

Digital Racism: *A Quantitative Analysis of the Extent that Perceptions of Student Race Influence Instructors Scoring of Online Posts*

Gina M. Haughton¹

¹ College of Education and Leadership, Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Correspondence: Gina M. Haughton, College of Education and Leadership, Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, WI, USA. Tel: 1-414-510-6366.

Received: July 18, 2016

Accepted: August 22, 2016

Online Published: September 5, 2016

doi:10.5430/irhe.v1n2p215

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/irhe.v1n2p215>

Abstract

The purpose of the research was to investigate the extent in that racism exists or is present in higher education online courses when scoring online posts. The research question was: Digital racism: to what extent do perceptions of student race influence instructors scoring of online posts?

The related research sub questions were:

1. Was there a difference in how the student online posts were scored?
2. Were there differences in how the participants in the scoring groups scored?
3. Were there differences in scores based on the name assigned to an online post?

The researcher utilized a quantitative research methodology that employed a 3 x 2 factorial design which incorporated two student online postings, a modified version of the 6+1 Traits Rubric® across three different scoring groups.

The findings of the research suggested that regardless of the sample that scored the student online post, the same online post was always scored higher regardless of the student name that was assigned to the post. However, each time an online post was assigned the name DeShawn, the online post was scored higher. There was a statistically significant difference. This finding suggests that instructors have lower expectations for a student of color when assessing student work online. The implications for online scoring are to ensure that all instructors are well informed on best practices in multiculturalism and that instructors create high expectations for all students.

Keywords: assessments, colorblindness, covert racism, digital racism, equity, multicultural, online education, subtle prejudice

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, inventions such as the computer and the Internet have been integral in making daily life easier and more convenient for the field of education. The purpose of the Internet is to both provide unlimited access to information, and for its users to be able to collaborate and interact with others on a global level. Within the last decade, educators have implemented the Internet not only as a method for instructors and students in higher education to access information, but also as a way to deliver course content.

The Sloan Consortium (2011) it was reported that more than 6.1 million students took at least one online class during fall 2010—a 10.1% increase over the year before. With this type of increase, it is apparent that students are interested in participating in online courses. According to Sankaran and Sankaran (2000) it is believed that the Internet is taking center stage today as the preferred format for distance learning courses. Noting this preference, it has been argued that using the Internet for course instruction is becoming part of the core emphasis at universities across the United States (Gaytan, 2010). According to the United States Census Report (2010) minority populations are increasing and now that online education is becoming the preferred way of students taking courses. Sankaran and Sankaran (2000) stated that there is a need for research that explores the existence and impact of racism in online education.

1.1 History of the Problem

America has always had a turbulent history of racism particularly in education. At one time, all people of color were denied the right to an education. According to Woodson (1990) since the days of slavery, laws were created and enforced to keep slaves from the right to an education. Blacks were not allowed to attend White schools, nor were they allowed to open their own schools. If Whites were found attempting to educate Blacks, a sanction would be given.

Blacks and other students of color struggled to attend colleges and universities. Based on the recommendation of abolitionists and free Blacks, it was decided that institutions of higher education should be racially segregated thus the formation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBU) primarily located in Southern states. As Whites became more liberal, northern White institutions of higher education began to implement a process so that Blacks could attend what was considered White institutions. According to Woodson (1990) the plan included three stages one of which was teaching the realization that Blacks should be admitted to Whites schools and be viewed as equals and academically comparable to the Whites students who are admitted. Having high expectations for Black students sends a message that instructors believe in their capabilities. The integration of Blacks into higher education now provides more educational opportunities. In the United States, all people, which include many different racial identities, have a right to an education. Now Americans have the right to an education online wherein they can obtain new liberties one of which concealing their racial identity.

1.2 Current Status of the Problem

When students enroll in online courses, they have an option to conceal their identity. This lack of visual physical appearance prevents online instructors from knowing the racial identity of students in the course. Online instructors may begin to make assumptions based on students' writing practices (the incorporation of colloquialisms), and the name of the students.

Additionally, tracking the racial identity of online students effectively is not widely practiced; it is typically an option for students to disclose information related to ethnicity. Roblyer (1999) noted that in one week twice as many Whites as Blackshad used the Internet. Additionally, a study which assessed the attitudes of 334 online students showed that 98.8% of the sample was White (Lee & Hirumi, n.d., p. 534) the results imply that the majority of the students that are taking online courses may be predominately Whites students. However, according to the United States 2010 Census Report (<http://www.2010.census.gov>) Latinos are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group populating America. In the 10-year period between 1994 and 2004, minority enrollment in higher education rose by 49%, while enrollment of Whites students during the same period increased by only 6%. During that same time frame, growth in Hispanic enrollment led all racial/ethnic groups, increasing by 67% or nearly 674,000 students according to American Council on Education 2007 (<http://www.acenet.edu>). This data suggests that while a large majority of online students are White, the overall population in the United States is rapidly changing thus; the students who may be enrolling in online courses may also change.

