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Critical Race Theory and Policy Dispositions: A Study of White College Students, Empathy, and Their Support for Progressive Policies

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Critical Race Theory and Policy Dispositions:

A Study of White College Students, Empathy, and Their Support for Progressive Policies

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Abstract: This experimental study explores the relationship between exposure to CRT and political dispositions among white college students. It aims to address the gap in current academic literature regarding the intersection of CRT and political attitudes, particularly in relation to progressive race-based policies (PRBPs). Data were collected through interviews with white students at UCLA (N=8); from the data, mixed methods research was employed to illuminate how exposure to CRT may influence participants' levels of Interracial Empathy and dispositions toward PRBPs. Initially, this study hypothesized that exposure to CRT increases support for PRBPs through fostering Interracial Empathy. However, evidence from the study challenges this hypothesis, indicating that CRT, as operationalized in this study, did not significantly alter policy attitudes. This study aims to provide a more evidence-based foundation for understanding the impact of CRT on political beliefs and inform debates on its integration in educational settings.

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Introduction

Since 2020, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been a subject of intense debate in the United States, particularly regarding its inclusion in school curricula. From the perspective of many communities of color, CRT is an appreciated framework as it explicitly conveys their lived experiences in America, without employing excessive positivity or softening language to make it seem more palatable. On the other hand, conservative and predominantly white political leaders have vehemently advocated for the removal of CRT, asserting that it promotes liberal indoctrination and distorts understanding of race relations by assigning blame to white students. By framing CRT as a form of liberalizing indoctrination, political leaders argue that CRT, through its focus on systemic racism and power dynamics, aims to instill liberal values and perspectives in students.[1] However, it is important to recognize that CRT's primary focus lies in analyzing institutional patterns and power dynamics rather than assigning individual culpability.

CRT, as defined in this study, is the examination of how race and racism intersect with social, economic, and political structures to perpetuate systemic inequalities. CRT challenges the idea that racism is solely based on individual prejudice; the framework examines systemic and structural aspects of racism, acknowledging race as a social construct. It critiques conventional legal theories and emphasizes narratives and personal experiences to understand and address racism. The core tenets of CRT, as explained by Colleen Capper (2015), include the recognition of structural racism, the social construction of race, and intersectionality; furthermore, a critique of whiteness as normative (Capper 2015). As this framework was originally developed by legal scholars in the late 20th century, the ultimate aim of CRT is to raise awareness of the racialization of American institutions and offer a holistic perspective on the deep-rooted racial

inequalities embedded within these structures. By fostering this understanding, CRT aims to cultivate a more nuanced comprehension of the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

Consequently, this enhanced perspective may lead to a sense of Interracial Empathy that shifts students' viewpoints on privilege, race, and power, potentially influencing their dispositions towards Progressive Race-Based Political Policies (PRBPs).[2] As used in this paper, the term Interracial Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings and perspectives of individuals from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. It involves recognizing and empathizing with the experiences, challenges, and injustices faced by marginalized racial groups. Developing Interracial Empathy allows individuals to cultivate a deeper understanding of racial inequalities and fosters a sense of solidarity and support for marginalized communities. Interracial Empathy serves as a conceptual framework to understand how people recognize social injustice as well as their own roles in relation to these injustices. PRBP's on the other hand, refers to policies and initiatives that aim to address racial inequalities and promote social justice by actively considering race as a factor in decision-making. PRBPs seek to challenge systemic racism and create more equitable opportunities for marginalized communities. An example of a PRBP would be a policy advocating for affirmative action in educational institutions or monetary reparations to Black Americans to address generations of inequality.

The claims on which anti-CRT legislators base their contention are contingent upon assumptions that are not in alignment with the fundamental tenets of the framework. For example, S. Res 246, proposed by Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) in 2021 aimed to ban CRT on the following basis:

> "Expressing the sense of the Senate that Critical Race Theory serves as a prejudicial ideological tool, rather than an educational tool, and should not be taught in K–12 classrooms as a way to teach students to judge individuals based on sex, race, ethnicity, or national origin" (S. Res 246 2021).

In contrast to this proposed legislation, among several others (see figure 1), CRT, as aforementioned, does not overtly teach students to judge, but rather to acknowledge the racialized history of the United States. Another piece of anti-CRT legislation is a popular Bill that Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law in 2022 – HB 7. Referred to formally as the "Individual Freedom" measure, HB 7 imposes stringent limitations on racial education within schools. This bill stipulates that Floridian educational institutions are prohibited from subjecting any student or employee to training or instruction that promotes any of the following eight "specified concepts" based on race, color, sex, or national origin (HB7 2022). This action is deemed inherently discriminatory under the amended statute. Two of the eight specified concepts are as follows:

1. "A person's moral character or status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily defined by his or her race, color, national origin, or sex.
2. Such virtues as merit, excellence, hard work, fairness, neutrality, objectivity, and racial colorblindness are racist or sexist, or were created by members of a particular race, color, national origin, or sex to oppress members of another race, color, national origin, or sex" (HB7 2022).

Drawing from an underdeveloped interpretation of CRT, HB 7 is an example of legislators looking at the framework with a misguided understanding.

As per Stanfield's (1991) findings, racism is "most fundamentally a synchronized, political, economic, and structural problem rooted in complex historical and cultural processes and produced and stabilized through a number of psychological complexities" (Stanfield 1991). Most notably, the mass institution of slave labor via the transatlantic slave trade has trickle-down effects prevalent in the present day. Slave labor, after over 400 years, was only condemned by the law in 1865, following the passage of the 13th Amendment. After the abolition of slavery, the

ongoing fight for racial justice persisted as Jim Crow laws systematically disenfranchised Black

Americans by establishing a racial hierarchy in which disobedience to the discriminatory order

was punishable by law. Even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, sociopolitical

inequities persist. General examples of modern institutional racism include racial discrimination

in the housing sector despite the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 (Quillian and Lee

2020); republican legislators and governors intentionally and systematically blocking minorities

from the polls (Anderson 2018); and unfair policing strategies such as racial profiling that lead to

disproportionate minority incarceration rates (Welch 2007). As demonstrated, although

legislation has been enacted to safeguard the rights of minority groups, institutional disparities

remain; the deep-rooted integration of racism into the foundational structures of American

society has resulted in institutions being inextricably tied with discrimination.[3]

Figure 1: *Statutes with Bills Against CRT in K-12 Schools*
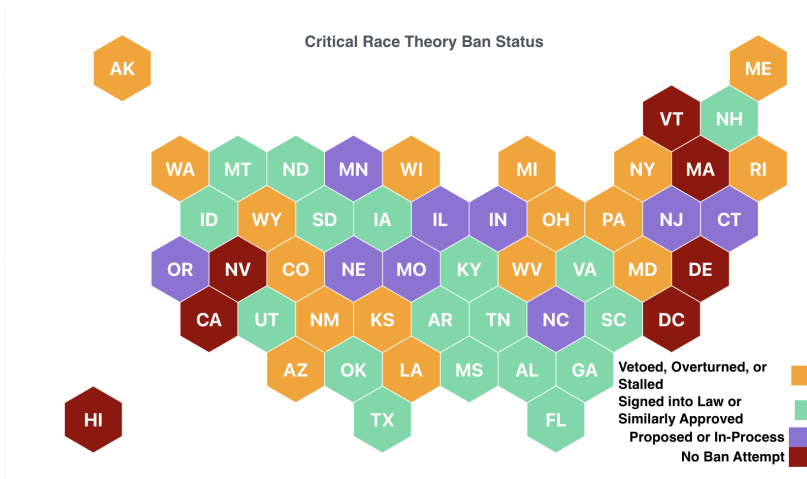
From World Population Review. (n.d.). Critical Race Theory Ban States. World Population Review.

https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/critical-race-theory-ban-states

   Before the emergence of laws that banned CRT, the theory was generally taught in

college or graduate-level classes and not in public schools, as many political figures argue

(Postel 2022). The framework is advanced in nature and requires critical thought to understand its tenets without making broad assumptions, such as those discussed in the S. Res 246 and other anti-CRT bills.

The field of CRT is relatively new and has primarily focused on examining its role in shaping attitudes toward diversity and inclusion. CRT asserts that racism is a structural issue rather than an individual one, aiming to amplify the often overlooked experiences of marginalized groups. This perspective extends to political policies, such as affirmative action, which are proposed to bring visibility to the struggles and barriers faced by marginalized groups. Given the shared goals between CRT, PRBPs and the broader societal polarization surrounding political policies promoting diversity and inclusion, it is reasonable to suggest a potential relationship between CRT and individuals' dispositions toward these policies. This study aims to explore and understand this potential connection, shedding light on the influence of CRT on political attitudes in the context of diversity and inclusion.

However, existing literature falls short of directly exploring this relationship and understanding the underlying mechanisms that contribute to it. This research gap serves as the motivation for this study, which aims to fill this void in knowledge. Specifically, this study seeks to answer two primary questions: 1) What is the relationship between exposure to CRT and dispositions towards PRBPs? 2) What are the mechanisms that facilitate this relationship? Given that nationwide decisions are being made based on the belief that CRT is a form of ideological indoctrination, there is a pressing need for more focused research on its direct effects and the mechanisms through which these effects might shape policy dispositions.[4] In the following sections, the existing literature on CRT, diversity, education, and empathy will be reviewed to assess the efficacy of CRT in promoting diversity education and its impact on educational

settings. Subsequently, a mixed-methods experiment will be conducted to explore how white students engage with CRT from both an educational and opinion-based perspective. The results will illuminate how CRT affects white students, including its potential to change their levels of Interracial Empathy or support for PRBPs. Finally, an empirical analysis of the participants' responses will be conducted to identify any discernible trends. Through this investigation, an attempt will be made to either validate or challenge the concerns raised by conservative leaders, thereby offering a more concrete basis for policymaking in education.

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on four key areas of scholarship: CRT, diversity, education, and empathy. The first section discusses previous studies of CRT. The next section investigates the general association between education and the promotion of liberal views. Moving forward, the focus shifts to the role of empathy in shaping liberal views, delving into the connections between emotional intelligence and political attitudes. The fourth section examines how exposure to diversity influences policy attitudes, offering insights into the broader implications for political views. Finally, the literature review assesses the effectiveness of CRT in promoting diversity education, exploring its impact on educational settings. This organizational structure guides the exploration of literature across these key thematic areas, providing a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms involved in the potential relationship between CRT education and attitudes toward PRBPs. By integrating findings from these interdisciplinary fields, this review aims to establish an evidence-based foundation for debates surrounding the integration of CRT in educational settings and its potential implications for political socialization.

The Study of Critical Race Theory

CRT emerged as a legal framework in the mid-1970s (Ladson-Billings 1998). Through the process of legal scholars delving into the persistence of racism despite the passage of civil rights legislation, CRT then began to integrate into education fields in 1995 (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Although emerging in the mid-1970s, CRT is still considered relatively new; CRT's recognition has been expanding in the 21st century which is perceived as advantageous for people of color, especially given the contentious history of race relations in the United States. (Hartlep, 2009). Throughout the years that CRT has been developed, key tenants have emerged as core aspects of the framework:

1. Intersectionality: The recognition that race is an identity that interacts and intersects with other social identities; these interactions shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw 1991).

2. Structural Racism: Racism is embedded within societal institutions, laws, policies, and practices, rather than solely being the result of individual prejudice or bias (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995).

3. Social Construction of Race: Race is not a natural or inherent category but rather a socially constructed concept that is used to justify and maintain power disparities between racial groups (Mills and Unsworth 2018).

4. Critique of Whiteness as Normative: Challenging the normalization of whiteness as the default or "normal" identity, which reinforces the marginalization of non-white individuals and communities (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995).

