

Quality over Quantity: Racism Comprehension in a Sociology Curriculum

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Sociology

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

Cheney Hurley
April 2023

On my honor, I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

Cheney Hurley
April 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to everyone who has supported me on my thesis journey and during my time at Colorado College. The first course I took at Colorado College was with Gail Murphy-Geiss as my professor, and now, in my senior year, I am completing my sociology major with her as my academic and thesis advisor. Through these milestones, she has been a wonderful mentor and advisor to me. Gail, I cannot thank you enough for your feedback and encouragement throughout the process of writing this thesis. Your continued support and guidance have been invaluable to me not just during this culminating experience, but also throughout my time at Colorado College.

I would also like to thank my professors, Minh Kim and Wade Roberts, who have encouraged me to explore the topics I'm passionate about using quantitative methods and statistical analysis. Minh and Wade, your mentorship has played a significant role in shaping my academic interests, and your courses have taught me important skills that I will use as I continue my education in pursuit of a master's degree in biostatistics.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for all their love and support in this process. To my mom, Pat, and sister, Molly, thank you for taking my calls and texts at all hours of the day and always offering your words of wisdom and encouragement. Your unwavering support and unconditional love are everything to me. To my best friends, AiLi, Alex, Avery, Ella, Estie, and Gabby, thank you for making my college experience so enjoyable. The best memories I have made at Colorado College have been with you all at my side. I'm so proud to call each of you my friend, and I will always be cheering you on, just as you have cheered me on through this experience.

ABSTRACT

Colorado College's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion was formally established in its Antiracism Implementation Plan, created in November 2019 with the intent of creating an antiracist community and environment at the College. The Sociology Department of Colorado College aims to assess its contribution to upholding the College's commitment to antiracism by evaluating its faculty's teaching and students' learning regarding racism. This study seeks to examine the association between sociology coursework and advanced levels of understanding of racism in undergraduate students at Colorado College. A coding scheme was developed to indicate whether respondents demonstrated a "basic," "intermediate," or "advanced" understanding of racism in their open-ended response to the question: "What is racism?" The results found that respondents' progression to higher levels of sociology coursework was significantly associated with their development of an advanced understanding of racism, as respondents who completed 200- and 300-level courses tended to have more advanced understandings of racism compared to those who had only taken 100-level courses.

In November 2019, Colorado College finalized its Antiracism Implementation Plan meant to “strive for an environment that does not foster negative experiences or outcomes based on race” after thorough internal and external reviews of racism at the College that started in 2018 (Colorado College 2019). With this commitment to antiracism, Colorado College hopes to create greater equity and inclusion for all members of the community, and since then, the College has set several goals to work toward making the campus an antiracist institution. In alignment with these goals as well as the review standards Colorado College sets forth, the Sociology Department at Colorado College wanted to examine its role in fostering an antiracist environment by assessing its teaching and students’ understanding of racism.

This study will analyze the relationship between students’ coursework in sociology and their understanding of how racism operates on a macro level, beyond individual prejudice and discrimination, to create systemic inequalities in society based on a dynamic racial hierarchy. Ultimately, the findings from this study will be used to help faculty reflect and improve upon their teaching, curriculum, and course offerings. When students develop an advanced understanding of racism, they can carry this knowledge through and beyond their college years and begin to deconstruct systems that perpetuate racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Bandy, Harbin, and Thurber 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories and Core Concepts of Race and Racism

In the United States, racial categories have historically been thought to stem from biological features and to be innate classifications based on skin color (Khanna and Harris 2009; Omi and Winant 2015). The idea that race is rooted in biological attributes has been widely discredited by scholars today, largely due in part to the pioneering work of W.E.B. Du Bois (Omi

and Winant 2015). W.E.B. Du Bois and other black scholars and activists were the first to refute the idea that race was rooted in biology, and they instead published works creating a “social science of race and racism” in the late 1800s (Omi and Winant 2015:5). It took more than 20 years for white sociologists and scholars to recognize Du Bois’ ideas and promote the concept of race as a social phenomenon (Omi and Winant 2015). The social construction of race and the systemic nature of racism that results from it is foundational to Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris 2006).

CRT originated from the work of legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado in the 1970s and 80s (Ladson-Billings 1999; Delgado et al. 2006). CRT stems from the critical legal studies movement, in response to its failure to incorporate racism in its critiques of mainstream meritocratic legal policies, ideologies, and practices, as well as from radical feminism, drawing on its ideologies to address power dynamics and the societal consequences of social constructions (Ladson-Billings 1999; Delgado et al. 2006). CRT scholars use an interdisciplinary approach to understand the governing dynamics of race, racism, and power that result in racial divisions and inequities in society while also attempting to address and change them (Delgado et al. 2006). Today, CRT is used in higher education to understand and analyze policies and practices at colleges and universities that contribute to racial inequities in educational access, attainment, and achievement (Hiraldo 2010).

Applying a CRT framework in higher education classes relies on curriculum to emphasize race as a social construction that has been continually molded and redefined throughout the years to maintain and reinforce the dominance of white Americans (Schmidt 2005; Omi and Winant 2015). Omi and Winant (2015:12) develop a theory of racial formation to describe the social construction of race as a process that classifies people based on “real or

imagined attributes” to create, dominate, and oppress subordinated groups. When the social construction of race is taught, students can begin to learn how racism is ingrained in the institutions and cultural norms that make up society. Institutional racism uses systematic policies and practices within institutions to create advantages and opportunities for the dominant group, historically comprised of white people in American society, while simultaneously discriminating, disadvantaging, and subordinating others (Ture, Carmichael, and Hamilton 1967; Feagin 2001; Schmidt 2005). Cultural racism relies on the cultural norms and beliefs of the dominant group being embedded into American society to emphasize white supremacy and further subordinate people of color (Feagin 2001; Schmidt 2005). The combination and interaction of individual prejudice and discrimination, cultural norms, and institutional policies play an essential role in developing what Feagin (2013:3) calls the “white racial frame” and its dominance in sustaining systemic racism in the United States.

