

Ideological Uncertainty: Exploring Racism as a Social Issue in Communication

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Understanding how ideological racist message compositions influence uncertainty reduction is a challenging process, but no more challenging than investigations on cognitive, behavioral, and relational uncertainty that are established as relevant to communication research (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Gudykunst, 1993; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Ideological uncertainty requires understanding how social issues (i.e., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism) perceived in communication interactions influence how uncertainty is experienced and reduced.

One must come to terms with more than some basic characteristics of cultural, ethnic or racial behavior, but to be on familiar terms with ideological systems as a critical intervention to the theory of uncertainty resulting in cultural or ethnic problems. As Smith (1982) proposed 18 years ago, “urgent” and “consequential” content must be the core of interpersonal/intercultural communication as a structural condition that permeates communication practices if we want to better human relations. Extending uncertainty reduction theory to include social issues is important because it not only includes the generality of the theory, but it further develops the relational and contextual nature of interactions. As West (1995) points out, “all relationships are influenced by ideological forces” (p. 131). Thus, focusing on social issues in uncertain situations can perhaps help us capture, in part, an individual’s pivotal swing between self, society, and the other.

This approach requires that we go beyond the intersections of race, ethnicity and gender toward explanations of ideology as a means to

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better understand social practices. The evidence does not lie in aggregate data because ideology influences the social order, thus social interactions. How our interactions are shaped by society lie in the social construction of ideology, not the social constructions of race and culture. There would be no need to acknowledge race and culture if there were no ideology. This article explores message composition specific to racism to understand how individuals process their uncertainty, which may account for contextually specific uncertainty reduction strategies. As racism is communicated to others, it is conceivable that individuals process the message to reduce their uncertainty. An individual who perceives the message as racist may want to understand what happened. Reducing uncertainty is perhaps part of that process. Individuals who experience high levels of uncertainty may utilize specific uncertainty reduction strategies that imply information-seeking behavior.

Although uncertainty influences have proliferated interpersonal and intercultural research, no study, to my knowledge, has investigated how racism or any other social issue informs uncertainty and its reduction correlates. Without this information available to develop a priori hypotheses, the following research questions are advanced:

- RQ1: Given a racist interaction described by the respondent, what experiences are described by diverse individuals as racist?
- RQ2: Given a racist interaction described by the respondent, how do individuals make sense of their experiences beyond simple categories in attempts to reduce uncertainty about self, other and society?

Literature Overview

Uncertainty Reduction

Much of the existing research on uncertainty reduction has erratically, if at all, empirically addressed social influences (see Gudykunst, 1985, 1983). When investigating ethnic uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1988) the inherent ideological dimension inherent in face-to-face interactions are ignored. The assumption is that whatever data emerges is a pattern of racial or cultural dynamics (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984), not an outcome of social influences affecting the

material realities of interactions.

Criticisms of uncertainty suggest that uncertainty is not always reduced and is not a principal concern for those interacting (Douglas, 1990). These studies generally imply that communication adjustments must be made if cultural and racial groups are ever going to engage in genuine communication. However, no real suggestions are given as to how adjustment functions. At the same time, there is an implicit assumption that guides and values certain interactions. This value also has a face which determines who is responsible for the adjustment. They are generally those individuals outside of the sanctified realm of obligation (the powerless) as defined by the social order.

Macro/Micro-level Racism

The literature on macro-racism is dominated by historians and political economists (Omni & Winant, 1986). Racism is emphasized as a rigid structural condition whose outcome is defined by a system eliminating multiple realities (Kovel, 1984; Van Dijk, 1980). The studies cited in Table 1 reflect macro-racism research. This list is not conclusive of all macro-racism research, but it is representative of the research in the last 90 years. Micro-level racism, on the other hand, emphasizes personal interactions. These issues are generally seen in the approaches of sociology, psychology, cultural/anthropology, and communication (Kim, 1994) characterized as perception-attitudinal studies (Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo 1985). Most of the research emphasizes the social world as ordered and stable, but offers different types of perspectives on race relations.