López (2003) further asserts that the premise of CRT is to "critically interrogate how the law reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society in particular for individuals of lower social

classes and persons of color" (Lopez 2003). Closson (2010) explains how CRT is a critique of racial reform efforts; however, the blend of strategy, research methodology, and foundational principles that CRT employs makes it challenging to grasp fully. Moreover, CRT views race as a social construct and scholars often intermix race and ethnicity, moving away from the traditional Black-White binary prevalent in American racial discussions – this blending has led to confusion about what CRT is and why it was created (Closson 2010). Now, over a decade after Closson's work, this confusion surrounding CRT has permeated American politics, with CRT being inaccurately defined and contextualized by influential political figures.

Education and Increased Liberal Views

The relationship between education and political attitudes has long been investigated by political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists alike. In the field of education, scholars widely recognize a causal relationship between higher education levels and increased liberal views. Ralph Scott's study, *Does university make you more liberal?* (2022), reveals that college education reduces authoritarianism and racial prejudice while increasing economic right-wing attitudes. Similarly, David L. Weakliem's research, *The Effects of Education on Political Opinions* (2002), demonstrates that education is associated with lower confidence in institutions. These findings are prevalent in this research study for two reasons. The first is that both studies suggest that higher education levels promote fundamental understandings that the framework of CRT seeks to teach. In this light, it is reasonable to suggest that CRT might be able to foster the same outcome–increased liberal views and therefore increased support for PRBPs. These studies did not delve into the mechanisms by which education liberalizes, which is another factor this study seeks to address.

In his work, *Liberalism in Education*, Winston C. Thompson delves into the impact of liberalism on contemporary dialogues within the education field. Thompson examines how liberalism functions as a guiding ethos across societal institutions, influencing debates surrounding educational structures and responsibilities (Thompson 2017). Notably, he underscores the intricate connection between liberalism and education, with a specific emphasis on principles such as equality and liberty. Thompson found that "liberalism's focus on questions of equality dominates discussions of education" (Thompson 2017). Despite the study asserting that liberalism aligns with prevalent lay perceptions of the value of education, it falls short in directly addressing or investigating the specific factors within the confluence of educational and liberal values that precipitate a transformation in ideology or worldview. Elizabeth Simon's study, *Demystifying the link between higher education and liberal values* (2022), further supports the idea that educational attainment is linked to liberal socio-political attitudes. However, Simon acknowledges the limited understanding of the causal relationship between education and liberal views, citing methodological challenges in assessing education's causal effect on political outcomes (Simon 2022). Her research reveals that college graduates tend to embrace liberal values such as environmental friendliness and gender egalitarianism more prominently than non-college graduates; significantly, an exception to this trend is observed in economic attitudes, where graduates typically adopt a more conservative stance (Simon 2022). In accordance, Paula Surridge, in *Education and Liberalism: Pursuing the Link* (2016), recognizes the "well-established link between 'liberal' social values and education" but also highlights the inadequacy of researching the underlying mechanisms; Surridge suggests that the "most likely mechanism that links education with liberalism is socialization" (Surridge 2016). Although

Surridge's work suggested that education liberalizes via a socialization model, the mechanisms by which this takes place were not pinpointed.

Carla Norloff explores the impact of education on voting preferences, examining whether it leads individuals to support more liberal or conservative candidates. Like other studies, she posits a correlation towards liberalism among those who are higher educated. While her study recognizes the correlation, Norrlof expresses limited interest in exploring the underlying mechanisms, stating, "what accounts for that correlation is less apparent" (Norrlof 2019). Although Norrlof acknowledges that higher education fosters critical thinking, challenges stereotypes, and promotes tolerance towards social differences, similar to other studies, it does not delve into the specific aspects or themes within education that may facilitate this shift towards critical thinking and encourage tolerance.

A study by Brianne Hastie investigates the mechanisms by which education might play a role in political socialization. In *Higher Education and Sociopolitical Orientation: The Role of Social Influence in the Liberalisation of Students* (2007), she found that both self-selection and socialization play a role in the liberalization of students as they get more educated (Hastie 2007). The evidence points to both "informational and normative socialization influences, from peers, faculty, and course content" (Hastie 2007). However, as acknowledged by Hastie, unpacking the relative contributions of each factor is difficult and in need of further investigation to pinpoint. So, while the current body of literature consistently supports the idea that education promotes liberal moral values, including principles such as equality, liberty, and tolerance, the mechanisms underlying this relationship lack comprehensive research.

Mayrl and Uecker (2011) conducted a study exploring how education contributes to the liberalization of students within the context of religious beliefs. They identified seven

dimensions of liberalization, primarily focusing on social effects. The study suggests that higher education plays a role in liberalizing students' beliefs by exposing them to religious diversity, fostering cognitive development, and creating cognitive dissonance (Mayrl and Uecker, 2011). Their findings indicate that college students, compared to their non-student counterparts, may undergo changes in various dimensions, such as becoming more unorthodox, naturalistic, uncertain about their faith, reserved, inclusive, individualistic, and independent (Mayrl and Uecker, 2011). Essentially, exposure to diverse perspectives and a wide range of ideas is proposed to directly influence a student's willingness to question institutions and consider the collective good rather than remaining rooted in their individual perspective, particularly in the realm of religious beliefs. Similarly, CRT, akin to education in a broader sense, aims to disrupt notions of America's social structure and expose perspectives that are often obscured. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that just as education liberalizes due to fostering a greater understanding of diverse perspectives, CRT might be able to produce the same effects by evoking a sense of empathy or shared responsibility for the conditions of the marginalized.

The aforementioned studies assert a connection between education and liberal views, values, and ideals. However, these studies have not thoroughly explored the underlying mechanisms driving this change; the specific curriculum choices, methods, and approaches to teaching, or the mere act of attending school as the causal factors remain unknown. It is likely that many mechanisms are working in conjunction with one another to create this correlation. A recurring theme in many previous studies is an enhanced awareness of others' perspectives and the acknowledgment of their struggles. It is reasonable to propose that increased awareness in these areas might generate a sense of empathy or trigger a shared responsibility among students, thereby liberalizing them and enhancing their inclination to promote the collective good rather

than adhering strictly to individualistic perspectives. Further research is essential to unveil how shifts in political behavior unfold as individuals become more educated.

Empathy and Its Relationship to Liberal Views:

In light of the study's focus on empathy as a potential mechanism for fostering greater support for PRBPs, an exploration of relevant scholarship on the topic of empathy was undertaken. Political psychologists have recently shown a growing interest in exploring the relationship between empathy and various political ideologies. Several studies suggest a positive correlation between empathy and liberal values. The study *Are Liberals and Conservatives Equally Motivated to Feel Empathy Toward Others?* (2018) delved into this connection by assessing the extent to which liberals and conservatives desire to feel empathy, actually experience it, and their willingness to assist others. The study concluded that liberals express a stronger desire for and experience more empathy than conservatives, and they are generally more willing to help others (Hasson et al. 2018). Similarly, Mary E. Hylton's research on empathy reveals a correlation between social empathy and higher rates of civic engagement, suggesting that empathy fosters people's involvement in social change processes (Hylton 2018).[5] By emphasizing empathy as a foundation for democratic decision-making, she implies that empathy promotes policy choices that prioritize the well-being of all rather than being driven by self-interest. This causal impact can be extended to CRT as CRT presents students with an opportunity to develop Interracial Empathy which increases their likelihood to advocate for PRBPs because said policies encourage a more inclusive and equitable society. CRT, although not inherently a form of political socialization, carries the potential to transmit political values. Its fundamental principles, including recognizing race as a social construct, examining systemic racism and power structures, and acknowledging intersectionality, can plausibly evoke Interracial

Empathy and lead to more liberal views. Stephen G. Morris, in his work on empathy and the Liberal-Conservative political divide in the U.S., explains that empathy plays a role in shaping differing political attitudes. Higher education, through cognitive development and the learning to take the perspective of others, can increase empathy among students, thereby liberalizing moral sensibilities (Morris 2021). Current scholarship on empathy posits that it promotes liberal values but whether these liberal values transmit to policy choices remains unknown–this is what this research study to answer.

McAdams et al. (2008) discovered that "political liberalism is often associated with empathic feeling and greater openness, both of which are characteristics connected with [a] greater understanding of others" (McAdams et al., 2008). Consistent with this study, Dani Cosme, Chrissy Pepino, and Brandon Brown establish a connection between empathy and open-mindedness in their work *Empathy, Open-mindedness, and Political Ideology: Conservative and Liberal Trends* (2014). They argue that, as both have been identified as factors contributing to the multicultural personality, it is likely that they are related. Their study involved sixty students at Chapman University who took a survey titled "Political Affiliation, Empathy, Open-Mindedness, and Voting Behavior". The survey assessed their open-mindedness as well as their empathy. Participants were asked to vote to gauge their voting behavior, and the results showed not only a correlation between empathy and open-mindedness but also a significant difference in open-mindedness found between conservatives and liberals: more open-minded students voted more liberally, while less open-minded students voted more conservatively (Cosme et al.). As this study demonstrated a correlation between empathy/open-mindedness and liberal voting behavior, it is reasonable to propose a connection between CRT, a framework that

promotes open-mindedness/empathy, and the promotion of more liberal voting behavior/policy dispositions. This is the precise connection that this study seeks to clarify.

Exposure to Diversity and Policy Attitudes:

There is also a growing scholarly interest in understanding how mere exposure to diversity affects attitudes toward policies. Academic scholarship on exposure to diversity typically refers to the amount of contact an individual has with others from different races and cultures. However, CRT offers students a framework that provides a more historically informed understanding of marginalized experiences. While this may not always take the form of direct exposure to diverse people, CRT can reasonably increase an individual's exposure to the *experiences* of diverse people. However, existing studies on the matter have excluded CRT as a mechanism for promoting diversity/inclusion. The focus has been primarily on passive diversity such as the representation of minority groups in the student body or administration. For instance, in *Race, Representation, and Policy Attitudes in U.S. Public Schools,* Keiser, Haider-Markel, and Darolia found that "political ideology and party identification play significant roles in shaping policy attitudes toward education, but even after controlling for these factors, the effects of race and representation remain significant" (Keiser et al. 2017 p. 559). These studies are peripheral to but do not directly address this study's curiosity as they have not examined how exposure to CRT might impact political attitudes or interact with other factors, such as political ideology and party identification. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the specific impact of CRT on policy attitudes and to better understand the complexities of the relationship between CRT exposure and political attitudes at large.

The Long-Run Effects of School Racial Diversity on Political Identity (2021) discusses how early life experiences, such as exposure to diversity, might affect one's political attitudes. To

uncover this, they surveyed 35,757 students—48% were Black, 43% were White, and 5% were Hispanic. According to the research, 'a 10 percentage point increase in the share of minorities in a White student's assigned school decreased their likelihood of registering as a Republican by 2 percentage points (12 percent)' (Billings et al.,). Here, exposure to diversity, specifically racial diversity, is associated with an increased likelihood of adopting a more liberal political ideology. While this study observed a correlation between increased diversity and more liberal political behavior, it focused solely on diversity through the lens of varied racial presence. CRT, an ideology rather than a demographic makeup, aims to impart the perspectives of those in racial minorities. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that although CRT teachings are not synonymous with a diverse classroom, some effects might be similar. CRT could reasonably promote values and attitudes akin to those fostered by racial demographic diversity, thereby increasing liberal attitudes and positive sentiments toward PRBPs.

A study by Linda Sax touches on a connection between diversity and political attitudes but in the context of gender rather than race. In *Gender Matters: The Variable Effect of Gender on the Student Experience* (2009), Sax contends that a heightened sense of social and personal responsibility may arise from engaging with diversity in college, expanding awareness of various perspectives and individuals from historically marginalized groups. This personal orientation could potentially boost motivation not only for increased social and political activism but also for the adoption of political views emphasizing elements of liberalism.