1.3 Need for Further Study of the Problem

Does racism happen in online classrooms since students can conceal their racial identity? While educators may be unaware of the racial identity and backgrounds of their students, embedding non-racist content and being aware of personal perceptions are concepts worthy of being examined. However, two of the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are in direct conflict with the notion that racism does not exist in online environments. According to CRT, it states that 1) racism will always exist as long as other injustices and discriminations remain, and 2) the ability to be racially colorblind does not exist. The researcher examined if these tenets also occur in online education.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Review of Literature

There are several ways in which Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been explained. CRT examines race relations, mainly within the United States, but in a broader context than the traditional civil rights approach. CRT analyzes the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). Parker and Villalpando (2007) suggest CRT's purpose is to unearth what is taken for granted when analyzing race and privilege, as well as the profound patterns of exclusion that exist in U.S. society.

The theory originated in the mid-1970s, due to a large number of people in the legal profession worrying about the slow rate at which laws were changing to promote racial equality. Legal professionals began to express concern worrying that movement towards equality during the Civil Rights Movement seemed to quickly erode. Racist

assumptions are embedded in our legal systems, but they are also encoded in our day-to-day landscape, including the ways in which we communicate. Awareness and discourse may possibly be the strongest defense against racism.

While there is no one official definition of CRT, based on the work of many theorists such as Bell (1987), and Solorzano (1998), there are six basic tenets that reside within the theory. The tenets include: 1) the permanence of racism which means racism is a normal part of American life, often lacking the ability to be recognized; 2) a critique of liberalism meaning society is not colorblind and tends to only address overt forms of racism; 3) counter storytelling which provides a voice to the unique perspectives of people of color; 4) recognizes interest-convergence, a process whereby the White power structure only encourages racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote White self-interests; 5) revisionist history which reexamines America's historical record rather than accepting history as the truth; 6) Whiteness as property in which racial realists who view race as a social construct as well as realizing that racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status. Valdes, McCristal, Culp, and Harris (2002), suggest a similar theory related to CRT. They believe other myths include: blindness to race will eliminate racism, racism is a matter of individuals rather than systems, and racism can be fought without paying attention to other forms of injustice and oppression. This relates to the researcher's study because if educators ignore how racism manifests itself in the educational field, and do not acknowledge racism as a systemic cancer embedded in society, improvements will be difficult to implement in online education.

This first tenet regarding the permanence of racism is often examined when studying CRT. Racism is seen as a natural part of American society, which typically shows favor to Whites individuals over people of color in most areas of life, including education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Action plans or multicultural strategies become ineffective when higher education ignores the existence of systematic racism. Instead, these initiatives work to propel and reinforce structural racism as well as institutional racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, it can be beneficial to consider how even well intended institutional processes and procedures can potentially promote racism.

2.2 Racism

There is an ongoing debate on whether the term *new racism* is adequate because during the latter part of the 20th century, formal expressions of prejudice were not especially popular, although prejudice existed (Leach, 2005). Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan (1998) showed that in some aspects, attitudes toward Black people in the United States had become more favorable; but in other issues, prejudice still existed. For example, the President of the United States is Black, so racism no longer exists. Because of these results, different authors have deemed it necessary not only to study the more hostile and direct forms of prejudice, but also to examine less direct approaches such as: *blatant-subtle* (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1998) is an expression of racism in which there is a shared belief in the superiority of one group over another, and that certain people are dangerous for one's society. This definition assumes xenophobia in which one may have an unreasonable fear or dislike for someone who is different. Subtle prejudice includes cognitive, emotional, and affective concerns that look into the positive emotions expressed toward the ethnic group. It is not so much a defense of negative emotions felt toward those that are different; rather it is an act of having a negative disposition. Racism has manifested in a new way; racism in the 21st century tends to be more subtle and ambiguous.

2.3 Covert Racism

Covert racism may be unintended racism as expressed by people who may not consider themselves racist (Durrheim & Dixon, 2004). Covert racism as opposed to overt racism, especially online is much more dangerous as it has the ability to more easily influence other's self-concepts, attitudes, and cognitive intimacy. It may be assumed that because your race can be hidden or denied while online, that the internet would then presumably be the answer to eliminating racism. However, there are countless websites and blogs that list bias facts with no research base and opinions of negativity. Covert racism is hidden in nature in that; the racist behaviors are not intentionally committed. With the arrival of the Internet and social media, covert racism seems to thrive.

The second tenet, colorblindness, is a mechanism that allows people to ignore racist policies that maintain social inequity (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). The other CRT tenet examined by the researcher, a critique of liberalism, stems from the ideas of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all. When analyzing the role of racism within U.S. society, the conception of colorblindness fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as other (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). The fact that participating in online courses can remove the appearance of race, it is worthy of exploring how CRT's colorblindness tenet impacts online education. Eliminating the race of students in an online course actually reinforces the ideology of the tenet.

