks and other people of color. Minimization frames permit

whites to ignore systemic racism as a system that disadvantages people of color and while

benefiting whites. Therefore, solutions to amend racial injustice are made insignificant because

racism is interpreted as not a problem deserving attention, reckoning, or reparations.

4.4   Objective Racism Frames

Objective Racism frames disqualify counter-framing arguments by assigning subjectivity

to people of color while claiming ownership of science and rational thought for whites

exclusively (Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi 2008). The objective racism concept is articulated by

Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, in their theorization of *white logic.* They define white logic as the

reasoning techniques and processes about the social world that supports white supremacy by

granting "eternal objectivity to the views of elite whites and condemns the views of non-Whites

to perpetual subjectivity" (2008:17). Thus, objective racism frames wield white logic to claim

scientific concepts as a white construct while simultaneously painting the critical viewpoints of people of color as subjective and silly (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008).

Discourses of objectivity characterize many objective racism frames, where commenter affect a performance of neutrality to reject counter-framing arguments as subjective or biased. Objective racism frames also work through focusing on the scientific concepts of **binaries, evidence, methodology,** and **statistics** to smear counter-framing arguments as silly or lacking in rigor. Objective racism frames lead to the racialized inclination of disqualifying counter-framing arguments and solutions while appearing rational and sane, thereby painting counter-framing arguments as emotional or irrational.

Objective racism frames work primarily through **discourses of objectivity**, where counter-framing arguments are dismissed or rejected as biased or lacking IN rigor. For example, here is commenter Douglas Tischler replying to the *New York Times* article "The Disproportionate Risk of Driving While Black":

> I am not defending the behavior of the police in this article, but it is hard to make informed judgments about the incidents reported when the NYT interviews ALL of the victims in these situations but NONE of the perpetrators.

Tischler invokes discourses of objectivity by arguing they must hear from the "the perpetrators" before they can accept the rigorous counter-framing argument presented by the article. The discourse of objectivity thus paints the article as biased, allowing for the framers to rebuff the counter-framing analysis presented by the article.

Discourses of objectivity commonly construct **binaries** to dismiss the concerns accentuated by counter-framing articles. For example, here is commenter Arthur's reaction to the *New York Times* article "Chicago Police Department is Plagued by Systemic Racism":

> The report contains some valid analysis and criticism, but it is plainly biased toward the "left." The only mention of gangs is to list the previous version of the city's gang loitering

> ordinance, which was struck down by the Supreme Court as vague, as another instance of institutional racism, and to then charge that the current version is also biased because gang members ordered to disperse were 85% Black, 14% Hispanic and only 1.4% white. Come on. Are the police supposed to find non-existent gang members just to equalize these numbers? And why can't the task force acknowledge that the gang bangers shooting up their communities are a big part of the problem? (Chicago)

Arthur's comment reflects how discourses of objectivity dismiss counter-framing arguments through the construction of binaries. Arthur can dismiss the article as "biased towards the left" because it does not provide a corresponding "right" opinion for balance. Arthur achieves dismissal through an affective posturing that mimics an objective viewer. Arthur begins with a cold and distant affect in their phrasing "the report contains some valid analysis and criticism" before repudiating the article as biased. Cold and calculating performances are central to discourses of objectivity because it anoints whites the ability to discard counter-framing arguments while appearing reasonable. Thus, we can see the centrality of affective performance and binaries to discourses of objectivity.

Objective racism frames also focus on *evidence* to dismiss counter-framing arguments. Commenter Teed Rockwell's response to the *New York Times* article "How Liberalism and Racism Are Wed" reflects the disingenuous focus on evidence:

> Everyone acknowledges that liberals are sometimes racists, and therefore do not always live up to the ideals of liberalism. This article makes the stronger claim that the ideals of liberalism are themselves racist. However, it provides no evidence or arguments whatsoever that this true. It cites numerous cases of deplorable racist behavior, some of which are attributable to liberals. Why shouldn't these examples be seen as liberals failing to live up to the ideals of liberalism? There's nothing here that even attempts to prove that liberalism itself is it fault. That would have been an interesting article, if she had succeeded in justifying her point. It's a shame she didn't write that article, instead of this random collection of anecdotes about bad stuff done by white guys.

