Article

Teaching Antiracism: College Students' Emotional and Cognitive Reactions to Learning About White Privilege

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Abstract

Class discussions of White privilege can increase sociocultural and international awareness in our students. Therefore, instructors should be encouraged to teach this topic in introductory college survey courses (e.g., psychology and sociology), although negative reactions by White students can affect student evaluations of an instructor's teaching skills. We decided to further explore college students' cognitive and emotional reactions to this topic. Principal components analysis revealed four factors. Agreement with items related to the factor Societal (e.g., American society is not a meritocracy) was associated with understanding White privilege. Agreement with items associated with the factor Personal (e.g., feeling personally attacked) was associated with failure to understand this concept. The remaining two factors, Denial and The Bad Guys (feeling like one of "the bad guys" in society), were not significantly associated with understanding White privilege. These findings are discussed in the context of successfully teaching antiracism.

Keywords

White privilege, emotions, antiracism, curriculum, racism

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According to critical race theory (CRT), racism is deeply embedded in U.S. society, with a myriad of legal, cultural, and psychological effects. We agree with CRT proponents that racism involves more than overt, crude acts of hatred; rather, it includes the many ways that persons of color are placed at disadvantage in modern society due to ethnically or racially based differences in power (Gillborn, 2006). Thus, we have included discussions of racism and "White privilege" (McIntosh, 1988) in our large General Psychology survey course for many years, closely monitoring student reactions and attitude changes (e.g., Boatright-Horowitz, 2005). In fact, we believe that mastery of the concept of White privilege involves a more sophisticated understanding of society, oneself, and one's interactions with others. It helps White individuals to comprehend their own personal experiences within the greater fabric of society. White privilege involves the numerous daily activities that are negatively affected by racism for persons of color and the tendency among White individuals to be unaware that they enjoy unearned privilege because they do not experience racism.

Background

White privilege occurs in almost every aspect of daily life, including shopping, traveling, seeking medical or legal assistance, purchasing a home, watching television, finding professional mentors, and sending one's children to schools, where the academic curriculum primarily focuses on Whites' achievements. For White individuals, freedom from racism in all of these activities just seems normal, so Whites tend to remain unaware of their privileged status. If a person does not have White privilege, then he or she is more likely to be suspected of shoplifting or some other crime; more likely to be denied legal or medical assistance; more likely to experience difficulty finding comfortable, safe housing; less likely to find professional mentors for career advancement; and more likely to have concerns about the physical and psychological well-being of one's children whenever they leave the home. Richardson (2011) described it poignantly:

> White society believes that if you act right and work hard, opportunities will make their way to you, but those same opportunities seem to escape the African American male who is pulled over and accused of being a drug dealer on his way home to his family after a 50-hour work week at a minimum wage job. (p. 21)

Without a doubt, racism continues to exist in modern society, and its effects continue to permeate and negatively affect the lives of Black and African American citizens (e.g., Brewster & Rusche, 2012).

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Competencies presented the goal of increasing sociocultural and international awareness in students (http://www.apa.org/ed/pcue/reports.html). In our view, teaching White students about White privilege is necessary for achieving this educational goal. An understanding of White privilege means that one has learned about the perspectives of the numerous people in society whose lives are negatively affected by prejudice and racism. Furthermore, understanding this concept means accepting that persons of color may consciously or unconsciously feel resentment toward White individuals, often with justification. To put it quite simply, no matter how difficult and seemingly underprivileged a White individual's life may seem to be, this individual is typically not required to deal with the daily effects of racism. During interactions with others, White individuals are also likely to be perceived as having unearned privileges and advantages. Thus, these disparities in perceptions of privilege can be a barrier in communication between individuals of different ethnicities. Although White individuals may express sympathy, even empathy, about the effects of racism on the lives of persons of color, it is more difficult to accept that one personally benefits from unearned White privileges (McIntosh, 1988).