Table 1: Various Approaches to Macro-Racism

Topical Area	Research
<p>Ideological/Scientific Discourses</p> <p>Assumptions: Science described individuals in scientific terms. This research is also responsible for legitimating racist beliefs.</p>	<p>Baker, 1974; Barker, 1992; Barth, 1969; Barzun, 1965; Bruner, 1914; Fredrickson, 1971; Glazer & Moynihan, 1975; Gould, 1981; Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Horsman, 1981; Jense, 1969; Yeboah, 1988; Young, 1990</p>
<p>Media Discourse</p> <p>Assumptions: Media discourse conveys negative representations and draws reprehensible images of minority groups further propagating who falls within the sanctified realm of social obligation.</p>	<p>Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Entman, 1994; Hall, 1995, Hartman & Husband, 1974; Orbe, 1998; Van Dijk, 1991; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995</p>
<p>Polarized Language Discourse</p> <p>Assumptions: Primitive dual language systems named objects from one episteme to the next which dictated symbols of hierarchy.</p>	<p>Gossett, 1963; Hannaford, 1996; Rajsheskar, 1979; Rashad, 1991</p>
<p>Political Economic Discourses</p> <p>Assumptions: Racism is a political force affecting certain group provisions for career opportunities openly and foreclosed. The primary emphasis is on unequal social goods how decisions are made as to who receives training, skills, fair treatment, and decent housing by laws, regulations, and political propaganda.</p>	<p>Brooks, 1990; Epstein, 1992; Goldberg, 1993; Katz, 1991; Wilson, 1987</p>

Table 2 is a representative summary of the literature across the social sciences that attend to bettering human relationships at the micro-level. In general, these traditions struggle to attend to racism, but they successfully illustrate how behavior is an everyday lived experience and are indicative of communication interaction patterns.

Table 2: Various Approaches to Micro-Racism

Topical Area	Research
<p>Sociological Approaches</p> <p>Assumptions: Explains how social and cultural organized structures sustain themselves, such as with family, ethnic groups and communities.</p>	<p>Alba & Logan, 1991; Allport, 1954; Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991</p>
<p>Cultural Anthropological Approaches</p> <p>Assumptions: Capturing and describing ethnic group behavior increases knowledge of cultural patterns.</p>	<p>Basso, 1970; Philippsen, 1989; Whyte, 1943</p>
<p>Communication Approaches</p> <p>Assumptions: Understanding cultural symbols and actions that constitute communication patterns and practices can lead to improving communication interactions.</p>	<p>Barnlund, 1989; Collier, Ribeau, Hecht, 1986; Gudykunst, 1993; Kochman, 1982; Porter, 1974</p>
<p>Psychological Approaches</p> <p>Assumptions: Information and cognitive processing can lead to behavioral output understood as a symptom based on race and internal attributes.</p>	<p>Crocker & Blanton, 1999; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Franklin, 1999; Gaines & Reed, 1994</p>

Macro-level approaches are criticized for arguing that society institutionally legitimizes racist behavior without a schema to illustrate when macro-racism and micro-racism end and begin (Essed, 1991).

When it does, rarely does it deal with agency, or it is measured in weak ways (Orbe, 1995). Other studies are criticized for a research edifice allowing the theory to drive the data as a condition of the paradigm (craniometry and intelligence-testing), and causing problems for validity (Fischer, et al. 1996; Mensh & Mensh, 1991). The literature cited in this review reflects the surplus of research covering race, culture and social issues. The reluctance of communication research to radically examine communication variables institutionally indicates that these issues will continue to flow unexplored in communication interactions and will continue to result in a communication gap. Thus, attending to social issues is a necessary condition to re-conceptualize communication research and should be at the core of its assumptions about interpersonal interactions.

Method

The method used in this study is built on existing multi- and interdisciplinary knowledge and offers a conceptual framework for interactions between people with different experiences. Participants were students attending a large Midwest university. Two hundred and seventy-six surveys were returned, however, 230 surveys were usable. Forty-four subjects provided incomplete data not meeting the criteria of a direct racism message. All incomplete data was deleted from all analyses. Of the 230 subjects in the sample ($n = 230$); 143 were women and 87 were men. Their ages ranged from 18 to 69 years and the mean age was 25.7. The mean income was \$16, 883. The racial/ethnic breakdown of this sample was as follows: White ($n = 117$), Black/African American ($n = 86$), Hispanic ($n = 15$), Asian ($n = 4$), Mixed Racial ($n = 7$) and Other ($n = 1$).