CRT Education and its Influence on Student Development

In the field of education, scholars largely investigate the use of CRT as a curriculum choice and its influence on student development. In *Utilizing Critical Race Theory to Examine Race/Ethnicity, Racism, and Power in Student Development Theory and Research,* Ebila

Hernández conducted a study utilizing CRT to examine how students understand race, ethnicity, racism, and power. Hernández analyzed existing literature on student development, intersectionality, and power and privilege through a CRT lens and found that CRT "provides students with the tools to explore, analyze, and critique multiple and complex intersections of oppression and privilege and, subsequently, to develop critical consciousness" (Hernández 2013 p. 219). However, the study was limited in scope and did not collect new data or conduct original empirical research. Furthermore, while there was a connection between CRT and the development of critical consciousness, there were no measures to see how this critical consciousness might affect a student's disposition towards PRBPs. Similarly, in *Critical Race Theory: A Transformational Model For Teaching Diversity,* Larry Ortiz and Jayshree Jani presented CRT as "a paradigm to critique and enhance the manner in which the subject of diversity is conceptualized and implemented in social work curricula" (Ortiz and Jani 2010). Focusing on social work education, their study addressed the challenges faced by social work programs in delivering effective diversity education. They viewed CRT as a means to rectify these challenges, highlighting its emphasis on intersectionality and structural change to benefit the marginalized. According to Ortiz and Jani (2010), CRT effectively teaches diversity in a manner that can enhance the practice of social work. Their study centered on the alignment of CRT principles with a better understanding of diversity and its importance. However, it lacked exploration into the mechanisms or broader effects of this enhanced understanding of diversity.

While the research on CRT and its impact on student development is still in its infancy, other studies have also found a positive correlation between exposure to CRT and the development of critical thinking skills and social justice-oriented attitudes. For example, in *Practical Application of Critical Race Theory: A Social Justice Course Design,* Rose M. Pulliam

recognizes CRT as an important tool for promoting social justice and equity through education; she contends that "a social justice model informed by CRT provides a comprehensive approach to teaching diversity and social justice" (Pulliam 2013). Similarly; *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction* by Delgado and Stefancic asserts that CRT provides essential knowledge to whites, helping them understand and conceptualize the nonwhite experience, which is otherwise challenging (Delgado and Stefancic 2001) In other words, CRT can effectively convey to whites what it's like to be a person of color more effectively than other approaches to diversity education. Nevertheless, researchers have not adequately studied the impact that CRT has on students as the framework is relatively new to the classroom. As a result, the overwhelming majority of studies about CRT education relate to developing self-autonomy while excluding the plausible potential implications this might have on policy attitudes.

The study *Unmasking, Exposing, and Confronting: Critical Race Theory, Tribal Critical Race Theory, and Multicultural Education* by Jeanette Haynes Writer argues that CRT offers "the possibility of unmasking, exposing, and confronting continued colonization within educational contexts and societal structures" (Haynes 2008). Consistent with the aforementioned studies, Writer recognizes CRT as a vehicle for breaking down white supremacist ideologies, particularly in the context of the indigenous struggle. She contends that an educational benefit of CRT is giving voice to people of color and enabling the contestation and reshaping of the dominant and often oppressive narrative (Haynes 2008). Although Haynes discusses CRT as a tool for diversity education, she does not explore the implications of this socialization on policy dispositions, nor does she delve into the mechanisms through which CRT facilitates the deconstruction of the dominant narrative.

In *Blinded by the White: Social Studies and Raceless Pedagogies,* Prentice T. Chandler conducted a study utilizing qualitative case studies of white male American History teachers in North Alabama. Her findings revealed that the omission of CRT in their courses led these teachers to reinforce and sustain white supremacy among students. This consequence arose from the wrongful treatment of race as an 'invisible' part of the curriculum (Chandler 2009). Specifically, in contrast to the principles of CRT, the studied classes adopted a liberal approach to teaching about race and racism, asserting a belief in constant gradual improvement.[6] This approach placed the persistence of racism on individuals rather than institutions (Chandler 2009). From a CRT perspective, the curriculum prioritized and emphasized white history while downplaying the history of others—a counterproductive approach to effective diversity education. In essence, this study supports CRT as a method of diversity education by demonstrating how its absence produces the opposite effect: a white-dominant historical narrative reinforces white supremacist ideology.

While scholars have examined the relationship between diversity education and policy attitudes, CRT has been recognized as a means to promote diversity in higher education. Because CRT explores how our laws and legal systems are shaped by white supremacy, it can provide a deeper understanding of what it means to facilitate a diverse and equitable environment in our current day. However, literature in this field excludes studies or findings on CRT's direct relationship to attitudes on political policies regarding diversity and inclusion, a valuable conclusion to be found. As Wood and Harris contend, "Critical Race Theory is a powerful model for understanding race and racism, and it provides an effective framework for promoting diversity in higher education by examining how race, power, and privilege intersect to shape the experiences of individuals and groups in society" (Wood and Harris 2018 p. 290). However,

while the existing literature emphasizes the importance of using CRT to promote diversity, it has largely overlooked the direct relationship between exposure to CRT and attitudes toward political policies–particularly those regarding diversity and inclusion. For instance, while Keiser, Haider-Markel, and Darolia found that political ideology and party identification play significant roles in shaping policy attitudes toward education, they did not examine how exposure to CRT might impact political attitudes or interact with other factors which is the focus of my intended study.

Upon thorough examination of the aforementioned studies, it becomes evident that there exists a significant gap in scholarly research that directly explores the relationship between CRT and political attitudes while considering other demographic factors. Furthermore, an additional gap exists in terms of understanding the underlying mechanisms that drive these ideological shifts. Despite CRT being a relatively new concept within the field of political science, a preliminary evaluation of the existing literature indicates its prominence and the need for further investigation. Therefore, the central question to be addressed is whether exposure to CRT directly influences individuals' policy dispositions and if so how. The current body of literature indicates a potential causal chain where CRT has a positive impact on diversity attitudes, which in turn positively influences empathy, and ultimately leads to greater support for liberal policies.[7] Building upon this understanding, the proposed study aims to investigate this causal chain within the context of college students, a group of emerging voters who possess the cognitive ability to engage with complex concepts such as CRT. By addressing the existing gaps in knowledge, this research endeavors to enhance our comprehensive understanding of how CRT shapes political beliefs and attitudes.

Contemporary Relevance

To comprehend this study, it is essential to have a foundational understanding of both contemporary politics and the historical context leading up to the present. The period between the end of the Jim Crow era in 1877 and the mid-1960s was characterized by legal segregation in the United States, prompting a widespread desire for change. This desire manifested through numerous political demonstrations by advocates and allies alike. Notably, figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks played pivotal roles in advocating for transformation, openly expressing their aspirations for a more equitable and inclusive United States.

For example, Martin Luther King Jr. led the March to Selma, which attracted as many as 25,000 people in solidarity with the Civil Rights movement, aiming to bring an end to segregation (Wallenfeldt 2023). The Selma march in 1965 was just one of many demonstrations reflecting Americans' yearning for a more inclusive and equitable society. Transitioning to the present day, there has been a distinctive shift in public discourse.

While in the 1960s, the focus was on advocating for the voice of the oppressed, and it was a dominant narrative in activism, there is now a sense that the majority, particularly white America, perceives itself as oppressed. In response to this perceived oppression, there is a growing popularity of anti-diversity rhetoric. Notably, the election of leaders like Donald J. Trump in 2016, who gained popularity through separationist rhetoric, marked a discernible shift in the discourse surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the contemporary landscape, there is a greater willingness among people to openly express their skepticism or disbelief in diversity and equity practices. A prevailing voice against diversity has become more prominent

than in previous years, with the impact of leaders like Trump influencing and amplifying this shift.

Since 2020, CRT has become a focal point of heated debate in the United States, particularly concerning its incorporation into school curricula. This has led to significant political mobilization aimed at dismantling both CRT and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives in higher education. Conservative political leaders, predominantly white, have vehemently advocated for the removal of CRT. They argue that it promotes liberal indoctrination and distorts the understanding of race relations by assigning blame to white students. For instance, Representative Ralph Norman, R-S.C., expressed his belief that "we're in a cultural warfare today" and stated, "Critical Race Theory asserts that people with white skin are inherently racist, not because of their actions, words, or what they actually believe in their heart — but by virtue of the color of their skin" (Sprunt 2021). Such rhetoric from influential leaders has, on a national level, misconstrued what CRT represents. It reflects a campaign to dismantle the framework without a comprehensive investigation into its true nature and principles.

On the other hand, many communities of color appreciate CRT as a framework that candidly articulates their lived experiences in America without omitting the aspects (such as inequities and racial violence) that may be uncomfortable to confront. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a prominent scholar and activist, explained to ABC News, "the law has played a substantially significant role in establishing what race and racism actually are in American society." She continued, emphasizing, "we can never forget that slavery was perfectly legal and constitutionally protected. Law has played a mixed role in our history. It has enslaved us. It has justified disenfranchising us. It has justified segregating us. It has justified marginalizing us,

criminalizing us" (Alfoncesca 2023). So, to some CRT breaks down the truth of American history while to others, it oppresses them by assigning some sort of blame.

Irrespective of these debates, it is important to ground oneself in the fact that CRT's primary focus as an academic framework lies in analyzing institutional patterns and power dynamics and not in assigning individual culpability. CRT seeks to bring to light the often hidden yet ubiquitous racialization of American institutions. So, while nationwide decisions are being made based on the belief that CRT has a covert political agenda, this study serves as focused research on CRTs direct effects and the mechanisms through which these effects might shape policy dispositions. Through this investigation, the concern of conservative leaders will either be validated or challenged, providing a more concrete basis on which to create policies on education.

Theory/Hypotheses

Increased exposure to the educational framework of CRT (independent variable) is hypothesized to be associated with greater support for PRBPs (dependent variable). This hypothesis posits two sub-claims. The first sub claim states that the independent variable, exposure to CRT, is positively associated with the process variable of increased levels of Interracial Empathy. The second sub-claim is that higher levels of Interracial Empathy are positively associated with stronger support for PRBPs. It is hypothesized that higher levels of exposure to CRT will lead to a greater understanding of institutional racial disparities, which serves as an intermediary process variable. This increased understanding will then contribute to the development of Interracial Empathy among participants. Subsequently, the presence of Interracial Empathy will foster solidarity and result in increased support for PRBPs, which is the dependent variable of interest. In other words, as individuals are exposed to more CRT content,

they are more likely to develop a deeper understanding and empathy towards individuals from different racial backgrounds. This, in turn, influences their level of support for policies aimed at addressing racial inequalities.

Methods

Research Design

This study is an experimental process of controlled comparison and theory building aimed at comparing the causal process of exposure to CRT to Interracial Empathy to positive dispositions towards PRBPs. The critical differences, or control variables were isolated and analyzed as well. The research design primarily consisted of 3 parts: the pre-treatment interview, CRT exposure, and the post-treatment interview. The research findings were derived from the pre-treatment interview, which assessed their Interracial Empathy levels and PRBPs dispositions, and the post-treatment interview, which assessed the same post-treatment. The experiment was conducted by the PI and four research assistants. Research assistants were hired to assist with the project CITI trained. Furthermore, research assistants were trained to conduct interviews, transcribe the interview recordings, and aid in recruitment measures.

Striving to obtain a representative sample of white students was important in allowing the study to capture variations in experiences, perspectives, and attitudes – thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of how CRT influences their political beliefs. The effort to recruit a diverse range of participants aimed to enhance the validity and generalizability of the study's findings within this specific population.[8]

Prior to the pre-treatment interview, a questionnaire was administered to 40 of UCLA's white students enrolled for the 2023-24 academic year; the group self-volunteered in response to

survey promotion. The survey was promoted via flyering on campus, sending promotional messages in class GroupMe chats, and through word of mouth. Recruitment aimed to secure a representative sample. Obtaining a representative sample of white students was an important goal, as the study could capture variations in experiences, perspectives, and attitudes, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how CRT influences their political beliefs. The questionnaire collected important demographic information, including age, grade, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, gender, and major. Additionally, participants were asked to rate their previous exposure to CRT on a Likert scale.[9] Ensuring a representative sample of white students contributed to the validity and generalizability of the study's findings within this specific population.