Rockwell performs discourses of objectivity to refuse the claims made by the article. Rockwell uses the words "evidence" and "claims" to invoke discourses of objectivity's distance and rationality, thus avoiding the need to offer specific critiques to the article's arguments. It is very

common for these commenters to avoid mentioning how the article does not successfully argue its position, or what evidence would have been helpful to strengthen the argument. The focus on evidence allows commenters to dismantle counter-framing arguments, thereby discarding the concerns of people of color.

Objective racism frames also emphasize the ***methods*** of counter-framing articles as a point of disqualification. For example, observe commenter Ralphie's response to the *New York Times* article "American Racism in the 'White Frame'":

> Hey, I know I'm being a pain. But would Dr. Feagin answer a simple question. Ever heard of a double blind study. Do you think it's ok to have a co-author of a book also be the observer? Where's the control? Just asking. Sorry I didn't pick up on that little bit of non-science before, but that's pure junk by any standard -- philosophical, sociological, you name it. No excuses are there? And for all of you readers who swallowed this bunkum, think that through -- I propose a "scientific" hypothesis, then I conduct the observations? Ridiculous.

Ralphie focuses on methods to reject the argument of the article. Ralphie uses the methodological practices and terms of the scientific method (double-blind study, controls) to disqualify the research presented in the article. The focus on methodology allows Ralphie to restrict what constitutes "science" and act as an objective critic who dismisses all other forms of systematic inquiry. Because the methods of the counter-framing article lay outside of what the Ralphie deems "science," Ralphie can take a mockingly dismissive tone against the article and reduce it to silliness. Therefore, rigid methodology interpretations allow Ralphie to disqualify the counter-framing article's argument.

The focus on methodology serves the purpose of restricting what constitute legitimate knowledge. Patrick Anthony's response to the *Washington Post* article "Poor White Kids are less likely to go to Prison than Rich Black Kids" highlights the methodology dismissal technique:

> There is an obvious way to perform the study which would help get better results. Compare Black males who have been incarcerated with Black males who have not been

incarcerated. Survey them to find out what the underlying differences are and form a more complete picture. For example, two parent compared to one parent households, income levels, schools attended, etc. Add in drug and alcohol use by the subject and family, and criminal history of the family. Also I would like to know about the racial composition of the areas where they lived. Also the racial makeup of their friends and associates. I have a hypothesis, but it would not fit into the narrative of victimization that is so popular with certain groups.

The focus on methodology allows Anthony to construct methodological differences among disciplines as hierarchical and deem the methods used by the counter-framing article as inferior. Anthony suggests that the article is biased because it does not illustrate "a more complete picture" due to alleged methodological failures. Therefore, Anthony asks for additional information before they can believe the conclusion drawn by the article. But, there can never be enough information for people who utilize objective racist frames. The problem is not with the methods, but the articles focus on systemic racism as an oppressive force for the lived experiences of people of color.

The ***use of statistics*** factors heavily in objective racist frames, particularly in relationship to arguments about crime. Commenters commonly rely upon statistics, from the entirely manufactured to the misinterpreted, to justify vast differential treatment towards PoC and black people. Statistical interpretations are reflected in commenter David's response to the *New York Times* article "Chicago Police Department is Plagued by Systemic Racism":

> How is the "Chicago Police Dept. Plagued by Systemic Racism"? Especially if: * Around 70% of perpetrators of Chicago crime as described by victims (in Case Reports) are black * Around 70% of Chicagoans in contact by police are black * Around 70% of Chicagoans shot or killed by police are black   I find it questionable that the NY Times in their reporting, like so many stories, makes no effort to add these easy-to-find, extremely relevant, and verifiable statistics for perspective. Instead, they merely regurgitate the Task Force findings, by writing without context, "In a city where whites, blacks and Hispanics each make up about one-third of the population, 74 percent of the 404 people shot by the Chicago police between 2008 and 2015 were black, the report said. Black people were the subjects in 72 percent of the thousands of investigative street stops that did not lead to arrests during the summer of 2014." Only in a single sentence is

it mentioned there are "high rates of violence in some of those communities, but that did not excuse abuses of power by the police ..."   Yes, there's police abuse. There's actually discrepancies in whose cases are more substantiated (mostly white persons). According to CNN 12/9/15, "The data showed that blacks filed 61% of the complaints and whites filed 20%. Of the 4% of complaints deemed valid, 57% are from whites compared with just 24% from blacks."   That's possibly racism. This disparities mentioned in the report and this article are not.