Student Reactions to Learning About White Privilege

Research shows that White students resist learning about White privilege, and this resistance is often reflected in class dynamics and student evaluations of instructor competency (e.g., Boatright-Horowitz & Soeung, 2009; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). In fact, there are numerous reports in the published literature about the negative, sometimes hostile, reactions of White students as they learn the concept of White privilege. Williams and Evans-Winters (2005) reported that their classroom teaching experiences were negatively affected, and their professional legitimacy questioned, because they discussed White privilege with White students. "Sadly, my students have come to view me as a vehicle of hostility that harbors notions of racism that no longer exist" (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005, p. 215). Nast (1999) stated that "incorporating issues of feminism, lesbianism, or black-white (in particular) . . . is a kind of kiss of death for any instructor, students invariably complaining on course evaluations" (p. 105). Boatright-Horowitz and

Soeung (2009) provided empirical evidence that teaching White privilege results in lower student evaluations compared to teaching an innocuous topic, such as social learning theory. Gillespie, Ashbaugh, and Defiore (2002) reported that class discussions of privilege made their White students feel anxiety, guilt, and embarrassment.

Although these latter reports were anecdotal and retrospective, it inspired us to conduct a more systematic analysis of White college students' reactions to learning about White privilege. The present research was an attempt to conduct an in-depth empirical analysis of the range of emotions and cognitive reactions as White students learned about this concept. Identifying the specific emotions and reactions associated with understanding and accepting White privilege is an important step in the effort to facilitate antiracism teaching and reduce societal racism. Therefore, we attempted to identify specific reasons White students would react negatively to learning about White privilege (e.g., see Boatright & Little, 2003) on the basis of personal observations of faculty at our institution who regularly teach this topic. We also provided students the opportunity to describe their reactions in their own words, allowing qualitative analyses of their responses.

Method

We used both qualitative and quantitative analyses of student responses to this antiracism component in our General Psychology course because previous researchers have emphasized the need to explore racial attitudes qualitatively (e.g., Black, 1994), and qualitative content analysis allows exploration of both subject and the context (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). In our study, qualitative data were analyzed for manifest content analysis, including the type of emotion mentioned by students, if any; whether they indicated agreement with the concept of White privilege; students' reasons for agreeing or disagreeing about the topic; and whether their comments indicated that they understood the overall concept of White privilege. Quantitative data were analyzed using principal component analysis based on ratings of agreement with 12 potential reasons for negative student reactions to the topic.

Participants

Participants were 674 students enrolled in a large General Psychology course at a northeastern university. Of these, there were 87 students of color (e, g., African American, Arab, Native American), and 400 were students who identified themselves as White, Caucasian, or European American. A total of 187 students did not report their ethnicities.

Procedure

Students took part in an antiracism module that is part of our large General Psychology course (Boatright-Horowitz, 2005) each semester. This course module emphasizes the topic of White privilege (Boatright-Horowitz, Frazier, & Harps-Logan, 2011; McIntosh, 1988) as well as modern racism. Students were then asked to respond to an anonymous in-class survey assessing their cognitive and emotional reactions to this experience. This paper-and-pencil questionnaire contained open-ended items that allowed students to describe their reactions to the concept of White privilege in their own words as well as a series of quantitative items that asked students to indicate their levels of agreement with each of 12 potential reasons for these reactions, using 10-point scales (see Tables 1 through 3).

Results

For the students of color, the highest levels of agreement occurred for the statements "It affirmed my personal experiences as someone who does not have 'White privileges'" ($M = 4.80$, $n = 81$, $SD = 3.36$), "It affirmed my personal observations of the experiences of others who do not have White Privileges" ($M = 4.43$, $n = 82$, $SD = 3.27$), and "I reacted negatively because I believed that I was already well informed about racism" ($M = 3.29$, $n = 373$, $SD = 2.59$). White students responded differently, with the highest levels of agreement occurring for "It affirmed my personal observations of the experiences of others who do not have 'White privileges'" ($M = 4.48$, $n = 377$, $SD = 2.59$), "It made me feel that I was one of 'the bad guys' in society" ($M = 3.77$, $n = 385$, $SD = 2.61$), and "I was sorry to lose the belief that American society functions as a meritocracy, in which everyone is able to succeed 'by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps'" ($M = 3.14$, $n = 373$, $SD = 2.59$).

