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**CENTERING HEALING, COUNTERING DENIAL: JOURNEYS TOWARD
RACIAL HEALING IN BLACK COMMUNITIES AND UNCOVERING
WHITE PEOPLE'S DENIAL OF BLACK RACIAL TRAUMA**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PSYCHOLOGY

by

Jada Cheek

August 2026

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Abstract

Centering Healing, Countering Denial: Journeys Toward Racial Healing in Black Communities and Uncovering White People's Denial of Black Racial Trauma

Jada Cheek

Racial trauma (i.e., trauma resulting from racist experiences) is a persistent and harmful psychological consequence of racism, yet it is denied or minimized by dominant cultural narratives and ideologies. The current work explores how Black communities can heal from racial trauma and how racial trauma is perceived in White communities. Study 1 examines Black community healing from intergenerational racial trauma, using secondary analysis of interviews with Black participants who visited key historical sites from the transatlantic slave trade in Ghana, West Africa. I employed an integrative methodological framework rooted in Black epistemologies, including the methodology of surrender, the daughtering method, and the H.U.N.C.H. method. Findings illuminate how place-based, community-centered, and ancestrally grounded experiences can facilitate healing from intergenerational racial trauma. Study 2 examined how White participants perceive racial trauma, exploring how different levels of racism shape acknowledgment of both racism and its traumatic impacts. Results demonstrated a strong positive relationship between racism denial and racial trauma denial, with participants denying racial trauma more in structural racism conditions. This effect was mediated by racism denial and moderated by systemic racism perceptions. Study 3 builds on these findings by introducing a critical

history intervention, which was an educational audio clip designed to increase systemic racism perceptions, and tests whether it increases acknowledgment of both racism and racial trauma. The intervention did not significantly shift perceptions, but Study 3 did replicate Study 2. Crucially, those with a more systemic view of racism showed greater acknowledgment of racism and subsequent racial trauma across both Studies 2 and 3, suggesting that a critical history intervention that effectively boosts systemic racism perceptions should also boost racism acknowledgment and, ultimately, racial trauma acknowledgment. Together, these studies trace the denial and acknowledgment of racial trauma across individuals and social structures while affirming that healing must be culturally grounded, rooted in community, and historically informed.

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Chapter 1

For centuries, Black people have endured severe violence, yet have demonstrated immense strength, joy, and resilience (Jones, 2003; Nobles, 2013a, 2013b; Grier-Reed et al., 2023). This violence has been persistent throughout history, including Jim Crow segregation, KKK lynchings, and inaccessible civil rights (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.; Equal Justice Initiative, 2020). Various systems of oppression for Black people persist today, including present-day police killings (Cooper & Fullilove, 2016; Jones, 2017; Waldron, 2020), residential segregation and housing discrimination (Roscigno et al., 2009), environmental racism (Henderson & Wells, 2021), and microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007).

Experiencing racism can be deeply traumatic for Black people (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; 2005b). This trauma may result in Black people experiencing increased heart rates, susceptibility to hypertension, depressive symptoms, feelings of self-hate, and fear (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; 2005b). These symptoms are forms of *racial trauma*, that is, trauma symptoms resulting directly from racist experiences or incidents that pose a psychological threat to one's racial identity and cultural values (Helms et al., 2012).

Racial Trauma

Trauma is defined as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Trauma can also result from racist incidents or events (Carter, 2007). *Racial trauma* is trauma resulting from a racist incident or event; it can manifest physically and

psychologically, similar to PTSD from war (e.g., increased heart rate, susceptibility to hypertension, depressive symptoms, and fear; Carter, 2007). Psychologists have developed the concept of *race-based traumatic stress*, recognizing that existing definitions of trauma and PTSD exclude trauma resulting from experiences of racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; 2005b, Carter, 2007). Racial trauma and race-based traumatic stress are often used interchangeably in the literature, and this overlap is because both terms describe trauma resulting from racism that mainstream definitions of trauma and PTSD fail to capture (Williams et al., 2018). However race-based traumatic stress specifically refers to the clinical model Carter (2007) and Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005a; 2005b) developed to establish that psychological and emotional harm from racism should be diagnosed and assessed like other forms of trauma. Racial trauma, has become the broader term for these cumulative psychological, physical, and collective harm, including but not limited to the clinical definition race-based traumatic stress describes (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019). Therefore I use the term racial trauma as the primary term throughout to describe the collective and intergenerational trauma experienced in Black communities.

Just as other forms of physical violence, such as sexual assault or domestic violence, can result in trauma, racism can also cause trauma symptoms and should be given the same gravity (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; 2005b). Racism can become institutionalized in the fabric of our social structures; therefore, it can have a consequential impact on Black communities. For example, law enforcement practices—especially racial profiling and excessive force—contribute to long-term,

systemic disparities that disproportionately harm Black communities, who face the highest rates of police violence. (e.g., Bor et al., 2018; Lee & Robinson, 2019; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017).

Prior to the development of race-based traumatic stress model, researchers studying racial dynamics had not fully explored the severity and intensity of how Black people experience racism and racial discrimination (Carter, 2007; Kirkinis et al., 2021). However, a range of empirical studies have now confirmed that these experiences can indeed result in trauma symptoms, including depression, intrusive thoughts, anger, hypervigilance, low self-esteem, avoidance, fear, anxiety, internalized racism (Carter, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; Speight, 2007), sadness, self-doubt, anger, and increased cognitive load (Sue et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2013; Franklin et al., 2006). To understand these consequences, many scholars have developed frameworks and measurements that are specific to trauma stemming from racism.

One of these scales is the UnRESTS (Uconn Racial/Ethnic Stress and Trauma Scale), which was developed specifically for use in clinical settings to diagnose and treat racial trauma (Williams et al., 2018). This scale allowed practitioners to diagnose racial trauma and helped patients identify feelings and reactions in the aftermath of racist encounters that they previously could not. Williams and colleagues (2018) tested the UnRESTS with patients already in therapy in a series of case studies. Patients in the study identified traumatic symptoms stemming from racist events in the workplace, schools, and family interactions. Each patient reported

various trauma symptoms, including fear, helplessness, confusion, anxiety, anger, depression, and self-doubt (Williams et al., 2018). Although many of these symptoms are included in the DSM-5 criteria for PTSD, the events causing them do not meet PTSD criteria, emphasizing the need for a more racism-specific trauma measure (Williams et al., 2018). Because the initial UnRESTS was developed for those already in therapy, Williams and colleagues (2022) later adapted this scale for researchers to use outside of a clinical setting. This adapted scale is the Racial Trauma Scale (RTS), which includes many of the symptoms in the DSM-V criteria for PTSD, along with slight differences in how these symptoms manifest. These symptoms include worry for family members in the same racial group, sleep deprivation, anger, and avoidance of dominant group members (i.e., White people; Williams et al., 2022). While there is conceptual overlap between PTSD and racial trauma, researchers have identified evidence for classifying racist experiences as traumatic, while the distinctions affirm the need for racism-specific trauma measures that PTSD does not capture.