The white racial frame promotes the idea of white virtuousness and the importance of racial capital in maintaining systemic inequality in the United States (Feagin 2013). The white racial frame establishes a racial hierarchy with white people at the top. This hierarchy dictates that the white experience is the only valid experience and affords privileges to white individuals while marginalizing people of color (Feagin 2013). Continuing to operate under the white racial frame allows systemic racism to endure. Students who have an advanced and complex comprehension of racism demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the systemic and structural nature of racism and how the racial hierarchy and white racial frame are maintained by institutions and cultural norms (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Bandy et al. 2021). Ultimately, students with deeper understandings of racism will be better equipped to deconstruct the systems and institutions that perpetuate racism in American society (Feagin 2013).

Student Learning and Outcomes

It is not uncommon for students to have any combination of feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, hopelessness, guilt, and discomfort arise when they are first learning about race and racism in undergraduate sociology or other diversity courses (Roberts and Smith 2002; Chick, Karis, and Kernahan 2009; Weinzimmer and Bergdahl 2018; Bandy et al. 2021). As a result, professors often face resistance from their students and must employ strategies to help them overcome this hesitancy, fear, and resistance. Many pedagogical strategies have been devised and proven to be effective in helping students overcome this resistance to engaging and learning (Roberts and Smith 2002; Chick et al. 2009; Weinzimmer and Bergdahl 2018; Bandy et al. 2021). Professors must first acknowledge that student resistance is expected when teaching about race and racism (Chick et al. 2009; Bandy et al. 2021). Affirming and accepting students as they are, rather than confronting or rejecting them, and creating a safe space and caring community in the classroom are key to facilitating the learning process, reducing student resistance, and creating more open-minded students (Chick et al. 2009; Bandy et al. 2021). Roberts and Smith (2002) further discuss the importance of the professor's role in managing emotions in diversity courses. The professor must act as an exemplar for students to create a safe and inclusive classroom environment (Roberts and Smith 2002). If professors want students to engage with the material, share their background and experience, and confront their privilege, they should do the same (Roberts and Smith 2002; Bandy et al. 2021). Additionally, Roberts and Smith (2002) argue that when resistance inevitably does arise, professors should facilitate a class discussion around it rather than individually target students who may be resistant. Ultimately, intentionality, compassion, and inclusivity must be at the forefront of professors' minds when teaching on the

sensitive topics of race and racism, and they need to possess skills to manage students and their own emotions to create safe spaces for all students to engage.

When students' resistance to learning about race and racism is reduced, several positive learning and attitudinal outcomes resulted for students in undergraduate sociology and other diversity courses on race and racism. For example, studies have shown anecdotal success in teaching about race as a social construction through both personalized and depersonalized exercises conducted in the classroom (Alicea and Kessel 1997; Obach 1999; Khanna and Harris 2009). Alicea and Kessel (1997) had their students guess the race of the others in the class. Peers' racial classification of certain students would differ from the student's self-defined identity, and this exercise was meant to demonstrate the inability to determine one's race from only their physical appearance (Alicea and Kessel 1997). In another study, Obach (1999) used circles with similar but varying patterns to teach students about the social construction of race. In the exercise, students divided the circles up in many ways based on the criterion they valued the most. The process of grouping the circles is comparable to the way society defines racial categories based on certain characteristics – arbitrarily and inconsistently. Students found this exercise to be useful in understanding the lack of an innate grouping in the circles and were able to transfer this understanding to think of race as a social construction (Obach 1999). Once students learn about the social construction of race, they can begin to understand how racism affects themselves, others, and society.

Much of the literature on the outcomes of teaching racism in undergraduate institutions revolves around students', especially white students', reactions to learning about racism. Studies have shown that diversity courses have made white students more aware of their white privilege and have evoked white guilt for some. For example, several studies have found that required

diversity courses increased students' understanding of white privilege (Fritschner 2001; Case 2007; Kernahan and Davis 2007; Cole, Case, Rios, and Curtin, 2011). These studies demonstrated to students that white people receive unearned privileges and advantages in life because of institutional, systemic, and cultural racist policies, procedures, and prejudices. As a result of a greater understanding of their white privilege, some students experienced a greater degree of white guilt causing them to want to enact change to address racism and the white privilege they receive (Case 2007; Kernahan and Davis 2007). Students have also become more aware of racism as institutional and systemic and are more comfortable in rejecting policies and ideologies based on meritocracy (Case 2007; Radloff 2010; Cole et al. 2011). For example, Cole et al. (2011) found that white students enrolled in diversity courses had increased opposition toward the Protestant Work Ethic, or the idea of meritocracy, and other studies have found increased support for race-based and affirmative action policies in correlation with diversity courses (Case 2007; Radloff 2010). A greater understanding of white privilege, an increased acknowledgment of racism, and a rejection of meritocratic policies and ideologies are direct reflections of students' growth in understanding of racism and students' part in making actionable progress toward eliminating the root causes of racial oppression and inequities.

Beyond an acknowledgment of racism, diversity courses attempt to reduce racial prejudice and negative racial attitudes. Studies have shown that students in diversity courses have positive changes in their racial attitudes and prejudices (Chang 2002; Hogan and Mallott 2005; Ghoshal, Lippard, Ribas, and Muir 2013). This reduction in prejudice points to a more enhanced and advanced understanding of racism, as students begin to understand the societal and systemic impacts of racism on their communities and personally engage in race issues by changing their behavior in response. Additionally, there is evidence that suggests that more time

spent in a diversity course is associated with positive attitudinal changes regarding race. Chang (2002) found that students had less prejudice toward African Americans when they had nearly finished their course in diversity compared to those who just began the course. Additionally, Hogan and Mallot (2005) found that only students currently enrolled in a diversity course showed reduced antagonism toward minorities, but this was not the case for those who had already completed their course on race. These studies suggest that current and prolonged exposure to sociology and diversity courses on race is an important aspect in the understanding of racism and the enactment of behavioral and attitudinal change.

