

# Teaching About Racism: Pernicious Implications of the Standard Portrayal

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Resonating with understandings prevalent among White Americans, psychologists tend to portray racism as a problem of individual prejudice rather than a systemically embedded phenomenon. An unintended consequence of this portrayal is to reproduce a narrow construction of racism as something that does not require energetic measures to combat. We describe 2 studies that provide support for this idea. Tutorials presented the topic of racism either as individual prejudice (*standard condition*) or as a systemic phenomenon embedded in American society (*sociocultural condition*). Results confirmed that perception of racism and (in Study 2) endorsement of antiracist policy were greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than among participants in the both the standard tutorial and no-tutorial control conditions. An ironic consequence of standard pedagogy may be to promote a modern form of scientific racism that understates the ongoing significance of racist oppression.

Investigators have documented extensive cultural differences in perception of racism, such that White Americans tend to perceive less racism in American society than do people from a variety of historically oppressed groups. To cite a recent example, White Americans tended to perceive less racism in relief efforts related to Hurricane Katrina than did African Americans (see Adams, O'Brien, & Nelson, 2006; Dach-Gruschow & Hong, 2006; USA TODAY/CNN Gallup, 2005).

One source of these differences lies in ego-defensive motivational pressures. In the case of Katrina, claims that racism tainted relief efforts may promote experience of collective guilt (Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006), threaten White Americans' sense that they are citizens of a nonracist society, or threaten the perceived legitimacy of a social order that promotes White privilege (Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007). Evidence suggests that White Americans are motivated to deny claims about racism as a means to defend against such threats (Adams, O'Brien et al., 2006; Adams, Tormala, & O'Brien, 2006).

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Another source is cultural knowledge: the different constructions of reality upon which people draw when making judgments about racism. One form of cultural knowledge that informs racism judgments are different representations of history (Kirkwood, Liu, & Weatherall, 2005). White Americans may have perceived less racism in the Katrina relief effort in part because they are less knowledgeable than African Americans about documented incidents of racism in response to past disasters (e.g., Mississippi flood of 1927; Barry, 1997; see Adams, O'Brien et al., 2006).

The focus of our research is a different type of cultural knowledge: the implicit conception upon which people draw when considering instances of potential racism. Evidence suggests that White Americans prefer an atomistic conception of racism as differential treatment from hostile individuals rather than a more systemically embedded phenomenon (Bobo, 2001; O'Brien et al., 2008). Applying this definition, they tend to perceive relatively low levels of racism in events such as the Katrina relief effort or in American society more generally.

#### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RACISM: A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

A similar tension about the definition of racism exists within the field of social psychology. As *psychologists*, social psychologists tend to understand their task to be the study of individual experience (see Farr, 1996). In turn, this understanding suggests a *standard approach* to racism as a problem of biased individuals rather than a systemic force embedded in American society. In contrast, recent work in social psychology suggests a more *sociocultural approach* to the problem of racist oppression (Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008). The defining feature of a sociocultural approach is to locate the essence of racism not in biased individuals but instead in the biased “stuff” of the everyday worlds that these individuals inhabit.

#### Discourse Analysis

For example, one source of a sociocultural approach is the theoretical perspective of *discourse analysis* (DA). A DA approach suggests that one should interpret racist talk not as a reflection of underlying racist dispositions but instead as communicative acts in which people draw upon culturally embedded, discursive repertoires to serve their rhetorical purposes (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Like DA, a sociocultural approach directs attention away from psychological states as the source of racism and instead emphasizes the extent to which racism is embedded in the collective

repertoires or bodies of discourse that people appropriate to make sense of current events, justify inequality, or legitimize privilege.

#### Cultural Stereotypes

Another source of a sociocultural approach is theory and research that portrays *stereotypes as collective representations* (e.g., Stangor & Schaller, 1996). From this perspective, the roots of racial stereotypes lie not in individual brains but in concrete links between identity categories and attributes in the material environment (e.g., links between *African American* and *ape*; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008; see also Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001). These environmental associations not only serve as reservoirs for embodied personal stereotypes but also constitute a charged atmosphere or “threat in the air” that can harm people from historically oppressed groups (Steele, 1997).

#### Target's Perspective

Yet another source of a sociocultural approach is a variety of work that approaches the topic of oppression from “the target’s perspective” (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Swim & Stangor, 1998). Perhaps the most well-known example is work on *stereotype threat*. This work reveals how the detrimental effects of systemic oppression are not limited to direct acts of biased treatment. Instead, the real possibility of systemic oppression looms like a “threat in the air” (Steele, 1997) that can be sufficient to cause harm in the absence of biased treatment (see also Adams, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, & Steele, 2006). Another example is the concept of *invisibility* (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008). This idea emphasizes that oppression is not limited to acts of commission but also extends to such acts of omission as failure to include oppressed group perspectives in narratives of American history (see Sears, 2008) or failure to portray people from oppressed groups in material representations of valued domains (e.g., academic success). Yet another example is the concept of *benevolent prejudice* (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Oppression is not synonymous with hostility but also includes cases of apparently positive affect or action that nevertheless reproduces relations of dominance and subordination. A final example is the concept of *cultural racism* (Jones, 1999; see also Sue, 2003). This idea emphasizes that oppression works not only through differential treatment but also as powerful groups impose ethnocentric constructions of reality—for example, conceptions of *fairness* (Smith & Crosby, 2008), *integration* (Gurin, Gurin, Matlock, & Wade-Golden, 2008), *merit* (Croizet, 2008), or representations of American history (Loewen,

1995) as semiofficial standards that apply to everyone, regardless of racial or ethnic background.