Racial trauma researchers recognize that the definitions of PTSD and trauma often fail to include racism as a legitimate source of trauma. Crucially, researchers emphasize that racial trauma should be treated as seriously as trauma from other forms of physical violence, such as sexual assault or domestic violence (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; 2005b). Many highlight that the effects of racism can result in deleterious psychological outcomes similar to PTSD, including depression, intrusive thoughts, anger, hypervigilance, low self-esteem, avoidance, fear, anxiety (Carter,

2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; Speight, 2007), sadness, self-doubt, anger, and increased cognitive load (Sue et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2013; Franklin et al., 2006). Scholars have also noted additional symptoms specific to racist experiences, including worry for family members in the same racial group, internalized racism (Carter, 2007), sleep deprivation, anger, and avoidance of dominant group members (i.e., White people; Williams et al., 2022).

Given the vast array of racial trauma outcomes, it is crucial to understand how different forms of racism produce these outcomes. There is evidence for three primary modes of racial trauma as outlined in the race-based traumatic stress model: *direct trauma*, i.e., trauma directly experienced by Black individuals (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; Sue et al., 2007), *vicarious trauma*, i.e., trauma from observing racism toward others and knowing that you yourself, a loved one, or another member of your racial group could experience the same form of racism again (Aymer et al., 2016; Bor et al., 2018; Bird et al., 2021), and *intergenerational trauma*, i.e., historical traumas from one's ancestors or family passed down through generations (Degruy-Leary, 2017; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Understanding these different modes is crucial because it emphasizes that Black people don't solely experience racism directly, but also through racist experiences they may witness others' experiences, as well as what might be passed down from ancestors. These distinct modes allow for the full breadth of racist experiences and the traumatic impact of them to be explored, ensuring that all modes are acknowledged.

Racial Trauma Denial and Healing

Despite the tangible and troubling impacts of racial trauma, mainstream U.S. American culture denies this trauma in various ways. People can directly deny the existence of racial trauma by, for example, claiming we¹ are too sensitive or are playing the “race card” when confronting perpetrators of racism (Johnson et al., 2021). Additionally, people and institutions deny the traumatic nature of racism when they deny racism itself.

Addressing the racial trauma Black people experience needs to include culturally relevant mechanisms and move away from Eurocentric, Western practices. Black psychology outlines culturally relevant African-centered values and principles, such as community, cultural pride, and spirituality (Auguste et al., 2022; Nobles, 2013; Washington, 2020). Researchers have also emphasized that healing from racial trauma should use Black psychological principles (Nobles, 2013a, 2013b; Washington, 2020). Some healing mechanisms include healing circles, storytelling, and connecting with the land (Auguste et al., 2020; Degruy, 2017).

To address both the harms of racial trauma and the denial of its existence, I offer a multi-layered approach to racial trauma denial and healing. I review how racial trauma impacts Black people’s psychological well-being. Given the deleterious effects of racial trauma, my work also investigates healing from this trauma. Considering the depth and often cumulative and pervasive nature of racism experienced in Black communities, healing is integral to racial trauma work. I then

¹ I am a Black woman, therefore will be using "we" throughout when referring to Black people and Black communities.

detail how racial trauma can manifest from direct experiences of racism, including a systemic analysis of these manifestations. Finally, I examine how perpetrators of interpersonal racism (i.e., White people) can deny this trauma, as well as how institutions and social structures contribute to this denial.

Studies Overview

This project is composed of three studies that move from exploring how Black communities experience racial trauma and pursue healing from it (Study 1), to assessing White people's denial of Black people's racial trauma (Study 2), and finally to testing an intervention aimed at turning racial trauma denial into acknowledgment (Study 3). Together, these studies offer a holistic approach to addressing racial trauma and healing.

Chapter 2

Study 1: Healing Intergenerational Trauma in Black Communities

Intergenerational trauma is one form of racial trauma that is prominent in Black communities. It can have many origins; however, in the current study, I focus on intergenerational trauma from chattel slavery. Due to the historical legacy of slavery and its long-lasting impacts in the United States, intergenerational trauma is a prominent form of racial trauma of great importance for Black people. To address these wounds, we must not only understand trauma but also work toward healing them. Therefore, my first study focuses on healing from the intergenerational wounds of slavery within Black communities. This study is a secondary data analysis of interviews collected during a community trip to Ghana, West Africa, which I attended, visiting two key sites from the transatlantic slave trade: the Assin Manso River and Cape Coast Castle. This study aimed to explore whether and how Black people experience healing at sites of historical oppression.

In the following sections, I begin by examining the psychological and physiological symptoms of intergenerational trauma. Drawing from Black psychology (Nobles, 2013), I explore how collective practices, such as healing circles and returning to ancestral lands, can offer powerful healing for Black people (Auguste et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2020). These culturally grounded strategies move us beyond coping toward restoration, liberation, and healing. To honor these experiences, I created an integrative methodological approach that combines the methodology of surrender (Dillard 2006; Dillard, 2008; Animashaun & Bell, 2023),

the daughtering method (Evans-Winters, 2019), the H.U.N.C.H. method (HighJohn-Bey, 2024), and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2022). These frameworks not only allow for rigorous analysis but also call forth memory, intuition, and ancestral wisdom as valid and necessary ways of knowing. As both a participant and researcher on this journey to Ghana, I weave my own embodied experiences into this work, holding space for the spiritual, emotional, and communal dimensions of healing from the intergenerational wounds of slavery.

Intergenerational Trauma & Healing from Slavery

Intergenerational trauma can cause injurious psychological effects for victims' descendants and the community, even without having experienced the trauma directly (Degruy-Leary, 2017; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Intergenerational trauma can manifest from racism in any form (i.e., individual, institutional, and structural) that one's ancestors experienced during slavery.

Our ancestors endured gravely different circumstances during slavery compared to contemporary Black U.S. American life, yet researchers have evidence the trauma they endured can and has been passed down through generations (Graff, 2014; Spann, 2022). In fact, there is work showing that racially oppressed groups who have experienced trauma from racism-related incidents show epigenetic markers in their DNA, such as *methylation* (Edwards et al., 2025). Specifically in Black communities, changes in methylation can be traced back to slavery, police brutality, and experiencing microaggressions. This biochemical change in DNA increases disease susceptibility and results from emotional responses to stressful situations

(Edwards et al., 2025; Mulligan, 2021). Similarly, Mekawi and colleagues (2023) found that Black mothers who experienced racism reported higher levels of depressive symptoms. This maternal depression was also linked to increased depressive symptoms in their children, suggesting the effects of racism can extend across generations (Mekawi et al., 2023).

In addition to these physical effects, the psychological impacts of slavery can manifest in negative beliefs, feelings of placelessness, spirit murder, and socialization patterns passed down through generations (Bernard & Pollock, 2024; Degruy, 2017; Edwards et al., 2025; Watson, 2023).

Kinship Ties and Community

Community and kinship are among the many tools our enslaved ancestors used for survival and flourishing. Kinship ties were central in African communities, comprised of extended family and even friends taking part in child-rearing, caring for elders, and overall survival of the tribe (Degruy, 2017; Nobles, 2013). Due to the forced separation of families during slavery, enslaved persons often formed kinship bonds with those unrelated to them, i.e., *fictive kinship* (Graff, 2014). Although these new communities were not related by blood, they still treated each other as family. Today, Black families continue these fictive kinship bonds, often having cousins, aunties, uncles, and sisters who are sometimes not blood relatives but are still considered family.