Survey Development

The protocol consisted of 13 open-ended questions (see Table 3 for list). The information obtained from each respondent was a qualitative self-report data concerning a direct experience with racism followed by additional qualitative prompts geared to gauge insight regarding processing and seeking.

Table 3: Open-ended Items Listed in the Survey

Sense-Making

2. What was unclear or ambiguous about the interaction?
7. What was the barrier or constraint in the situation?
12. What confused you about the interaction?

Uncertainty and Uncertainty Reduction

1. What questions did you have about this situation?
3. What were you able to predict about the other persons behavior?
4. What were you able to predict about your own behavior?
5. What were the rewards in this situation?
6. What was unusual, abnormal and deviant about this situation?
7. What further interactions did you have with the participants?
8. What anxiety did you feel in this situation?
9. What was similar between you and the participants?
13. How unpredictable was this situation for you?

Racism Message

11. How racist was this message for you?
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Note. All reported items are worded in terms of uncertainty reduction determinants, sense-making entries for information seeking behavior and racism intensity. The items are numbered in the order they appeared in the survey.

Uncertainty was operationalized using nine questions related to the 21 theorems of Berger and Calabrese (1975), which suggests that individuals who experience uncertainty: (a) ask questions, (b) perceive behavior as abnormal or deviant, and (c) experience levels of anxiety. Individuals reduce uncertainty in situations where they can (a) predict and explain the behavior of self and others, (b) see others as rewarding them, (c) perceive themselves to have similar values, and (d) anticipate future interactions. An additional question focused on the intensity level of determining the unpredictability of the message composition. Asking the participants if they perceived the racist message as confusing, a barrier or unclear was used to further assess one's level of uncertainty. Racism was assessed using a single item from the questionnaire (#11).

The qualitative items used in this study are rooted in the qualitative composition of Sense-Making borrowed from Dervin's (1976) con-

ceptualization of situation entry points for examining gap-defining and gap-bridging behavior as communicative practices rather than stable realities. A standard thematic, inductive analysis was used for the qualitative data. For this study, the three major considerations proposed by Janesick (1994) for interpreting written narratives were followed: (1) themes and patterns were extracted from the data not imposed prior to data collection; (2) no specific coding system was used and developed; and (3) themes were categorized based on terms used in the written responses by respondents. The primary intent was to find a way to connect the written story by remaining close to the data.

Results

Results of the study reveal new insights to uncertainty reduction theory research. Specifically, a thematic analysis was utilized to evaluate responses in the self-report and open-ended questions. The qualitative responses of Blacks, Whites, Hispanics and Asians is compared because the open-ended responses echoed that there are differences in the way individuals perceived their racism experiences and their uncertainty and uncertainty reduction within the encounter. Hecht, Larkey, and Johnson (1992) posit that "One cannot assume that all interactants share a similar definition of the situation, message, conversational rules, and so on" (p. 210). Individuals posited ideas about racism that the readers may find preposterous, because the descriptions given of racism messages did not resonate with historical discourses of the past and with present day reality. However, every voice was heard, considered, and valued consistent with the perceptions stated by the respondent. The analysis produced a set of seven themes. The following themes emerged as forms of racism perceived in different interactions: name-calling, confrontational threats, social stereotyping, admitted bigotry, profiling, double standards, and differential treatment.

Name-Calling

The most commonly cited response of a racist message referred to name-calling. Racial epithets and slurs (e.g., "N__", cracker, white honky, white girl, white boy, whitey) emerged as forms of intimidation and were often associated with violence in the interactions. A white male post-civil rights respondent described an instance with a stranger as he and a group of friends were walking home. He reports that, "Suddenly, he [one of the black guys] stuck his head out the window

and called us crackers. We just ignored him and went home.” To further illustrate how others are guided by their prejudices, a Mexican-American female respondent reported a past incident with a schoolmate [a black female]. She describes how the schoolmate’s personal portrait of her further set them at odds:

As a high school junior, I was riding the bus home from school when I heard an African American girl call me a dumb Mexican. I and many other Mexican American students were infuriated by the remark . . . we ended up in an altercation that caused me to finish my senior year through home schooling. I was robbed of my senior year.

