

Proposal Narrative

The Systemic Racism Curriculum Project (SRCP) is a classroom-based, participatory action research program aimed at facilitating a systemic understanding of racism in the U.S. The aims of the SRCP are to 1) produce empirical research and theory on the ways in which people in general, and white people specifically, develop critical consciousness around racism, 2) to translate research findings into curriculum, and 3) to develop a network of collaborating sites engaged in organizing communities for systemic change. The project proposed here relates primarily to the first aim.

Previous research shows that white Americans are less likely than their people of color peers to understand racism as a systemic process. This problem is due to white people's socialization, which emphasizes adherence to colorblind ideology and a belief in meritocracy, and is exacerbated by (mis)education lacking in critical historical content that would demonstrate the systemic and institutionalized nature of racism in the U.S. (Coleman et al., in press; Adams et al., 2008; Nelson et al., 2012). But the situation is not hopeless. Systems thinking about racism (and other forms of oppression) can be improved when curricula explicitly address the structural and institutional nature of racism. It can be further improved when white students are given the opportunity to both explore the nature of whiteness and engage with racial others who may possess greater knowledge of systemic racism by virtue of their socialization as people of color (Lopez et al., 1998; Lopez, 2004; Casey, 2010). As a classroom-based intervention, the SRCP incorporates experimental research I collaborated on prior to coming to Western. In that study (Bonam, Coleman, Das & Salter, 2018), 315 White Americans were exposed to either an audio clip of an expert discussing the federal government's role in creating Black ghettos, or a clip of another expert discussing a topic unrelated to racism. Those who heard the clip about the government creating ghettos were more aware of systemic racism than those in the control condition, as measured by a perceptions of racism scale (Adams et al., 2006). Open ended data from the same participants suggested that for those unaware of such history, learning about it was emotionally jarring, and their emotional reactions were related to a desire for action, such as educating other people (Coleman, Bonam & Yantis, in press).

Between fall 2017 and fall 2018, the SRCP has been implemented in 10 classes at WWU's Woodring College of Education. Those include HSP402 and HSP404 in the Human Services Program, NURS305 in the Nursing Program, and ELED405 in the Elementary Education Program. A total of 253 students in those courses participated in various classroom and community-based activities associated with the project. They were predominantly white (64.1%) and female (77.5%), with an average age of 27.4 years. The remaining participants were Black (2.5%), East or South Asian (8.6%), Latino/a (8.1%), Native (1.5%), two or more races (15.2%), and gender non-binary (3.2%). They were also overwhelmingly liberal, with 82.4% identifying as very liberal, liberal, or slightly liberal. The remaining 17.6% identified either as neither liberal nor conservative (9.6%), or very to slightly conservative (8%). Activities included participating in the experimental intervention described above, creating media for curricula, interviewing peers about racial socialization, and contributing to an interactive mapping project meant to map manifestations of systemic racism in their communities. In the process, they have produced multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data include interview

transcripts and reflective writing. Quantitative data include measures of perceptions of racism, critical consciousness, and activism orientation. In the winter and spring quarters of 2018, the SRCP will again be implemented in HSP402, as well as in two new collaborating classes in WWU's College of Business and Economics and the Psychology Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

The project proposed here involves completing mixed-methods analyses currently underway and writing up the findings for one or more publications, which I expect to complete by the end of the summer of 2018. Preliminary findings extend the results of the original studies described above, supporting the assertion that learning about the systemic nature of racism can promote a proactive antiracist stance in white Americans under certain conditions. Future analyses will address the following questions: 1) How does critical historical knowledge of one's own community affect understanding of systemic racism? 2) How do white Americans communicate critical historical knowledge of racism to less educated peers? 3) In what ways do white Americans and their people of color peers differ with regard to questions 1 and 2? and 4) How do racial identity, political orientation, and other demographic factors impact these processes?

Analyses will be based on a sequential explanatory design (Ivanoka et al., 2006). Qualitative data will first be analyzed thematically by deconstructing texts to identify relevant categories of meaning, then reconstructing them into theoretically relevant, higher-order themes (Percy et al., 2015). Quantitative analyses will investigate hypotheses informed by the thematic analyses. This approach involves identifying hypothetical relationships among variables as suggested by the qualitative data, then testing those relationships through correlational analyses and/or analyses of variance (ANOVA) meant to test the effect of one variable on another. Preliminary analyses, for example, suggest that one's racial identity may impact the ability to perceive systemic racism, as well as the relationship between perceptions of racism and willingness to engage in various forms of activism.

Findings from this study will make various contributions to community-based study of whiteness and racism, curriculum development, and my own and others' teaching. Publications from this research will target the fields of community psychology, social psychology, and education. With regard to community and social psychology, the aim is to contribute to the development of theory related to the social ecology of critical consciousness development around racism and its intersections. With regard to the field of education, the aim is to evaluate the curricular materials and activities associated with the SRCP, and to inform best-practices around classroom and community education about racism at various educational levels and in various educational settings.

References

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