2.4 Colorblindness

The colorblind ideology has dominated public debate in the United States, and was originally developed in the wake of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (Barrett & George, 2005). Efforts to promote a colorblind ideology in which all people were to be judged as individual human beings (without regard to race or ethnicity) were intended to eradicate racism and discrimination. It was supposed to promote justice and generally improve the economic and social climate for Blacks in America. Seemingly, a colorblind ideology would also promote harmony between ethnic groups.

A study by Tynes and Markoe (2010) found that Whites students and those who rated high in racial colorblind attitudes were more likely not to be offended by images from racially themed parties. The more racially colorblind a participant was, the less likely they would be to find parties at which attendees dressed and acted as caricatures of racial stereotypes offensive. According to Tynes (2010) in (<http://www.racismreview.com>):

“If you subscribe to a colorblind racial ideology, you don’t think race or racism exists, or that it should exist. You are more likely to think that people who talk about race and racism are the ones who perpetuate it. You think that racial problems are just isolated incidents and that people need to get over it and move on. You’re also not very likely to support affirmative action, and probably have a lower multicultural competence.”

Furthermore, Tynes (2010) believes that online discrimination/racism negatively impacts the mental health of online participants. In the study, both depression and stress were identified as effects of online racism.

Colorblindness creates a society that denies their negative racial experiences, rejects their cultural heritage, and invalidates their unique perspectives. It can be argued that the term colorblindness means color-(people of color), blindness-(unseen). Those who subscribe to this notion ignore people of color as if they don’t exist. However, many Americans view colorblindness as helpful to people of color by asserting that race does not matter (Tarca, 2005). Most underrepresented minorities will explain that race does matter because it affects opportunities, perceptions, and income. When race-related problems arise, colorblindness tends to individualize conflicts and shortcomings, rather than examining the larger picture with cultural differences, stereotypes, and values placed into context. This also has an impact in education. According to Lewis (2001) and Skiba et al. (2002), the skin color of students significantly impacts how students are treated. Students of color received much harsher punishments for misbehaving than their Whites counterparts. For example, African American students engaged in a fight with the use of weapons, and received a two year suspension, while students who were not identified as Whites, did not receive a two year suspension. This study shows how the color of skin or racial identity of a student may result in unfairness and inequities.

Colorblindness prohibits progress toward a non-racist society. Acknowledging the ethnic differences amongst racial groups rather than pretending they do not exist provides validation to people of color. The researcher’s theoretical framework focused on the two tenets: 1) the permanence of racism which means racism is a normal part of American life, often lacking the ability to be recognized, and 2) a critique of liberalism meaning society is not colorblind and tends to only address overt forms of racism, there are criticisms to the framework.

2.5 Criticism of CRT

Although many scholars have subscribed to the framework of analysis of CRT, the educational system as a whole, maintains some apprehension. Acknowledging that racism is a central part of the societal structure is unsettling. By acknowledging racism, members of American society could recognize initiatives made by the government as improving the lives of people of color, but still benefiting the dominant. Examples of these programs include affirmative action, study abroad programs, and diversity initiatives. CRT also provides a voice to the people who have been systematically oppressed (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013).

Another complaint is that CRT does not include social class and gender as part of its framework due to its sole focus on race. CRT places race at the center of the paradigm; however this does not necessarily mean that other identities are ignored. Scholars work to address the how race and other social identities interact and connect within their analysis (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). CRT focuses on injustices; race, class, sexuality or gender cannot be thought of as independent from one another. The researcher collected descriptive data from the study’s participants in order to analyze how gender and other factors correlate or influence racism.

Overall, since the inception of CRT in education, limited progress has been made partly because CRT is relatively new and many scholars, when using CRT, only focus on the two tenets of counter-storytelling and permanence of racism (De-Cuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The researcher did not include the popular and often

over-studied counter-storytelling tenet as a part of the theoretical framework. The researcher conducted a quantitative experimental study, and a qualitative methodology would have been more suitable for counter-storytelling. While all of the tenets are significant, the contributions do not capture all that CRT has to offer. It is essential that we utilize the full power of CRT, including Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism. The researcher focused on the permanence of racism and colorblindness in the experimental study as it was appropriate to the quantitative methodology. Through the use of all tenets of CRT, researchers are able to unmask and uncover the reinforcement of Whites supremacy (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013).

Patton (2002) recommended incorporating critical race perspectives in daily practices within education, so that awareness about the role of race in producing racial inequities. As a result, faculty, student affairs professionals, and institutional administrators should be aware of the rooted racism in educational settings and acknowledge the systemic complexities that further disadvantage students of color.