Because most of the respondents reported name-calling as their primary incident, these responses appeared to capture its pervasiveness, as one respondent states, “I started school and I would always hear people call me ‘nigger.’ I had never heard that word before, but when I moved to this new city, I started hearing this a lot.” Perhaps name-calling is prevalent between cultural/racial others because of our first amendment right to free speech and the general societal tolerance for it. There is a disjunction between freedom of speech and respect of difference. This is where the paradox lies. On one hand, free speech represents principles of liberty and equality; on the other hand, free speech is how we have put forward racist expressions. The continuance of this behavior dismisses the impact name-calling has on interracial interactions, thus allowing the behavior to become significant in the social realm of acceptability and enabling its effectiveness.

Confrontational Threats

Another fear tactic included in racist reports was confrontational threats. Threats were introduced as verbal, nonverbal or physical practices as an outgrowth of continued social tensions. Respondents reported a variety of different threats. One white female respondent reported that a black female at the pool and her four friends “came in and beat up” her and her friend. Others reported being “screamed at” or given a “dirty look” as signifiers of racism and physical dominance. A black civil rights era born male reports a racist message from many strangers in his community regarding his dating of a white female:

I got prank phone calls by people threatening to beat me or hang me for seeing a white girl. I will never forget one morning my par-

ents found a burning cross in our yard. My parents made me break up with her and the racism stopped . . .

Confrontation can take many forms, but its affect on the lives of its recipients can make one, in the words of one respondent, “forever mortified.” In these cases, confrontation has taken the shape of symbolic and physical violence creating a playground for tyranny. Yet another inconsistency exists. Confrontations, of any kind, are widely held by European, of the racial other, as irrational behavior (Kochman, 1982). With respect to the confrontations reported in this study, whether symbolic or physical, each should be recognized as equally irrational.

Social Stereotypes

Social stereotypes, particularly those based on race, were powerful sources of exaggeration and separation in reported conceptions of racist messages. As one civil-rights era born black female reports about her encounter with racism in her freshman English class, she notes that her skin color carried a set of assumptions about her ability to speak English unbeknownst to her prior to this incident:

I was enrolled in freshman English. All of the students in the class were minority. The instructor was white, and male and he announced to the class “Since none of you can speak standard American English, while you are in the class, you will learn to write and speak white.” I was shocked to hear an instructor voice such blatant stereotypical assumptions about the students in the class. I was offended that standard American English was given status of being synonymous with whiteness.

If nothing else, this incident provided a great example of what the instructor thought about himself and his race. Although stereotyping carries inaccurate descriptors, it appears to be an organizing principle that has the ability to cause great emotional harm. What remains constant among the black, Hispanic and Asian respondents is the power dynamic (teacher-student) illustrating the perpetrator’s dominance and the receiver’s subordination. One post-civil rights Asian American male illustrates how authority is established in his first grade experience with the “office lady” who assumed that he couldn’t speak English based on his physical characteristics. He describes that she put him in “remedial classes without asking him a single question,” which ren-

dered him invisible and unimportant. Stereotyping is our modern day anti-social drug, because it allows us to talk about and treat individuals a certain way without really knowing who they are.

Admitted Bigotry

In categorizing themes, admitted bigotry emerged as an explicitly disclosed racial dislike or discomfort for the cultural other through verbalized admittance. Admitted bigotry tugs at the very heart of racism and exists as its most blatant form. Admitted bigotry does not exist because of what the respondent perceived, but what was admitted to the respondent. A black post civil rights era born male states that a white female on the bus said that she didn't like, "N_____. N_____ are ignorant people in general," in response to his inquiry of her skin-head status based on the way she was dressed. The ambiguousness of this situation is in comprehending whether the response was true or did his line of questioning motivate it.