Student Understanding of Racism

Seeing positive attitudinal changes, increased awareness of white privilege, and the institutional/cultural aspect of racism are great steps toward having students develop a richer understanding of racism, but these studies provide largely anecdotal evidence. Only a few studies have developed methods using student data to investigate the progress students make in learning the complexities of racism over time in sociology and other diversity courses (Bidell et al. 1994; Becker and Paul 2015; Winkler 2018; Bandy et al. 2021). Bidell et al. (1994) use a 5-step model to evaluate white students' learning of the nature and cause of racism over the duration of a semester in a cultural diversity course. At the beginning of the semester, three-fourths of students had step 1 responses, indicating they thought about racism in simplistic and individualistic terms. At the semester's end, around half of the students ended up in steps 3 and 4, demonstrating they had developed a more complex understanding of the systematic nature and causes of racism (Bidell et al. 1994). Bidell et al. (1994) found students' overall understanding of racism increased on average by 0.76 steps, and neither age nor college experience were significant predictors of understanding, suggesting that the increase in understanding of racism should not be attributed to

the relative amount of time in college or the age of the student. Although some students showed no change in their understanding of racism, this study provides evidence that suggests students can develop more complex and comprehensive understandings of racism and its pervasiveness in the systems and institutions of society through undergraduate courses on race and racism.

Winkler (2018:813) uses a similar approach to analyze students' understanding of racism using a 5-level rubric to code students' assignments to measure "racism comprehension." The rubric ranged from no level of understanding to a level of "applied analytical" understanding, indicating students demonstrated a complete and complex understanding of systemic racism (Winkler 2018). At the beginning of the course, 70 percent of students had no understanding of systemic racism, but around halfway through the course, nearly 90 percent of students reached the highest level of understanding. The large shift in understanding came largely from one in-class activity emphasizing the differences between and definitions of racial stereotyping, racial prejudice, and racism. While many black students had developed their understanding of racism before this exercise, they did notice a change in white students' understanding and interactions after this exercise. Winkler (2018) also found differences in understanding by relative time in school. This study not only provides further evidence that undergraduate courses on race and racism can be effective in fostering a deeper understanding of race and racism but also that certain demographic factors of students, such as race or undergraduate class standing, could influence the ability or rate at which one develops a richer understanding of racism.

Bandy et al. (2021) furthered the research on the understanding of race and racism by looking at students' comprehension of definitions and concepts of race and racism (cognitive understanding) as well as their emotional ability to discuss and engage with diverse people and subjects (affective understanding). While it is important to understand how students'

comprehension of course topics and concepts progress, the affective development of understanding racism plays an equally important role. Developing an affective understanding of race and racism allows students to participate in meaningful discussions of topics of race and racism with others in their class and community to explore their positionality and enhance their overall cognitive understanding (Bandy et al. 2021). Bandy et al (2021:118) ultimately found that students in their sociology class advanced cognitively by developing a “more elaborate, complicated, and nuanced understanding of the histories and structures of racial formations” as well as emotionally through their ability to “engage one another productively around differences, empathize with experiences of racism, and articulate increasingly complex emotional and value-based understandings of racial justice that involved interracial solidarity” (Bandy et al. 2021:131). The development of affective understanding highlights the importance of implementing pedagogical skills to minimize resistance to learning about race and racism. When students can engage in the classroom, they can deepen their cognitive understanding of race and racism.

Given the significant role that higher education plays in shaping students' knowledge and beliefs about race and racism, it is important to investigate how different pedagogical approaches and curricular offerings can influence students' understanding. This study seeks to expand on the abundant body of literature on the pedagogy, teaching, and understanding of race and racism in higher education institutions by investigating the role sociology coursework – which often covers topics of race and racism – plays in fostering advanced and complex understandings of racism in undergraduate students. This study aims to explore the extent to which the type and number of sociology classes taken by undergraduate students at Colorado College impact their level and depth of understanding of racism.

METHODS AND DATA

Data and Survey

Data for this study were collected and provided by the Sociology Department of Colorado College. A survey (see Appendix) was distributed to all undergraduate students enrolled in a Sociology course at Colorado College between January 24, 2022 and April 27, 2022. Before engaging in coursework for their enrolled course, every student was required to complete the four-question survey. In the survey, students were asked to provide their personal definition or explanation of racism in 250 words or less. The survey included additional questions regarding how many and which previous sociology classes the student had taken as well as their academic year in school at the time. The survey received 220 responses, but three responses were designated as missing because they were duplicate or incomplete responses, bringing the sample size to 217 students.

Measures for Comprehension of Racism

Variables to measure the understanding of racism were developed using a coding scheme based on previous research from Bonilla-Silva (1997) and Bandy et al. (2021). Bandy et al. (2021:122) suggest that advanced explanations of racism “recount racial power structures and the stereotypes and prejudices on which they depend, particularly how racial hierarchies of power, despite reform, are maintained by existing laws and other social institutions.” This definition implies that an explanation of racism is advanced if it does two main things: (1) it recognizes the existence and presence of a racial hierarchy and how it creates systemic inequalities based on race, and (2) it acknowledges how the racial hierarchy has been maintained and continues to be perpetuated through the structural forces of society, like institutional practices and cultural values.

Two dichotomous dummy variables were created to indicate whether responses to the question “What is racism?” (1) mention or acknowledge the existence of a racial hierarchy and (2) mention or acknowledge the structural factors that have helped maintain the racial hierarchy and perpetuate systemic inequality. Other variants that similarly convey the idea of the presence of a racial hierarchy were accepted as successfully addressing the component, such as the mentioning of racial power structures, white supremacy, marginalization, and more. Similarly, specific examples or themes that encompass the structural nature of racism were accepted as successfully addressing the structural component of racism (Table 1). For each dummy variable, responses were coded as “1” to indicate the student incorporated the respective component successfully in their definition or “0” to indicate they did not.