David's response demonstrates how statistics are used to deny counter-framing arguments. David uses uncited statistics to argue that because "perpetrators of Chicago crime" are black, they should be targeted disproportionately by the police. The vast majority of black people do not commit crimes in their daily lives (Ray 2015). The disproportionate policing commonly allows police to racially discriminate against communities of color, causing an undue burden on their lives (Alexander 2010). However, the statistics allow David to make several leaps of logic by constructing uncited statistics as facts. Objective racism framers' reliance on statistical interpretations encourages the racialized inclination to continue racial discrimination against people of color by the police, as seen in commenter James' reaction to the *New York Times* article "The Disproportionate Risk of Driving While Black":

> If you are in an identifiable group that commits crime disproportionately it should not be a surprise that you are considered suspicious disproportionately.   The real question has nothing to do with the number of stops of one racial group or another. The real question is whether the stops result in a disproportionate number of non-convictions. If one racial group is being stopped more often, but, as a result of the stops, is also being convicted of a crime more often, then the disproportionate number of stops is just a reflection of good police work.

Commenters employ statistical interpretations as unwavering facts that cannot be disproven by a framework that centers counter-framing. Therefore, commenters utilize statistical interpretations to justify the racist treatment of black people by the police and dismiss the concerns of black people and other people of color concerning their unjust treatment by the police.

Objective racism frames purport supremacy by claiming singular ownership over the discourse of science and rationality. Objective racism frames' claim of rationality is based on white supremacist logic that paints whites as objective and people of color as subjective. The ownership over objectivity permits the automatic disqualification of counter-framing arguments, while simultaneously appearing rational and unbiased. Therefore, systemic racism is maintained, and counter-frames are smeared as irrational, biased, and emotional.

4.5   Reverse Racism

Reverse Racism frames understand whites as the true victims of racism, inverting the racial hierarchy highlighted by counter-framing arguments. Reverse racism frames understand black people as beneficiaries of societal privilege, from governmental welfare programs to affirmative action, in direct maleficence to whites. Studies point to reverse racist understandings of racial inequality to be quite common among whites (Hughey 2014). Reverse racism frames go beyond complete denial of white supremacy as the central mechanism of U.S. systemic racism towards a false inversion of the racist hierarchy where whites are disadvantaged, and people of color are privileged. Reverse racism frames thus contest counter-framing arguments by asserting whites as the true victims of racism.

Commenters employ reverse racism frames to enact *white victimization* reactions, where white supremacy is denied through high affect to claim central oppression in the United States. Commenters also define racial discourse as *unfair to whites* to erase the significance of white supremacy in the United States. Reverse racism allows whites to dismiss counter-framing arguments through narratives that declare *everything is racist* to alleviate the centrality of white supremacy to the existence of racial inequality.

Reverse racism frames work primarily through ***white victimization*** reactions. Mary affects white victimization in her response to the *New York Times* article "How American Tolerates Racism in Jury Selection":

> This is problematic because interracial juries make fewer factual errors, deliberate longer and consider a wider variety of perspectives than all-white juries, according to several studies." I'd like to see these studies. This is one of the most racist statements ever. So whites just 'vote' regardless of evidence?! Blacks are smarter and better at analysis?! Shame on the NYTimes. Let me see those 'studies' - are they all done by the Upshot? The ACLU? Sharpton? What about the jury for OJ?

Mary understands herself as victimized by the article's counter-framing arguments. Through white victimization, any analysis that center race and racism is considered racist. Mary appropriates oppression to reject the article's conclusion because it focuses on race. Mary willfully misinterprets the article, claiming it states that "blacks are smarter" to decry the article as biased against whites, furthering her victimization. The affective performance continues through her calls to shame the *New York Times* organization. The emotive-laden comment centers white victimization, allowing Mary to deflect any charge of racism and relinquish the centrality of white supremacy in U.S. racial inequality.