A relatively large number of students ($n = 187$) did not report their ethnicities, and their responses for our quantitative items were significantly correlated with those of the White students ($r = .98$, $n = 12$, $p = .000$) and to a lesser extent with those of the students of color ($r = .56$, $n = 12$, $p = .057$). Given the class composition on a predominately White campus, it is likely that the majority of the students who did not report their ethnicities were White. Furthermore, for each of the 12 quantitative items on our questionnaire, the mean responses of students who failed to report their ethnicities were not significantly different from those of the White students, with one exception. Specifically, the students with missing ethnicity data were significantly more likely to agree with a statement that our class discussion affirmed their

Table 1. Reactions to Learning About White Privilege in Students of Color

Questionnaire Item	*M*	*SD*	*n*
1. It made me feel that I was one of "the bad guys" in society.	2.24	2.21	82
2. I reacted negatively because I believed that I was already well informed about racism.	3.22	2.86	83
3. I was surprised because I had viewed racism to be a problem that occurred in the distant historical past.	2.41	1.07	83
4. It affirmed my personal observations of the experiences of others who do not have "White privileges."	4.43	3.27	82
5. I resented the attempt to teach me to be better person.	2.28	2.55	82
6. I did not like giving up my old ways of thinking.	1.76	1.82	82
7. I felt grief at losing belief in the American dream.	2.36	2.33	82
8. It affirmed my personal experiences as someone who does not have "White privileges."	4.80	3.35	81
9. I was sorry to lose the belief that American society functions as a meritocracy, in which everyone is able to succeed "by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps."	3.06	2.55	80
10. It made me uncomfortable to have to reject my long-held national beliefs.	1.91	1.87	81
11. It felt like a personal attack on me and/or my family members.	2.40	2.69	81
12. Being White and admitting privilege was definitely an uncomfortable, if not painful, process.	1.92	2.05	75

Note: Levels of agreement based on a 10-point scale.

observations as individuals who did not benefit from White privilege ($t = -3.75$, $df = 530$, $p = .00$).

For the White students, a principal components analysis using SPSS revealed that the 12 quantitative items on the questionnaire consisted of four factors, which we will refer to as Societal, Personal, Denial, and The Bad Guy. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test showed that the sample size was adequate for these purposes (KMO = 0.80, which was greater than the criterion of .50). Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed that there were significant relationships between variables that could be extracted as factors (chi square = 909.246, $df = 66$, $p = .00$). Thus, these data met the assumptions for principal components analysis.

Table 2. Reactions to Learning About White Privilege in White Students

Questionnaire Item	*M*	*SD*	*n*
1. It made me feel that I was one of "the bad guys" in society.	3.77	2.61	385
2. I reacted negatively because I believed that I was already well informed about racism.	3.14	2.58	386
3. I was surprised because I had viewed racism to be a problem that occurred in the distant historical past.	.83	2.25	385
4. It affirmed my personal observations of the experiences of others who do not have "White privileges."	4.48	2.59	377
5. I resented the attempt to teach me to be better person.	2.25	2.36	376
6. I did not like giving up my old ways of thinking.	2.12	2.21	382
7. I felt grief at losing belief in the American dream.	2.37	2.22	379
8. It affirmed my personal experiences as someone who does not have "White privileges."	2.34	2.22	367
9. I was sorry to lose the belief that American society functions as a meritocracy, in which everyone is able to succeed "by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps."	3.29	2.59	373
10. It made me uncomfortable to have to reject my long-held national beliefs.	2.08	2.06	378
11. It felt like a personal attack on me and/or my family members.	2.14	2.35	381
12. Being White and admitting privilege was definitely an uncomfortable, if not painful, process.	3.27	2.64	379

Note: Levels of agreement based on a 10-point scale.