Admitted bigotry between strangers can provoke physical confrontations if there is no reason to believe that the perpetrator can reward the receiver of the racist message. However, when family members admit bigotry, uncertainty seems to be at high levels, perhaps it is because we see racism as something that is outside of who we are. A civil rights era born Hispanic self-identified female describes an instance that occurred at the age of 10. The respondent reports that when her grandmother saw her playing with a Puerto Rican boy, in the yard, her grandmother, "kicked him out of the yard, because he was of a much darker complexion." The grandmother further told the respondent that if she ever saw her with a dark skinned man she would "disown" her. This example is clear picture of internalized racism. Internalized racism widens the claim that racism is pervasive and it makes resisting racism difficult. When family members are the perpetrators, challenging racism and standing up for justice becomes difficult, especially if the family member is a person of authority.

Profiling

Another theme woven through out the self-reports is racial profiling. Although not a new phenomena, racial profiling, like stereotyping, is characterized, by respondents, as constraining and limiting. Profiling is connected to historical activities (i.e., KKK, vagrancy laws etc.) articulated in the early 20th century that is embedded in our social interactions. Respondents reported that they were followed or stopped in

shopping stores or on the street by police officers. One post civil rights era born white male indicates how profiling was used to identify him and a group of 15 Caucasian students and teachers on a service project trip to a large Midwestern city. The group was stopped by two police officers, one black and one white, while walking down the streets of a predominantly black neighborhood. The respondent reported that the officer told them they were, "The wrong color and in the wrong part of town." They further described that the officers thought they were "buying drugs because white people usually didn't frequent that part of town."

A black male post civil rights era born respondent reported that profiling is a consistent act for him because he had, "been involved in racial profiling many times." Not only did he describe this particular situation as a lived experience, but also a distinct act of harassment based a series of police actions and reasons given for the mandatory stop. The respondent reported that the police "approached the car with their hands on their guns." They searched him and asked if he had any weapons. He further explained how two more police cars pulled up and checked his car plates and the outside of his car. The respondent ended his account with stating that he believed that the police would have planted something in his car if he did not have two girls in the car with him. The respondent's description of events clearly acknowledges that he did not feel safe and that the stop was bogus, further representing the power that Whites have in society.

Another respondent, a Mexican American male, reported that a clerk, who thought he was stealing merchandise, followed him around a store. Here we see profiling gets played out through stereotyping, making the separation of the two difficult. The tensions revealed in these responses indicate that respondents believe they had no recourse implicitly or explicitly because of the inherent position of authority (police-community person; shop manager-shopper).

Double Standards and Rewards

Kellerman and Reynolds (1990) argue that when people expect rewards from others, they are motivated to reduce uncertainty. Double standards imply that where liberty extends for some it is limited for others; and these limitations are known boundaries where unattainable benefits lie. The following civil rights era born white male in his account with racism cited reverse discrimination in the form of hiring

quotas as his unattainable reward. He argues that he had, "to be unemployed for almost 6 months," before his tuition was funded. This respondent believed that social policies have gone too far to right racial wrong doings. He goes so far to say that "a mind is a terrible thing to waste, but only if it is a Black mind." His perception fails to consider that white women have benefited from affirmative action more than any other racial group (Pincus, 2001/2002).

Another post civil rights era born female expressed her displeasure with institutions that specifically give special treatment to groups based on race. She reports that while completing the college application process and searching for scholarships, she ran across several that she was ineligible for because she was "not black and there were several scholarships exclusively available for black students." This was very upsetting for her because she believed that society would "never allow scholarships to be offered to only white people."

Whites, in this study, often reported reverse discrimination in the form of college entrance policies, hiring quotas, and race-based scholarships in a quest to draw attention to inequitable treatment. The focus the word "Black" appears to be the impetus for anti-affirmative action sentiments. For example, scholarships are never just based on race. Blackness alone does not give individuals scholarship privileges. Other criteria (i.e., grade point, specific major, residence, familial heritage, parent group affiliation, institution affiliation, the sponsoring organization, etc.) are also considered. The real damage is not that Whites perceive reverse racism as a legitimate claim. The harm is in the lack of historical consciousness. Whites have been historically privileged in all institutions whereas scholarships for Whites are framed in a different language (i.e., Daughters of the American Revolution and legacies in white fraternities). The word "White" doesn't have to appear for one to know that the scholarship is intended for a white person. Additionally, hiring quota arguments have no empirical support that non-white groups are overwhelmingly represented in businesses. Some Whites, as well as some Blacks, are using racism as an excuse for failure.