The interview portion took place via Zoom. Participants were instructed to keep their cameras off and situate themselves in a private location. This approach aims to promote honesty and foster higher levels of free speech among participants. By removing the pressure of being observed or having their words associated with their physical identity, participants may feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions freely. Oral consent was read to each participant, confirming their willingness to participate as well as to be recorded. The pre-treatment interview gauges participants' Interracial Empathy levels using a modified version of Hogan's empathy scale.[10] Additionally, their dispositions on PRBPs were assessed via Likert scale ratings, using policies from the CMPS Survey 2020. Participants were asked to provide explanations for all Likert responses. Quantitative data from Likert scale responses underwent numerical coding and statistical analysis, while qualitative data from interview transcripts was thematically analyzed using qualitative content analysis, identifying themes and patterns.

The post-treatment interview was identical to the pre-treatment interview, and the analysis compared the differences in responses. The study utilized a treatment and control group design. In the treatment group, participants watched a 6-minute video introducing CRT through academic definitions and examples. In contrast, the control group watched a 6-minute video presenting popular media opinions about CRT, including incorrect definitions based on personal opinions rather than academic foundations.

Throughout this paper, RQ#a represents the question pre-treatment while RQ#b represents the identical question post-treatment. The participants were asked the following questions:

Outside Variable Assessment:

RQ1: With 1 being strongly Republican and 5 being strongly Democratic, where would you place your political affiliation? Why did you place yourself there?

RQ2: Please estimate your family's annual income using the following options.

- *1: <$20,000*
- *2: $20,000 - $40,000*
- *3: $40,000 - $60,000*
- *4: $60,000 - $100,000*
- *5: >$100,000*

RQ3: Have you ever been exposed to Critical Race Theory before this interview? If so, how were you first exposed? And by whom?

RQ4: How do you define Critical Race Theory in your own words? How does it make you feel?

Interracial Empathy Assessment: *For the following statements, rate them, and then provide a brief explanation for your rating. The answer scale is from 1-5, 1 meaning the statement does not describe you very well, 5 meaning the statement describes you very well.*

*RQ5: Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for people from marginalized racial groups when they are having problems. Why did you place yourself there? **[scored inversely]***

RQ6: I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play, and I don't often get completely caught up in it. Why did you place yourself there? **[scored inversely]**

RQ7: Before criticizing somebody from a marginalized identity, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place. Why did you place yourself there?

PRBP Disposition Assessment: *Rate your level of support for 3 policies related to racial equity. Please use the provided scale and provide a brief explanation for each rating.*

Strongly support 1
Support 2
Somewhat support 3
Somewhat oppose 4
Oppose..5
Strongly oppose 6

RQ8: Reparations to Black Americans to address inequities created by generations of racism. Why did you place yourself there?

RQ9: Developing a federal standard in education, ensuring that kindergarten through high school students learn more about racial inequality and racism. Why did you place yourself there?

RQ10: Ensuring affirmative action in jobs and universities so that everyone can benefit from a diverse school or workplace. Why did you place yourself there?

Treatment Manipulation Assessment:
RQ11: Can you describe the video that you just watched?

RQ12: what are your immediate reactions and feelings?

RQ13: To what extent do you believe this video was valuable/credible?

After each interview, the Zoom recordings were transcribed. This approach aimed to assess the impact of exposure to different perspectives on participants' understanding and perceptions of CRT. Participants were randomly assigned to either the treatment group and exposed to educational CRT materials, or the control group, exposed to opinion-based CRT materials. This design allowed for a comparison between the groups and helped control for

confounding variables. These procedures aimed to generate valid and replicable empirical results. Validity was ensured through careful data collection and analysis, drawing from established measurement tools such as Likert scales and Hogan's empathy scale. Likert scales and Hogan's empathy scale provide standardized measures for assessing attitudes and empathy levels. The chosen methods are well-suited for addressing the research questions, allowing a comprehensive exploration of the relationships between CRT exposure, Interracial Empathy, and support for PRBPs.

Concept Specification and Operationalization

This study focuses on CRT as the primary independent variable. CRT is an academic framework that examines how race intersects with systems of power, privilege, and oppression to perpetuate racial inequality in society. To operationalize CRT, two 6-minute videos were created. The first video, which serves as the educational treatment, provides an exploration of CRT as an academic framework. It delves into its origins, purpose, and the rationale behind its advocacy. In contrast, the second video, serving as the opinion treatment, presents opinion-based viewpoints on CRT frequently depicted in the media. These perspectives tend to lean more conservative and often oppose CRT based on misinformation. Each video features four speakers, including academics, legal experts, and parents, maintaining a comparable structure throughout. The purpose of creating these two distinct videos is to compare reactions to the two treatments and evaluate how participants respond to a comprehensive explanation of CRT versus a limited portrayal often seen in media sound bites. This comparison aims to assess participants' reactions to different levels of information and perspectives on CRT.

Dispositions towards PRBPs serve as the dependent variable in this study. PRBPs refer to policies that aim to address racial inequalities and promote social justice by actively considering

race as a factor in decision-making. To measure participants' dispositions, identical interviews were conducted before and after CRT exposure. A Likert scale was used to rank support for PRBPs, along with explanations for their answers. This study took from policies included in the Collaborative Multiracial Post-election Survey (CMPS) 2020, such as: promoting reparations for Black Americans, establishing a federal standard in education to address racial inequality and diversity, and ensuring affirmative action in jobs and universities for both People of Color and a diverse school/work environment.

Interracial Empathy is the process variable in this study, representing the ability to understand the perspectives of individuals from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. To measure Interracial Empathy, a modified version of Hogan's empathy scale was used. Participants rated their agreement with specific statements using a Likert scale and provided explanations for their ratings. By using Hogan's empathy scale and assessing participants' agreement on the Likert scale, the study aimed to capture and measure their level of Interracial Empathy.

Other causal variables considered in this study encompass demographic factors, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, previous exposure to CRT, and political affiliation. By accounting for and analyzing their influence, the study gained a better understanding of the specific impact of CRT exposure on political dispositions while controlling for other factors that may shape participants' attitudes and beliefs. To operationalize these concepts, participants completed a questionnaire with information about their gender, socioeconomic status, previous exposure to CRT, and political affiliation prior to the interview. By collecting specific data on these variables, the study aimed to account for their potential impact on participants' dispositions towards PRBPs. Additionally, these other causal variables served as control variables, enabling

an examination of potential differences in participants' dispositions towards PRBPs based on these variables while maintaining consistent CRT exposure.

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative analysis was conducted, employing a mixed methods approach. Eight interviews were conducted, and each was analyzed as a case; the unit of analysis for this study is each individual participant. Out of the eight participants, 50% are male, 37.5% are female, and 12.5% identify as non-binary; the average age of the sample is approximately 19.5 years old; 50%, are majoring in social sciences, while 25% are majoring in sciences and another 25% are majoring in interdisciplinary fields. There is no single major shared by multiple participants, indicating a diverse range. The majority of participants, accounting for 62.5%, come from families with an annual income greater than $100,000. 25% of participants reported an income range of $60,000-$100,000, 12.5% reported an income range of $40,000-$60,000, and one participant, or 12.5%, reported an income of less than $20,000. Regarding political affiliation, 37.5% of participants identify as leaning Democratic, while the remaining 62.5% indicate a moderate stance.

New data was gathered for this research. Participants volunteered, selected from within UCLA, specifically targeting white students. The research findings were derived from two main sources of data: the pre-interview questionnaire and the interview results. The questionnaire collected quantitative data that was analyzed statistically. The interviews provided qualitative data, allowing participants to share their perspectives in a conversational and open-ended format. The interview transcripts were the primary source of qualitative data, analyzed thematically to identify themes and patterns. This mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, provided a comprehensive exploration of the relationships being investigated.

Table 1: *Table of Participants*

Name (pronouns)	Treatment	Age	College Grade Level	Major	Family Income Estimate	Political Affiliation 1((very conservative) - 5 (very liberal)	Previous Exposure to CRT 1 (novice) - 5 (expert)	Race
Dylan Thompson (he/him)	Education	19	2nd	Climate Science	>$100,000	5	3	White
Ethan Anderson (he/him)	Education	21	4th	Mathematics and Arabic	$60,000-$100,000	5	2	White
Emma Gordon (she/her)	Education	20	3rd	Anthropology	>$100,000	5	3	White
Maya Evans (she/her)	Education	19	2nd	Biology	<$20,000	3	3	White
Daniel Miller (he/him)	Opinion	18	1st	Political Science and History	>$100,000	3	3	White
Ryan Ogden (he/him)	Opinion	18	1st	Global Jazz Studies	>$100,000	4	3	White
Charlotte Bell (they/she)	Opinion	20	3rd	Sociology	$60,000-$100,000	5	3	White
Zoe Bush (she/her)	Opinion	21	Transfer	Communications	$40,000-$60,000	3	3	White

Results: Participant Profiles

Dylan Thompson: Education Treatment

Table 2: *Dylan Thompson Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	Post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	Pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	Post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Dylan Thompson (he/him)	2	5	5	10	10	2,1,2	2,1,2

Dylan Thompson, a 19-year-old second-year student studying Climate Science,

politically affiliates himself as "very liberal" (Thompson 2023). As qualified by this study, he

comes from a family with a high income, estimated to be greater than $100,000. Dylan expressed

that his previous exposure to CRT was neither of expertise nor novice but rather in the middle.

He explained that his previous exposure to CRT was informal, at first via an online "rabbit hole"

as he described, and then being further developed by surrounding himself with different people

in college (Thompson 2023). Given that his introduction to CRT was not in a formal or

educational setting, his description of CRT as a framework was fundamentally accurate.

Although said in non-colloquial terms, he expressed that CRT is analyzing history as it happened

rather than "whitewashing it," as he explained; specifically including how 'racism has [...]

evolved from like an overt political system into [a] kind of subvert and [...] integrated part of the

system'" (Thompson 2023).

Dylan's observance of the educational video was not met with ideological resistance. He

seemed to accept the video as fact and trust that the academics shown, of all races, were credible

and speaking based on fact rather than a political agenda:

> RQ11: "The video was bringing in different, um, different people in academia to explain
> to, you know, the news-watching public about, what critical race theory is, and kind of
> what I got from that is it's [...] a theoretical framework to analyze how to analyze [...]
> systematic racism within, um, you know, the legal system as well as just generally in the
> system" (Thompson 2023).

He expressed that He found the video to be credible as it featured "professors from [...] credible

universities" (Thompson 2023). However, the treatment did not change his immediate feelings

towards CRT despite his expressing that he had a better understanding of the general concept

after watching:

> RQ12: "I understood the general concept before, but I didn't know kind of, like, the work
> where it stemmed from and whatnot. But other than that, I don't think my feelings or
> anything have changed" (Thompson 2023).