Five questionnaire items were associated with the first factor, which we labeled *Societal* (eigenvalue = 19.22, explaining 30.58% of the variance in these data). These items tended to include references to losing belief in the American dream, rejecting one's national beliefs, and learning that American society does not function as a meritocracy as well as acknowledgement that others do not benefit from White privilege (i.e., Items 4, 7, 9, and 10 on the questionnaire). It is also interesting to note that the questionnaire item about feeling discomfort from admitting privilege was also correlated with these items (i.e., Item 12). For the White students, there were four questionnaire items correlated with the second factor, labeled *Personal* (eigenvalue = 18.46,

Table 3. Reactions to Learning About White Privilege in Students Who Did Not Report Their Ethnicity

Questionnaire Item	*M*	*SD*	*n*
1. It made me feel that I was one of "the bad guys" in society.	3.50	2.61	467
2. I reacted negatively because I believed that I was already well informed about racism.	3.15	2.63	469
3. I was surprised because I had viewed racism to be a problem that occurred in the distant historical past.	2.75	2.22	468
4. It affirmed my personal observations of the experiences of others who do not have "White privileges."	4.47	2.72	459
5. I resented the attempt to teach me to be better person.	2.25	2.39	458
6. I did not like giving up my old ways of thinking.	2.05	2.15	464
7. I felt grief at losing belief in the American dream.	2.36	2.23	461
8. It affirmed my personal experiences as someone who does not have "White privileges."	2.78	2.64	448
9. I was sorry to lose the belief that American society functions as a meritocracy, in which everyone is able to succeed "by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps."	3.24	2.58	453
10. It made me uncomfortable to have to reject my long-held national beliefs.	2.05	2.03	459
11. It felt like a personal attack on me and/or my family members.	2.19	2.41	462
12. Being White and admitting privilege was definitely an uncomfortable, if not painful, process.	3.05	2.60	454

Note: Levels of agreement based on a 10-point scale.

accounting for 12.50% of the variance). These items seemed to involve personal resentment as a reaction to learning about White privilege, including feeling that one is being personally attacked (i.e., Items 5, 6, and 11). The third factor was labeled *Denial* (eigenvalue = 11.99, explaining 9.11% of the variance) because it involved two statements about the existence of racism today and whether White individuals necessarily benefit from White privilege (i.e., Items 3 and 8). Finally, a fourth factor was related to a single questionnaire item, "It made me feel that I was one of 'the bad guys' in society," so we labeled it *The Bad Guy* (eigenvalue = 11.00, accounting for 8.48% of the

variance). Thus, these quantitative analyses revealed four factors or potential subcomponents related to student explanations of their reactions to learning about White privilege, with these four factors accounting for the majority of the variance in the data (i.e., about 61% total).

In addition to collecting quantitative data, we also used open-ended questionnaire items asking students to describe their initial reactions to learning about White privilege and to provide additional comments about their views on the topic. These qualitative data included the type of emotion mentioned by students, if any; whether they indicated agreement with the concept of White privilege (yes, no, or some agreement); students' reasons in their own words for agreeing or disagreeing about the topic; and whether their comments indicated that they understood the overall concept of White privilege (yes vs. no). We will refer to these four qualitative measures as *emotion, agreement, reasoning*, and *understanding*, respectively. Interrater reliability, or agreement between two researchers working independently, achieved moderate levels, with kappa values that were 0.59 or higher (Cohen, 1968).

It is important to note that statements of agreement with the concept of White privilege were not viewed to be the same as actually understanding the concept. White individuals often say that they agree that White privilege exists, but they then present arguments against it, often describing situations in which they believe that they personally have not experienced privilege. In our view, understanding White privilege means that White individuals acknowledge that they benefit from structural racism and that their daily lives are free from the negative effects of racism, regardless of any other difficulties they may experience. Therefore, participants in the present study were identified as understanding White privilege if they made some comment in agreement with the concept of White privilege, without then making statements in argument against it. In this analysis, 66.7% of the students of color understood the concept of White privilege, whereas only 40.8% of the White students and 50.00% of the students without ethnicity data were determined to understand this concept.