2.6 CRT in Higher Education

Increasing the amount of students of color enrolled at an institution of higher education is an insufficient if the goal is institutional change. Investigating the climate of the campus to have culturally competent and diverse staff, faculty, and administrators is a more effective way of becoming more diverse and inclusive.

According to Engberg (2007), the history of intergroup relations on college and university campuses is deeply embedded in the changing demographic composition of the postsecondary student body. Students of color, for instance, began entering colleges and universities in unprecedented numbers after the passage of the Civil Rights and Higher Education Acts in the 1960s. Yet few colleges and universities were prepared for the inherent challenges in educating such a diverse population of college students. As a result, the history of intergroup relations is marked by periods of campus unrest and heated, if not violent, exchanges between diverse groups of students (Null, 2009).

Patcher et al. (2010) conducted a study on how racism was perceived to be a prevalent and major occurrence experienced by students of color. Conducting a quantitative study, 277 students were surveyed, and 88% indicated that they had experienced racial discrimination at least once (p. 47). 11.6% of students indicated that they had experienced racism at least 12 times out of the total number of 24 situations to choose from on the questionnaire (p. 47). The questionnaire included situations such as racial slurs and slogans, racial conflicts and physical assaults and other subtly racial, ethnic, and language segregation.

Dalton (1991) suggests a number of factors that have contributed to racial incidents: lack of knowledge, experience, and contact with diverse peers; peer-group influence; increased competition and stress; the influence of off-campus groups and the media; alcohol use; changing values; fear of diversity; and the perception of unfair treatment. Many of these factors are exacerbated by the shortage of opportunities for students of different racial groups to have meaningful discussions about interracial issues.

3. Method

Given the research purpose of exploring how racism exists in online courses, this study employed a quantitative methodology through the use of an independent 3x2 factorial design. The study involved the creation of two online student threaded discussion post between two students in which the participants will use the 6+1 Traits Rubrics®. The independent variables in the study were the student names assigned to each essay. The dependent variable was the actual scores in which are assigned to the student essay. The controlled variables are the essay, rubric, and the type demographic data that will be collected. When the data was collected, the researcher looked for correlational relationships based on the data particularly related to racial identity.

3.1 Sampling Procedures

The sample included online adjunct instructors in higher education, higher education faculty, K-12 principals, and K-12 teachers. The samples used in the study were randomly selected and then placed into three groups of 30. One group of participants was provided with no student names (control groups), and all higher education faculty. The second and third group was able to see both student names next to their respective posts. The researcher created two student posts that both warrant the same score using the selected components of the 6+1 Traits Rubric®. Both student posts contained the same word count, and each contains an error in each of the following scored areas: ideas, sentence fluency, and conventions. Each participant group received a set of directions, a print out of a screen shot that will resemble the authenticity of the student posts.

Both of the names will identify a male student; however the implied racial identity of the students differed based on individual participants assumption of the sound of and association of the name to a particular race. When selecting names, the researcher conducted an Internet search for options, and discovered an article from 2006 on

(<http://www.abcnews.com>) that researched the top 20 White and Black sounding names. The researcher chose to only create male sounding names to help with reliability.

Lastly, each participant will provide their demographic information which will include: gender, age, race, and number of years teaching, familiarity with 6 +1 Traits Rubrics®.

3.2 Gender

In the control group, 40% were male, 53.3% were female, and 6.67 % did not disclose their gender. In trial 1, the participants' gender included 28.33% male, 65% female, and 6.667% not disclosed. In trial 2, the participants' gender included 16.67% male, 70% female, and 13.33% was not disclosed.

3.3 Age

The age of the participants in the control group ranged from 36-71 years old, with 10% not reported. In trial 1, the participants' age ranged from 29-70 years old. The age of the participants in trial 2 ranged from 26–66 years old with 13.3% not reported.

3.4 Racial Identity

The race of the participants in the control group were 83.33% Whites, 0% Black, 3.33% Latino, and 13.33% chose not to provide their racial identity. In trial 1, the participants reported 53.33% Whites, 36.67% Black, 3.33% Latino, and 6.66% chose not to disclose their racial identity. Lastly, trial 2 reported 55% Whites, 25% Black, 0% Latino, and 20% chose not to disclose their racial identity.

3.5 Years of Experience

The participants were asked to provide their number of years of experience during the study. The control group reported a range of 3-52 years of teaching, with 10% of participants withholding their years of experience; trial 1 reported 1-40 years of experience, and trial 2 reported 2-41 years of teaching experience.

3.6 Familiarity with Rubric

Lastly, the participants were asked to report on their familiarity and previous usage of the modified 6 +1 Traits Rubric® in which was used to grade the online student posts. The control group only reported 23.33% of participants who had used the rubric prior to the study, 63.33% of the participants were not familiar with the rubric, and 13.33% did respond to the question on the survey. In trial 1, 73.33% of participants were familiar with the rubric, whereas 26.67% had not used the rubric before. In trial 2, 70% of the participants were familiar with the rubric, 16.67% were not familiar with the rubric, and 13.33% did not respond to the question on the survey.