Ethan Anderson: Education Treatment

Table 3: *Ethan Anderson Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Ethan Anderson (he/him)	3	5	4	13	12	2,1,2	2,1,1

Ethan Anderson (he/him), a 21-year-old 4th-year, is pursuing a double major in Mathematics and Arabic. His family's income falls within the range of $60,000-$100,000. Politically, he also identifies as very liberal. Contrary to the other participants, Ethan expressed that his previous exposure and understanding of CRT was closer to that of a novice rather than of expertise. He explained that he had rather limited exposure to CRT, expressing how "[he's seen the term in like news articles, but [he's] never really read anything about it" (Anderson 2024). Although he acknowledged that his understanding of CRT was preliminary prior to the interview, he understood that the framework was regarding race and systemic bias:

> RQ4a: "Okay, I have basically no foundation to back this up and I'm very willing to be completely wrong. I think it's an understanding of [...] dynamics between people of different races. I think predominantly in [...] post-colonial settings, specifically with [...] a viewpoint of their systematic biases and powers in play that means you can't just do apples-to-apples comparisons of population. How does it make me feel? It makes me feel, I guess, happy that people are talking about race" (Anderson 2024).

CRT, as he understood it pre-treatment, made him feel "happy" that CRT brings an important discussion to light yet "angry" because it has become "politicized" in the media (Anderson 2024).

Ethan's reaction to the treatment was not one of resistance. based on his responses, he seemed to accept the video's content as fact and trust that the academics and scholars shown were knowledgeable:

> RQ11/12: "The video was interviewing [...] a bunch of scholars, or it was a teacher and I don't know if the university professors or lawyers who were talking about Critical Race Theory [...] My immediate reactions seemed reasonable. It made me feel like I agree with a lot of what those people are saying and essentially I guess I agree with the premise of Critical Race Theory although I'm not sure I have like I pretty sure I don't have the historical knowledge really to back that up if I were pressed incredibly hard on it. Yeah, so I guess there's a feeling of like, oh, I should learn more about this" (Anderson 2024).

Emma Gordon: Education Treatment

Table 4: *Emma Gordon Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Emma Gordon (she/her)	3	5	5	12	11	1,1,2	1,1,1

Emma Gordon is a 20-year-old 3rd-year student majoring in Anthropology. She estimated her family income to be over $100,000 per year and noted that her previous exposure to CRT was neither of expertise or novice, but rather in the middle. Politically, she identifies as very liberal. She explained how she had previous exposure to CRT through sources like CNN, particularly during discussions about inclusion or exclusion in schools. She conveyed an accurate foundational understanding of CRT:

> RQ4a: "I think that CRT, obviously, I do think it's a like a more graduate-level ideal, but it's just recognizing the certain structures that we have in place within our political system and like more widely just like the American system or like every system as a

whole and recognizing that like some structures have been brought up and maintained because of like Uh, ideals of racism" (Gordon 2024).

After being exposed to the education treatment, Emma expressed positive feelings about CRT, viewing it as a valuable framework for understanding systemic racism and historical inequalities:

> RQ12: "I think that it's, uh, really, really great because, um, I'm really sick of seeing a bunch of, like, conservative, um, news outlets kind of, like, spreading a lot of, like, really, really harmful misinformation about what Critical Race Theory is and, like, lying about what is going on in schools, um, like, saying that. showing a spoken word poetry, uh, clip in a school is, uh, teaching their kids that, like, white privilege, like white, like being white is bad. Being white, like, like all white people are racist. Like, that's kind of what I hear a lot with, misinformation of what CRT is. Um, and so I like that the video dismantles that and breaks it down into some true facts" (Gordon 2024).

Maya Evans: Education Treatment

Table 5: *Maya Evans Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Maya Evans (she/her)	3	3	3	5	8	3,2,3	3,2,3

Maya is a 19-year-old 2nd-year student majoring in Biology. Politically, she identifies as moderate. She estimated her family income to be less than $20,000 per year and noted that her previous exposure to CRT was neither of expertise or novice, but rather in the middle. She explained how his previous exposure to CRT was in an educational setting, in one of her sociology classes. She said The topic was introduced by one of her professors specializing in CRT. She displayed a good foundational understanding of what CRT is prior to the interview:

> RQ4a: "I would say Critical Race Theory [...] breaks down how race and racism are all tangled up with [...] laws and institutions. You know, and it's not just about personal bias,

it's about how the whole system is rigged, though, like it digs into how our privilege and all that all that mess play out in different racial groups. As for feelings, I'm just, I don't know. [...] I feel very neutral about it, I would say, but I feel like there's a lot we can do to better. Better. Better are better. Just the whole concept" (Evans 2024).

Maya's reaction to the video differed from the other participants, as she was direct in noting that she did not take everything in it at face value. Maya did not elaborate as to why she did not interpret the content from the video as fact. However, she explained that she considered the video to be an "eye-opener" and that she wasn't very "surprised" by the things said; at the same time, she said it was only "moderately" credible in her opinion (Evans 2024).

Daniel Miller: Opinion Treatment

Table 6: *Daniel Miller Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Daniel Miller (he/him)	3	3	3	7	8	6,1,4	6,1,4

Daniel Miller is an 18-year-old 1st-year student majoring in Political Science and history. Politically, he identifies as moderate. He estimated his family income to be over $100,000 per year and noted that his previous exposure to CRT was neither of expertise or novice, but rather in the middle. He explained how his previous exposure to CRT was in high school:

RQ3a: "[I was first exposed in my] junior year AP U.S. History teacher. Uh, she taught the first third of our course, uh, through a purely Critical Race Theory lens, and then the second third using some of its elements before saying that it didn't give an accurate depiction of post-1965 America, and she abandoned it" (Miller 2023).

As he described, his AP U.S. history teacher taught them CRT, yet expressed her disagreement with the framework as she found it to be inaccurate. Although his first exposure to CRT

incorporated anti-CRT messaging, he had a good foundational understanding of CRT

pre-treatment, describing it as follows:

> RQ4a: "A way of retelling history that puts it through the perspective of looking at how policies and how governments and institutions have been set up to penalize and discriminate against racial minorities. In terms of how it makes me feel, I feel like it's, I would just agree with my junior year teacher, I think that it makes me feel like it's a legitimate way of viewing history to a certain extent, that it does have its shortcomings, but overall I don't feel threatened by it or any of that" (Miller 2023).

Taking the teachings from his former history teacher, Daniel looked at CRT through a critical

lens and took some of it as legitimate while also finding shortcomings. When exposed to the

opinion treatment, he was adamant that he did not find the treatment credible:

> RQ12: "My immediate reaction would be that it's a total fallacy what they're pushing. And it intentionally misrepresents what Critical Race Theory is. And they're talking about Marxism and other collectivist economies and things just to scare people away from it. It just seems to be incredibly misinformed or disinformed. [...] Good source of information on Critical Race Theory because they were talking about critical race during being radical Well, I would consider what they said to be reactionary and that is pretty much the video for what I saw. [...] Credible? Not at all. It was on it's just pure politics and Fox News has their lightning their bias And it was a total reflection of that" (Miller 2023)

Daniel highlighted the misinformation in the video and explained how the misinterpretation of

the CRT as a framework rendered the treatment entirely incredible. Despite his not agreeing with

all aspects of the framework, he was able to identify misinformation versus the intention of the

framework as created by academic and legal scholars.

Ryan Ogden: Opinion Treatment

Table 7: *Ryan Ogden Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Ryan Ogden (he/him)	3	4	5	9	14	1,1,1	1,1,1

Ryan Ogden is an 18-year-old 1st-year student majoring in Global Jazz studies.

Politically, he identifies as liberal-leaning and he estimated his family income to be over

$100,000 per year. As he explained, his previous exposure to CRT was when he first heard that

in certain states, legislators were banning the framework from classrooms:

> RQ3a: "I think I mean, I think I was actually exposed to CRT when I heard it was getting banned. But I haven't taken any classes on it but I've just kind of heard those words. I don't actually know what it is" (Ogden 2023).

When asked to define CRT, he replied that "[he doesn't] know if [he] can define it if [he doesn't]

know what it is" (Ogden 2023). Accordingly, he indifferently said that CRT made him feel "fine"

(Ogden 2023).

Ryan's immediate reaction and feelings towards the treatment was that of relative shock.

He felt as though the sentiments shared were absurd:

> RQ12: "At first I thought what they were saying was kind of ridiculous. [...] I was a little surprised at how like, I mean, I think they probably chose to, to include people of color speaking out in this interview, because they know it might have more effect on somebody who's watching, like, TV, then. If then then then a white person saying the same things. I don't know if that's actually like, representative. Like, what we thought, I don't know, where were the demographics of like, where people stand on race theory, either in Florida or the United States? Like, I don't know what those stats actually are. But, I mean, I, I was gonna say, I mean, I guess I was kind of surprised to see that. I mean, yeah, I mean, like I said, I don't think a lot of that really resonated that strongly with me. You know, I think I'd be more curious to see. To read more about the different, maybe more democratic or at least objective" (Ogden 2023).

In alignment with his adverse reaction, he did not find the opinion treatment to be credible nor to

be personally useful:

> RQ13: "Credible? I mean [...] not really credible. And then I guess, I guess it's valuable.[...] Like, it's, I mean, me personally, for me, it's not useful. It's not useful to me at all. Like, I'm not taking anything to heart, I'm probably going to go look for somewhere else" (Ogden 2023).

Ryan expressed that he found it valuable on the basis that it was information. However, he did

not find the treatment to be personally useful as he did not find the sources to be credible.

Charlotte Bell: Opinion Treatment

Table 8: *Charlotte Bell Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Charlotte Bell (they/she)	3	5	5	12	12	1,1,3	1,1,3

Charlotte Bell is a 20-year-old 3rd-year student majoring in Sociology. They politically

identify as very liberal, estimated their family income to be $60,000 - $100,000 per year, and

noted that their previous exposure to CRT was neither of expertise nor novice, but rather in the

middle. They explained how their previous exposure to CRT was via their mom's book club:

> RQ3: "Um…I think over the pandemic my mom was in a book club? I don't think it was
> a Critical Race Theory book club but I think it was more just something put on by the
> DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) committee at her work…and I think she just talked
> about it a lot but I don't think I fully understood it at the time and I don't think I have a
> super extensive understanding of it now either" (Bell 2023).

When asked about their definition of CRT and their feelings towards it, they explained that she

felt as though they were not informed enough:

> RQ4b: "Um, I don't really know. Like I said, I don't know if I know enough to fully define
> it, but, um, I would maybe define it as, like, a type of education with, like, an emphasis
> on equity and an emphasis on, like, awareness of racial discrimination and implicit bias.
> Um, how does it make me feel? Neutral? Neutral. I don't really know a whole lot about it.
> I feel like it's something that probably should be included more in education, but that's
> about it" (Bell 2023).

After watching the opinion treatment, they explained that their immediate reactions and feelings

were conflicting:

> RQ12: **"**I definitely had a real, I have, I have a generally positive outlook on Critical
> Race Theory, but I think it was really interesting to see black people kind of. Expressing
> views strongly against it. And I think I don't know. I think that was interesting. And I'm
> more curious to see, like, what the wider Black communities opinion on critical race
> areas. And um, I don't know. I think they were also very polarizing opinions. I think that
> they were chosen for news clips because they're polarizing. So I don't know if I should
> just be taking that with a grain of salt. But, um, I don't know. Conflicted, a little angry at
> Fox News, but that's normal" (Bell 2023).

In regards to the credibility of the video, they thought it was valuable because it shows people's

opinions:

> RQ13: "I think it was extremely valuable because it shows people's opinions, it shows the
> way the media is portraying people's opinions of Critical Race Theory, and it also shows
> What they're leaving out like, where are the teachers, what are they, are they not
> interviewing teachers? They're mostly interviewing just, it looks like parents and news
> anchors. I'm not exactly sure what the Fox News people's descriptions were, but I think it
> was valuable. Was it credible? Maybe I think it would be more credible if it had more
> opinions. Um, and I think, I don't know. I think some of the clips in the beginning could
> have been presented a little bit better by those media sites. But, um, I think all of those
> opinions are valuable. They just show where people are getting these ideas, um, and kind
> of the ideas that lead to the legislation that either allows or prevents Critical Race Theory
> schools" (Bell 2023).

Their response to the treatment demonstrated that they hold value in the opinions of others.