Although 400 White students participated in this study, only 149 of these students responded by spontaneously identifying emotions for the open-ended questionnaire items about their reactions to the topic of White privilege. The most commonly reported response for White students was that they felt "shocked," surprised," or "astonished" (i.e., 24.8% of the students reporting emotions; see Table 4). Of the White students, 51.0% reported negative emotions, 8.1% reported positive emotions, and 40.9% reported neutral emotions. "Acceptance" was categorized as neutral in these analyses because it is not clear whether these students meant it as resignation, a

Table 4. Emotions Reported by Students of Color, White Students, and Students Who Did Not Report Their Ethnicity

	Students of color		White students		No ethnicity reported	
Reported emotion	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Neutral						
Shocked, surprised, astonished	7	18.9	37	24.8	9	22.0
Not surprised, no effect	11	29.7	24	16.1	10	24.4
Acceptance	1	2.7				
Positive						
Glad, great, good	1	2.7	2	1.3	1	2.4
Interested	5	13.5	8	5.4	6	14.6
Inspiring, awe	1	2.7				
Fine, ok, not bad	1	2.7				
Liked it, impressed	1	2.7	2	1.3		
Negative						
Offended, resentment			6	4.0	1	2.4
Upset			7	4.7	1	2.4
Bad, down, sad, not happy	2	5.4	26	17.5	8	20.0
Sick			1	0.7		
Guilty			8	5.4	1	2.4
Ashamed			2	1.3		
Disappointed			4	2.7		
Angry, mad	1	2.7	4	2.7		
Confused			3	2.0	1	2.4
Embarrassed			1	0.7		
Disgusted	1	2.7				
Disheartened	1	2.7				
Uncomfortable, tense, awkward	2	5.4	5	3.4		
Frustrated	1	2.7				
Didn't like it, not pleased	1	2.7	4	2.7		
Attacked, targeted			1	0.7	1	2.4
Bothered, annoyed			3	2.0	1	2.4
Weird, odd			1	0.7	1	2.4

negative emotion, or a more positive type of emotion. The valence of emotions reported by White students did not appear to be related to whether they understood the concept of White privilege. Of the White students

reporting negative emotions, 37.5% understood the concept of White privilege, whereas 25.0% of the students reporting positive emotions understood the concept.

The most commonly reported emotion for students of color ($n = 37$) was that they felt "not surprised" or that they experienced "no effect" (29.7%), and only 24.3% of these students reported negative emotions in reaction to the class discussion. For the students of color, the valence of their reported emotions did not appear to predict whether they understood the concept of White privilege (i.e., 33.3% with positive emotions and 44.4% with negative emotions understood the concept). Twenty-two percent of the students who did not report their ethnicities ($n = 41$) indicated that they felt "shocked," surprised," or "astonished," and an approximately equal number of students indicated that they were "not surprised" or that they experienced "no effect" (24.4%). For students who did not report their ethnicities, 50% of the students reporting negative emotions understood the concept of White privilege, whereas only 14.3% of the students reporting positive emotions seemed to understand this concept.

A second qualitative measure involved whether participants directly stated agreement, some agreement, or disagreement with the concept of White privilege in response to the open-ended questionnaire items. Of the 400 White students participating in this research, only 155 students spontaneously mentioned whether they agreed with the concept of White privilege. The majority of these students (i.e., 62.6%) indicated that they agreed with the concept, and 24.5% indicated that they partially agreed with the concept. Only 12.9% of the White students stated that they disagreed with the concept of White privilege. The remaining 245 White students did not respond to the questionnaire items with wording that indicated either agreement or disagreement. Of the 87 students of color who participated in this study, 64 students directly stated whether they agreed with the concept of White privilege. The majority of these students (80.7%) indicated agreement, 9.7% indicated partial agreement, and 9.7% indicated disagreement with the concept. Finally, 112 of the 187 students who did not report their ethnicities stated whether they agreed with the concept of White privilege. Of the students with missing ethnicity data, 72.7% agreed with the concept, 20.0% agreed partially, and 7.3% disagreed with the concept of White privilege.