3.7 Validity/Trustworthiness/Triangulation

To prevent internal validity threats, the researcher eliminates the need for time to pass during the experiment. This prevents the participants from maturing or regressing; participants completed the survey at one setting. To prevent external validity the researcher will use a face to face survey which allows all instructors access to the survey, and participation in the study regardless of their own racial identity, age, or gender.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

For each research question, the researcher developed a research hypothesis and a null hypothesis as follows:

1. Was there a difference in how the student online posts were scored?
Research hypothesis: There was a difference in how the online posts were scored.
Null hypothesis: There was no difference in how the online posts were scored at the $p \leq .05$ alpha level.
2. Were there differences in how the participants in the scoring groups scored?
Research hypothesis: There were differences in how the participants in the scoring groups scored the online posts.
Null hypothesis: There was no difference in how the participants in the scoring groups scored the online posts at the $p \leq .05$ alpha level.
3. Were there differences in scores based on the name assigned to an online post?
Research hypothesis: Connor's online post will receive higher scores simply as a result of his name.

Null hypothesis: The name assigned to each student's online post will result in no significant difference in how the scoring groups evaluate each student online post at the $p \leq .05$ alpha level.

5. Results

5.1 Statistics and Data Analysis

Data generated by techniques previously described were subsequently interpreted through the analysis techniques/procedures of statistical methods. Both inferential and descriptive statistics will be used when analyzing the results. The data were collected through the 6+1 Traits Rubric® which was given to higher education instructors. The researcher then entered the data into the SPSS database for accuracy and inferential statistical analysis.

The researcher used inferential statistics to analyze the data through the use of a two way factorial ANOVA. The independent variables in the study were: 1) online student post one and 2) online student post two. The dependent variable was the score that was assigned by the study's participants. The researcher ran a univariate to determine the significance of the overall student scores between each participant group. The researcher examined how both students were scored in terms of the rubric components: ideas, sentence fluency, and conventions.

The researcher also collected descriptive data from each participant. These data included: gender, race, age, number of experiences using 6 +1 Traits Rubric®, number of years teaching, and number of years teaching online. This information was used to analyze and make comparisons amongst the demographic information of each participant group.

The researcher looked for correlations between the scores of between the two students, as well as look for comparisons when removing variables that were collected in the demographic descriptive data. A correlation analysis was used to measure the direction and strength of the relationships between each variable assuming a normal distribution. The independent variable (student names assigned to each survey) and the dependent variables (scores received on each essay). Additionally, an ANOVA (analysis of variance) was conducted to determine a significant difference between the essay scores and the demographic data collected from each participant. The research hypothesis: The online threaded student discussion posts submitted by the presumably White student will receive a higher score than the posts submitted by the presumably Black student.

5.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

ANOVA

A univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of the three samples that participated in the study. An assumption of an ANOVA is that of normality; the groups must be normally distributed on the dependent variable. The researcher can determine whether the interaction between variables is statistically significant at the $p = .05$ level. There was a statistically significant difference between the groups scoring of the student online posts in the study. The control group $M=3.95$; Trial 1 $M=4.34$, Trial 2 $M=4.40$. There was also a statistically significant difference on how the online post was scored. There was no statistically significant difference in mean scoring between the group and how the online post was scored.

For the purposes of inter-rater reliability, the researcher implemented a Cronbach analysis. In the study the researcher explored how the scores issued by the scoring groups were related. The result was a score of .939. High internal consistency is considered acceptable when the reliability coefficient is .70 or higher.

The modified version of 6 Traits Rubric® asked all scoring groups to score both online student posts in the areas of ideas, sentence fluency, and conventions. In the three categories, the scoring groups were able to score the student online posts on a scale from 1 beginning to 6 exceptional.

5.3 Findings Related to Research Question One

The research question was: Was there a difference in how the online posts were scored?

There was a statistically significant difference in how the online posts 1 and 2 were scored. Online Post 1 ($M=3.50$) and Online Post 2 ($M=4.96$). There was also a statistical significance when the control group was compared to both Trial 1 and Trial 2. The control group mean was ($M=3.96$), Trial 1 ($M=4.34$), and Trial 2 ($M=4.40$). However, there was no statistical significance between how the online posts were scored between Trial 1 and Trial 2. The research question asked if student name influence an online instructor's evaluation of a student post. The results showed that regardless of the sample that scored the student an online post, the same online post was always scored higher regardless of the student name that was assigned to the post.

5.4 Findings Related to Research Question Two

The second research question was: Were there differences in how the scoring groups scored the online posts?