Table 1: Accepted Variants for Hierarchical and Structural Components of Racism

Components of Racism	Variants
Racial Hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Racial power structures/dynamics - Marginalization - Oppression - Racial domination and subordination - Racial privilege - Racial superiority - Racial supremacy
Structural Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historical Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, redlining, the War on Drugs, capitalistic exploitation - Specific Examples/Laws/Policies/Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Mass incarceration, unequal sentencing practices, discriminatory policing practices, education inequality, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, health care disparities, economic disparities, environmental disparities

Three additional dummy variables were created to indicate whether a response provided an “advanced”, “intermediate”, or “basic” level of understanding of racism. Responses were classified as demonstrating an “advanced” level of understanding and coded as “1” if they mention the two main components from Bandy et al. (2021): the presence of a racial hierarchy and structural forces that reinforce and maintain the hierarchy leading to systemic inequality

based on race, and “0” if they fail to incorporate both. The “intermediate” level of understanding dummy variable is coded as “1” if the responses include either the racial hierarchy or structural forces in its definition but not both, and “0” if it includes both or neither. The “basic” level of understanding dummy variable is coded as “1” if the response neglects to incorporate both components and “0” if it includes at least one component (Table 2).

Table 2: Levels of Understanding of Racism with Examples

Level of Understanding	Hierarchy	Structural	Examples from this Data Set
Advanced	Yes	Yes	Racism is discrimination performed based on racial characteristics, most often skin color. Systemic racism is caused by laws and power structures that were established to discriminate against- and divert resources away from- communities that are primarily made up of a non-white race.
Intermediate	Yes	No	An act of discrimination and/or prejudice that usually targets a racial group or someone who belongs to that racial group that is marginalized in a society.
Intermediate	No	Yes	Racism includes both passive and active discrimination based on race. This can include things like small, often unnoticed by the majority, micro-aggressions, but also extend to overt discriminatory laws.
Basic	No	No	Racism is undeserved prejudice or hatred towards a person because of their racial identity.

Finally, the three dummy variables regarding levels of understanding of racism were combined into one ordinal variable – “score of understanding” – where “1” corresponds to basic, “2” corresponds to intermediate, and “3” corresponds to an advanced level of understanding.

Independent Variables

From the survey data provided, additional dummy variables were created to enhance the analysis of the pre-existing categorical variables in the dataset. The Sociology Department at Colorado College offers a 100-level course on racial inequality that is meant to study race as a “dimension of inequality” and examine “institutional forms of racism” (Colorado College 2023). To later examine the relationship between taking this course and levels of understanding of racism, a dummy variable was created to indicate if a student has taken SO113: Racial Inequality. The “Racial Inequality” dummy variable was coded as “1” indicating the student has

taken SO113:Racial Inequality if the course was listed in their response to the question regarding previous sociology classes taken or “0” if they have not.

Additionally, a First Year Program/Experience (FYP/FYE) course is an introductory course that first-year students must take prior to taking any other classes at Colorado College. The Department offers an FYP/FYE course in sociology which can be the first place first-year students learn about racism on a macro-level. To later examine the impact of FYP/FYE courses on levels of understanding of racism, a dummy variable was created to indicate if a student took their FYP/FYE course in the Sociology Department. Students who listed any CC100 course or SO100: Thinking Sociologically taught in Block 1 were coded as having taken an FYP/FYE course in the Department. The “FYP/FYE” dummy variable was coded as “1” to indicate students took their FYP/FYE in the Sociology Department or “0” to indicate that they took it in an alternative department.

Five additional dummy variables were created to indicate the highest level of sociology class a student had taken. These included “no sociology courses”, “100-level”, “200-level”, “300-level,” and “400-level”. The “no sociology courses” dummy variable was coded “1” if the student did not list any previous sociology courses in their response and “0” if they did. Students who listed at least one 100-level class in their previous sociology coursework and no higher-level courses (200-, 300- or 400-level) were coded as “1” for the 100-level dummy variable and “0” otherwise. Similarly, students who listed at least one 200-level class in their previous sociology coursework and had no higher-level courses (300- or 400-level) were coded as “1” and “0” otherwise. The same process was used to create the 300- and 400-level dummy variables. Similarly, dummy variables were created to indicate students’ academic year in school. “First-year”, “Sophomore”, “Junior”, and “Senior” dummy variables were coded as “1” if the student

was in that respective academic year in school or “0” if not. A categorical variable was also created to separate upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) and underclassmen (first-years and sophomores).

Finally, several categorical variables were created to summarize the number of prior sociology courses students have taken. Using a numeric count of prior sociology courses taken, the categories from the survey were reshaped into mutually exclusive categories: “0”, “1-2”, “3-4”, “5-6”, and “7 or more” prior courses to form a new categorical variable. Another categorical variable was created to summarize the number of prior sociology classes taken with the categories: “0-3” and “4 or more” classes and these categories were further broken down into “0”, “1-3”, and “4 or more” to create a third variable describing the number of prior courses.

Methods

Descriptive statistics were conducted for all variables for each respective level of understanding. Due to the ordinal nature of the score regarding understanding, Mann-Whitney U tests and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of understanding for all variables. Given that this pilot study aims to find the potential relationships and patterns that exist within the imperfect, real-world data collected, a higher significance level of 0.10 (Thabane et al. 2010) was used to identify any associations so as to ultimately help faculty in the Sociology Department reflect and improve upon their teaching in the discipline. Chi-square analyses were then conducted to examine the relationship between each variable and having an advanced understanding of racism at the same 0.10 significance level. All statistical analysis was conducted using R version 4.2.3 and all appropriate assumptions were met for each statistical test run.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were generated to examine the distribution of respondents by academic background and level of understanding of racism (Table 3). More than half of respondents demonstrated an advanced level of understanding of racism (54.8%) with the mean score of understanding for all respondents being 2.38 (2 = intermediate, 3 = advanced).