Differential Treatment and Anxiety

Gudykunst (1988) suggests that when individuals anticipate negative outcomes, anxiety is aroused. Anxiety was expressed when respondents reported being treated differently. Differential treatment is a phrase that represents the deep social structure underlying racist mes-

sages. These acts represent entitlement and exclusion. In these instances, the respondent's knowledge of what was fair and equal proved disconcerting. A post civil rights black female referred to an encounter with an Asian storekeeper, who refused to let her use the bathroom in her business, but allowed a white female to use the facilities, as anxious. The cause of her anxiety was the storekeeper's untruthfulness. The respondent reported that she was "looking right at the [bathroom] sign when the lady said no."

In a different scenario, a Mexican American civil rights era born female reports her first experience with racism. She reported that a white waitress sat her and her family at a table in the restaurant, but didn't ask them what they wanted. After 15 minutes she came back to take their order and raced off again, but never returned with their meal. The respondent offered a causal explanation as to why the behavior was racist. Observing the waitress serve other patrons promptly was one factor; the other was that the diner was half full, which indicated that the waitress was not too busy to provide timely service. The respondent even reported noticing that when her family decided to leave, after waiting another 20 minutes, a white female walked in and was seated immediately. The respondent's observation of the events led her to believe that her family was not served because they were Mexican.

Another example involves a civil rights era born male who reported differential treatment on the job. The respondent states that as a lifeguard, he and a friend were "horse-playing" when their supervisor pulled them to the side and announced that if he caught them playing around again he would fire them. In a similar situation with white male co-workers, the supervisor "didn't raise his voice and he told them calmly that they were role models and couldn't be seen acting like that." Although, the respondent posed several questions relating to why the manager did not threaten the white boys about their jobs, the respondent reported that he was in total disbelief. He was now aware of his social boundary — how far his liberty extends and where it ends.

Exclusion from social services is not just a Black and Hispanic phenomena. Although Blacks and Hispanics and other racial groups have not historically oppressed Whites, treating people differently is a practice in which all social communities, regardless of race, can participate. A white female civil rights era born respondent shopping in a Black-owned hair shop reports a time when she was treated differently based on her skin color. The respondent reported that she was asked to, "go

to her own side of town to shop," while walking down the aisle of a black hair shop. The following statement indicates that she experienced emotional arousal because she "ran out of the store crying." She also illustrated that the incident was not anticipated because she "couldn't believe that just happened."

These instances were particularly noteworthy in conveying how respondents understood their hurt feelings and the omitted rewards based on power dynamics. Respondents were also fully aware of the limitations imposed on them making known their powerlessness in achieving an outcome. These racism experiences, although drastically different, illustrate the gap in perceptions of racism. They also reflect a deeper difference in how we reduce uncertainty. Many racist messages reported were reduced to personal prejudice and involved situational exclusion (i.e., reported as one-time only encounters) rather than social exclusion. This dichotomy created by unique histories made comparisons revealing.

Discussion

This present study was designed to propose a contextual investigation of social issues in interpersonal communication. It appears to be the first study that has positioned racism as a social issue and dimension of uncertainty reduction theory. Intercultural and interpersonal scholars have discussed uncertainty reduction in a variety of relationships (i.e., stranger, friendship, acquaintance, romantic partner), but do not extend the analysis to include ideological factors. The analysis indicates that uncertainty is perhaps not related to traditional uncertainty reduction correlates, but is symptomatic of social impacts on everyday interactions. Specifically, the findings indicate that: (a) perceived deviance does not increase uncertainty; (b) the ability to predict behavior does not mean that individuals are less uncertain; (c) past experiences and expectations are related to perceived deviance; (d) gender and era of birth is a factor of predicting the behavior of others, and (e) information seeking behavior leads to (intra-active) self-interrogation methods.