There was a statistically significant difference in how the groups scored the online posts. The control group ($M=3.95$) and Trial 1 ($M=4.34$) showed a statistical significance ($p=.009$). The control group ($M=3.95$) and Trial 2 ($M=4.40$) also showed a statistical significance ($p=.003$). Both Trial 1 ($M=4.34$) and Trial 2 ($M=4.40$) had an overall mean score that did not show a statistical difference, which means the online posts were scored similarly.

5.5 Findings Related to Research Question Three

The question was: Were there differences in scores based on the names assigned to the online posts?

Although there was no statistical significance between how the groups scored the online posts based on the ANOVA ($p=.054$), there were differences in how the student online posts were scored when a name was assigned. The two names chosen were Connor and DeShawn. Online post 1 control group ($M=3.19$), Trial 1 ($M=3.49$), and Trial 2 ($M=3.82$) was consistently scored lower than online post 2 in each trial regardless of the name that was assigned to it. In online post 1, DeShawn ($M=3.82$) scored significantly higher than Student A ($M=3.19$), however, when the online post 1 was assigned the name Connor ($M=3.49$), the online post was not scored significantly.

In online post 2, DeShawn ($M=5.19$) was scored statistically higher than Student B ($M=4.72$), and when online post 2 was assigned the name Connor ($M=4.98$), it was not statistically higher than Student B. The researcher concluded that in each of the Trials in the study, when the online post was assigned the name DeShawn, it was scored statistically significantly higher than when DeShawn's name did not appear on the online post. Figure 1 shows the differences in the scoring of online posts with the names assigned across the scoring groups.

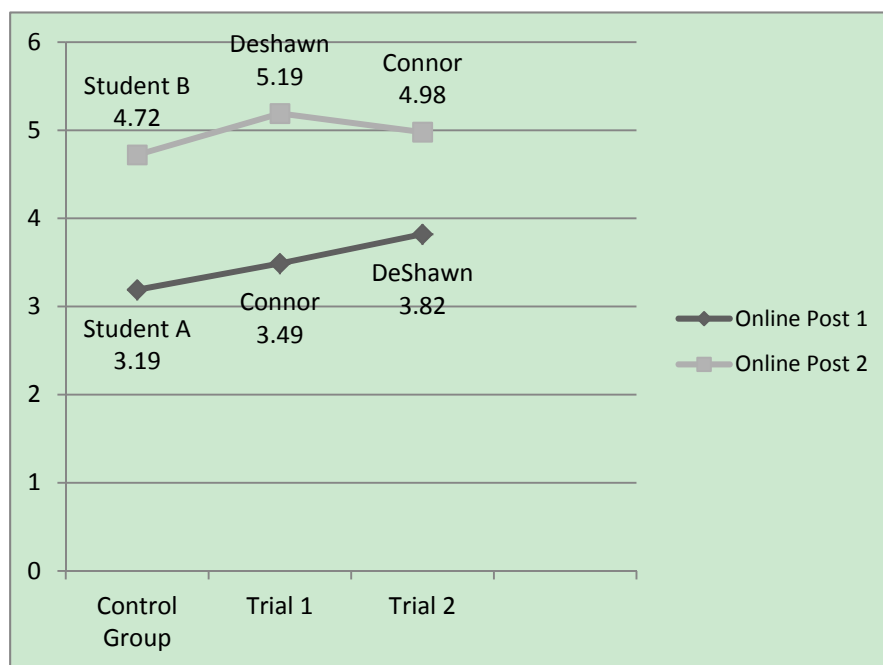


Figure 1. Mean scores of online posts across the trials

The third research question stated: Were there differences in scores based on the names assigned to the online posts? The research hypothesis stated that Connor's online post will receive higher scores as a result of his name. Based on the findings, the researcher cannot reject the null hypothesis.

6. Conclusions Related to Research Purpose

6.1 Online Assessment

While much has been written on assessing students in traditional environments, there is a scarcity of research studies on assessment of students in online environments (Liu, 2008). Robels and Braathen (2002) also noted that while the

online delivery mode is accepted widely in education, the issue of assessing students in online courses has not been thoroughly examined. Additionally, much of the existing literature on assessment in online environments is informal. More empirical studies are needed (Liang & Creasy, 2004). Finally, among the limited empirical studies, extremely few of them were conducted in the context of higher education.

Assessment is argued to be even more important in online environments (e.g., Rovai, 2000). According to Weiten (2010), most online students, who are busy adults with many family and work commitments, tend to be more practical and are less likely to participate in activities that are viewed as supplemental to the course goals and assessment scheme. They further point out that in face-to-face environments instructors have opportunities to go over the course materials with students, while in online environments, where students have more flexibility in deciding when and what course materials to read, “the instructor’s efforts may be wasted unless assessment tasks are closely aligned and interwoven with study materials” (p. 22).