Respondents who had taken SO113: Racial Inequality had the highest mean score of understanding (M = 2.61), followed by respondents who had taken five to six sociology courses (M = 2.54), and respondents who completed at least one 200-level course (but never a 300- or 400-level course) (M=2.51). On the other hand, students whose highest level of sociology was a 100-level course had the lowest mean score (M = 2.34), followed by students who had taken no prior sociology courses (M=2.30).

Table 3: Percent (n) of Respondents by Academic Background and Level of Understanding of Racism with Mean Score of Understanding (N=217)

	All	Mean	Advanced	Intermediate	Basic
Academic year					
First-year	30.6 (66)	2.35	48.5 (32)	37.9 (25)	13.6 (9)
Sophomore	31.5 (68)	2.38	57.4 (39)	23.5 (16)	19.1 (13)
Junior	22.7 (49)	2.41	59.2 (29)	22.4 (11)	18.4 (9)
Senior	15.3 (33)	2.39	57.6 (19)	24.2 (8)	18.2 (6)
Number of prior sociology courses					
0	30.4(66)	2.30	50.0 (33)	30.3 (20)	19.7 (13)
1-2	28.1 (61)	2.36	50.8 (31)	34.4 (21)	14.8 (9)
3-4	12.0 (26)	2.50	65.4 (17)	19.2 (5)	15.4 (4)
5-6	12.0 (26)	2.54	61.5 (16)	30.8 (8)	7.7 (2)
7 or more	17.5 (38)	2.34	57.9 (22)	18.4 (7)	23.7 (9)
Highest sociology level					
100-level	21.7 (47)	2.26	44.7 (21)	36.2 (17)	19.1 (9)
200-level	25.3 (55)	2.51	63.6 (35)	23.6 (13)	12.7 (7)
300-level	22.6 (49)	2.45	61.2 (30)	22.4 (11)	16.3 (8)
FYP/FYE course	16.1 (35)	2.43	57.1 (20)	28.6 (10)	14.3 (5)
Racial Inequality course	10.6 (23)	2.61	65.2 (15)	30.4 (7)	4.4 (1)
All		2.38	54.8 (119)	28.1 (61)	17.7 (37)

Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted to further examine the differences in mean scores of understanding of racism between measures of previous sociology coursework and academic year in school (Table 4). A mean score of one would signify a “basic” level of understanding, a mean score of two would signify an “intermediate” level of understanding, and a mean score of three would signify an “advanced” level of understanding. The p-value is presented for all tests and Cliff’s delta effect size was included regardless of statistical significance if the value was considered non-negligible (Cliff’s delta ≥ 0.147) (Romano and Kromrey 2006). A “small” difference in means occurs when Cliff’s delta is greater than or equal to 0.147 and less than 0.330 while a large difference in means occurs when Cliff’s delta is greater than or equal to 0.474 (Romano and Kromrey 2006).

All mean scores for the groups in Table 4 were greater than two but less than three suggesting every group had an intermediate to advanced understanding of racism on average. There was a statistically significant difference in mean scores of understanding between those whose highest level course in sociology was a 100-level course compared to those whose highest level was a 200- or 300-level course ($U = 2028$, $p = 0.060$, Cliff’s delta = 0.170). Although significant, there is only a small difference in mean scores where respondents at a 200- or 300-level of coursework in sociology have larger mean scores of understanding of racism compared to those at a 100-level (Cliff’s delta = 0.170; $M = 2.48$ and $M = 2.26$, respectively). The only other non-negligible difference in mean scores of understanding of racism came between respondents who have taken SO113 Racial Inequality and those who have not (Cliff’s delta = 0.160). Respondents who have taken Racial Inequality had higher mean scores of understanding than those who have not taken the course, however, this difference is not statistically significant as the p -value exceeds the 0.10 benchmark ($U = 2589$, $p = 0.162$, Cliff’s delta = 0.160). There are

negligible and non-significant differences in mean scores by academic year, number of prior sociology courses taken, and FYP/FYE course (Table 4).

Table 4: Difference in Mean Scores of Understanding of Racism by Academic Background

Group 1	Mean	Group 2	Mean	Group 3	Mean	<i>p</i>	Cliff's delta
<i>Academic year</i>							
First-year	2.35	Soph, Junior, Senior	2.39			0.464	---
Senior	2.39	First-yr, Soph, Junior	2.38			0.850	---
First-yr, Soph	2.37	Junior, Senior	2.40			0.607	---
<i>Number of prior sociology courses</i>							
0	2.30	1 or more	2.41			0.330	---
0-3	2.34	4 or more	2.45			0.230	---
0	2.30	1-3	2.37	4 or more	2.45	0.531	---
<i>Highest sociology level</i>							
100-level	2.26	200-, 300-level	2.48			0.060	0.170
200-level	2.51	100-, 300-level	2.35			0.208	---
300-level	2.45	100-, 200-level	2.39			0.439	---
<i>FYP/FYE course</i>							
Sociology Dept	2.43	Other Dept	2.37			0.696	---
<i>Racial Inequality course</i>							
Taken	2.61	Not Taken	2.35			0.162	0.160

Chi-square tests were then conducted to analyze the relationship between academic background and having an advanced understanding of racism reporting the *p*-value and Cramer's *V* effect size (Table 5). Cramer's *V* was recorded regardless of significance when it reached a value of 0.100 or higher as it is no longer considered negligible at that point (Warmbrod 2001).