However, the lack of diversity in opinion made it less credible in their opinion.

Zoe Bush: Opinion Treatment

Table 9: *Zoe Bush Characteristics and Results*

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Zoe Bush (she/her)	3	3	3	12	12	1,1,1	1,1,1

Zoe Bush is a 21-year-old Transfer student majoring in Communications. She politically affiliates as moderate. Zoe estimated their family income to be $40,000 - $60,000 per year and noted that her previous exposure to CRT was neither of expertise or novice, but rather in the middle. She explained how her previous exposure to CRT was through mainstream media. Specifically, she detailed how she heard about it on the news when they were debating whether it should be included in classrooms (Bush 2024). When asked about CRT's definition she explained:

> RQ4a: "Um, from what I've heard, I believe it has to do with like, um, people of color being like underserved and underrepresented and how that has to do with like America and American history and how that affects people generationally. Um, So I guess that's how it would be in my own words, um, and then how it makes me feel, I'm not very sure because I don't know too much about it. Um, yeah, so I guess that would be my answer" (Bush 2024).

In reaction to the opinion treatment, her immediate reactions and feelings were that the video was generally in opposition to CRT:

> RQ12: "I think that the coverage that they were showing and the commentators and stuff that they had were very opposed to it. That's like, the message I was receiving through it. Um, my immediate reactions and feelings, I think they felt very strongly about it. I know that's also the way Fox News kind of like covers things. They're very strong about and vocal about what they're opposed to and not opposed to. Um, so yeah, I think they're very, I don't know. Yeah, I don't know. It was very interesting. I usually like to watch both. Like others, you know, hear everything. Whereas they just have one" (Bush 2024).

In terms of the video's credibility, she used the occupations of the speakers as key factors of judgment:

> RQ13: "It was from a news organization and they did have, I mean, the people, everyone's like entitled to their own opinion. So they did have people who were like teachers or like that guy was a doctor. Um, so I guess it was, it was credible" (Bush 2024).

Although she did not go into detail about how she assessed its credibility she did express that she finds value in the opinions of others.

Analysis

This section delves into a thematic analysis of the data collected through interviews and surveys, aiming to explore the impact, or lack thereof, of CRT treatments on participants' policy dispositions, with an emphasis on the mediating influence of Interracial Empathy. The analysis is organized around several key themes that emerged from the data, including participants' perceptions of CRT, their levels of Interracial Empathy, and their stances on PRBPs.

Education Treatment Group

In the education treatment group, there were no participants who quantitatively demonstrated both an increase in Interracial Empathy and an increase in support for PRBPs. On the contrary, two participants – Ethan and Emma – showed a decrease in Interracial Empathy with an increase in support for PRBPs. While quantitatively, both participant's scores for Interracial Empathy went down, their explanations for their responses still indicated a high level of empathy and compassion for marginalized groups and diverse perspectives. For example, Emma's Interracial Empathy score decreased by 1 point post-treatment due to her quantitative response to RQ7b. However, her explanation for lowering her rating was that although she believes it's important to empathize with others before offering criticism, she acknowledges that in practice, this isn't always feasible:

> RQ7b [edited for clarity]: Thinking more about it, I'd probably answer three because while I would want it to a five since I think that is a very mature way to look at some situations where we criticize someone but I think that is judgment. My mom taught me that while the first reaction we have is following how others are telling us to react, the second reaction is actually our personal reaction. I think that with more heated circumstances we revert to a lizard brain of sorts where we can be really mean to people (Gordon 2024).

She expressed a desire to empathize with others before being critical of them. Simultaneously, she came across as humble and introspective, acknowledging that there might be instances where she falls short of doing so. Throughout the interview, Emma consistently demonstrated empathy towards marginalized groups and expressed concern for addressing racial inequalities through her qualitative responses. This consistency suggests that her level of empathy remained stable both before and after the CRT treatment despite her lowering her score.

In Ethan's case, His quantitative empathy score decreased by 1 point. However, his qualitative explanations for this indicated that his answers remained the same as his pretreatment responses. He did not go into detail on why he gave the ratings post-treatment, but rather gave a number and emphasized that it was "for the same reason as last time" (Anderson 2024). The treatment did not affect Ethan's Interracial Empathy or policy dispositions; it did make him lean more liberally than prior. Interestingly, there was a similar discrepancy in Ethan's qualitative and quantitative responses regarding his political affiliation. The treatment sparked a shift towards feeling more strongly about leaning democratic. However, his rating was more right-leaning than pre-treatment:

> RQ1b [edited for clarity]: I consider myself a Democrat for the same reasons as before. I didn't mention climate change last time – but this time it's a bigger thing to lean more Democratic than Republican.

While participants expressed that they had the same views post-treatment, some forgot the exact rating they gave pre-treatment which skewed their quantitative answers while their qualitative answers remained the same. For these two participants, the treatment was not powerful enough to significantly change their outlooks on PRBPs or Interracial Empathy.

One participant, Maya Evans, had an increase in her Interracial Empathy score while her support for PRBPs remained stagnant pre- versus post-treatment. Similar to the aforementioned

circumstances, Maya verbally explained that she had the same explanations for her ratings pre- and post-treatment while giving herself a different number. The discrepancy in her response was due to her answers to RQ7:

> RQ7a: "I [...] recognize that people feel less sympathetic towards individuals from like, [marginalized] racial groups. So I definitely do have some empathy for them. But at the same time, I feel like just because I'm not really a minority, I don't have the best understanding. So I couldn't really I couldn't really place myself very well, just because I haven't been in their shoes I know of feel, you know, feel that feel strongly about this statement" (Evans 2024).
>
> RQ7b: "Oh, I would place myself, um, at two [inverse scored as 4] again [...]. I'm very neutral and ambivalent, kind of, about expressing sympathy for individuals that encounter these problems just because, um, I haven't walked a day in their life" (Evans 2024).

Overall, Maya's responses both pre- and post-treatment were the same. After watching the treatment, she explicitly noted that she still felt neutral about the CRT:

> RQ4a: "I would say Critical Race Theory is [...] a way to like, understand the ways in which like race, power and systematic, like racism, like intersect and influence, um, our society […]. I don't really have an opinion on how it makes me feel, but I'm very neutral" (Anderson 2024).

Whether it be regarding political affiliation, Interracial Empathy, or policy outlooks, it was noted that the treatment did not change how she felt about CRT. Interestingly, Maya was the only participant in the educational treatment group to question the credibility of the video. It is plausible that her skepticism regarding the content of the video could have influenced the extent to which the video influenced her PRBP dispositions.

The fourth participant in the education treatment group – Dylan Thompson – had stagnant responses both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thompson consistently attributed answers surrounding Interracial Empathy to his desire to understand the nuances of others' experiences and consider the cultural context of others' decisions:

RQ5a: "I try to have [...] compassion and empathy for people in a lot of situations. And, [...] just understanding the kind of […] the privilege, I guess, of living in the US and being white" (Thompson 2023).

RQ7b: "I try to [...] think about this when, you know, I'm around different people and […] you just want to make sure that your criticism is not, you know, of their identity or because of their identity and what not. And it's just, you know, something that they did that may have been bad or [...] of the like" (Thompson 2023).

Dylan's answers were very similar pre- and post-treatment, almost identical in verbiage. The treatment did not have a profound effect on his sentiments. In terms of Dylan's disposition towards progressive race-based policies, his ratings were also identical. In Dylan's explanations for his responses, he emphasized his values as guiding factors as well as acknowledged his left-leaning views. In some cases, he said the policies (such as reparations) didn't even do enough to address what marginalized communities face:

RQ8b: "I agree with the idea behind it, but I don't think that goes far enough to address, you know, the systematic disparities" (Thompson 2023).

He found it important for everyone to know the 'truth' about history as he calls it and to have adequate diversity in spaces of work and education:

RQ9b: "It's very important for people to learn real history, along with helping to develop, you know, students' critical thinking skills" (Thompson 2023).

RQ10b: "It's very important and beneficial to have a diverse work, workplace or team" (Thompson 2023).

Despite having only moderate exposure to CRT prior to the interview, his policy dispositions and sentiments regarding equity remain consistent when analyzed with both a qualitative and quantitative lens.

Among all participants who received the education treatment, it appeared that exposure to CRT, as operationalized in the study, did not substantially alter their views. While one participant mentioned a slight shift towards the left after the treatment, during the interviews, participants

emphasized that their pre-existing backgrounds and understanding of CRT were more influential in shaping their opinions than the treatment itself.

Opinion Treatment Group

In the opinion treatment group, none of the participants exhibited both a measurable increase in Interracial Empathy and an increase in support for PRBPs. 50% of the participants showed an increase in Interracial Empathy without a corresponding increase in support for PRBPs. Conversely, 50% of participants reported no change in scores for both Interracial Empathy and support for PRBPs.

The two participants who reported an increase in Interracial Empathy with stagnant dispositions on PRBPs were Daniel Miller and Ryan Ogden. Similar to the education treatment group, participants found themselves forgetting the exact number they used to rate themselves pretreatment, yet expressing the same answer and explanations for the answer. Ryan decreased his Interracial Empathy rating for RQ6 Yet he verbally expressed that he could go with either number:

> RQ6a: "3 I guess[...] I don't know; it depends on what movie I watch" (Ogden 2023).

> RQ6b: "two or three? [inverse score 4 or 3…]if I liked the movie, I'll be invested. Might be rooting for the protagonist. [...] I'm not the craziest movie watcher so two (Ogden 2023).

In Daniel's case, he decreased his Interracial Empathy rating for RQ5 by 1 point. During the pre-exposure portion of the interview, he expressed and acknowledged that marginalized people undergo different challenges to white demographics:

> RQ5a: "While it is a problem, I don't think feeling sorry for people is the solution, and that just distracts from actual policy solutions to demarginalizing those racial groups" (Miller 2023).

He explained that feeling sorry for someone isn't a solution and distracts from the actual solutions of improvement. So here, although he puts himself at a moderate rating, he does express concern for the struggles of marginalized groups; he does not believe that the solution is through an emotional reaction. After watching the opinion treatment, his feelings about this grew even stronger:

> RQ5b: "Watching the video made me realize that feeling sorry for someone is definitely not going to be a solution when there are disinformation campaigns like that, and that policy solution is going to be far more productive, so feeling sorry is a waste of time" (Miller 2023).

Daniel's opinions remained largely consistent throughout the interview, and after watching the opinion treatment, he expressed a belief that institutional policy solutions are more effective in assisting marginalized communities than emotional reactions. Although his empathy score decreased, it seemed that he preferred to demonstrate compassion and concern through tangible actions rather than emotional responses. However, his support for PRBPs did not increase. While he supported policies aimed at aiding marginalized communities in general, he had varying opinions about the specific policies discussed.

The other half of the participants who remained stagnant in their answers were Charlotte Bell and Zoe Bush. They both had higher Interracial Empathy scores at 12 out of 15 and both showed high support for PRBPs.

Charlotte Bell expressed having an efficiency and logic-oriented mindset when it comes to policy rather than a more empathetic and socio-emotional approach. Despite not changing their answers overall, they did express a slight shift in how they viewed oppression after watching the treatment:

> RQ10a: "I put strongly support, um, because I feel like, I'm a sociology major, so in a lot of our classes we talk about, um, like inequities across different racial groups in things

like healthcare and housing and education, um, and I think that, um, A lot of marginalized communities, but in certain places in LA, especially black Americans, um, have really inequitable experiences when it comes to health care, um, and education" (Bell 2022).