Kinship and community for Black people were systemically discouraged. Black people in community were made illegal in the Slave Codes, and when our

ancestors were allowed to gather, it was often only allowed in the presence of White people (National Museum of African American History & Culture n.d.). Connection and community were such a central part of how our ancestors shared news, engaged in pleasure through music, and even shared strategies for resilience. Restricting these gatherings was a form of social control, and the punishments were often grave, including arrest, heavy fines, or lynching (Massey & Myers, 1989).

When Black people witness or hear about another Black person being harmed (i.e. vicarious trauma), our instinct is to think of them as family, due to these instinctual kinship ties. For example, considering police killings of Black people, we may not personally know the victims. Yet, the impact is often as if we just watched our sister, auntie, father, or cousin being killed, or can imagine them being killed similarly. These kinship ties can intensify the traumatic impact of such horrific incidents.

Placelessness

Along with kinship ties, which focus on ties to other Black people being like family; another form of trauma that is not fully discussed in the racial trauma literature is the concept of obruni. Obruni is an Akan term loosely meaning "a foreigner" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Hartman (2007) theorizes the concept of obruni in relation to her years of research on slavery that describe her travels to Ghana. She discusses this feeling that some Black Americans have of being a stranger, both in the motherland (i.e., Africa) and here in the United States. Many of us, as Black Americans, cannot trace our ancestral roots and do not have records of

where we descended from in Africa. While Black American culture is unique and extraordinary in its own right, lacking connection to our African ancestral roots (i.e., cultural connectedness) can engender psychological harms that have not fully been explored in the racial trauma literature. These harms might include feelings of isolation and lack of cultural identity. Moreover, feelings of being a foreigner can be exacerbated when one is part of a cultural group whose ancestors were forced onto unfamiliar lands and forcibly taken from their home.

Spirit Murdering

Experiencing such trauma can also result in *spirit murdering*, which is a consequence of racism where the spirits of racially minoritized people are decimated. Spirit murder is not just attacking one's self-esteem; it involves devaluing one's humanity through humiliation and degradation, to such an extent that the targets of racism no longer consider themselves worthy in the world (Williams, 1991). Comas-Díaz and colleagues (2019) theorize a similar concept called a *soul wound*, which refers to the result of historical trauma that psychologically damages one's character and spirit. The very institution of chattel slavery was used as a calculated tool for spirit murdering to occur, deeming Black people as inferior beings and less than human, valued only for their labor, designed to damage Black enslaved persons' spirits. Intergenerational spirit murder can occur when these devaluing messages continue to be communicated today via broad social representations (e.g., implicitly associating Black people with apes, Goff et al., 2008).

Survival Socialization

Chattel slavery does not only impact adults; children are also impacted greatly. Parents of Black children often feel the dual burden of experiencing racism and racial trauma themselves, while helping their children navigate racism. This dual burden can create feelings of helplessness and distress that exacerbate primary trauma symptoms for Black parents (Bernard & Pollock, 2024). Because Black parents play a critical role in shaping their children's socioemotional development and teaching their children about racism, the impacts of intergenerational trauma can surface in how they teach emotion regulation (e.g., encouraging children to repress anger, interpreting autonomy as disrespect, and discouraging them from standing up for themselves, Graff, 2014). During slavery, if an enslaved person challenged a slave owner or showed anger toward them, they were brutally beaten or killed (Kinouani, 2020; Degruy, 2017; Graff, 2014). Being angry or standing up for oneself was dangerous during slavery, so, out of moral safety, visible resistance could not happen. Consequently, these socialization patterns had to be passed down to keep oneself and one's children safe.

These socialization patterns, once necessary for survival, can risk perpetuating cycles of trauma if not consciously addressed and healed. For Black people, trauma may not only come from direct experiences of racism but also from this collective memory and the racism our ancestors experienced. Spann (2022) emphasizes that, if left unchecked and unacknowledged, traumatic symptoms and reactions can continue to grow with each generation. Therefore, we must create strategies not only for

coping but also for healing from this trauma. We must create these strategies not only for the current generation but also for our future generations healing.

Healing from Intergenerational Trauma

Collective healing should be rooted in the values and cultural ways of being within affected communities. Black psychology theoretical framework holds that these crucial principles should inform research examining the Black experience: spirit, cultural pride, and community (Auguste et al., 2022; Nobles, 2013b; Washington, 2020). For instance, if one is studying trauma caused by anti-Black racism, a healing framework would need to align with Black cultural principles.

Acknowledging and healing from the psychological and physical effects of racial trauma, induced not only by experiencing racism but also likely by the denial of racism and racial trauma, needs to be informed by the cultural values of the community affected (Washington, 2020; Nobles, 2013a, 2013b). Standard strategies, however, often do not include Black cultural contexts needed for fully understanding racial trauma (Auguste et al., 2022; French et al., 2020; Helms et al., 2012; Washington, 2020). Contrastingly, Black psychology emphasizes connections with the spirit, Black/African culture, community, and collective healing (Nobles, 2013a; Washington, 2020). The radical healing framework, similarly, posits that connection to community and coping with and naming shared racist histories is an integral part of collective healing (French et al., 2020).

In response to the limitations of traditional psychology, Nobles (1974, 2013b) highlights that psychology often centers European American practices and ideologies,

such as individualism, competition, and independence. Black psychology, on the other hand, uses a decolonial approach to studying psychological issues facing Black people, centering Black culture and the uniqueness of the Black experience. Historically, our ancestors believed community and self are interconnected, a principle expressed through *Ubuntu*, meaning “I am because you are” (Washington, 2020; Nobles, 2013a). Building on this decolonial foundation, Nobles’ work formalized Black psychology as a field rooted in African-centered values, establishing core tenets that continue to shape how we understand and support the psychological well-being of Black communities.

Core Tenets of Black Psychology

Nobles (1974) was a founder of Black psychology and emphasized a need to critically reevaluate how researchers drew conclusions about Black psychological experiences. He and others highlighted that the study of Black people should be informed by the values and realities of our community (Nobles, 1974; Nobles, 2013a, 2013b; Washington, 2020). He thus created a new psychological framework that centered African/Black cultural principles and values: *community*, *spirit*, and *cultural pride*.

Community. Central to a Black psychological framework is community connection. When studying Black trauma and the most effective ways of healing, researchers have conceptualized that community-centered healing is more effective than other traditional methods (i.e., individual therapy), mainly when aiming to combat racism and trauma (Grier et al., 2023; Page & Woodland, 2023; Turner et al.,

2022; Nobles 2013a, 2013b; Nobles, 1974; Bryant-Davis, 2013). Bryant-Davis (2013) emphasizes this type of healing in her case study and autoethnography describing Black sisterhood (i.e., close friendships between Black women). Findings highlight that social support, community, and spirituality were key success factors for Black women's mental health.