White victimization allows whites to reconstruct history through a lens of white oppression. Reverse racism frames paint the government as largely a source of rights and privileges for blacks, and not for whites. For example, here is commenter Ron Alexander responding to the *Washington Post* article "Broken by the Bubble: In the Fairwood Subdivision":

> The problem with all these stories in the papers with the theme that blacks are victimized is that there is an important element of the story that is always missing: individual responsibility. Blacks were victimized in slavery and in Jim Crow, both in the North and the South. But since the 1940s, blacks have been advantaged: Truman integrated the military in the 1940s; desegregation came in the 1950s; fair housing, civil rights, and voting rights laws came in the 1960s; LBJ's early education programs (head start) and various anti-poverty programs; then followed affirmative action in education; then affirmative action in government hiring and for government contractors; EEOC anti-

discrimination laws in hiring and employment practices, etc. So for 65 years, blacks have been advantaged, not victimized. Yes, police use of excess force is a problem, but it's a problem associated with low-income inner-city minority ghettos…

Alexander lists a variety of governmental programs that he interprets as programs for blacks. His interpretations of governmental programs as aid for black is completely false; governmental programs throughout U.S. history helped whites, and largely excluded blacks. For example, black people were excluded from FHA loans that aided white suburbanization through racially restrictive covenants and practices of redlining (Katznelson 2005). Reverse racist frames, however, allow commenters to ignore historical systemic racism. Through this ignorance, Alexander relies on cultural racist frames to shame black people for their lack of privilege, rather than understanding the conditions of systemic racism.

Reverse racism frames push commenters to conceptualize racial discourse through "***everything is racist***" interpretations, as untitled commenter notes on the *Washington Post* article "No, Protester Who Point Out Campus Racism Aren't Silencing Anyone":

Now hear this..any accomplishments you have as a white person were from white privilege. Please don't ever be proud of yourself. All your accomplishments are because of the racism black people face. As for black people, everything is excused. Please act anyway you like and blame it on white people. This sounds really fair to me. No future consequences for this new norm. Black people will behave and the whites will be shown as the devils they are.

The comment understands counter-framing discussions as unfair because they believe racial discourse blames whites for racism while excusing black people. Whites interpret themselves as the victims of racism debates, thus ignoring the ways in which systemic racism is a structural system that whites benefit from, no matter their consent.

Reverse racism frames, therefore, allow whites to discard counter-framing arguments as ***unfair to whites***. For example, we can see in commenter Gary's response to the *New York Times* article "How Liberalism and Racism Are Wed":

Using 18th century examples and pretending that poor white people don't experience the same violations of their rights undermines the arguments here. And using terms like NJ working class show the author's own biases. This kind of rant against whites - that the belief in rights and fairness is really the opposite - sure gives a "white" person like me pause. I did not choose to be born into this racial quagmire and calling me white, liberal or not doesn't truly describe me - it stereotypes me

Gary views arguments critical of white supremacy as stereotypical to white people. Gary does not convey an understanding of whiteness as a privilege in a racist, hierarchical system. Thus, he mischaracterizes the counter-framing argument as unfair to whites. Other commenters invoke the white working class as evidence that whites also suffer. Gary also identifies racism debates as unfair because he did not choose to be white. Therefore, counter-framing arguments that underscore how whites are privileged through their racial status are interpreted as unfair to white people.

This sense of unfairness encourages commenters to express how whites have also suffered greatly through history; as seen in commenter John B reaction to *New York Times* article "Noam Chomsky on the Roots of American Racism":

I wonder how many people reading this are aware of the history of Irish slavery? Here is an interesting article: http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-irish-slave-trade-the-forgotten-white-s...   I have some Irish ancestry, and as an American with a B.A. and a curiosity toward many subjects, I find it astonishing that this history never came to my ears until I was over 45 years old. I can only conclude that America has an undue obsession with black slaves in particular. As white Americans, we are supposed to exist in a sort of constant state of repentance. We are absolutely barraged with the narrative of white crime against non-whites. But this is only part of the human story.

The narrative serves to assert whites as the true victims because they have to suffer a "constant state of repentance" or guilt for a problem he claims no longer existing. The unfairness to whites narratives ignores the centrality of white supremacy to the contemporary state of racial inequality in the United States. The unfairness narrative ignores the unique severity of U.S. slavery. Unlike white indentured servants, blacks were fixed as property through their 'race' for generations with

no hope of ever transcending their racial inferiority (Roediger 2008). Whites cannot be racially subjugated because systemic racism privileges whiteness by providing unjust enrichments to white people in the direct unjust oppression of people of color (Feagin 2000; Haney Lopez 1996). Reverse racism frames thereby falsify the racist hierarchy to appropriate oppression from those who truly need solutions – blacks and other people of color. Thus, reverse racism only seeks to further the unjust enrichments whiteness affords whites in the United States.