An especially important contribution of research from “the target’s perspective” is to illuminate *systemic privilege*. The same constructions of reality that harm experience for people from oppressed groups—for example, the construction of standardized tests as a measure of merit (Croizet, 2008)—often enhance experience of people from dominant groups (Walton & Cohen, 2003). By adopting the target’s perspective, it becomes easier to appreciate how apparently neutral situations are neither accidental nor inevitable but instead constitute motivated constructions of reality (i.e., *intentional worlds*; Shweder, 1990) that have evolved to promote dominant group experience (Lowery et al., 2007; Martín-Baró, 1994; Sue, 2003).

### PORTRAYAL OF RACISM IN PSYCHOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

How do psychologists resolve the tension between the individualist ontology of the discipline and insights of research from the targets’ perspective? To answer this question, we conducted a review of the best-selling social psychology textbooks. (A list of these textbooks is available from the authors.) In general, results of the analysis indicate that these standard pedagogical resources construct the topic of racism as a problem of biased individuals.

#### Naming the Phenomenon

One indication of an individualistic construction is evident in tables of contents. Titles of chapters in which discussions of racism appear typically do not refer to *racism* or *oppression*. Instead—and accurately reflecting the majority of research—discussions of racism appear in chapters with titles that refer to *prejudice*, *stereotyping*, and *discrimination*.

#### Choice of Topics

Besides chapter titles, an individualistic construction of racism is also evident in common topics of discussion. Besides the general phenomena of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, the most common topics of discussion include the distinction between automatic and controlled varieties of racist bias (e.g., Devine, 1989); changing norms for expression of racism (e.g., modern racism; McConahay, 1986); the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), and various prejudice-reduction interventions (e.g., “jigsaw” classroom; Aronson, Stephan, Sikes, Blarney, & Snapp, 1978). Although some textbooks discuss systemic manifestations of racism, they tend to portray these as expressions of individual racism

rather than cultural-psychological phenomena (cf. Jones, 1999).

#### Portrayal of Topics

As the preceding sentence suggests, an individualistic construction of racism is evident not only in the choice of topics but also in an individualistic portrayal of topics that might otherwise form the basis of a sociocultural account. For example, most textbooks share with a sociocultural account an emphasis on the phenomenon of automatic racism (Devine, 1989). A sociocultural account locates the essence of automatic racism in environmental associations or shared realities that continually tune individual dispositions or racist habits over the course of the entire lifespan (Karpinski & Hilton, 2001; Lowery, Hardin, & Sinclair, 2001). In contrast, most textbooks locate the essence of automatic racism in rigid, deeply embodied habits that people acquire during early childhood socialization and thereafter find difficult to break. Following from this individualistic construction of automatic racism, textbook discussions of antiracist action typically focus on changing people’s prejudices or affording them greater control over their deeply embodied habits rather than changing the systemic manifestations of racism that continually reshape habits of automatic racism.

Likewise, most textbooks share with a sociocultural account an emphasis on the phenomenon of stereotype threat. However, the dominance of an individualistic construction ensures that textbook discussions of stereotype threat remain poorly integrated into the overall narrative about racism. Discussions of stereotype threat sometimes appear in an entirely separate chapter (e.g., “Self and Identity”) from racism-relevant topics (typically “Prejudice and Stereotyping”). When the topic of stereotype threat does appear in the same chapter, it is often in a separate section devoted to the target’s experience that not only has the feeling of an afterthought but also fails to emphasize the key insight of stereotype threat research, namely, that the oppressive impact of racist stereotypes is not limited to acts of racial discrimination but includes detrimental consequences for motivation and performance that can occur in the absence of biased treatment. As a result, the potential to promote a more sociocultural account of racist oppression remains unmet.

### IMPLICATIONS OF AN INDIVIDUALISTIC PORTRAYAL: TWO EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The individualistic portrayal of racism that emerges from textbooks is appropriate to the extent that it accurately

describes existing work on the topic. However, an approach to racism as individual-level bias is potentially problematic for (at least) three reasons. First, this approach privileges White American conceptions over those that prevail among people from historically oppressed groups. Second, this approach fails to square with an emerging body of research from the target's perspective, which implies a more sociocultural approach to the problem of racist oppression. Finally, to the extent that the standard portrayal does promote a conception of racism as direct acts of differential treatment by biased individuals, it may lead people to perceive a small role for racism in American society that requires less energetic efforts to combat. As a result, the standard portrayal might lead them to show less endorsement of antiracist policies (e.g., affirmative action; Son Hing, Bobocel, & Zanna, 2002) than they might otherwise show.