We were most interested in the types of White students' responses that were associated with understanding the concept of White privilege. Therefore, mean values were calculated for the variables associated with each of the four factors derived through principal components analysis for the White students (i.e., for Societal, $M = 3.09$, $n = 364$, $SD = 1.63$; for Personal, $M = 2.38$, $n = 373$, $SD = 1.71$; for Denial, $M = 2.59$, $n = 366$, $SD = 1.79$; and for The Bad

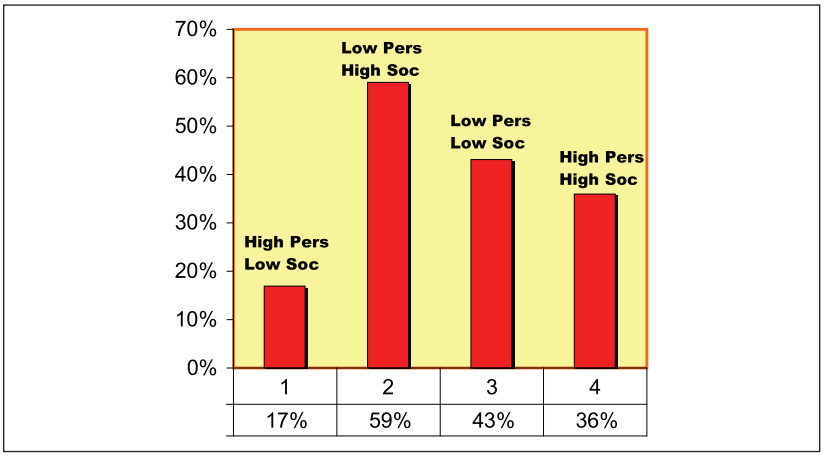

Figure 1. Percentage of students who understood White privilege as a function of mean scores for Personal and Societal ratings

Guy, $M = 3.77$, $N = 385$, $SD = 2.61$). Binary values for each of these four factors were then coded on the basis of the values of the means (i.e., high vs. low), allowing nonparametric analysis of the associations between the variable of understanding and each of the four factors (see Appendix A). Basically, we wanted to know whether any of these four factors (i.e., Societal, Personal, Denial, or The Bad Guy) were significantly associated with understanding the concept of White privilege when understanding this concept was viewed as a binary (i.e., yes vs. no) phenomenon.

For the Societal questionnaire items, high levels of agreement were associated with understanding White privilege, as assessed by the Phi coefficient, a measure of association between binary variables (Phi = 0.10, $n = 397$, $p = .05$). On the other hand, low levels of agreement with the Personal questionnaire items labeled were associated with understanding White privilege (Phi = –.17, $n = 400$, $p = .001$). Finally, neither Denial nor The Bad Guys appeared to be associated with understanding this concept (all $p > .05$). We then decided to examine the patterns of responding associated with understanding the concept of White privilege. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who understood this concept as a function of their relative levels of agreement with the factors Societal and Personal (i.e., the two factors that were shown to be associated with the outcome variable, understanding).

Clearly, the students who disagreed with the Societal questionnaire items (e.g., believing that society is a meritocracy) and who agreed with the

Personal questionnaire items (e.g., feeling personally attacked) were the *least* likely to understand the concept of White privilege. On the other hand, students who agreed with the Societal questionnaire items and disagreed with the Personal questionnaire items were *most* likely to understand White privilege. It also seems that students who felt personally attacked by class discussions about White privilege were less likely to understand the concept compared to students who did not react this way, even when they agreed with the Societal items, but additional research is required to determine whether this is a consistent finding.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine student reactions, both emotional and cognitive, to learning about White privilege, because this information should be useful to instructors who seek to learn more about the "best practices" to use when teaching this controversial topic.

As expected, the students of color showed relatively strong agreement with the statement that they do not have White privilege as well as the observation that others lack these privileges. These students were also likely to indicate that they were already informed about the concept prior to the class discussion. On the other hand, the White students showed relatively high levels of agreement that learning about White privilege made them uncomfortable, as if they were the "bad guys" in society. This is consistent with prior research that suggested that White students may feel overwhelmed, guilty, or hopeless when they learned about this topic (Rozas & Miller, 2009). The White students in our study also agreed that other people lack these privileges. Both the students of color and the White students tended to agree that they were sorry to lose their belief that American society functions as a meritocracy. However, only three students identified themselves as Black or African American. Unfortunately, the category of participants referred to as "students of color" included a diverse group of students with ethnicities that have been historically associated with oppression in American society, including Latina/Latino, Arab, Cape Verdean, and so forth. This can be viewed as a serious limitation of the present study. Although our primary focus involved exploring attitude changes about racism in White students, the responses of the students of color in the present study may not be representative of Black or African American students. It would therefore be desirable to replicate this research with a less diverse group of students of color, a type of study that is difficult to conduct on our predominantly White campus.