Kellerman and Reynolds (1990) suggest that deviance increases uncertainty, and if the respondent perceives an incentive they will attempt to reduce uncertainty. This was especially true for white respondents, but not for black and Hispanic respondents. Because ethnicity is central to racism experiences, how Blacks and Whites experience racism is an important part of this analysis.

White respondents generally responded that the situation was abnormal and that they experienced anxiety and uncertainty. Racism

wasn't considered a frequent experience further illustrating that racism is not pervasive for Whites and does not have the residual effects of an ongoing legacy. Thus, past experiences made it difficult for Whites to predict the behaviors of others. Additionally, Whites reported that these instances were one-time only acts revealing that situational racism is different from institutional racism because it does not hold tremendous power over the daily, lived experiences of Whites. The lack of past experiences and the type of experience does not invalidate what Whites perceive as racism, but it might explain why Whites have co-opted traditional language concepts to explain perceived acts of racism against them (e.g., reverse racism). In other words, Whites may see similar (or at least what they perceive to be as similar) things happening to them because they are White. Thus, racism gets mutated to a new form in order to share victimization influencing the systemic ways we don't see racism.

However, black and Hispanic respondents reported that their incidents were not deviant, yet they reported feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. The inconsistency in responses could be due to past experiences (or lack thereof). Black and Hispanic respondents generally reported that racism was prevalent in their lives. Thus, past experiences (or lack thereof), is a crucial finding. Blacks generally reported that they were able to predict the interaction based on past experiences, which helped them anticipate how future interactions might develop. This is consistent with past studies. However, Blacks and Hispanics did not perceive their situations as deviant because of past experiences and expected outcomes. This is not consistent with current research. The frequency with which one experiences a phenomena does not necessarily mean that ambiguity and uncertainty is low.

Predicting behavior also led to some interesting developments in the area of gender and era of birth. Post civil rights era born individuals and men reported being able to predict behaviors of others and civil rights era born individuals reported the ability to predict self. This finding indicates that civil rights era born individuals may be more restrictive in their interactions than the post civil rights era born individual. Being born in a particular era is an indication that interpersonal interactions may be directly affected by the political and social events of the time and still remains a powerful influence. Thus, concerns of equity may be more of an issue to civil rights era born individuals than post civil rights era born individuals.

An interesting finding revealed that respondents became self-focused, as discussed in Duval and Wickland's (1972) discussion on

self-awareness. This method of self-interrogation (an inter-active strategy) illustrates respondents' heightened pre-occupation with self. Self-interrogation methods were utilized to reflect on personal behavior (e.g., What did I do to deserve that?), and shortcomings and inadequacies (e.g., Was I not qualified enough?). Not only did respondents seek information about themselves and their own actions, but also they were specific to focus on the outcome of the situation (e.g., Should I be offended?), and the perpetrators actions (e.g., How could the coaches do this?). Using this particular method provides, in part, a hermeneutic interpretation parallel to Gordon's (1995) ideas on attitudes in racism. Self-interrogation illustrates: (a) how individuals internally generate information about the self that is useful to them, (b) how individuals admit struggle safely and without repercussion, and (c) how they see their own complicitness on some level.

Limitations

Limitations inherent in the study are important to acknowledge. First, relying on retrospective accounts can always affect data because current emotions may interfere with, confuse or bias past thoughts. Future studies should address past and present behavior of this study. Second, differing racist expressions might have influenced this study in uncertainty. Many respondents reduced racism messages to personal prejudice and attitudes toward racism were situationally based. What is actually defined as racist may not be directly related to what racism means or how it functions in the world. In other words, micro-level experiences that are one-time only encounters may have no direct affect on one's privilege further affecting data analyses. Third, future research should focus on specific types of dyadic interactions (family, stranger, friend, etc.) and type of racist event because the type of experience can help to determine the level of uncertainty and predictability.