To investigate this last possibility, we conducted two experiments in which we examined effects of instruction on perception of racism. For both studies, we created two tutorials about racism. A standard tutorial drew upon textbook presentations and material for racism education published by the American Psychological Association (APA; Feinberg, 2000). An alternative tutorial drew upon the sociocultural account of racism. We compared the effectiveness of these tutorials (measured against a no-tutorial control) in raising consciousness about the extent of racism in American society. To the extent that the standard account reinforces mainstream American conceptions of racism as individual bias, we hypothesized that exposure to this account would not succeed in raising consciousness about racism in American society. In contrast, we hypothesized that a more sociocultural account of racism, inspired by research from "the target's perspective," would lead students to perceive more racism in ambiguous events (and, in Study 2, to indicate greater support for antiracist policy) relative to the no-tutorial control group.

Previous research has considered effects of other teaching interventions—including multicultural training, knowledge of automatic bias, and awareness of White privilege (e.g., Case, 2007; Ford, Grossman, & Jordan, 1997; Ocampo et al., 2003)—on racism-relevant responses. However, we know of no research that examines consequences of a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism (i.e., as a systemically embedded phenomenon rather than individual bias). Similarly, previous research has considered effects of teaching interventions on intergroup attitudes or manifestations of bias (e.g., Ford et al., 1997; Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001). However, we found only one study that examined consequences of teaching interventions for students' perception of racism in ambiguous events (Kernahan & Davis, 2007). In that study, students in a

"Psychology of Prejudice and Racism" course scored higher on a measure of racism perception both at the end of the course than at the beginning of the course and relative to students in a "Behavioral Statistics" course.

## STUDY 1

In Study 1, we created online tutorials to teach students about the topic of racism. We then investigated the effects of these tutorials on perceptions of racism in ambiguous events.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants were 126 students from an introductory psychology course at the University of Kansas. Data analyses include only the 108 students (56 women, 46 men, 6 unstated) who indicated "White/Caucasian American" on an ethnic identification item.

#### *Tutorial Procedure*

Participants enrolled in the study via an online recruitment system. Upon enrolling, participants received an Internet link that randomly assigned them to one of two treatment conditions or a control condition. In the control condition, the link conveyed participants to a survey. In the treatment conditions, the link conveyed participants to one of two tutorials about racism. Table 1 provides an overview of the tutorials.

The first five sections of the tutorial were identical across conditions. The first section defined *prejudice*, *stereotype*, and *discrimination* as biased affect, cognition, and behavior. The second section discussed the apparent disappearance of blatant racism, which the third section contrasted with the rise of subtle or *modern racism*. The fourth section discussed psychological consequences of being the target of racism, and the fifth section introduced the phenomenon of stereotype threat.

The last two sections of the tutorial varied across conditions. Material for the *standard tutorial* came directly from textbooks and an APA Web site (Feinberg, 2000). Consistent with the understanding of racism in mainstream American worlds, these materials portrayed racism as the product of individual bias. The sixth section of the tutorial considered personality factors associated with racist prejudice. The seventh section introduced the idea of automatic bias (Devine, 1989).

The last two pages of the *sociocultural tutorial* discussed key ideas associated with a sociocultural approach to the problem of racism. The sixth section

TABLE 1  
Comparison of Tutorials, Study 1

<i>Sections 1–5: Material Common to Both Tutorials</i>	
Section 1. <i>Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination</i> as biased thinking, feeling, and action.	
Section 2. The apparent decline of old-fashioned racism	
Section 3. Subtle or modern forms of racism (e.g., Harber, 1998)	
Section 4. Psychological impact of discrimination (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989)	
Section 5. Stereotype threat: Detrimental effects on identification and performance (Steele, 1997)	
<i>Sections 6–7: Material Differed Across Tutorials</i>	
<i>Standard Tutorial</i>	<i>Sociocultural Tutorial</i>
Section 6. Personality factors and prejudice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Authoritarianism (Adorno et al., 1950)</li> <li>● Religion (Batson et al., 1993)</li> <li>● Conformity (Pettigrew, 1958)</li> </ul>	Section 6. Insights of the target’s perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Racism as “threat in the air” (Steele, 1997) in the absence of discrimination.</li> <li>● Systemic privilege</li> </ul>
Section 7. Automatic and controlled prejudice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prejudice and stereotypes as habitual, unconscious associations (Devine, 1989)</li> </ul>	Section 7. Systemic manifestations of racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stereotypes and prejudice as cultural representations, systemic associations</li> <li>● Institutional racism</li> </ul>

of this tutorial explicitly emphasized (as the standard tutorial did not) that racist systems include “threats in the air” that can cause harm without direct acts of individual bias (Steele, 1997). It also explicitly discussed systemic privilege: how the same constructions of reality that constitute barriers to people from oppressed groups tend to benefit people from dominant groups. Finally, the seventh section discussed systemically embedded, material manifestations of racism in institutions and practices.

*Online Survey*

Seven days after they completed the tutorial, participants in the treatment conditions received an e-mail invitation to participate in another online study for course credit. We designed this invitation to obscure any connection to the previous tutorial study. Participants who accepted the invitation clicked on a link that directed them to an online survey, which they had until the end of the semester to complete. Completion times ranged from 7 to 54 days after the tutorial, with a median time of 12 days. There were no effects for time elapsed between the tutorial and survey, and completion rates were similar across treatment conditions (31% and 27% for sociocultural and standard tutorial conditions, respectively). Participants in the control condition completed the survey immediately after enrolling in the study. The survey included the following measures.