Similarly, in a sample of Black women, West and colleagues (2010) found in those who experienced some form of racial discrimination, problem-solving coping mechanisms (e.g., acknowledging seeking social support, making plans for healing) were associated with lower levels of depression. More avoidant-coping mechanisms (e.g., denial, mental disengagement) were associated with higher levels of depression. These findings underscore the importance of culturally relevant and constructive coping mechanisms for supporting Black mental health. Similarly, research with Black college students examined flourishing in those who had indicated they experienced, witnessed, or learned about a racially traumatic event. Those who developed deeper connections to community and spirituality reported higher levels of *flourishing*, finding meaning in life, positive psychological health, and emotional well-being (Grier et al., 2023).

These studies suggest effective coping must begin with naming and acknowledging racial trauma, rather than avoiding it, given that participants in both studies had to first indicate experiences (or witnessing) some form of racism. Yet, as French and colleagues (2020) argue, coping alone is not enough. To truly disrupt the psychological consequences of racism, Black people must be supported in moving

beyond coping and survival; toward healing, flourishing, and envisioning liberation. One key pathway to this kind of transformative healing lies in spirituality—a powerful resource through which Black communities have historically resisted oppression, restored connection, and reclaimed wholeness.

Spirit. Spirituality is “belief in the value of a higher power and unknown forces that influence all living things and one’s life” (Jones, 2003, p. 236). Spirituality goes beyond the physical and into the metaphysical dimensions of being. Bryant-Davis and Wong (2013) highlight religion and spirituality as coping mechanisms to heal from racial trauma and improve mental health. They also emphasize that it is essential to know why and how certain cultures use spirituality as a resource (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013).

Many Communities of Color use spirituality as a connection to their ancestors. For Black people, this ancestral connection can be crucial to thinking about how spirituality manifests in our experiences and how our ancestors used spirit as a form of resistance, survival, and connection.

Our ancestors relied on spiritual technologies as part of their overall strategies for liberation. Spiritual technology refers to our ancestral and ancient sources of knowledge rooted in memory, intuition, and embodiment, which act as a conduit to transcend time and space. It is how our peoples have used our spiritual practices to manipulate and transform conditions of violence and domination toward our collective futures (Page & Woodland, 2023, p. 81).

During and after the transatlantic slave trade, many ancestral traditions were abandoned, which was codified in the Code of Indian Offenses. It prohibited Indigenous Americans from many practices, including their spiritual traditions. Enslaved Black people often faced similar restrictions (Price, 1883). The European Christian tradition was forced upon Black people during slavery, when they had to give up their African traditions and rituals (Page & Woodland, 2023; Price, 1883). Yet, healers stress that, as Black people, we must use our ancestral spiritual tools to heal our past and move forward into the present (Degruy, 2017; Page & Woodland, 2023).

Cultural pride. Black psychology emphasizes the importance of not only focusing on the negative aspects of the Black experience but also on the strength and resilience of us as a people (Nobles, 2013b). Connection and pride in Black culture are crucial to gaining self-confidence, connecting to one's culture, and resisting dominant cultural narratives that try to refute the beauty and breadth of being Black (Bryant-Davis, 2013; Jones, 2003; Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). These messages can and should include positive messages about beauty, skin color, hair, and skillsets that come with being Black. Neville and Cross Jr. (2016) interviewed Black participants across the diaspora (i.e., Australia, United States, South Africa, and Bermuda) to examine how Black people develop and assign meaning to their Blackness. Participants reported greater racial pride through various experiences, including seeing Black public figures (e.g., Nikki Giovanni) as representatives of paths they could take in their careers. They also expressed learning about Black

culture to foster more respect, pride, reverence, and admiration for their Black ancestors and culture (Neville & Cross Jr., 2016). This deep sense of cultural pride not only strengthens Black identity and self-worth but also lays the groundwork for transformative healing.

Healing Strategies

One framework that focuses on healing from oppressive systems (e.g., slavery) is radical healing (French et al., 2020). Radical healing is deeply rooted in liberation and Black psychology; it approaches healing as resisting harmful systems, while envisioning freedom and liberation (French et al., 2020). Each strategy I highlight here incorporate at least one facet of radical healing (i.e., critical consciousness, emotional and social support, and cultural authenticity) and uses some core principles from Black psychology (i.e., community, spirit, and cultural pride).

Healing Circles

Healing circles—a practice drawn from indigenous cultures—use Black psychological principles to address racial trauma. During this practice, group members engage in talking sessions where everyone gathers in a circle to heal from harm, strengthen community, and connect with others (Hopkins, 2002).

Healing circles serve many purposes. They are used as a form of group therapy, mainly because Black people can feel a diminished sense of connection with traditional therapy methods (Duncan, 2003; Grier et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2022). For example, a survey of Black male college students revealed that higher *cultural mistrust* (e.g., thinking it best for Black people to be on their guard when around

White people; not trusting White co-workers) reduces the likelihood of seeking traditional therapy (Duncan, 2003). Countering this trend, healing circles help destigmatize the deleterious effects of racial trauma through the storytelling of similar experiences (Auguste et al., 2022). Healing circles are a culturally relevant alternative to therapy that increases therapy utilization (Grills et al., 2016). Healing circles are also effective in times of racial unrest or community crisis. They can be a source of support and structure for organizing among activists (Raffo, n.d.).

Recently, the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) implemented healing circles to help Black people heal from racial trauma, foster connection with other Black community members, and share collective experiences and coping strategies through storytelling (Auguste et al., 2022). Auguste and colleagues (2022) highlight how these circles facilitated healing for Black people using Black psychological principles. Participants reported feeling validated about their experiences and gratitude for the circle, as well as experiencing healing in the space. Researchers opened the circle with an African proverb and a brief meditation before diving into a discussion about stressors from COVID-19, the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and subsequent trials of the officers involved in their murders. Participants felt validated, grateful, excited to participate again, and experienced a sense of healing in the space (Auguste et al., 2022). Grills et al. (2016) also used healing circles more broadly to foster Black power and identity and combat false historical narratives about Black culture. Whereas Auguste and colleagues (2022) focused on specific racially traumatic events, Grills and colleagues (2016) took a

more holistic approach by focusing on Black identity and combating white supremacist ideals and negative messages about Black culture. They aimed to create counter-narratives to mainstream U.S. cultural representations of Black identity.

Researchers highlight how these circles facilitate healing for Black people. First, they require acknowledgment of race-related violence, where people call it out instead of denying or avoiding it. They were also informed by a culturally relevant Black psychological framework, emphasizing positive cultural affirmations, community care, spiritual practices (like opening with a meditation or African proverb), and providing participants with strategies for coping with and healing from race-related trauma (Auguste et al., 2022).

Land Embodiment and Place-Based Critical History

Another healing strategy, used in many Indigenous American and African cultural practices, includes a connection to the Earth. In his article on place and placelessness, Johnson (2012) discusses how place-based knowledge is crucial to our history, and how much of our Western teachings disconnect history and place. For Black people in the United States, it is crucial to think critically about the very land we occupy today and develop place-based knowledge about our history. By learning about and visiting physical sites of oppression, there is a deeper learning via connecting with the land in ways that are not possible through word of mouth or conventional educational means.