An unexpected finding in this research involved the number of students who did not report their ethnicities, presumably because of the topic of White privilege. Although the students with missing ethnicity data responded comparably to the White students for most questionnaire items, they were more likely to deny that they personally benefited from White privilege. It is feasible that the majority of students with missing ethnicity data were White, given the class composition; therefore, this is an interesting finding. It suggests that these students began responding to the questionnaire with a negative attitude, refusing to answer this initial demographic question. Subsequent questionnaire items allowed them to express the view that they did not personally benefit from White privilege. This finding seems consistent with the suggestion by Pedersen, Walker, Paradies, and Guerin (2011) that antiprejudice interventions with these issues may be particularly difficult for White individuals who believe that they personally lack privileges in society. Furthermore, according to racial and ethnic identity development theory, a key developmental issue for Whites involves the abandonment of entitlement (Helms, 1995), which appears to be difficult for these students. This is unfortunate because White individuals who have a lower economic status and fewer societal privileges still do not have to experience the daily effects of racism. We would like for all of our students to understand this basic concept of White privilege because it is likely to increase their understanding of other people's experiences and other people's worldviews.

A common reaction among all of our students was shock, surprise, or astonishment following the class discussion of White privilege. This makes it clear that the concept has not been addressed in the earlier educations of most students. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the valence of emotions such as surprise should be viewed as positive or negative; therefore, those emotions were categorized as neutral. Furthermore, this specific type of reaction was not necessarily associated with understanding the concept of White privilege. For students reporting this reaction, the concept was understood by 14.3% of the students of color, 40.9% of the White students, and 22.2% of the students who did not report their ethnicities. In fact, it did not appear that any specific emotion was associated with understanding the concept of White privilege. Nor was it clear that the valence of emotion (i.e., positive vs. negative) predicted an understanding of White privilege. For White students and students of color reporting positive emotions, the percentages of students who understood the concept were 33.3 and 25.0, respectively. For students who did not report their ethnicities, 50% with negative emotions and 14.3% with positive emotions were determined to understand White privilege. Perhaps negative emotions have a stronger

association with understanding the concept (Gaine, 2001), but additional research is necessary to support this conclusion.

The most important finding in the present study involved the constellation of student responses associated with understanding White privilege. Specifically, White students who agreed with the items in our questionnaire identified as Societal were more likely to understand the concept, particularly if they did not feel personally attacked. Societal items included references to losing belief in the American dream, rejecting one's national beliefs, and learning that American society does not function as a meritocracy. This makes sense, given the resistance of many White individuals to understanding that racism is still a problem in modern society and their view that enough has already been done to mitigate the effects of racism (Rozas & Miller, 2009). Although our analysis of the specific emotions reported by students did not reveal obvious predictors for understanding White privilege, the students who acknowledged societal manifestations of White privilege also tended to admit that they felt discomfort while learning about this concept. According to our results, relatively few students actually reported the anxiety, guilt, and embarrassment predicted by Gillespie et al. (2002; but see Case, 2007). However, further research is required to explore the feelings of discomfort reported by White students.

It may be useful to provide a comprehensive list of possible emotions from which students would select their emotional reactions rather than to rely on open-ended questions, as we did in this study. Many of our students did not mention any specific emotions, and they were therefore omitted from analysis of emotional reactions. On the other hand, our quantitative measures revealed that students who experienced the discussion of White privilege as a personal attack (e.g., "It made me feel that I was one of 'the bad guys' in society," "I resented the attempt to teach me to be better person," "It felt like a personal attack on me and/or my family members") were unlikely to understand the concept. Clearly, it would be beneficial to find a way to minimize this type of personal resentment about the topic when teaching White students about White privilege. The results of the present study suggest that achieving this could increase the numbers of White students who accept and acknowledge the existence of White privilege.