*Conceptions of racism.* Participants completed a single item that measured conceptions of racism. The item consisted of a line ranging from *Social-Structural Forces to Biased Individuals*. Participants clicked a point

on the line to indicate their beliefs about the nature of racism.

*Perception of racism.* Participants responded to 18 items using a 7-point scale, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*certainly*), with instructions to “indicate how much you, personally, think prejudice, discrimination, or racism play a role in each” (modeled on Adams, Tormala et al., 2006; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Principal components analysis revealed two factors. The first factor consisted of eight items ( $\alpha = .77$ ) that referred to systemic manifestations of racism embedded in the structures of American society (e.g., “The use of American Indians as mascots by high school, college, and professional sports teams”). The second factor consisted of seven items ( $\alpha = .75$ ) that referred to isolated acts of individual bias (e.g., “Jack, a Black American man, walks past a group of young White American men, and hears them use a racial epithet”).

*Identity relevance.* Participants indicated which of a series of ethnic labels best described their race/ethnicity. They then completed the four-item Private Regard subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (CSE<sub>PR</sub>; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) with reference to this category. This measure enabled tests of hypotheses about the relevance of conceptions and perceptions of racism for White American identity. Previous research suggests that White Americans tend to both (a) define racism as an individual rather than systemic phenomenon (Bobo, 2001; O’Brien et al., 2008) and (b) perceive less racism in ambiguous events than do people from

historically oppressed groups (e.g., Adams, Tormala et al., 2006). This study provides an opportunity to test the hypothesis that these patterns are strongest among people who hold *White American* identity in high regard (see Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007).

## Results and Discussion

The three-group design (sociocultural tutorial, standard tutorial, and control) of Studies 1 and 2 afforded two focused contrasts with which to test primary hypotheses. The first contrast tested the hypothesis that the sociocultural tutorial promotes greater consciousness of racism relative to both the standard tutorial and control conditions. To accomplish this contrast, we weighted conditions with codes of  $(1 + -1/2 + -1/2 = 0)$ , respectively. The second contrast tested a hypothesis that we suspect is an article of faith among many psychologists: the prevailing pedagogy, represented in this study by the standard tutorial condition, promotes greater consciousness of racism relative to the control condition. In contrast to this hopeful hypothesis, we expected minimal differences between standard tutorial and control conditions, even on the measure of racism conceptions, to the extent that the former simply reinforces default conceptions of racism as individual bias. To accomplish this contrast, we weighted sociocultural tutorial, standard tutorial, and control conditions with codes of 0, 1, and  $-1$  respectively. Although planned contrasts provide the primary test of hypotheses, we follow convention and report results of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and post hoc comparisons for each outcome.

### Beliefs About Racism

The computer translated responses for the line measuring conceptions of racism into a 49-point scale ranging from  $-24$  (*socio-structural forces*) to  $24$  (*biased individuals*) with a midpoint of 0. The omnibus ANOVA for this item was not significant,  $F(2, 100) = 2.20, p = .12$ ,

TABLE 2  
Means and Standard Deviations for Tutorial Conditions, Study 1

Measure	Sociocultural <sup>a</sup>		Standard <sup>b</sup>		Control <sup>c</sup>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Individualistic conception of racism	3.56	10.71	10.14 <sup>d</sup>	12.66	11.16	9.59
Perception of racism, systemic	4.06	0.91	3.31	1.00	3.44	0.91
Perception of racism, isolated	5.30	1.22	5.40	0.84	5.04	1.07
CSE <sub>PR</sub>	5.74	1.47	6.23	0.93	5.75	1.12

Note. CSE<sub>PR</sub> = Private Regard subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

<sup>a</sup> $n = 18$ . <sup>b</sup> $n = 22$ . <sup>c</sup> $n = 64$ . <sup>d</sup>One participant failed to complete this item, so  $n = 21$  for this measure.

$\eta_p^2 = 0.42$ . However, results for the first planned contrast revealed the hypothesized pattern,  $F(1, 100) = 4.29, p = .041, d = .55$ . More than seven days after the tutorial, the tendency to define racism in terms of individual biases was less strong among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than in the other two conditions (see Table 2). The second planned contrast was not significant,  $F(1, 100) < 1$ ; there was no evidence that the standard tutorial changed participants' definitions of racism relative to participants in the control condition.

### Perception of Racism

Omnibus tests revealed a significant effect of condition on perception of racism in systemic forms,  $F(2, 101) = 3.57, p = .032, \eta_p^2 = .066$ , but not in isolated acts,  $F(2, 101) = 1.29, p = .33, \eta_p^2 = .022$ . Post hoc tests revealed the hypothesized pattern, indicating that perception of systemic racism was greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial than both the standard tutorial and control conditions (see Table 2). The first planned contrast indicated the same conclusion; more than seven days after the tutorial, perception of racism in systemic forms was greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than in the other conditions,  $F(1, 101) = 7.14, p = .009, d = .69$ . This contrast was not significant for perception of racism in isolated acts,  $F(1, 101) < 1$  (see Table 2). Together, these results indicate that a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism, inspired by research from the target's perspective, is effective at raising consciousness of racism in systemic forms without obscuring perception of racism in isolated acts.