Reverse racism frames interpret whites as the true victims of the racist hierarchy in the United States. Reverse racism denies the centrality of white supremacy to systemic racism and racial inequality. Whites, therefore, utilize reverse racism frames to dismantle counter-framing arguments and invert the oppressive realities of systemic racism. Reverse racism frames center whites in racial discourse that should center the racial oppression suffered black people and people of color.

4.6   Summary of Findings

My analysis comment section reactions to counter-framing articles reveal a racial dialectic relationship. The relationship underscores that counter-framing arguments co-exist with white racial frames to structure racial discourse. I organize my findings around the key frames of white racial framing I uncover from my examination: ***Cultural Racism, Abstract Liberalism, Minimization, Objective Racism, and Reverse Racism. Cultural racism*** frames fix presumed inferior cultural practices and pathologies onto blacks and other people of color to delegitimize counter-framing arguments (Bonilla-Silva 2010). ***Abstract liberal*** frames offer decontextualized principles of fairness and equality regarding racial matters to disregard counter-framing arguments (Bonilla-Silva 1997). ***Minimization*** frames decline counter-framing arguments by diminishing the significance of racism as a central organizing principle in U.S. life (Bonilla-Silva

2010). ***Objective Racism*** frames disqualify counter-framing arguments by assigning subjectivity to people of color while claiming ownership of science and rational thought for whites exclusively (Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi 2008). Lastly, ***Reverse Racism*** frames understand whites as the true victims of racism, inverting the racial hierarchy highlighted by counter-framing arguments.

My findings elucidate the vast diversity of beliefs, stereotypes, and narratives framers use to reject counter-framing arguments and justify the conditions of systemic racism. However, the frames were united in their delegitimization of systemically aware and counter-framing arguments which seek to highlight the prevalence of racism in U.S. social life. My research illustrates the tenacity and fluidity of white racial framing in maintaining a white supremacist order through the rejection of systemically aware and race critical arguments. It is, therefore, important to continue investigations into the pervasion of white racial frames in internet interactions and discourse.

5   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

My analysis of comment section reactions to counter-framing articles reveals the existence of a racial dialectic relationship, where counter-frames co-exist with white racial frames. Commenters respond with a variety of racist framings – identified as ***Cultural Racism, Abstract Liberalism, Minimization, Objective Racism, and Reverse Racism*** - to reject the arguments of the counter-framing articles. I found examples of counter-frames that struggle with white racial frames in comment sections. However, white racial frames were central to racial discourse online. The overarching question guiding my research asks what an observation of reactions to counter-framing articles can reveal about contemporary racial discourse in the United States. My findings suggest that the racial dialectic structures contemporary racial discourse, where counter-frames will co-exist with white racial frames.

My findings complicate narratives presented by the Center for Racial Justice Innovation that proclaim more meticulous and systemically aware media can advance racial justice initiatives. My research examines a variety of counter-framing articles using a diversity of methods to reveal a systemic racial hierarchy in the United States. Despite expertise and rigor, commenters wield white racial frames to reject the counter-framing arguments on racialized ideological grounds. I, therefore, theorize that the racial dialectic is structural to public racial discourse. We should, therefore, be critical of claims that comprehensive counter-framing will necessarily advance racial justice by providing better information to readers.

A race critical perspective helps us to understand why white racial frames co-exist with counter-frames in public racial discourse. Race critical scholars understand systemic racism as a structural phenomenon, not an individualist phenomenon of prejudice or animus (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Systemic racism constructs a racial hierarchy that permeates all U.S. institutions, creating a racial structure that simultaneously privileges whites and subjugates people of color. Therefore, race critical scholars conceptualize racism as a social system which seeks to maintain white supremacy. Race critical scholars further argue racial ideology justifies the racist structure and hierarchy in society. Therefore, the expression of racial ideology through racial discourse seeks to legitimate white supremacy through the white racial frame (Feagin 2010). My findings support race critical theorizing by highlighting the simultaneity of counter-frames, which strive to challenge racial hierarchy, and white racial frames, which seek to maintain or reassert the racist hierarchy. My research suggests we should not conceptualize counter-framing as an opportunity to persuade skeptics to a "correct" position of racial progress and justice. Instead, we should conceptualize counter-framing as an initiation of the racial dialectic. Counter-frames will co-exist with white racial frames, forming a racial dialectic that will challenge, disrupt, maintain, or reassert the racial hierarchy currently in place in the United States. Race critical perspectives lead us to re-interpret the racial contestation found in comment sections as not unique, but ordinary and foundational to race relations in the United States.