A powerful example of land-based learning rooted in specific cultural knowledge is the Remember the Removal program (Lewis et al., 2020). By retracing

the historic Trail of Tears on bicycle, Cherokee youth and young adults engage in an embodied educational journey which connects them to the physical landscapes their ancestors once traveled under violent displacement. This direct interaction with land transformed historical learning from abstract information into lived, emotional, and spiritual experiences. Participants describe connecting and learning from each other on the journey, and emphasize by learning what their ancestors went through, it gave them a deeper appreciation for their strength and resilience (Lewis et al., 2020). The study highlights how land-based learning fosters a deepened sense of cultural identity, historical consciousness, and cultural pride, while also promoting health and well-being (Lewis et al., 2020). In this way, land is not just a backdrop for learning, but an active, relational teacher that grounds cultural values and catalyzes personal and communal transformation.

The Trail of Tears is a site where unimaginable violence and oppression occurred against Indigenous communities in the United States. Scholars have explored land as a form of art therapy, cultural connection, and a resistance practice for Black people (Royster, 2025). Others have theorized and argued that frameworks such as radical healing should consider Black ecologies and Indigenous land based healing as part of healing from oppressive systems (Schmidt & Patterson, 2024). However no empirical work, to my knowledge, has explored healing from racial trauma using land based practices in Black communities. My work aims to fill this large gap by investigating if land connected to the transatlantic slave trade can be a site of healing for Black people. Some key sites of oppression related to the

transatlantic slave trade are located in Ghana, West Africa. Much of our history in the United States limits our knowledge of what happened to enslaved persons before they were forced on the Middle Passage. Johnson (2012) posits, that in gaining this hands-on, place-based history can catalyze healing through knowing and seeing where our ancestors came from and what they endured.

Race, place, and history. Bonam and colleagues (2017) have considered the connection between race and place. Not only is race tied to people, but also to physical spaces, as well as the social construction of race and racism (Bonam et al., 2017). Scholars have found by prompting people to combine place—through applying meaning to physical spaces via personal connections—while learning about systemic racism, people develop a personalized understanding of systemic racism (Coleman et al., 2019; Coleman et al., 2026; Coleman & Yantis, 2024; Dancis & Coleman, 2022). In one learning exercise developed by Coleman and colleagues (2026); (also see Dancis & Coleman, 2022), White participants select a physical location to which they are personally connected. They research and write about how systemic racism is embedded there; then they write a personal reflection on this experience. Participants engaging in the activity report a newfound awareness and learning about systemic racism, and a deepened awareness of their own roles in systemic racism (e.g., Bonam et al., 2026; Coleman et al., 2026; Dancis & Coleman, 2022). Although these studies were conducted with White participants, key findings indicate place-based critical history can help deepen and concretize historical knowledge, along with its potential for healing in Black communities.

A Novel, Integrated Approach to Black Healing

Both healing circles and land embodiment, when implemented as racial trauma healing strategies, incorporate core tenants of Black psychology. Some empirical work does provide evidence that intentionally centering these tenants (e.g., community, spirit, and cultural pride) can facilitate Black healing (Auguste et al., 2022; Grills et al., 2016). To my knowledge, however, no study has investigated how implementing both healing strategies centered on Black psychological principles can facilitate healing for Black people. My work aims to fill that gap by investigating if healing can happen when multiple healing strategies (i.e. healing circles and land based critical history) centered on Black psychological principles are implemented. Given the deep history in Ghana related to chattel slavery, this study aims to explore if and how Black people experience healing at sites of historical oppression. For many Black Americans, we hold many traumas resulting from slavery, including feelings of placelessness, spirit murder, and harmful socialization patterns; as well as disconnection from our ancestral practices. This study aims to explore how Black people can heal from these specific forms of intergenerational trauma using healing circles and land based critical history.

Method

Data Collection

These data were collected on a community trip to Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast in Ghana, West Africa. The trip was hosted by Restorative Justice for Oakland (RJOY), a non-profit organization that does work and provides training related to

restorative justice, healing, and provides mental health services. Every three years, RJOY takes its staff and community members to a different African country to learn more about their justice systems. The trip was 12 days long, but the analysis of the interviews mainly focuses on two days, when we visited the Assin Manso River and the Cape Coast Slave Dungeon. I was a participant on this trip (through a research internship I previously held with RJOY), so will use “we” throughout. I explore how this informed my analysis and interpretation of the data later in this section.

Throughout the trip, RJOY staff facilitated healing circles each day. Some aimed to build community, and others centered reflection and grounding. There were about 30 people on this trip, so we also had smaller groups that would gather and have circles each evening to reflect on the days’ events. The day of our journey before heading to Assin Manso and Cape Coast, the whole community engaged in a healing circle to ground us all in our upcoming journey. We took the time to name how the visit might impact us and were given the prompt “What ancestors are you bringing with you on this journey?”. As everyone shared out, some people named ancestors from their direct lineage, and others named other Black ancestors who inspire them (e.g. Queen Nanny of the Maroons).

Brief Site History and Context

Assin Manso was the site where enslaved Africans took their "last bath" in the Donkor Nsuo (Slave River). The land was used both as a place of rest and branding. Assin Manso was one of the largest markets for slave merchants. Enslaved persons were brought there and fed, allowed to rest, take their final baths, and branded at

Assin Manso before being forced to various dungeons across Ghana. The enslaved persons who appeared strong enough were forced to walk the 40 miles to Cape Coast Castle; those who appeared to be weak or “damaged” were tied to trees and left there to die (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, n.d.).

When we arrived at Assin Manso, we were greeted by a young man who had us gather and explained to us the history of the site and guided us to a wall where we stopped. He explained to us that our ancestors, when they were brought here, had very little clothing and did not have shoes as they traveled. He welcomed each of us (if we were comfortable) to remove our socks and shoes to get a small glimpse into how our ancestors traveled this same path. He guided us about half a mile through a beautiful grove of trees, which led us to the river. Everyone had the chance to walk down into the water and take in the space. We stayed for probably about an hour or so to give everyone time, and afterwards we all gathered in circle, holding hands, while listening to a poem one of our community members felt inspired to write while at the site:

The sun greets you
Extend across your limbs
Call into it
Fall into each other
Welcome home
We reunite with wide eyes
Sweaty palms

Rattling energy

The earth greets you

The ground greets you

Home greets you

Welcome home

What have you carried?

What are your hands open for?

This place is meant for you, all of you

It can heal and hold

Welcome home

The following day, we went to Cape Coast Slave Dungeon (also known as Cape Coast Castle). Sweden built Cape Coast Castle, although ownership shifted to the Danish, Dutch, and English overtime. Cape Coast was first used as a port for trading gold, wood, and textiles, and when the English took control, it was used for trading humans. It became a principal point of trading for enslaved peoples across the Atlantic, when the enslaved populations were too large for the castle to hold. Hence, they created underground dungeons to hold larger numbers (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, n.d.).

When we arrived at Cape Coast, we were greeted by our tour guide who took us around the entire property, which included the upstairs quarter where soldiers lived, the church, a "cell" where punished enslaved persons were sent, and finally the dungeons. The tour guide explained each area of the premises to us as we walked

through, and we engaged in conversation with him and each other as we entered each part of the property.