In contrast, there was no evidence from the second planned contrast for the effectiveness of the standard approach in promoting consciousness of racism. Participants in the standard tutorial condition perceived no more racism—in either systemic forms or isolated acts,  $F_s(1, 101) < 2.0, p_s > .16$ —than did students who did not participate in any tutorial. To the extent that results of the study extend to academic settings in general, they suggest that the standard pedagogy of racism may be less effective than instructors might hope at promoting consciousness of racism.

### Identity Relevance

Neither the omnibus ANOVA nor planned contrasts revealed effects of the manipulation on the CSE<sub>PR</sub> ( $p_s > .22$ ; see Table 2). However, the primary purpose of this measure was not to assess effects of the manipulation but rather to test hypotheses about the identity relevance of racism perception. Results confirmed the hypothesized relationship between CSE<sub>PR</sub> and

individualistic conception of racism,  $r(104) = .26$ ,  $p = .004$ . (Here and elsewhere, we report one-tailed significance tests of correlations to accurately represent our directional hypotheses.) Likewise, results indicated a hypothesized, negative relationship between CSE<sub>PR</sub> and perception of racism. However, this relationship was evident only for perception of racism in systemic forms,  $r(104) = -.23$ ,  $p = .009$ , and not in isolated acts,  $r(104) = .08$ ,  $p = .23$ . A statistical test confirmed that this within-participants difference in correlations was significant,  $F(2, 101) = 7.95$ ,  $p < .01$ . This pattern is consistent with the idea that the identity relevance of racism perception is greater for systemic manifestations than for isolated acts (see Adams, O'Brien et al., 2006).

Implicit in our investigation is the idea that increased consciousness of racism is desirable and worthy of teachers' efforts to promote it. However, a broader purpose for educating students about racism is to promote greater endorsement of anti-racist policies (Son Hing et al., 2002). Study 2 considers this outcome.

## STUDY 2

Besides a measure of policy endorsement, the procedure for Study 2 also changed the context for tutorials. Although the online context of Study 1 was sufficient to produce long-lasting changes in perception of racism, some may argue that it lacks ecological validity. Accordingly, we conducted Study 2 in the context of an actual psychology class.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 90 students (roughly 5:4 ratio of women to men) at the University of Kansas. Analyses include only the 72 participants who indicated *White American* ethnicity. Participants in the control condition came from sections of an introductory psychology course and received course credit for completing the online survey. Participants in the treatment conditions came from sections of a social psychology course and participated as part of a classroom exercise. None of the courses had covered racism-relevant topics (e.g., prejudice) when the study began.

### Tutorial Procedure

We randomly assigned sections of social psychology students to receive one of two tutorials during regular, 50-min class periods. Outlines of these tutorials appear in Table 3. The same guest instructor conducted tutorials for all sections. Although based on a standard script, the procedure followed an interactive, lecture format; as a result, sessions within the same condition varied slightly as a function of student input.

*Standard tutorial.* Participants in the *standard tutorial* condition heard a lecture, based on textbook accounts and an official APA Web site, that portrayed racism as a phenomenon rooted in individual bias. This lecture began with a demonstration of the Implicit

TABLE 3  
Comparison of Tutorials, Study 2

<i>Standard Tutorial</i>	<i>Sociocultural Tutorial</i>
1. <i>In-class demonstration of IAT</i>	1. <i>In-class demonstration of IAT</i>
2. Stereotypes and prejudice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Definitions: biased thinking and attitudes</i></li> <li>● Perceptual confirmation (Stone et al., 1997)</li> </ul>	2. <i>Definition: Stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination</i>
3. Relationship of stereotyping to prejudice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Automatic and controlled (Devine, 1989)</li> <li>● Activation (Kawakami et al., 1998)</li> </ul>	3. <i>Subtle forms of racism</i> (although in less detail than in standard tutorial and without discussion of research)
4. Sources of Prejudice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ego defensive motives (Fein &amp; Spencer, 1997)</li> <li>● Realistic Group conflict (Sherif et al., 1966)</li> <li>● Mere categorization</li> </ul>	4. Varieties of oppression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Individual—typical focus in psychology</li> <li>● Institutional: Discussion of possible examples</li> <li>● Cultural (Jones, 1999)</li> </ul>
5. Discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Definition: Biased action</i></li> <li>● Decline of blatant racism</li> </ul>	5. Systemic analysis: Social identity threat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) as an example of oppression in absence of discrimination</li> <li>● Oppressive representations (Fryberg et al., 2006)</li> </ul>
6. <i>Subtle forms of racism</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Modern./Symbolic Racism (McConahay, 1986)</i></li> <li>● <i>Aversive Racism (Gaertner &amp; Dovidio, 1986)</i></li> </ul>	6. Systemic analysis: Privilege <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stereotype lift (Walton &amp; Cohen, 2003)</li> <li>● Privileging representations (Fryberg et al., 2006)</li> </ul>
7. <i>Prejudice Reduction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954)</i></li> </ul>	7. <i>Prejudice Reduction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954)</i></li> </ul>

Note. Entries in italics were roughly identical across tutorials.