Accordingly, the current study suggests that future research should focus on two additional issues related to racism to further capture one's pivotal swing between self, society, other and ideology. First, racism could be examined with a focus on issues of punishment. This element could give crucial insight for developing a research edifice centered on how the ideology functions and determines uncertainty. For example, Herman's (1998) discusses the high level of anxiety women feel during their initial interactions with men. She contends that the rape of women by men creates the context under which women's anxiety

exists. Future research could assist communication scholars in determining if ideology creates a context under which uncertainty exists given the nature of the ideology.

Conclusion

To conclude, the responses described in this article suggest that ideological uncertainty exists at a macro-level because social elements involved reflect marginality and sites of power that affect people daily. This focus mandates attention to ways of bracketing, in part, the impacts of power, which constrain intergroup interactions. Building a research edifice will not eradicate the variety of "isms" that exist. Rather the assumption is that power and ideology will become important aspects of communication theory and research where practical application strategies for effective race relations will emerge. Not only will this emphasis lead to innovative communication research design, it can also provide professionals with explicit strategies to end racism through designing workshops on workplace diversity and anti-racism training to understand what contributes to ineffective interactions.

Implications For Future Research and Theory

To test the generalizability of these conclusions further research is warranted. Previous research on uncertainty reduction has examined the dyadic composition of respondents. Because respondents reported a variety of experiences with different individuals, clearly dyadic composition remains important; the meanings that are generated therein are likely to affect uncertainty and its reduction correlates (e.g., strangers, friends, family, intimates, etc.). Moreover, learning how the type of racism the respondent reports (e.g., name-calling, differential treatment, profiling, etc.) is related to uncertainty is also important to understand predicting behavior. Other forms of racism that deal with direct experiences, colluded experiences and experiences where racism was interrupted should be also explored. Each of these situations will yield a different response to uncertainty and uncertainty reduction strategies. As such, past experiences and expectations are likely to affect information-seeking behavior.

In order to study ideological uncertainty, one must focus predominantly on characteristics that are specifically associated with the ideology and its pervasiveness. The ideology should produce research on how individuals are positioned with regard to the flows of power in society and attributes of society that connect to persons in enduring

ways. Uncertainty about ideological issues is different from uncertainty about the individual interaction or the level of the relationship because it focuses on the cogitation of the world implicit in the interaction as a module. The kinds of information seeking strategies utilized by participants in this study to reduce uncertainty are perhaps generalizable to other types of social issues (e.g., sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc). Understanding perceived racism in uncertainty reduction is an initial step toward achieving interracial communication competence. This study provides a model for such research.

Implication For Future Practices

Practical applications to be developed from this study are anchored in how the respondents situated themselves in real uncertain experiences where the perceived racism experience is validated. Professional diversity trainers who generally focus on blame and victimization would be wise to focus on the reported forms of racism. For example, name-calling can lead to workshops emphasizing the elimination of name-calling and other exclusionary acts as a communication constraint and tool of oppression. One obvious goal might be for trainers to focus on police officers' urgency to gather as much information as possible about individuals before instituting a random police check. Profiling behaviors of police officers is an ideal opportunity for change to occur. Clearly, four police cars are not necessary to stop someone with a broken taillight. Police officers who are successful at decreasing predictability of profiling behavior will lead to more favorable perceptions and an increased level of respect of police in various social communities.

Furthermore, this race relations approach has advantages of broadening our perceptions of how racism is experienced by whom and with what uncertainty effects. Human rights workers can draw on ideological uncertainty in fighting racial discrimination in seeking racial relativism through policies. If we are careful not to "legitimate one set of knowledges" (Dervin, 1989 p. 70) about how racism and other exclusionary acts manifest, the logic behind racial relativism will lead to proportional representation under the law. If we can expect racial relativism beyond employment, then anti-discrimination policies will be standard practices in all sectors of public life.

Building effective interactions takes more than reducing uncertainty if one's circumstances have not changed. The social context has to change. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other "isms" will have

to end before people can truly achieve ideal levels of certainty. If the path I have taken is a correct one, then this study provides an expansion of uncertainty reduction theory at the level of its ontological foundation for future research endeavors and an understanding of at least one aspect of uncertainty reduction variability.

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