Participants, Design, and Data

I conducted secondary data analysis of brief semi-structured testimonials with 14 Black participants living in the United States, of different age groups. Each testimonial was a semi-structured interview that lasted about 5-7 minutes each. Each interview was transcribed, and the average page length was 2 pages. Although the interviews were brief, what participants shared allowed for a deep and robust analysis of my research questions. Participants responded to one prompt "How has this trip contributed to your personal healing?". The testimonials took place about four hours after we visited the second site (Cape Coast Dungeon), at the hotel we were all staying at in Elmina, Ghana. The entire group was asked whether they would be willing to speak individually about the journey's impact on them. About half volunteered to give a testimonial. They first verbally consented to participate to the RJOY staff conducting the testimonials. I was also a participant. I did not, however, include my testimonial in the dataset, which I explain further in my analysis approach. A staff member of RJOY conducted the testimonials and did not record participant demographic information. Therefore, the demographic information I had access to is limited.

Analysis Approach

I created an integrative methodological approach that brings together the methodology of surrender (Animashaun & Bell, 2023; Dillard 2006; Dillard, 2008),

the daughtering method (Evans-Winters, 2019), and the H.U.N.C.H. (*H*istorically logical, *U*nderstanding, *N*uances, *C*ommunity: for us, by us, and *H*onor) method (HighJohn-Bey, 2024). These three methodologies value spirituality, ancestral knowledge, memory, and intuition as valid sources of knowledge production and meaning making. Each approach emerges from Black epistemologies and insists upon care, accountability, and historical depth when engaging with Black lives and narratives. I combined these methodologies with steps outlined in reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2022).

Methodology of Surrender

Methodology of surrender involves approaching the research as both meditative in that it is led by the wisdom of the ancestors, and deeply spiritual in that it extends knowledge production to the ancestors and embodied experiences with the research. It involves paying attention to the spiritual world as a site of scholarship and reverence throughout the data analysis process, and the surrender works as a space of peace, love, and admiration, which is honest to our ways of Black cultural knowledge. This involves memory work; that is, using photographs, videos, conversations, and embodied emotions as a source of the data points. Methodology of surrender embraces the act of letting go, which involves letting the data, the participants, emotions, and ancestral presence guide both the analysis and the research questions that may form, staying open to what may be discerned.

Daughtering Method

Daughtering involves taking in the world as a Black woman by reaching back to our childlike selves, being observant, engaging in deep learning, and appreciating the world around us. The daughtering method focuses on how Black women and girls engage in care, healing, and resistance through intergenerational relationships. Specifically, it has five key elements: intergenerational knowledge sharing, care as resistance, embodied knowledge, spiritual and emotional intuition, and activism. Daughtering as a method highlights how Black girls and women learn from our mothers, aunties, grandmothers, and other non-biological community mothers. It acknowledges spirituality, emotionality, lived experiences, and personal narratives as crucial and legitimate ways of understanding the world.

H.U.N.C.H. Method

The H.U.N.C.H method stands for **H**istorically logical, **U**nderstanding, **N**uances, **C**ommunity: for us, by us, and **H**onor. This method requires having an understanding of history through a culturally sound and accurate lens, understanding the community one is researching, and taking into account the complex, nuanced understanding of cultural norms, and the relationships of the participants. It also requires being deeply rooted in the Black community, taking great care, and honoring the stories of the participants (HighJohn-Bey, 2024).

Interpretive Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is a six-step process for analyzing qualitative data, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, reviewing themes, naming and defining themes, and writing up the data (Braun &

Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2022). Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of how their background, values, identities, and assumptions influence how one interprets data, applies codes, and the creation of themes. I had the immense privilege of being a participant on this trip. Therefore, my role as a researcher in this analysis is entangled with my own experiences as a Black woman on this journey in Ghana. Therefore, I used my photos, memories, stories, and interactions with the participants as part of my reflexive analysis. RTA becomes interpretive because I did not explicitly follow the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), and the deep integration of other methods throughout the process. My interpretation of these data was also deeply influenced not only by my identity as a Black woman, but being both research and participant. My analytic approach thus implements interpretative RTA because I integrated it with the daughtering method, methodology of surrender, and H.U.N.C.H throughout. This integration was appropriate for my analysis because these three additional analytic approaches are grounded in embodiment, intergenerational memory, spirituality, Black cultural knowledge, and honoring participants' voices and stories. Although I am coming in with a research question, I stayed open to new or additional questions that may have been discerned from these data. I documented my emotional and physical responses to these data throughout, staying attuned to my own embodied reactions, paying close attention to when the participants mention embodied experiences as well. My analysis also let my own ancestral connections and spirit guide me as I analyzed the testimonials. Each time, before I engaged with the testimonials, I wrote and spoke aloud the following meditation (which Evans-

Winters, 2019 deems an important, though optional, step when engaging with the daughtering method).

My work is sacred. My memory is power. My spirit is knowledge. I come to work as a site of remembrance, discovery, of healing. Let my heart stay open, my body be a vessel, and my spirit be connected. I invite the memory and spirit of my ancestors to guide me through this work with care, reverence, and immense gratitude. Asé.

Finally, I used this guiding question that Evans-Winters (2019) names as central to reflect on in the daughtering method, “How does engagement with inquiry and data serve my family, my communities, my self-worth, and the person I want to become?” I used this question as a key reflection practice as I move through the data analysis process using the steps outlined in reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). This question acted as a "gut check" after each analysis session, where I recorded voice memos for myself after each time I engaged with the testimonials.

Below, I outline how I integrated H.U.N.C.H, daughtering, and methodology of surrender into each phase of the interpretative RTA process. Rather than following each step of RTA sequentially, my analysis process was iterative, which allowed for my integrated methodological approach to be meditative, reflexive, and flexible (See Figure 1).

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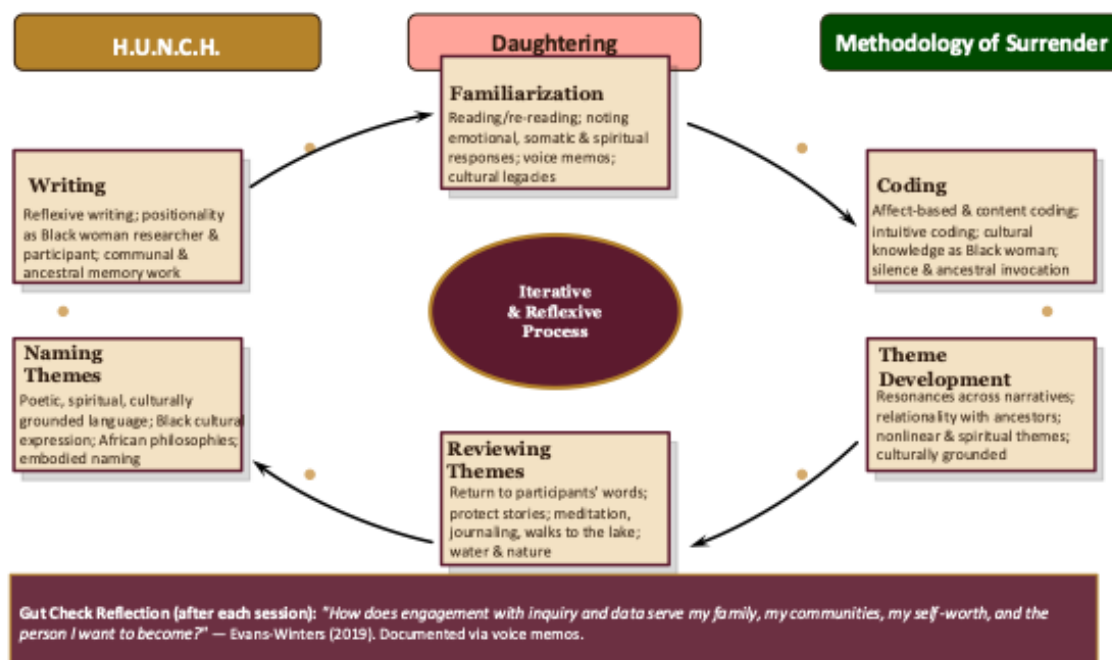