Associations Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), which the instructor used both to introduce the distinction between automatic and controlled components of bias (Devine, 1989) and to emphasize the pervasiveness of automatic biases across individuals. The instructor then defined *stereotype*, *prejudice*, and *discrimination* in standard fashion as individual-level phenomena and discussed functions and origins of prejudice (e.g., to bolster self-worth; Fein & Spencer, 1997), techniques for measuring racist prejudice, the difficulty of measurement given changing norms for expression of prejudice (Biernat & Crandall, 1999), and the distinction between modern and old-fashioned racism (McConahay, 1986). The lecture ended with a discussion of the “contact hypothesis” (Allport, 1954) and prejudice-reduction techniques.

**Sociocultural tutorial.** Participants in the *sociocultural tutorial* condition heard a lecture that included many of the same topics as the standard tutorial condition but discussed them in a way that portrayed racism as a systemic phenomenon embedded in American society. As in the standard tutorial condition, this lecture also began with a demonstration of the IAT and ended with a discussion of prejudice-reduction techniques. However, rather than the distinction between automatic and controlled biases, the instructor used the IAT demonstration to emphasize the sociocultural roots of racism and the extent to which IAT responses reflect the tuning of individual mind to environmentally inscribed associations and shared realities of racism (Karpinski & Hilton, 2001; Lowery et al., 2001). Likewise, the instructor again defined *stereotype* and *prejudice*, but this time in ways that emphasized their status as collective representations (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Stangor & Schaller, 1996). The instructor explicitly contrasted the definition of discrimination as direct, differential treatment to a definition that emphasized cultural racism: imposition of ethnocentric constructions of reality as the standard for all people in a culturally diverse society (Jones, 1999). The instructor then discussed the phenomenon of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) with the explicit purpose of suggesting how systems of oppression can elicit harmful outcomes even in the absence of differential treatment (see Adams, Garcia et al., 2006). Similarly, the instructor discussed the phenomenon of stereotype lift (Walton & Cohen, 2003) as a case of systemic privilege, noting how systems of oppression include apparently neutral constructions of reality that serve to enhance experience of dominant groups.

### Dependent Measures

Participants in the treatment conditions completed dependent measures during the next class meeting, 3 to 5 days after the racism lecture. Participants in the control

condition completed dependent measures after the same researcher who conducted tutorials for the treatment conditions made an announcement during a regularly scheduled class session. Students who accepted the invitation completed the survey in a separate classroom immediately after class. Besides the same CSE<sub>PR</sub> measure from Study 1, the survey included a set of 21 new items for which participants indicated agreement on 7-point scales from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Conceptions of racism.** One subset of eight items measured conceptions of racism. A factor analysis of this subset revealed a two-factor solution. The first factor consisted of three items ( $\alpha = .75$ ) that implied a construction of racism as a systemically embedded force (e.g., “Structural factors are largely responsible for racial inequality”). The second factor consisted of five items ( $\alpha = .67$ ) that implied a construction of racism as the product of biased individuals (e.g., “People’s racist attitudes are the main source of racism”).

**Acknowledgment of systemic racism.** Another subset of seven items ( $\alpha = .77$ ) measured acknowledgment of systemic racism. Rather than rate the extent to which an item was due to racism (as in Study 1), these items required participants to indicate their agreement with a more general statement about racism. Sample items include “White Americans are privileged compared to minority groups” and “We live in a meritocracy where each person can rise to the status allowed by his or her innate capacities” (reverse scored).

**Policy-relevant beliefs and attitudes.** A final subset of six items ( $\alpha = .78$ ) measured endorsement of antiracist policy. Sample items include “Black Americans deserve some sort of reparations for the years of oppression within this country” and “Universities should make every effort to attract qualified Black American students.”

## Results and Discussion

Although omnibus ANOVAs revealed no effect of condition on conceptions of racism as individual bias,  $F(2, 71) < 1$ , they did reveal a marginally significant effect of condition on conceptions of racism as a systemic force,  $F(2, 71) = 2.71, p = .073, \eta_p^2 = .073$ . Conceptions of racism as a systemic force were greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than in the standard tutorial and control conditions (see Table 4). The first planned contrast indicated that this hypothesized pattern was statistically significant,  $F(1, 69) = 5.06, p = .028, d = .57$ . The second planned contrast for this measure was not significant,  $F(1, 69) < 1$ , and

TABLE 4  
Means and Standard Deviations for Tutorial Conditions, Study 2

Measure	Sociocultural <sup>a</sup> (n=24)		Standard <sup>b</sup> (n=21)		Control <sup>c</sup> (n=23)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Conception of racism, systemic	5.11	1.36	4.30	0.89	4.57	1.25
Conception of racism, individualistic	4.97	0.69	5.20	0.75	5.17	0.96
Acknowledgment of systemic racism	4.83	1.12	4.06	0.83	4.44	1.03
Endorsement of anti-racism policy	4.78	1.27	4.27	0.96	4.16	1.10
CSE <sub>PR</sub>	5.70 <sup>d</sup>	1.35	5.71	1.02	5.83 <sup>e</sup>	0.95

Note. CSE<sub>PR</sub> = Private Regard subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

<sup>a</sup>n = 24. <sup>b</sup>n = 21. <sup>c</sup>n = 23. <sup>d</sup>One participant failed to complete this item, so n = 23 for this measure. <sup>e</sup>One participant failed to complete this item, so n = 22 for this measure.

neither contrast was significant for conceptions of racism as individual bias,  $F_s(1, 69) < 1.13, p > .29$ .