There is a statistically significant difference in having an advanced understanding between respondents whose highest level of sociology was at the 100-level compared to respondents at a 200- or 300-level ($\chi^2 = 3.497$, $p = 0.061$, Cramer's $V = 0.167$). Respondents at a 200- and 300-level in sociology coursework tend to have more advanced understandings of racism than those at a 100-level, although the strength of this association is weak to moderate (Cramer's $V = 0.167$). While not reaching statistical significance, there is a weak association between having taken 0-3 sociology courses and having an advanced level of understanding of racism, compared to taking 4 or more sociology courses ($\chi^2 = 1.902$, $p = 0.168$, Cramer's $V = 0.103$). Academic year in school, taking an FYP/FYE course in the Sociology Department, and

taking SO113: Racial Inequality are not significantly associated with respondents having an advanced understanding of racism and these associations also have negligible effect sizes.

Table 5: Associations Between Academic Background and Advanced Understandings of Racism

Group 1	% (n)	Group 2	% (n)	Group 3	% (n)	p	Cramer's V
<i>Academic year</i>							
First-year	14.8 (32)	Soph, Junior, Senior	40.3 (87)			0.252	---
Senior	8.8 (19)	First-yr, Soph, Junior	46.3 (100)			0.903	---
First-yr, Soph	32.9 (71)	Junior, Senior	22.2 (48)			0.512	---
<i>Number of prior sociology courses</i>							
0	15.2 (33)	1 or more	39.6 (86)			0.425	---
0-3	33.2 (72)	4 or more	21.7 (47)			0.168	0.103
0	15.2 (33)	1-3	18.0 (39)	4 or more	21.7 (47)	0.305	0.105
<i>Highest sociology level</i>							
100-level	13.9 (21)	200-, 300-level	43.0 (65)			0.061	0.167
200-level	23.2 (35)	100-, 300-level	33.8 (51)			0.278	0.102
300-level	19.9 (30)	100-, 200-level	37.1 (56)			0.576	---
<i>FYP/FYE course</i>							
Sociology Dept	9.2 (20)	Other Dept	45.6 (99)			0.910	---
<i>Racial Inequality course</i>							
Taken	6.9 (15)	Not Taken	47.9 (104)			0.403	---

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the impact of sociology coursework on undergraduate students' understanding of racism at Colorado College. While there have been many anecdotal reports on how sociology and other diversity courses can improve students' awareness of their privilege and the larger structural factors of racism at play, few studies have methodologically examined the association between sociology/diversity courses and students' comprehension of racism. This study adds to the existing body of literature by using survey data to examine if and to what extent previous sociology coursework and relative time in college are associated with an advanced understanding of racism.

There is a significant relationship between students' highest level of sociology coursework completed and their depth of understanding of racism. Specifically, students who have taken 200- or 300-level courses tend to have a more advanced understanding of racism than

those who have only taken 100-level courses. While we cannot specifically explain why higher-level sociology courses are associated with more advanced understandings of racism, this finding does suggest that advancing from a 100-level to a 200- or 300-level sociology class is key. Typically, 200- and 300-level classes cover more advanced sociological theory and begin to incorporate more advanced coursework, including literature reviews and introductory data analysis projects. It is possible that incorporating more theory or analysis into 100-level classes could increase comprehension, but it may be that students need 100-level courses to create a foundation of knowledge that they can then use as they progress through 200- and 300-level courses to develop more advanced understandings of racism.

There was no association between taking more sociology classes and having a more advanced understanding of racism, suggesting that prolonged exposure may not be a critical factor in students' development of an advanced understanding of racism. This finding contradicts previous literature which suggested that prolonged exposure to sociology and diversity courses on race can be influential in students developing a more advanced understanding of racism (Bidell et al. 1994; Winkler 2018; Bandy et al. 2021). The results of this study suggest that advancing to higher levels of sociology coursework may be more important than the sheer number of courses when it comes to developing more advanced levels of understanding.

The current literature has conflicting conclusions on the impact that relative time in school or class standing has on the understanding of racism. Bidell et al. (1994) found that students' increase in understanding of racism could not be attributed to the relative amount of time in college, while Winkler (2018) found differences in understanding by relative time in college. This study aligns with the findings of Bidell et al. (1994) and suggests that there is no association between a student's academic year and having an advanced understanding of racism.

Additionally, there were no differences in means scores of understanding between any grouping of class standings.

Specific to Colorado College, taking an FYP/FYE course in the Sociology Department did not have any significant association with having an advanced understanding of racism nor a significantly higher mean score of understanding of racism. As this may be first-year students' initial exposure to learning about racism beyond the interpersonal level, the FYP course could be a great place to ensure curriculum regarding the hierarchical nature and structural forces of racism that lead to systemic inequalities are incorporated.

Additionally, taking SO113: Racial Inequality was not significantly associated with having an advanced level of understanding of racism. Further, the difference between mean scores of understanding with regard to taking Colorado College's racial inequality course was also deemed statistically non-significant. Although this difference was found to be non-significant, a small difference in mean scores of understanding was found, where those who have taken SO113: Racial Inequality had higher mean scores of understanding, on average. While we must interpret this difference with caution, the racial inequality course may still have some impact in shaping advanced levels of understanding of racism. This finding suggests that specific courses on race and racism could be a factor in fostering a deeper understanding of racism, but that advancing to any 200- or 300-level course in sociology, regardless of its emphasis on race and racism, is more influential.

Ultimately, this study has valuable findings that contribute to the existing sociological research on the comprehension of racism in undergraduate students. The findings suggest that more advanced sociology coursework is strongly associated with developing advanced levels of understanding of racism and that specific courses on racial inequality may also help develop this

understanding. To help students develop an advanced understanding of racism, it will be important for faculty to encourage them to advance in their sociology coursework, and establishing a higher-level course on racial inequality could be especially beneficial in promoting more advanced thinking on the topic.

Limitations and Future Research

It is important to note that there were several limitations to this study. The findings of this study were limited partially due to the survey design. The limited number of demographic questions in the survey prevented any analysis of how certain identities – race in particular – and social factors may influence students' understanding of racism. Future research should adapt the survey to incorporate additional demographic questions, such as race, gender identity, and socioeconomic status.