Furthermore, According to the Liu (2008), online environments can provide greater flexibility in where, when, and how assessment is taken. On the other hand, online environments pose challenges to instructors in assessment of online students. For example, in a fully online course, the instructor usually cannot see students physically, and he or she may never know for sure who is actually taking the course. This makes authentication and cheating issues more challenging to tackle in online courses. Bonk and Dennen (2003) discussed this issue more specifically. During formative assessment grading, all students receive the same grade if they participate. The goal is to understand what students know and provide timely feedback to improve their knowledge and understanding. In contrast, the goal of summative assessment is to evaluate student performance after conclusion of each discussion. Instructors can provide feedback in the form of a grade and may use rubrics to provide more reliable measures. They cautioned that summative assessment may encourage quantity rather than quality.

7. Discussion of Implications

7.1 Implication One

Online instructors should continuously examine their own biases about racial identity and their expectations for all of students. There are complexities that online instructors face when both instructing and assessing student learning that one might not always be immediately aware of as suggested by Sue (2007). Based on the literature, the three types of current racial transgressions: 1) Micro-assaults: conscious and intentional actions or slurs; 2) Micro-insults: verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity; and 3) Micro-invalidations: communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color Sue (2007). Becoming aware of thoughts and experiences related to race might impact student learning thus increasing reliability when grading. While Sue’s (2007) racial transgressions were not immediately present in the researcher’s study, it is important for online instructors to be aware of their subconscious biases.

7.2 Implication Two

There is little research on online education and its impact on student learning. Institutions are rapidly creating and implementing online courses through trial and error. Those in leadership positions in higher education will need to assume strategic and intentional roles in implementing quality online programs. Making online instructors aware of their racial biases and helping them focus on valid and reliable grading measures online. Online learning and management systems such as LiveText® and Canvas® allow students to upload assessments so that instructors can score them online. These systems attempt to provide reliability; however in actuality they provide more convenience for instructors regarding grading. Moving forward, creating systems where anonymity occurs so that instructors can grade online without knowing who the student is while they are grading will increase reliability.

7.3 Implication Three

Teachers must be consistent in setting high expectations for all students. Lowering standards for students of color because there is a belief that they cannot meet high standards presents a bias. A study by Mikesell-Redding (2012) tested whether a statement about stereotype awareness which described racial bias would influence how undergraduate students’ essays were graded. It was hypothesized that White instructors would grade an essay written by a Black student lower than a White student; however, this difference was expected to dissipate with the insertion of the statement of stereotype awareness. In spite of being shown the stereotype awareness document, White instructors were significantly more likely to grade Black students an average of 4 points higher than White students. This study addresses low expectations for students of color, thus assigning a higher score to the work of Black students.

However, in comparison to the previous study, the researcher's analysis found that in each online post and across all three scoring groups, when the online post was assigned the name Deshawn, it was scored statistically significantly higher as opposed to when it was assigned the name student or Connor. In both studies, forms of covert racism took place as instructors seemed to assign "pity points" to Black students. Future qualitative research may be able to help address why teachers have a lower expectation of black students.

School teachers and leaders must be aware of their expectations that they set for all students in the classroom regardless of race. Assigning unearned points to any student is unjust and a disservice to them. If the outcome of teaching is student learning, it is imperative that teachers equitably assign grades.

7.4 Implication Four

One implication for research is that this research should be repeated in different geographical regions and with a more diverse sample. Including a more diverse sample and population and having different subject matter in the student online posts could also help add to this body of research and generalizability. The results of the study might also change if the survey was given to instructors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The outcomes may also change if the sample was made up solely of instructors that do not typically teach in online situations. Additionally, the names on the student posts could be changed to names more closely assigned to females instead of males.

7.5 Implication Five

The researcher used a modified version of the 6 Traits Rubric®. Using other validated rubrics that participants are more familiar with may also add a value to the research. There is a need for the creation of more validated online rubrics for scoring online posts. Finding ways for online conversations to be scored in a more valid and reliable manner may benefit the research field as many do not currently exist.

7.6 Implication Six

Another implication would be to include more longitudinal studies on this topic. Implementing this study over the period of a full length course or courses may show different trends and variation in scoring. Examining online instructors grading processes over time may show that online instructors do score more equitably over the period of a course rather than analyzing grading of online posts for one assignment in one isolated moment in time.

7.7 Implication Seven

The seventh implication examined is extending the study to isolate variables collected in the study. Determining the actual score that each instructor assigned the online student posts will provide additional insight into the assumption that Whites instructors may have been assigning the Black student the inflated score. The bias of scores may have actually come from instructors that were Black, which would still relate to low expectations. Participant demographic data, sentence fluency, ideas, and conventions in the rubric may have a statistical significance as data is further disaggregated.

7.8 Implication Eight

The last implication is to implement a qualitative component to the study. Perspective is reality, and asking students their perspective on digital racism based on name identity may provide more insight. Including this portion to the study will allow students to have a voice in the study. A qualitative component may also be added for instructors as they can share why they made choices about scoring as it relates to the rubric. This will give instructors an opportunity to give feedback about the online student posts, their perceptions/expectations, and the quality or understanding of the rubric.