The omnibus ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition on acknowledgment of systemic racism in U.S. society,  $F(2, 71) = 3.30, p = .043, \eta_p^2 = .087$ . Post hoc tests indicated that acknowledgment of systemic racism was greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than participants in the standard tutorial condition, but not participants in the control condition (see Table 4). Consistent with these results, the first planned contrast was also significant,  $F(1, 69) = 5.29, p = .025, d = .59$ , indicating that acknowledgment of systemic racism was significantly greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than participants in the other conditions. Although participants tended to acknowledge *less* systemic racism in the standard tutorial condition than in the control condition, the second planned contrast indicated that this trend was not significant,  $F(1, 71) = 1.71, p = .20$ .

To summarize, results replicate patterns from Study 1 in a classroom context with different measures of primary outcomes. Participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition showed (a) greater agreement with a systemic conception of racism and (b) greater acknowledgement of systemic racism in U.S. society than did participants in the standard tutorial and control conditions. These results provide support for the hypothesis that a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism is effective at raising consciousness of systemically embedded racism. In contrast, results again provided no evidence that the standard pedagogical approach was effective at raising consciousness of racism. In fact, mean scores for outcomes were lower (although not significantly so) in the standard tutorial condition than in the control condition.

#### Endorsement of Antiracist Policy

Although the omnibus ANOVA revealed no effect of condition on endorsement of antiracist policy,  $F(2, 71) = 2.11, p = .13, \eta_p^2 = .058$ , results of the first planned

contrast revealed the hypothesized pattern,  $F(1, 69) = 3.99, p = .05, d = .51$ . Endorsement of antiracist policy was greater among participants in the sociocultural tutorial condition than in other conditions (see Table 4). In contrast, there was no evidence from the second planned contrast for the effectiveness of the standard approach at increasing support for antiracist policy. Participants in the standard tutorial condition showed no greater policy endorsement than did participants who received no tutorial at all,  $F(1, 69) < 1$ . These results suggest that the standard pedagogy of racism may be less effective than many instructors suppose at increasing endorsement of antiracist policy.

#### Identity Relevance

Neither the omnibus ANOVA nor planned contrasts revealed effects of the manipulation on CSE<sub>PR</sub> ( $p_s < .78$ ; see Table 4). Although results indicated no evidence for the hypothesized, negative relationship between CSE<sub>PR</sub> and conception of racism as a systemic phenomenon,  $r(71) = -.06, p = .32$ , they did indicate the hypothesized positive relationship between CSE<sub>PR</sub> and conception of racism as individual bias,  $r(71) = .21, p = .041$ . Likewise, results provided strong evidence for the hypothesized, negative relationship of CSE<sub>PR</sub> with acknowledgment of racism in U.S. society,  $r(71) = -.27, p = .012$ , and endorsement of antiracist policy,  $r(71) = -.35, p = .002$ . Participants who held White American identity in high regard endorsed a conception of racism as individual bias, acknowledged little racism in U.S. society and were not supportive of antiracist policies.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Reflecting its importance as a focus of research, racism has been a central topic in the standard pedagogy of psychology. However, most courses do not consider *racism* per se but instead use it as a domain in which to discuss *stereotyping* and *prejudice*. Consistent with

the cultural psychology concept of *mutual constitution*—the idea that culture and psyche “make each other up” (Shweder, 1990, p. 1)—we propose that this difference in terminology both *reflects* and helps to *reproduce* different constructions of reality. That is, the reduction of racism to stereotyping and prejudice *reflects* the extent to which social psychology has roots in ideologies of individualism (Adams & Stocks, 2008; Farr, 1996; Henriques, 1984; Leach, 2002), but it also *reproduces* racist realities to the extent that it leads students (a) to conclude that racism plays a less extensive role in American society and (b) to express less endorsement of ameliorative policies than they might otherwise do.

Support for these statements comes from two noteworthy patterns in the studies we described. Results provide no evidence that the standard pedagogical approach was effective at promoting consciousness of racism; instead, outcomes of participants in the standard tutorial condition did not differ from those in the control condition. The optimistic interpretation of this pattern is that the standard approach did *not* have the undesirable effect of making students in these studies less conscious of systemic racism than they already are. The less optimistic interpretation is that, because it resonates with popular understandings in mainstream American society, the standard approach may produce no greater consciousness of systemic racism or endorsement of antiracist policies than having no instruction at all.

In contrast, results suggest that increased consciousness about racism and support for antiracist policy may require instructors to discuss racism as a systemic phenomenon embedded in American society (i.e., an understanding that resonates with experience of oppressed targets; see Martín-Baró, 1994). Participants who received our sociocultural tutorial demonstrated greater consciousness of systemic racism and (in Study 2) indicated greater support for antiracist policies than did participants in both the standard-tutorial and control conditions.