RQ10b: "I said strongly support, um, because I don't know, it was interesting that that guy in the video was talking about, like, he doesn't feel oppressed, um, because he was able to get, like, multiple degrees, um, and I think that's really valuable. It does make me look at it in maybe a different way. So, yeah, maybe, maybe all, like, all black Americans are not oppressed, but I think that statistically there is enough inequities still, um, in, like, in terms of socioeconomic status. Um, and like educational achievement that there should be reparations to just kind of help close that gap. Like, yeah, maybe not every individual needs it, but I think the community as a whole could probably benefit from it. Um, and I mean, America, we have the money" (Bell 2023).

This shift was gleaned in their responses to RQ10, explaining how they believe they had a better understanding of it post-treatment. With similar logic, they expressed support for the goal of affirmative action while questioning whether affirmative action was the most efficient means to achieve said goal.

RQ10a: "I don't know if my understanding of affirmative action is extremely good, but [...] I hear a lot about it in athletic programs, too, um, and I kind of see it in a negative light in that way,[...] they're just picking more racially diverse players to, like, check a box and not, like, the best player[…]. I think it does a disservice to all of the players, because if you're just picking people, checking a box, Your team might suffer a little bit. […] They're not fully ready. I think. It kind of does a disservice. I think the intent is really good in making workplaces more diverse because I don't think it's helpful to be in a homogenous environment, um, but I think maybe the way the policy is enacted could be changed a little bit" (Bell 2023).

RQ10b: "I would still say about a three. Um, I think there are a lot of benefits to having a diverse school or workplace [but] I think we can create a lot of conflicts when it feels like that's like a force thing[…]. I feel like it'd be weird too as the person who got the job through affirmative action to just like, even if you didn't just get it because of affirmative action, like, it must be weird to like wonder if you did and it must kind of create a sense of imposter syndrome[…] It's valuable to have a policy to make workplaces more diverse, but I'm not sure that affirmative action as it stands is the best thing to get us there" (Bell 2023).

Even after watching the opinion treatment, they continued to see value in the implementation of affirmative action policies. However, the video brought to their attention the potential conflict that mandating equity-based policies could entail. While the treatment did not decrease their level of empathy or support for policies aiding marginalized groups, they began to consider more carefully how the dominant group might perceive these policies, whether negatively or positively, after watching the treatment.

Discussion

Given the findings of this study, it is evident that the initial hypothesis regarding the influence of CRT exposure on increasing support for PRBPs among white students has not been supported. Furthermore, Interracial Empathy has not been supported as a salient facilitating variable. Overall, participants maintained their pre-existing outlooks and values throughout the interviews. While a few outliers showed slightly more support for liberal values after the education treatment, this change was not significant enough to alter their actual stance on policies. This lack of significant change challenges the notion, often cited by conservative lawmakers, that CRT significantly influences students' political beliefs.

While exposure to CRT may encourage students to think more critically about their opinions, it does not necessarily result in a shift towards supporting PRBPs or leaning more liberally. Regarding empathy as a potential facilitating variable, many participants indicated that their policy perspectives were influenced more by practical, logical considerations rather than emotional factors. Consequently, the hypothesis of the study, which posited that exposure to CRT would increase empathy and subsequently lead to greater support for PRBPs, was not supported by the evidence gathered. Overall, the findings suggest that CRT may prompt students to engage

in more critical thinking about their political beliefs, but it does not automatically translate into increased support for PRBPs or a more liberal stance.

It is important to acknowledge that this study has some limitations due to the case selection. One limitation of the study was the potential lack of generalizability due to the narrow ethnic case selection and criteria. However, this choice was made for practical reasons within the study's timeframe and with a specific interest in how CRT affects those positively impacted by racism at large. Another limitation was the possibility of selection bias, as voluntary participation may have attracted individuals with specific interests or inclinations.[11] To mitigate this, efforts were made to recruit a more representative sample of white students at UCLA, ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Due to limitations in recruitment, a representative sample was not gathered. However, the data remains valuable because it offers insights into a specific subset of the population that still holds meaningful patterns that can inform decision-making, provide context, or contribute to a broader understanding of how white college students react to CRT. Furthermore, the small sample size of 8 interviews was a potential limitation, affecting both the statistical power and the generalizability of the findings. With a smaller sample, it becomes challenging to detect significant patterns or relationships and draw widely applicable conclusions. Lastly, the lack of diversity in the participants' political affiliations was a potential limitation in the study; all participants in this study leaned either moderate or liberal before the experiment. In this light, the social context of the participants likely shaped the results: since all participants are students at UCLA, a university situated in a liberal state and the relatively progressive Los Angeles area, it is plausible that individuals who are more progressive and attend liberal-leaning institutions might not be as influenced by CRT due to their preexisting political and sociopolitical surroundings. Further studies could benefit from examining

participants further to the right on the political spectrum before exposure to CRT. This could

uncover potential differences in results if participants did not begin with more progressive views.

These limitations should be acknowledged and considered when interpreting and discussing the

study's findings. However, given that this study focuses on exploring the mechanism of

Interracial Empathy, a smaller sample size can provide an opportunity for in-depth analysis and a

richer understanding of participants' unique perspectives and experiences.

There is a need for innovative methods to effectively convey CRT's principles,

potentially leading to more lasting impacts on student perspectives. While there remains the

potential for CRT to impact attitudes towards PRBPs, further investigation is necessary to

explore this potential more comprehensively. Future studies may benefit from alternative

operationalizations of CRT, potentially over longer durations, to assess its effects on student

dispositions more thoroughly. Although this study did not yield significant ideological changes,

existing literature suggests that CRT holds promise in shaping attitudes towards PRBPs and

Interracial Empathy.

Figure 2: *Causal Factors That Influence Dispositions toward Progressive Race-Based Policies, Through CRT*
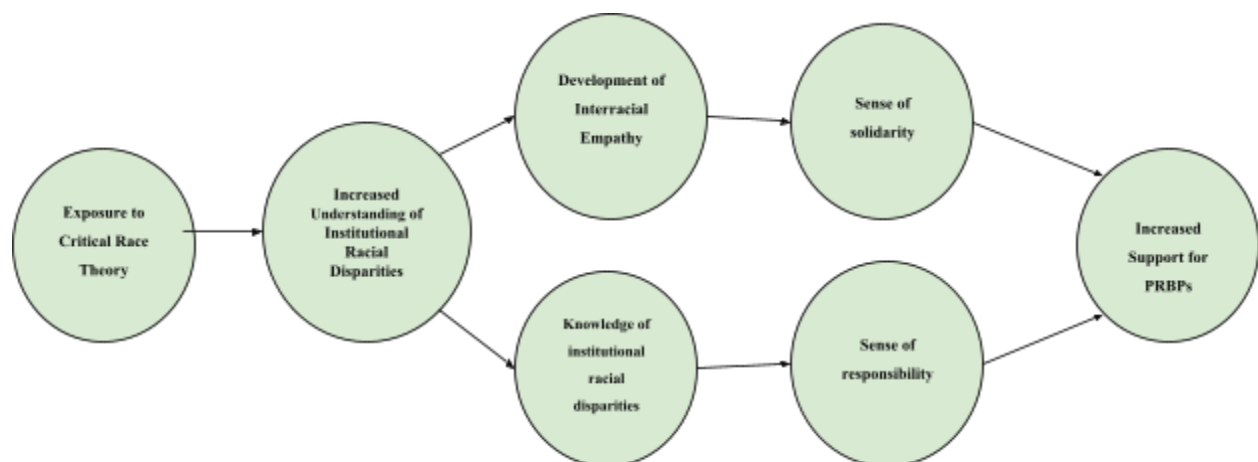
The basis of this facilitation is based on two interconnected pathways (see Figure 2). Firstly, CRT facilitates the development of Interracial Empathy by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives and explicit historical contexts.[12] Secondly, the cultivation of Interracial Empathy serves as a critical mechanism linking CRT and increased support for PRBPs.[13] Thus, exposure to CRT can be seen as a catalyst for promoting empathy and, subsequently, generating greater support for PRBPs.

David J. Ortiz and Jayshree Jani discuss how CRT is a framework that can "effectively teach diversity by "requir[ing] students to analyze the institutional arrangements of society, assess how they are shaped by dominant cultural assumptions and recognize how they may disadvantage members of non-dominant cultural groups" (Ortiz and Jani 2010 p.189). Most racially marginalized groups in the U.S. live in a reality where CRT is understood as fact and formally learning it serves to reinforce their lived experiences. When those unaccustomed to CRT are introduced to the ideology, they are likely to experience a different perspective for the first time; subsequently, they are given the opportunity to Interracially Empathize with authentic and explicit experiences. Mary E. Hylton's research on empathy reveals a correlation between social empathy and higher rates of civic engagement, suggesting that empathy fosters people's involvement in social change processes and increases civic engagement (Hylton 2018). By emphasizing empathy as a foundation for democratic decision-making, she implies that empathy promotes policy choices that prioritize the well-being of all rather than being driven by self-interest. This notion can be extended to CRT: CRT presents students with an opportunity to develop Interracial Empathy which increases their likelihood to advocate for PRBPs because said policies encourage a more inclusive and equitable society.

CRT, although not inherently a form of political socialization, carries the potential to transmit political values. Its fundamental principles, including recognizing race as a social construct, examining systemic racism and power structures, and acknowledging intersectionality, can plausibly evoke Interracial Empathy and lead to more liberal views. Stephen G. Morris, in his work on empathy and the Liberal-Conservative political divide in the U.S., explains that empathy plays a role in shaping differing political attitudes. Higher education, through cognitive development and the learning to take the perspective of others, can increase empathy among students, thereby liberalizing moral sensibilities (Morris 2021). Consequently, exposure to CRT has the potential to enhance understanding of various demographics' struggles and social concerns. When students are receptive to CRT's ideology, they can develop a heightened awareness of racial dynamics and systemic inequalities, which in turn can evoke a sense of solidarity or responsibility, increasing their support for redress of racial inequities, thus influencing their perspectives towards more empathetic viewpoints.

Scholars who posit a positive correlation between education and liberal political dispositions provide compelling evidence that higher education levels offer students exposure to diverse ideas, critical thinking skills, and access to information that challenges more traditional, conservative views. For instance, Colin Campbell and Jonathan Horowitz, in their work on college influence on sociopolitical attitudes, assert that higher education significantly influences students' endorsement of liberal ideas such as civil liberties and gender egalitarianism (Campbell and Horowitz 2016). This research highlights the transformative impact of education on sociopolitical attitudes. Building on these findings, I propose that by incorporating CRT into curricula, educational institutions play a vital role in fostering the growth of Interracial Empathy among students by allowing them to better understand and connect with the experiences of

marginalized racial groups. Milos Brocic and Andrew Miles have also found a correlation between college education and the liberalization of moral concerns for the majority of students (Brocic and Miles 2021). Similarly, this study further supports a correlation between formal education and the endorsement of liberal notions. However, existing literature still falls short in isolating the precise mechanisms responsible for these effects. Therefore, a central question remains: Does exposure to CRT specifically have a substantial impact on shaping policy dispositions, and if so, how? While the influential factors of determining race-based liberal policy dispositions may vary, I contend that exposure to CRT, administered in a manner more influential than the research design employed in this study, will have a noticeable impact due to the intervening effect of Interracial Empathy.

Disagreeing scholars may say that exposure to CRT alone is insufficient to determine a student's dispositions on PRBPs. While their perspective has merit, this study recognizes that political socialization is a nuanced process influenced by various factors beyond CRT education. These factors include ideological biases, demographic characteristics, individual agency, and daily socialization processes. Recognizing the complex interplay of these influences, it is important to view CRT exposure as part of a larger ecosystem that contributes to political socialization. While CRT education provides a framework for understanding race and systemic inequalities, its impact is mediated by other factors. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge at the hypothesis stage and throughout the experimental process that the relationship between CRT education and liberal policy attitudes is not deterministic. Education, including CRT, is a contributing factor rather than the sole determinant of political views.