8. Conclusion

Discussing racism can often be a difficult topic to discuss. Examining how it manifests in online education can be just as cumbersome. There is a lack of updated research in the field of education to examine and to continue to support the findings in the researcher's study. As online education continues to become more integrated into higher education learning, there is a need for more research to be completed.

May this work aid others by ensuring equitable practices are incorporated in planning, implementing and assessing online work.

References

ABC news. (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.abcnews.com>

- American Council on Education. (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu>
- Barrett, K., & George, W. H. (2005). *Race, culture, psychology and law*. Seattle: SAGE Publications.
- Bell, D. (1987). *And we are not saved: The elusive quest for racial justice*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bonk, C. J., & Dennen, V. (2003). Frameworks for research, design, benchmarks, training, and pedagogy in web-based distance education. In Moore, M. G., & Anderson, W., G. (Eds.), *Handbook of Distance Education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dalton, J. (1991). *Racism on campus: Confronting racial bias through peer interventions*. New York: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, pp. 3-13.
- DeCuir, J. T., & Dixon, A. D. (2004). "So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there": Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Research*, 33(4), 26-31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033005026>
- Engberg, M. (2007). Educating the workforce for the 21st century: A cross-disciplinary analysis of the impact of the undergraduate experience on students' development of a pluralistic orientation. *Research in Higher Education*, 48(3), 283-317. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11162-006-9027-2>
- Gaytan, J. (2007). Visions shaping the future of online education: Understanding its historical evolution, implications, and assumptions. *Online Journal of Distance*, X(II).
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863>
- Leach, C. W. (2005). Against the notion of a "new racism". *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 15(6). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/casp.841>
- Lee, J. L., & Hirumi, A. (n.d.). *Analysis of essential skills and knowledge for teaching online*. University of Central Florida.
- Lewis, A. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-Whites school. *American Education Research Journal*, 38(4), 781-811. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00028312038004781>
- Liu, S. (2008). *Design and use of assessment tasks in online graduate courses: Instructors' practices, reflections, and perceptions*. Indiana University.
- Mikesell-Redding, D. (2012). *An experimental study on the effects of stereotype awareness on the subjective grading of undergraduate college essays* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3513240)
- Null, W. N. (2009). *American Educational History Journal*, 36(1). Information Age Publishing.
- Parker, L., & Villalpando, O. (2007). A racialized perspective on education leadership: Critical race theory in educational administration. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 43(5), 519-524. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07307795>
- Patcher, L. M., Bernstein, B.A., Szalacha, L.A., & Coll, C.G. (2010). Perceived racism and discrimination in children and youths: An exploratory study. *Health and Social Work*, 35(1).
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Meerteens, R.W. (1998). Subtle and blatant prejudice in Western Europe. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(1), 57-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420250106>
- Robles, M., & Braathen, S. (2002, Winter). Online assessment techniques. *The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, 44(1), 39-49.
- Roblyer, M. D. (1999, Fall). Is Choice Important in Distance Learning? A Study of Student Motives for Taking Internet-Based Courses at the High School and Community College Levels. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education*, 32(1), 157-171. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08886504.1999.10782621>
- Rovai, A. P., & Barnum, K., T. (2003). Online course effectiveness: An analysis of student interactions and perceptions of learning. *Journal of Distance Education*, 18(1), 57-73.
- Sankaran, S. R., & Sankaran, D. (2000, March). Effect of student attitude to course format on learning performance: An empirical study in web vs. lecture instruction. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27(1), 66-73.

- Schuman, H., Steeh, C., Bobo, L. D., & Krysan, M. (1998). *Racial attitudes in America: Trends and interpretations*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. (2002). The Color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34(4), 317-342. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1021320817372>
- Sloan Consortium. (2011). *Going the distance: Online education in the United States*. Retrieved from <http://www.sloanconsortium.org>
- Solorzano, D. (1998). Critical race theory, racial and gender microaggressions, and the experiences of Chicano and Chicana scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, (11), 121-136. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/095183998236926>
- Sue, D.W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Tillman, L., & Scheurich, J. (2013). *The handbook of research on educational leadership for equity and diversity*. Routledge Publishers: New York.
- Tynes, B. M. (2010). Race, racism and social networking sites: What the research tells us. *Racism Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.racismreview.com>
- Tynes, B. M., & Markoe, S. C. (2010). The role of color-blind racial attitudes in reactions to racial discrimination on social network sites. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018683>
- United States Census Report. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.2010.census.gov>
- Valdes, F., McCristal, J., & Harris, A. (2002). *Crossroads, directions and a new critical race theory*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Weiten, W. (2010). *Psychology: Themes and variations*. California: Canadian Publishing.
- Woodson, C.G. (1990). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Africa World Press. Trenton, NJ.