### Remaining Questions and Future Directions

To our knowledge, these studies constitute the first empirical investigations to consider the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches for raising consciousness about racism. Given the initial nature of this investigation, we opted for a broad, multifaceted manipulation to test the effect of different pedagogical approaches in ecologically valid settings. The focus of this manipulation was not to vary the topics chosen for coverage but instead to vary the portrayal of those topics. Accordingly, we built the sociocultural tutorial around the same core of social-psychological research that forms the basis of racism-relevant discussions in standard textbooks (e.g., on automatic racism and stereotype

threat), but we portrayed these topics in a way that resonates more clearly with a sociocultural analysis

Having documented the consequences of different pedagogical approaches with a broad manipulation, an important task for future research is to refine conclusions using more narrowly tailored tests of hypotheses in settings that allow for better experimenter control. For example, rather than different approaches to racism itself, results of our research may reflect a more general shift in attention away from the standard focus on personal dispositions to a focus on sociocultural determinants of thought and action. In turn, this shift may have little to do with racism-relevant content of the tutorial but instead may be a simple function of differential frequency with which words like *individual* and *collective* occur in different tutorials. These possibilities form the basis of our ongoing research.

### *Attitude Change or Tutorial Recall?*

One question that remains from these studies concerns the possibility that observed responses of participants in the sociocultural tutorial conditions do not reflect “true” differences in participants’ attitudes and beliefs about racism but simply learning and recall of different tutorial information. One response to this question concerns the interval between the online tutorial session and completion of outcome measures in Study 1. If observed effects are simply recall of tutorial information, then one would expect them to wane as the study-completion interval increased. However, effects of the sociocultural tutorial manipulation did not wane, even though the study-completion interval was as great as 54 days.

A more important point concerns the meaning of participants’ responses. We make no claims that observed effects of the sociocultural tutorial reflect deep changes in individual beliefs and attitudes, and we suppose that observed differences disappeared as participants reimmersed themselves in worlds—including, we suspect, their psychology courses—that promote individualistic understandings of racism. For this reason, and in contrast to standard interventions that focus on prejudice reduction or intergroup attitudes, a sociocultural perspective advises that one should attempt to change the collective constructions of reality—including conceptions of racism implicit in the discourse and practice of psychology—that continuously tune judgments about racism over the course of a person’s lifespan (see Adams et al., 2008).

### *Individual Responsibility*

We have emphasized hypothesized benefits of a sociocultural approach to teaching about racism. What

about potential costs? Although a portrayal of racism as a systemic phenomenon may promote perception of racism and endorsement of antiracist policies, it may also absolve people of the responsibility (or otherwise undermine their motivation) to regulate personal expression of automatic racism. Our study did not include measures of personal responsibility or motivation to regulate expression of racism. An investigation of this possibility awaits future research.

### *Individual Measures*

A related question is whether observed, null effects for the standard tutorial reflect the inefficacy of this approach or the fact that the outcomes measured in the studies concerned systemic manifestations of racism. Perhaps the standard tutorial would be more effective at promoting change in more individual manifestations of racism—maybe scores on the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986) or a race-based IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998)—than either the sociocultural tutorial or a no-treatment control. Although this remains a question for future research, it is noteworthy that items from the Modern Racism Scale include denial of systemic discrimination. This suggests that, at least for that particular measure of individual racism, one would observe a similar pattern as in our research—namely, that the standard tutorial is no better at reducing Modern Racism Scale scores than is no tutorial at all.

### Standard Individualistic Pedagogy as Modern Scientific Racism

The field of psychology has a mixed record with respect to racism and oppression. On one hand, psychologists were active participants in the eugenics movement and acted in support of segregationists during the civil rights era (see Jackson, 2004; Richards, 1997). On the other hand, psychologists have also been among the vanguard of social scientists fighting in support of antiracist policy (Smith & Crosby, 2008; Wrightsman, 2008), raising consciousness of individual racism (Project Implicit, 2007), and designing interventions to decrease prejudice and improve intergroup relations (see Stephan, 2008).

Although acknowledging this mixed record, we are confident that many psychologists genuinely desire to apply insights of the field to combat racist oppression. This renders the implications of our analysis all the more ironic. Despite genuine desires to increase consciousness of racism and support for antiracist policy, we psychologists may unwittingly undermine our efforts to the extent that we employ a standard pedagogy that portrays racism as stereotyping and prejudice. This individualistic portrayal has the unintended effect of leading students to perceive less racism and state less

endorsement of antiracist policy than alternative portrayals of the topic.

In other words, an ironic or unintended consequence of standard pedagogy may be to promote a modern form of scientific racism. Unlike old-fashioned scientific racism, modern scientific racism does not require explicit beliefs about inferiority. Instead, its key features parallel the concept of modern racism at an individual level: an emphasis on ideologies of individualism that lead people to deny or understate the significance of racism (McConahay, 1986). Both modern racism theory and the analysis presented here highlight the extent to which individualistic constructions of racism are not culture neutral but instead resonate with experience of White Americans (Bobo, 2001; O'Brien et al., 2008; Sears, 2008).

By referring to standard pedagogy as modern scientific racism, we do not imply that instructors who use standard pedagogy are somehow racist. Instead, we emphasize that, even when motivated to combat racism, psychologists may ironically contribute to racist outcomes to the extent that they rely on tainted conceptual tools that understate the significance of racism. From this perspective, the struggle against racist oppression requires the development and articulation of a model of racism that conveys the liberating potential of social psychology (Martín-Baró, 1994; see Markus, 2005). We offer this article as an initial step toward this goal.

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