The responses regarding students' definitions of racism were coded qualitatively into three levels of understanding of racism and no intercoder reliability was established in this process. Should this study be repeated, multiple coders should analyze the data to establish some form of intercoder reliability and reduce bias.

The findings of this study should also be interpreted with caution. Using a 0.10 significance level in hypothesis testing can lead to an increased likelihood of committing a Type I error, or concluding a significant relationship exists when it truly does not. Additionally, it is possible that students took the survey multiple times if they were enrolled in more than one sociology course in the Spring 2022 semester when the survey was administered. If this occurred, the assumption of independence of observations for the statistical tests used in this analysis would be violated and could lead to inaccurate or skewed test results. Future studies should attempt to mitigate repeat observations or find a way to account for them. For example,

collecting ID numbers could aid in tracking multiple responses so that longitudinal data analysis techniques could be used in future research. Further, the results of this study should not be extended beyond the Sociology Department at Colorado College. To make broader conclusions about the role of sociology coursework on the comprehension of racism in the larger population of undergraduate students, future research could replicate this study using multiple undergraduate institutions with a diverse sample of students.

REFERENCES

- Alicea, Marisa and Barbara Kessel. 1997. "The Socially Awkward Question: A Simulation Exercise for Exploring Ethnic and Racial Labels." *Teaching Sociology* 25(1):65-71.
- Bandy, Joe, M. Brielle Harbin, and Amie Thurber. 2021. "Teaching Race and Racial Justice: Developing Students' Cognitive and Affective Understanding." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 9(1):117-37.
- Becker, Sarah and Crystal Paul. 2015. "'It Didn't Seem Like Race Mattered': Exploring the Implications of Service-learning Pedagogy for Reproducing or Challenging Color-blind Racism." *Teaching Sociology* 43(3):184-200.
- Bidell, Thomas R., Elaine Meyer Lee, Nicole Bouchie, Colleen Ward, and Dana Brass. 1994. "Developing Conceptions of Racism Among Young White Adults in the Context of Cultural Diversity Coursework." *Journal of Adult Development* 1(3):185-200.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 1997. "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation." *American Sociological Review* 62(3):465-80.
- Case, Kim A. 2007. "Raising White Privilege Awareness and Reducing Racial Prejudice: Assessing Diversity Course Effectiveness." *Teaching Psychology* 34(4):231-5.
- Chang, Mitchell J. 2002. "The Impact of an Undergraduate Diversity Course Requirement on Students' Racial Views and Attitudes." *The Journal of General Education* 51(1):21-42.
- Chick, Nancy, Terri Karis, and Cyndi Kernahan. 2009. "Learning from Their Own Learning: How Metacognitive and Meta-affective Reflection Enhance Learning in Race-Related Courses." *International Journal for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 3(1):1-26.

- Cole, Elizabeth R., Kim A. Case, Desdama Rios, and Nicola Curtin. 2011. "Understanding What Students Bring to the Classroom: Moderators of the Effects of Diversity Courses on Student Attitudes." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 17(4):397-405.
- Colorado College. 2019. "Our Plan to Become an Antiracist Institution." *Colorado College*: 1-24.
- Colorado College. 2023. "Racial Inequality." Retrieved Apr. 11, 2023 (<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/curriculum/catalog/courses/so113.html>).
- Delgado, Richard, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris. 2017. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Feagin, Joe R. 2001. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge.
- Feagin, Joe R. 2013. *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counterframing*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Fritschner, Linda Marie. 2001. "Lessons about Race in Introductory Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 29(1):110-5.
- Ghoshal, Raj Andrew, Cameron Lippard, Vanesa Ribas, and Ken Muir. 2013. "Beyond Bigotry: Teaching about Unconscious Prejudice." *Teaching Sociology* 41(2):130-43.
- Hirald, Payne. 2010. "The Role of Critical Race Theory in Higher Education." *The Vermont Connection* 31(1):53-9.
- Hogan, David E. and Michael Mallott. 2005. "Changing Racial Prejudice Through Diversity Education." *Journal of College Student Development* 46(2):115-25.

- Kernahan, Cyndi and Tricia Davis. 2007. "Changing Perspective: How Learning About Racism Influences Student Awareness and Emotion." *Teaching of Psychology* 34(1):49-52.
- Khanna, Nikki and Cherise A. Harris. 2009. "Teaching Race as a Social Construction: Two Interactive Class Exercises." *Teaching Sociology* 37(4):369-78.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 1998. "Just What is Critical Race Theory, and What's it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?" *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11(1):7-24.
- Obach, Brian K. 1999. "Demonstrating the Social Construction of Race." *Teaching Sociology* 27(3):252-7.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2015. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Radloff, Timothy D. Levonyan. 2010. "College Students' Perceptions of Equal Opportunity for African Americans and Race-based Policy: Do Diversity Course Requirements Make a Difference?" *College Student Journal* 44(2):558-64.
- Roberts, Alison and Keri Iyall Smith. 2002. "Managing Emotions in the College Classroom: The Cultural Diversity Course as an Example." *Teaching Sociology* 30(3):291-301.
- Romano, Jeanine and Jeffrey D. Kromrey. 2006. "Appropriate Statistics for Ordinal Level Data: Should We Really be Using t-test and Cohen's d for Evaluation Group Differences on the NSSE and Other Surveys?" in Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Florida Association of Institutional Research, January, Cocoa Beach, FL.