Figure 1. *Iterative Reflexive Thematic Analysis Process*

Familiarization. I read and re-read the transcripts slowly, noting any emotional, somatic, and spiritual responses from the participants, as well as my own. I noted my own responses by recording voice notes as I read through the testimonials, mentioning any physical and emotional reactions I had (e.g. tears, flutters in my stomach, laughter, etc.). This honored the methodology of surrender's invitation to be moved and the daughtering method's call to attend with care. I was also sure to reflect on what historical and cultural legacies are active, honoring H.U.N.C.H., this included pausing to look up certain historical reference's participants may have mentioned in the transcripts.

Coding. Rather than coding strictly for content, I paid close attention to affect as well as content. Moments of silence, tears, and ancestral invocation were coded as meaningfully as spoken words. Methodology of surrender encourages intuitive

coding, whereas the H.U.N.C.H. method guides attention to cultural specificity. Intuitive coding allowed me to use my own cultural knowledge as a Black woman to assign codes, along with my specific experiences on the trip to guide the coding process.

Theme development. I built themes from resonances across narratives, shaped by cultural language and emotional depth. Keeping in line with the daughtering method, I aimed to pay close attention to themes that honor the relationality between participants and the ancestors. With methodology of surrender, I stayed open to nonlinear and spiritual themes that may have emerged, and I used H.U.N.C.H. to reflect on the themes being culturally grounded to be sure they reflect the lived experiences of Black communities.

Reviewing themes. I returned to participants' words to ensure each theme honored their meaning, emotions, and embodied experiences. Daughtering reminds us to protect and not misrepresent participant stories. H.U.N.C.H. method ensures historical and cultural fidelity and accuracy, and methodology of surrender encourages us to resist trying to fit a story into themes. This phase involved a lot of meditation and journaling. Along with the voice memos, I often went on walks to nearby lake. These walks allowed me to connect with nature, particularly the water, and often resulted in new thoughts about the themes and memories from the trip that I may not have thought of prior.

Naming themes. I named themes with poetic, spiritual, and culturally grounded language when appropriate. This naming aimed to honor the participants'

voices and legacies. I also choose theme names that reflect Black cultural expression and not focus on academic jargon. Some theme names I chose honor African philosophies and practices, while others are centered around the embodied, emotional nature of the trip.

Writing. I wrote reflexively, with awareness of my position as a Black woman researcher and participant engaged in communal, ancestral memory work.

Together, these methods provide a culturally grounded and reflexive analytic process, rooted in Black culture and ancestral connection. By bringing together methodology of surrender, daughtering, and H.U.N.C.H., it embraces emotion, embodied experiences, and relationships in the analysis process. However, integrating these methodologies did come with some tensions. For instance, methodology of surrender requires much flexibility, and is meditative and spiritual in nature. Deciding how to employ this method into the steps of RTA was difficult, hence why I did not follow these steps in order and allowed myself to analyze the testimonials using a more flexible, iterative process. Finally, the daughtering method was intended to be used in qualitative research studying and honoring Black women and girls; these testimonials were done with both Black men and Black women. Therefore, rather than trying to employ the daughtering methodology in a way that departs from its intentions, I used it more as a reflexive process, given my positionality as a Black woman myself. I discuss throughout the results how my views and experiences as a Black woman in the United States influenced and intertwined with the participants' experiences.

Results and Discussion

Given the prompt "How has this journey contributed to your personal healing?", participants were able to speak about how the trip had healed them in profound ways. My analysis resulted in four themes: 1) sankofa, 2) emotional alchemy, 3) ubuntu, and 4) land embodiment (see Appendix A for full thematic coding scheme). Within these themes participants spoke about how the trip and sites we visited were transformational, in that it shifted collective memory of what our ancestors endured during slavery and bolstered cultural pride. The trip also helped deepen their connections to Black history and culture and had a great impact on their personal healing.

Sankofa

Sankofa is a Twi expression originating from the Akan people in Ghana (Temple, 2010). Literally translated, sankofa means "Go back and get it". Its deeper meaning is grounded in appreciation for history and embodies respect and honor for our ancestors. It emphasizes that by going back to our past we can embrace the past and begin to move forward (Temple, 2010). Participants discussed how learning about slavery in this hands-on way created a deeper learning for them, and that it propelled them to look forward to a better future for our people.

Xavier talks about this learning as a way of moving forward. He states:

I think the main source of healing from that was it was like empowering for me to feel like I had this opportunity to come back here and learn more about my culture and my history and stuff, and my ancestors probably didn't think that

was gonna be possible for me, knowing the position they were in. So, it feels empowering for me to be able to think about creating a better world that I wouldn't be able to envision.

Many participants discuss this very critical aspect of radical hope, which Mosley and colleagues (2020) outline in their radical hope framework as a key aspect of healing from the harmful pasts of racism. Participants not only talk about how they felt a sense of empowerment and learning about the history, but the visions they have for a better future. Envisioning not only a better future for themselves, but it is also the call back to our ancestors, who could not possibly have imagined us being there, while they were living through the horror at that time of enslavement. This aspect of radical hope is even more palpable: physically seeing part of what our ancestors went through and still having glimmers of hope for a better future are exactly what the radical healing framework encapsulates: "It is radical because it transcends one's ability to envision and understand what the future holds" (French et al., 2020 p.26).

Regina also discusses learning Black history at a deeper level on the trip:

You know [...], today we went to the dungeons. We went to the um, the dungeons, some people call them slave castles, but after you go there, you're like, this is no castle, it's more like a House of torture. And so, something I always knew, I always knew African American people I always knew we were strong, and you know we're good at a lot of things like sports or, you know. We're creative people, and amidst the pain we always find joy. You know, I like being African American and I love, you know, I love my culture and what

I learned today, I didn't learn it, I just understood it at a deeper level today. So I was impacted by understanding something at a deeper level. Something I knew, I heard, we talked about, but I understood it at a deeper level.