As public racial discourse becomes increasingly digitized, it is imperative that race critical scholars begin to examine the consequences of the racial dialectic nature of racial discourse. Over the last few years, we have begun to see the most public discussions of racism – Black Lives Matter and police brutality, immigration policy, environmental racism, racist economic deprivation and reparations – increasingly occur online. The online racial discourse

later embeds frameworks and ideologies into the public's consciousness, altering action in offline interactions. My research underscores how the racial dialectic structures racial discourse. Thus, as activists and scholars cement their counter-framing engagement and activism online, my research expects the white racial frame to contest their efforts vigorously. Race critical scholars understand the white racial frame as the dominant frame in maintaining racial inequality in the United States (Feagin 2010). The dominant white racial frame will provide fluid rationalizing frames to delegitimize counter-frames and reassert white supremacy. It is thus imperative for race critical scholars to pay close attention to racial discourse online, as the augmented reality concept argues the increasing racial contestation occurring online will have consequences for race relations and racial discourse offline.

However, the augmented reality concept does not adequately consider the differential racialized nature of offline and online spaces. Bonilla-Silva et al. (2006) argue that whites live and socialize in hypersegregated spaces, what they term white habitus, which reinforces homogenous whiteness as the regular and "correct" way of being. White habitus normalizes and unracializes white homogeneity and delegitimizes whiteness and white supremacy as inequality producing forces in social life (Bonilla-Silva, Goar and Embrick 2006). However, digital spaces, unlike their physical counterparts, are not characterized by hypersegregation due to the lack of physical barriers. People of color and counter-frames are unrestricted by physical limitations and can intermix quite easily with whites and white racial frames. The augmented reality theory does not consider the difference in racial segregation in its conceptualization of the enmeshing of offline and online experiences. Due to its relative absence of physical barriers, online spaces can become sites of racial integration that sharply differs from the homogenous whiteness most whites experience in their offline experiences.

My findings of reactions to counter-framing arguments suggest that whites will assert whiteness online to mirror the whiteness of their offline lives. Wendy Moore argues that whites maintain dominance of spaces through white institutional space where "racialized structures, cultures, and practices, as well as dominant ideologies" interact to create whitewashed spaces (2008: 165). Through Wendy Moore's work, I posit that comment sections act as digitized white institutional space. Commenters claim the digital landscape of comment sections as white space by rejecting counter-frames and racial inequality through white racial frames. As Jessie Daniels has noted in her text *Cyber Racism*, many people in her study could not correctly identify racist discourse in online spaces (2009). Therefore, online spaces have the ability to reproduce whiteness by delegitimizing counter-frames while appearing normal, unracialized, unremarkable (Moore 2008). My research opens possibilities to explore the internet generally as a space of digitized institutional white space. Future research should thus explore how whites can claim online spaces as white spaces, deny the existence of racism, and maintain the racist hierarchy in the United States.

My research holds implications for public online racial discussions of racial inequality. It is fundamental to shut down comment sections on counter-framing articles. When media sites keep comment sections for counter-framing articles, they are inviting commenters to engage in the structural relationship of the racial dialectic, where white racial frames and counter-frames co-exist. The structural racial dialectic reflects the larger structural relationship of white supremacy, where racial discourse provides an opportunity to express racial ideology to maintain the racial hierarchy in the United States. This relationship is structural; we cannot reduce the white racial frame through individualist negotiation. Media sites should, therefore, expect comment sections reacting to counter-framing articles to become havens of the white racial

frames. Comment sections will become white institutional space that can reproduce white supremacy by delegitimizing counter-frames and reinforcing whiteness as normal and unremarkable. Therefore, sites should discontinue comment sections and consider other ways to engage with readers concerning racial discourse.