Finally, it is interesting to note that students who spontaneously stated that they agreed with the concept of White privilege did not necessarily understand the concept, according to our operational definition. Of the 97 White students who spontaneously mentioned that they agreed about White privilege, about a third subsequently argued against the concept in the open-ended questionnaire items. In fact, it seems typical for White students learning

about White privilege to give some acknowledgement of its existence in society and then respond defensively by describing personal experiences in which they felt that they lacked privilege. However, for White individuals, understanding the concept of White privilege means acknowledging that one has not been the target of racism, despite any other types of problems and difficulties. Thus, we believe that the expression of these defensive arguments precludes understanding the concept. Furthermore, White students often attempt to spend valuable class time discussing their own personal experiences (e.g., so-called reverse racism), although the focus of discussion should be learning about the experiences of persons of color, institutional racism (policies and practices), and the effectiveness of antiracism efforts. Student attempts to change the focus of class discussions can be viewed as a manifestation of White privilege that contributes to the difficulty of teaching this topic. However, it is important to make the effort. When the topic of White privilege is omitted from the curriculum in our college survey courses, then we are actively perpetuating societal racism, and we are ourselves exhibiting White privilege.

"Best Practices" in Teaching Students About White Privilege

There are numerous resources for instructors who are committed to teaching their students about societal racism, including the topic of White privilege (e.g., Boatright-Horowitz, 2005; Bronstein & Quina, 2003; Denson, 2009; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, Pedersen et al., 2011; www.tolerance.org). However, it is interesting to note that evaluations of the factors that facilitate this type of teaching remain relatively rare for mainstream or large survey courses. Densen (2009) conducted a meta-analysis to identify the factors associated with effective teaching for 27 published studies, including 24 college courses (i.e., diversity courses, ethnic studies, and women's studies), as well as workshops and peer training interventions. Although there may have been sample bias because students enrolled in these types of courses were probably predisposed to be open to issues of prejudice and racism, the results may be applicable to mainstream courses. Denson found that enlightenment was associated with higher levels of effectiveness across teaching settings. Personal enlightenment involves expanding an individual's content-based knowledge of other groups or altering an individual's perspective about relationships with others. Intergroup contact also appeared to be beneficial, perhaps because discussing these issues with students from diverse backgrounds allows the exchange of personal stories and experiences with racism.

Other resources for "best practices" in teaching students about racism and White privilege include suggestions that involve dispelling myths with accurate

information, and identifying similarities and differences between groups during antiprejudice interventions can be an effective strategy (e.g., Pedersen et al., 2011; www.tolerance.org). Although evaluations of these strategies are beyond the scope of the present work, they are well accepted and frequently used in the design of antiracism interventions. However, we believe that evaluation of the effectiveness of various antiprejudice teaching strategies is still in its infancy, particularly for mainstream college courses. Further research is required to fully understand the cognitive and emotional experiences of students exposed to this form of teaching as well as the factors that influence whether individuals are accepting or resistant to these changes in their world views.

Conclusion

It is clear that learning about White privilege is necessary for college students to increase their sociocultural awareness; however, these lessons often trigger defensiveness in White students. The present research contributes to the literature on "best practices" for teaching this topic. We therefore suggest that helping White students understand how racism is manifested in modern society, without causing them to feel criticized or personally attacked, may increase the effectiveness of these interventions.

Appendix A

In the present study, SPSS was used to calculate Phi coefficients; however, the traditional formula for this calculation is

$$\frac{ad - bc}{\sqrt{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}}.$$

In these analyses, data are organized in a 2 × 2 contingency table, such as the following:

	Variable 1	
Variable 2	Low	High
No	a	b
Yes	c	d

Thus, for our data, Variable 1 in these 2 × 2 contingency tables was the number of participants for whom the mean value of the factor (i.e., Societal,

Personal, Denial, and The Bad Guy) was lower versus higher than the mean value for all participants. Variable 2 was whether participants understood the concept of White privilege.

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