Disagreeing scholars may argue that Interracial Empathy alone is not a concrete enough mechanism to reliably predict or indicate liberal views. They may assert that politics operates on

absolute standards rather than moral concerns, and therefore there should be an intervening variable that is more absolute in nature. While it is true that there may be alternative explanations for Interracial Empathy development that extend beyond moral concerns and CRT exposure, it is crucial to recognize the unique contribution of CRT in fostering Interracial Empathy through its focus on untold marginalized experiences and intersectionality. CRT offers a more nuanced understanding of systemic inequalities and marginalized perspectives that cannot be easily replicated by alternative explanations alone. This comprehensive learning experience, facilitated by CRT, has the potential to foster a more profound and transformative Interracial Empathy.[14] In this way, CRT becomes an indispensable tool in promoting social progress and shaping more inclusive policy dispositions. Therefore, despite acknowledging the existence of alternative explanations and the complexity of political socialization, the unique contribution of CRT in fostering transformative Interracial Empathy remains a crucial aspect to consider.

Positionality Statement

The author and primary investigator of this study identifies as a Black woman who is a 4th-year undergraduate student studying Political Science and African American Studies. She acknowledges that she is not the primary demographic of this study and thus does not have personal ties to their race-based experiences. She engages in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion work and is a firm believer in investing in the success of communities of color through research and policy. During this process, she appreciated the vulnerability of each participant who entrusted her with their perspectives during the interview process. With that, she has a deep understanding and empathy towards the participants who may have been more vulnerable as the topics are polarizing, and feels a responsibility to honor their stories and accurately represent their answers.

Conclusion

In summary, this study aimed to provide insights into CRT's impact on political attitudes backed by empirical research. Specifically, this study aimed to uncover a causal relationship between exposure to CRT and increased Interracial Empathy, as well as a causal relationship between increased Interracial Empathy and increased support for PRBPs. However, the evidence obtained from the experiment did not support these hypothesized relationships. Based on the data, it was evident that the CRT treatments did not significantly alter the participants' pre-existing dispositions. Their responses appeared to be heavily influenced by long-held values and perspectives, suggesting that more impactful factors would be needed to influence their viewpoints beyond the scope of this study's CRT treatment which took the form of a brief 6-minute video. Despite this, the results have highlighted areas for further research and underscored the importance of investigating the potential effects of CRT in greater depth.

The result being that exposure to CRT does not significantly change political attitudes may suggest that the politicized concerns about CRT are unfounded and that educational institutions should be more receptive to incorporating CRT within their curricula. The findings challenge the conservative argument that CRT education liberally indoctrinates students. Instead, they suggest that students may arrive at college with pre-existing progressive or liberal values. For these students, exposure to CRT may not significantly alter their beliefs, as they are already inclined towards such perspectives. The scope of this study was rather small, as it was limited to merely eight white undergraduate students on UCLA's campus. With this, in addition to a more thorough operationalization of CRT, areas for future research include surveying a larger sample size as well as focusing on different demographic groups. Expanding the sample size in future research allows for a more robust analysis and enhances the generalizability of the findings. For

example, expanding the sample base to college students across the United States rather than specifically within UCLA. With a larger sample, researchers can obtain more representative data, increasing the statistical power and reliability of the study. Additionally, focusing on different demographic groups–Black students, Asian students, democrats, republicans–would be an interesting area of study as we can understand how those who live through negative aspects of CRT may respond and react to the framework.

The influence of CRT warrants an immediate and thorough investigation, particularly considering that significant policy decisions are being made by influential policy makers based on its purported influence, despite lacking substantial evidence. While this study offers one avenue for evaluating the impact of CRT, it is essential to recognize that CRT manifests in various forms both in ways we realize or through subconscious messaging. The contemporary conservative culture war perpetuates pervasive rhetoric that undermines the importance of students learning about both CRT as a framework and the concept of race itself. Moreover, this rhetoric has the potential to expand if not critically examined. Many conservative news outlets, political figures, and community leaders propagate an anti-CRT narrative, contributing to a growing movement aimed at vilifying the framework. They portray CRT as inherently negative and divisive rather than insightful. While these opinions should not be immediately dismissed, it is crucial to ensure that accurate information, supported by multiple studies from reputable sources, is accessible to the public. Whether it's a political figure or a community member, conclusions must be informed by data rather than personal opinion.

Endnotes

[1] Liberalizing Indoctrination: The term "liberalizing indoctrination" as used in this paper refers to the assertion made by some conservative political leaders that Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a form of ideological indoctrination with a liberal bias. These leaders argue that CRT, through its focus on systemic racism and power dynamics, aims to instill liberal values and perspectives in students. However, it is important to note that this term is employed here to describe a specific viewpoint and should not be taken as an objective characterization of CRT or its educational objectives. The term "liberalizing indoctrination" is used in the context of discussing the objections raised against CRT by certain political leaders and does not reflect the overall intent or purpose of CRT education.

[2] Progressive: In the context of this paper, the term "progressive" refers to a political ideology or approach that advocates for social, political, and economic reforms to address systemic inequalities and promote social justice. Progressive policies often prioritize issues such as income redistribution, healthcare access, environmental sustainability, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial and gender equity. The term "progressive" is used to denote a political orientation that seeks to challenge and change existing power structures and promote more inclusive and equitable societies.

[3] Institutional Disparities: Institutional disparities, as referred to in this paper, pertain to the unequal treatment, opportunities, or outcomes that are perpetuated by systemic structures, policies, or practices within institutions. These disparities often manifest along racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic lines, resulting in unequal access to resources, education, healthcare, employment, and other societal advantages.

[4] Policy Dispositions: Policy dispositions, as referred to in this paper, denote an individual's attitudes, preferences, or orientations towards specific political policies or issues. It encompasses their inclinations, beliefs, and values regarding the appropriate course of action or solutions to societal problems. Policy dispositions can range from conservative to liberal, progressive to traditional, or from supporting or opposing specific policy proposals or reforms.

[5] Social Empathy: Social empathy couples interpersonal empathy with an understanding of contextual factors and a sense of social responsibility (Segal et al., 2012). Segal (2011) defines social empathy as "the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities" (Segal 2011)

[6] Constant Gradual Improvement: refers to the principle of making continuous progress through small, incremental changes over time. It emphasizes the value of steady, sustainable advancements rather than seeking sudden or dramatic transformations.

[7] "Diversity attitudes" in this context refers to individuals' inclinations or perspectives regarding diverse groups of people, as well as their stance on policies aimed at promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within society.

[8] To strive for a representative sample of white students, various strategies were implemented. These included reaching out to white student organizations, collaborating with academic departments that have significant white student enrollment, and utilizing university databases to identify and contact white students across different disciplines and grade levels.

[9] A Likert scale: A Likert scale is a commonly used psychometric measurement tool that assesses individuals' attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. It consists of multiple statements or items to which respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a predetermined scale, typically ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The Likert scale provides a structured approach for quantifying subjective responses, allowing researchers to analyze and compare participants' perceptions or attitudes numerically. It has been widely employed in various fields of research, including psychology, social sciences, and market research, to measure and assess individuals' opinions, preferences, and behaviors. The Likert scale is valuable for capturing nuanced responses and facilitating statistical analysis, providing researchers with valuable insights into participants' perspectives on the variables under investigation.

[10] Hogan's Empathy Scale: Hogan's empathy scale, developed by Dr. Robert Hogan, is a widely used measurement tool to assess individuals' levels of empathy. It consists of statements that participants rate based on agreement or disagreement. The scale provides insights into empathetic tendencies and their relationships with other variables in various research domains. It is valuable for understanding individuals' capacity for empathy and its implications.

[11] This potentially introduced bias, as participants more knowledgeable or passionate about the topic may have different views.

[12] Through this exposure, individuals gain a deeper understanding and empathy for the experiences of people from different racial backgrounds. This heightened empathy, in turn, fosters a more positive attitude towards PRBPs, as individuals recognize the importance of addressing systemic racial inequalities.

[13] By understanding the lived experiences of marginalized communities and recognizing the historical and ongoing racial injustices within American institutions, individuals are more likely to advocate for policies that seek to rectify these inequities.

[14] While it is valid to consider alternative explanations, it is essential to recognize the distinctive strength of CRT in promoting Interracial Empathy that goes beyond surface-level understanding. By shedding light on untold stories and perspectives, CRT encourages students to engage with diverse experiences, challenge their preconceptions, and develop an Interracial Empathy rooted in social justice and equality.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Table of Participants

Name (pronouns)	Treatment	Age	College Grade Level	Major	Family Income Estimate	Political Affiliation 1(very conservative) - 5 (very liberal)	Previous Exposure to CRT 1 (novice) - 5 (expert)	Race
Dylan Thompson (he/him)	Education	19	2nd	Climate Science	>$100,000	5	3	White
Ethan Anderson (he/him)	Education	21	4th	Mathematics and Arabic	$60,000-$100,000	5	2	White
Emma Gordon (she/her)	Education	20	3rd	Anthropology	>$100,000	5	3	White
Maya Evans (she/her)	Education	19	2nd	Biology	<$20,000	3	3	White
Daniel Miller (he/him)	Opinion	18	1st	Political Science and History	>$100,000	3	3	White
Ryan Ogden (he/him)	Opinion	18	1st	Global Jazz Studies	>$100,000	4	3	White
Charlotte Bell (they/she)	Opinion	20	3rd	Sociology	$60,000-$100,000	5	3	White
Zoe Bush (she/her)	Opinion	21	Transfer	Communications	$40,000-$60,000	3	3	White

Table 2: Dylan Thompson Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	Post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	Pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	Post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Dylan Thompson (he/him)	2	5	5	10	10	2,1,2	2,1,2

Table 3: Ethan Anderson Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Ethan Anderson (he/him)	3	5	4	13	12	2,1,2	2,1,1

Table 4: Emma Gordon Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Emma Gordon (she/her)	3	5	5	12	11	1,1,2	1,1,1

Table 5: Maya Evans Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Maya Evans (she/her)	3	3	3	5	8	3,2,3	3,2,3

Table 6: Daniel Miller Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Daniel Miller (he/him)	3	3	3	7	8	6,1,4	6,1,4

Table 7: Ryan Ogden Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Ryan Ogden (he/him)	3	4	5	9	14	1,1,1	1,1,1

Table 8: Charlotte Bell Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Charlotte Bell (they/she)	3	5	5	12	12	1,1,3	1,1,3

Table 9: Zoe Bush Characteristics and Results

Participant	Previous Exposure to CRT (1=none, 5=expert)	Pre-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	Post-treatment Party Affiliation (1=very conservative, 5=very liberal)	pre-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	post-treatment Empathy Score (5=less empathetic, 15=more empathetic)	pre-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)	post-treatment PRBP Disposition Scores (1=strongly support, 6=strongly oppose)
Zoe Bush (she/her)	3	3	3	12	12	1,1,1	1,1,1

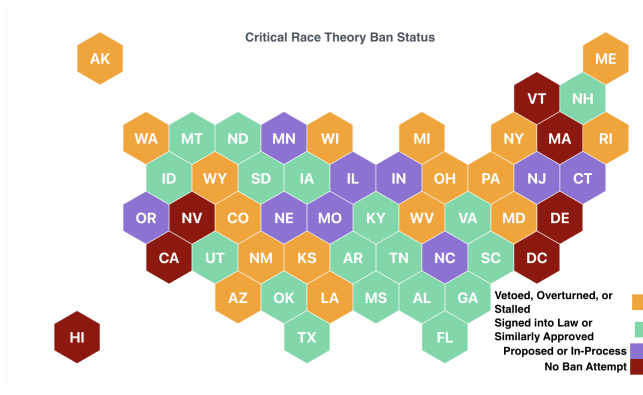Figure 1: Statutes with Bills Against CRT in K-12 Schools

Figure 2: Causal Factors That Influence Dispositions toward Progressive Race-Based Policies, Through CRT