- Schmidt, Sheri Lyn. 2005. "More Than Men in White Sheets: Seven Concepts Critical to the Teaching of Racism as Systemic Inequality." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 38(2):110-22.
- Thabane, Lehana, Jinhui Ma, Rong Chu, Ji Cheng, Afisi Ismaila, Lorena P. Rios, Reid Robson, Marroon Thabane, Lora Giangregorio, and Charles H. Goldsmith. 2010. "A Tutorial on Pilot Studies: The What, Why, and How." *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 10(1):1-10.
- Ture, Kwame, Stokely Carmichael, and Charles V. Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Random House.
- Warmbrod, J. Robert. 2001. "Conducting, Interpreting, and Reporting Quantitative Research." Workshop notes, Research Pre-Session, National Agricultural Education Research Conference, December 11, New Orleans, LA.
- Weinzimmer, Julianne and Jacqueline Bergdahl. 2018. "The Value of Dialogue Groups for Teaching Race and Ethnicity." *Teaching Sociology* 46(3):225-36.
- Winkler, Erin N. 2018. "Racism as a Threshold Concept: Examining Learning in a 'Diversity Requirement' Course." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 21(6):808-26.

Sociology Department Assessment Survey 2022

1. **What year are you?**
 - 1st year
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
2. **How many sociology classes have you taken at Colorado College BEFORE this one?**
 - 0
 - 1-2
 - 3-4
 - 5-6
 - 6 or more
3. **Please select each class that you have taken by the professor who instructed it. Do NOT include the one you are currently in.**
 - CC100 Surveillance Society: Hughes, Cayce
 - CC100 Constructing Social Problems: Murphy-Geiss, Gail
 - CC100 Self and Society: Wong, Sandi
 - CC100 Logics of Inequality: Rojo, Florencia
 - CC120 Writing for Social Justice: Giuffre, Kathy
 - CC120 Writing for Social Justice: Roberts, Wade
 - CC120 Private Troubles, Public Issues, and Social Change: Wong, Sandi
 - SO100 Thinking Sociologically: Murphy-Geiss, Gail
 - SO100 Thinking Sociologically: Hanscott, Lauren
 - SO100 Thinking Sociologically: Schneider, Emily
 - SO101 Inequality in the U.S: Munoz, Vanessa
 - SO101 Inequality in the U.S: Rojo, Florencia
 - SO101 Inequality in the U.S: Dantzler, Prentiss
 - SO105 Art and Society: Giuffre, Kathy
 - SO112 Gender Inequality: Figueroa, Chantal
 - SO113 Racial Inequality: Wong, Sandi
 - SO116 Global Inequality: Popkin, Eric
 - SO118 Deviance and Social Control: Hughes, Cayce
 - SO118 Deviance and Social Control: Hanscott, Lauren
 - SO130 Environmental Sociology: Roberts, Wade
 - SO190 Topics: Japanese Society: Mori, Shuta

- SO190 Topics: From Title IX to "Me Too": Gender-Based Harassment and Assault: Murphy-Geiss, Gail
- SO190 Topics: Globalization and Immigration Policy (Pre-College): Popkin, Eric
- SO228 Social Theory / Development of Sociological Thought: Giuffre, Kathy
- SO228 Social Theory / Development of Sociological Thought: Dantzler, Prentiss
- SO229 Sociological Research Design: Murphy-Geiss, Gail
- SO229 Sociological Research Design: Hanscott, Lauren
- SO231 Youth Organizing and Social Change: Popkin, Eric
- SO235 Sociology of Family: Munoz, Vanessa
- SO240 Law and Society: Murphy-Geiss, Gail
- SO246 Sociology of Health and Medicine: Roberts, Wade
- SO247 Development and Social Change in the Global South: Popkin, Eric
- SO257 Globalization and Immigration on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Popkin, Eric
- SO267 Development and Grassroots Resistance in Latin America- Theory into Practice: Popkin, Eric
- SO270 Contemporary French Society: Murphy-Geiss, Gail
- SO280 Sociology of Education: Wong, Sandi
- SO280 Sociology of Education: Hannscott, Lauren
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Visual Ethnography: Figueroa, Chantal
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Abolition Democracy in the Pandemic Era: Popkin, Eric
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Crimmigration: The criminalization of immigration: Rojo, Florencia
- SO290 Advanced Topics: U.S. Poverty and Social Welfare: Hughes, Cayce
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Data Analysis and Visualization: Roberts, Wade
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Rethinking Violence in Society: Rojo, Florencia
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Summer Immigration Institute: Popkin, Eric
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Global Mental Health Policy: Figueroa, Chantal (**note: this course was taught fall 2021 as SO390, see below)
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Sanctuary Cities in the U.S.: Rojo, Florencia
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Global Health: Biosocial Perspective: Figueroa, Chantal
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Constructing Solidarity and Mutual Aid in the Pandemic Era: Popkin, Eric
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Gender and Development: Figueroa, Chantal
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Youth Organizing and Social Change: Popkin, Eric
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Global Woman's Health: Figueroa, Chantal
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Race, Gender and Crime: McKay, Dwanna
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Peace, Conflict and Social Justice in Israel/Palestine: Schneider, Emily
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Japanese Society: Mori, Shuta
- SO290 Advanced Topics: Youth Empowerment in the Neoliberal Age: Popkin, Eric

- SO290 Advanced Topics: Community Development: Dantzler, Prentiss
- SO292 Sociology of Body and Health: Munoz, Vanessa
- SO301 Quantitative Research Methods: Roberts, Wade
- SO302 Qualitative Research Methods: Munoz, Vanessa
- SO302 Qualitative Research Methods: Schneider, Emily
- SO311 Community Based Praxis: Murphy-Geiss, Gail Radke, Jordan
- SO312 Communities and Networks: Giuffre, Kathy
- SO314 Sociology of Culture: Giuffre, Kathy
- SO318 Politics, Inequality, and Social Policy: Roberts, Wade
- SO322 Symbolic Interactionism: Munoz, Vanessa
- SO324 Urban Sociology: Hughes, Cayce
- SO324 Urban Sociology: Dantzler, Prentiss
- SO390 Advanced Topics: Global Mental Health Policy: Figueroa, Chantal
- SO390 Advanced Topics: Community Based Research: Rojo, Florencia

**4. To the best of your ability, please answer the following question: What is racism?
(Max: 250 words)**