My research, however, only investigates the racial dialectic through examining counter-framing articles and their respective comment sections. Future research should seek to explore a wider array of digital interactions. The comment section is a foundational interaction of the internet, thus, beginning a race critical exploration in comment section spaces is warranted. However, race critical scholars must research a variety of digital spaces to deepen our theories investigating how the internet is a racialized institution structured by systemic racism and white supremacy. Further research should apply a race critical perspective to social media sites and other digital spaces to examine the existence of digitized white institutional space and the racial dialectic. Studies should be especially critical of whiteness and how internet spaces reinforce white supremacy by maintaining structures that benefit whites.

I argue the racial dialectic structures online racial discourse; therefore, future research should strive to examine the internet as a racialized institution. Just as in the offline world, online experiences are socially structured by racial ideologies that work in tandem with systemic racism to maintain and perpetuate racial inequality. As the internet continues to grow as a foundational structuring and organizing force in the U.S. – altering access to job opportunities, education, social networks, etc. – it becomes imperative to understand how the internet as a racialized institution. My research also suggests that the internet act as institutional white space where whites will seek to maintain their white privilege through dominance. My research suggests race critical scholars should explore how the internet as a racialized institution and a site of racial

contestation. White dominance online will surely afford whites with greater economic and symbolic privileges while compounding greater economic and symbolic oppression of people of color.

As internet use continues to become a central organizing social institution in U.S. life, race critical theorist must begin to grapple with how such a racialized institution will alter the experiences of individual and systemic racism in our lives. Race critical literature contains the theoretical works significant for understanding a contemporary world enmeshed in rampant racialized online content. I hope my research urges race critical scholars to explore the internet as a racialized institution that will hold racialized implications for the physical world in which we inhabit. My research holds implications for further investigation into how the internet as a racialized institution governed by racialized ideologies may alter how people conceptualize of racialized categories, groups, and meanings in the physical world. My research begins the theorization of the internet as a racialized institution that can alter or augment the racism and white supremacy we experience in our lives. It is imperative that we as race critical thinkers continue this line of research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Articles of Analysis

The New York Times		
Date	**Title**	**Author(s)**
April 16, 2016	"272 Slaves were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does it owe their Descendants?"	Swarns R.
April 13, 2016	"Chicago Police Department Plagued by Systemic Racism"	Davey M. and M. Smith
April 2, 2016	"When Whites just Don't Get it, Part 6"	Kristof N.
November 10, 2015	"A History of Racism of the University of Missouri"	Staples B.
October 2015	"The Disproportionate Risks of Driving While Black"	LaFraniere S. and A. Lehren
October 30 2015	"How America Tolerates Racism in Jury Selection"	Thompson L.
May 9, 2015	"How Racism Doomed Baltimore"	New York Times: The Editorial Board
July 27, 2015	"American Racism in the 'White Frame'"	Yancy G. and J. Feagin
March 18, 2015	"Noah Chomsky on the Roots of American Racism"	Yancy G. and N. Chomsky
February 27, 2015	"How Liberalism and Racism are Wed"	Yancy G. and G. Sheth

Table 2: Articles for Analysis

The Washington Post		
Date	**Title**	**Author(s)**
April 28, 2016	"We Can't Forget how Racist Institutions Shaped Homeownership in America"	Freund D.M.P.
April 13, 2016	"Chicago Police 'have no regard' for Lives of Minorities, Reports Says"	Berman M.
March 23, 2016	"Poor White Kids are less likely to go to Prison than Rich Black Kids"	Ehrenfreund M.
March 10, 2016	"No, Protesters Who Point Out Campus Racism Aren't Silencing Anyone"	Harper S.
March 3, 2016	"Researchers have Found Strong Evidence that Racism Helps the G.O.P Win"	Ehrenfreund M.
February 26, 2016	"America has locked up so many Black People, It has warped our Sense of Reality"	Guo J.
November 12, 2015	"A Course Originally Called 'The Problem of Whiteness' Returns to Arizona State"	Wang Y.
Jan 25, 2015	"Broken by the Bubble: In the Fairwood Subdivision"	Kelly K, J. Sullivan, & S. Rich
Jan 24, 2015	"The American Dream Shatters in Prince George's County"	Fletcher, M.
Sept 22, 2015	"Jews in America Struggled for Decades to Become White"	Steinlauf G.