Here Regina touches on two important pieces of learning that scholars (see Dancis & Coleman, 2022; Bonam et al., 2017; Coleman & Yantis, 2024) have emphasized can occur when learning about history: First, for many participants being physically at the site helped concretize the history they had previously learned about slavery. For example, many of us knew about the dungeons our ancestors were kept in, but seeing with our own eyes gave us a more concrete understanding of them. The darkness, the size, the one tiny window hole that let in a small amount of sunlight; these details are not discussed or taught about in many schools. Second, the physical space also helped deepen participants' understanding of this history. For instance, we know that our ancestors lived through horrific conditions, while in the dungeons, the docent showed us all a part of the floor that was raised, he explained to us that this was solidified waste, as there were no bathrooms in the dungeons. This small fact really intensified the fact that slave owners went to great lengths to dehumanize and humiliate our ancestors in ways that are unfathomable.

Cape Coast to this day is called "Cape Coast Castle" and technically it was because it housed many government officials, soldiers, and even a church (Cape Coast Castle Museum, n.d.). However, as Regina points out when you go below and see the dungeons, it is indeed like a house of torture. Being in the physical space, then, helped not only deepen what participants already knew, but also produced a

shift in perspective of our ancestors and understanding of Black culture. It revealed truths that are often covered in the United States when we discuss aspects of this harmful history, particularly in how history is taught in schools which is often sanitized (Perez & Salter, 2019).

Finally, a key aspect of Sankofa involved an invitation, a call for community to experience the trip in the ways that we did and return back to learn more of our Black history. Will says "Every African American, if they can afford it, or in the African diaspora, should come here. It requires saving and planning, but everyone should come here. You would have a better understanding and appreciation of our story." This call points to key aspect of a transformative shift in the collective memory of our ancestors' struggles, which aided in not only an increase in historical knowledge, but a pride and appreciation of our ancestors, which scholars have posited is a key pathway to healing (Mosley et al., 2020).

Despite generations of attempts to dehumanize, degrade, humiliate, and damage Black peoples' spirits (Williams, 1991; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019) this trip, for many healed the soul wounds that may have been present from centuries of anti-Black racism and the institution of slavery. Although this trip was filled with learning more about the atrocities our ancestors faced, for many it aided in healing these soul wounds, both from historical and contemporary negative messages about our people. This learning, resulted in immense pride for our Black culture, and resulted in a deepened appreciation for our ancestor's resilience, strength, and survival through it all.

Emotional Alchemy

This theme consisted of any mention of participants naming the many emotions that came up for them. For some, these emotions were tangled and even transformed, with the very deep negative emotions (e.g. anger, hurt, sadness), transforming into positive ones of hope, gratitude, and acceptance.

Jackie says:

Well. I was brought to tears yesterday when I went by the River. I, thought I was tough, until I saw what my ancestors went through and I, honestly I wish I could tell them, Thank you for fighting for us, going through it, so we didn't have to do it.

A lot of participants also expressed not being able to fully articulate their emotions, and some even explicitly saying they didn't quite know what they were feeling. For example Brent says "To be honest, man, I feel like there's much more processing to do, but so far... been very impactful in the sense that...I feel more, I feel even deeper appreciation for what my ancestors been through."

Some even expressed feelings of pride, and a mix of other emotions, Alexis talks about her identity as a Jamaican American and her journey with Black identity and culture being transformative after our journey.

It feels like it's allowed me to have a sense of pride. We had a check in [community] circle the other day, and my word was pride. I've always felt pride in being Jamaican, but it also felt like there was this missing link as someone who grew up in the US and quite honestly, I felt a little bit of shame holding on

to the pride because I felt like, you know, I was seeing so much poverty and harm and I still had challenges with understanding what does it mean to be black in the world and black in America. [...] Am I black enough and being on this journey has allowed me to bring all of those things in to perspective and to create a deep link [...] And so for me, in terms of my healing journey, I'm letting go of a little bit of the shame around not growing up in my home country because when my mom sees the opportunity to bring me to the US, she took it. So I'm letting go of not feeling shame around that. I'm also letting go of not feeling like I have to pinpoint to someone exactly where my DNA says that I descend from, the Maroons. Which is an identity that holds on to and I know it's an identity that exists in my veins and so being here and hearing others name it, has really brought [me] pride in a real way. [...] I felt at peace in moments that I thought that I would fall to my knees and cry, or in moments I thought I would be so angry that it would be unshakable and I didn't feel that in many other places. You know, when I think about enslavement trails or walks, whatever you want to call it in the US, those moments felt unshakable and being here it felt like a weight being washed away.

For Alexis, not only did the trip come with feelings of shame turning into pride, but as she expresses feeling positive feelings such as peace when she expected some negative feelings to emerge. Many participants expressed complex, and often dynamic emotions. There was an aspect of being in the space that allowed for these emotions to fully surface and sometimes instead coalesce and transform into new ones. I contend

that being in a physical Black space (i.e. a country like Ghana, with a majority Black population), and experiencing these emotions surrounded by Black community, allowed for these emotions to not only surface but become a source of deep processing and healing. Often times when learning about history related to racism, Black people are sometimes in spaces with White people, which can create feelings of uncomfortably, and emotional stifling in mixed race spaces (James-Gallaway & James-Gallaway, 2023).

Reading the emotions participants expressed throughout this theme, I reflected on the many times I had expressed intense emotion around conversations of racism in mixed race spaces. Leaving those spaces left me often feeling embarrassed, alone, and even ashamed at times. On this trip, it was a beautiful feeling knowing that I was surrounded by people who got it, who shared and often pushed me to feel the full breadth of my emotions. Although many people rightfully felt many negative emotional responses; being able to cry, scream, fall down to our knees in some cases was in such contrast to the sometimes survival tactics our ancestors had to employ, stifling their emotions in order to not be punished or worse. These survival tactics sometimes being passed down through generations of Black people. However on our journey we got to not only experience these emotions ourselves, but by witnessing the members of our community experience them too aided in such validation and emotional expression.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a Zulu term which means, "I am because you are" (Nussbaum, 2003). Ubuntu captures the meaning of community and oneness with the Earth, it

means that as a people we are interconnected with each other and the land. This theme was captured through participants sharing how the community aspect of the trip contributed to their personal healing in impactful ways, that helped us all feel connected to each other, and the land of Ghana through mind, body, and spirit.

Scott says:

We take for example the circle that we participated in on Friday with this group. I saw literally dozens of people like open to being vulnerable, to express their deep feeling, their deep emotions, and that is moving to me because it means that people are processing and working through their relationship with this land and some people have done DNA testing and figured that most of their DNA is from Ghana, so they call this home. I'm honest with myself to say I do not know, but I saw people processing this and it was meaningful to me because I saw fellow Africans on the soil being, like, allowing themselves to connect with the people, the place, and the journey in Ghana.

Scott continues:

Yeah. So, I wanna talk about the river that we visited. In my 13 years are coming here, I'd never visited that river. [...] And here's what I said, participated in that event, as I watch people rid themselves of their shoes and socks and walk that journey as their ancestors before them might have walked, as I see people reflecting on the spirit of their ancestors, as I see people acknowledging how challenging and difficult it must have been for their ancestors as they did that walk, knowing that they'd never, ever again see or experience their family, that

they'd be removed from this land. And so, we as their progeny, we as their descendants, like, came back to reclaim. [...] So yeah, this has been after 13 years, and maybe as much as 13 more trips, I feel the connection on this trip with such a large group of people is magical. It is magnificent. It's just awesome.

This is particularly powerful because while some of us knew each other on the trip, there were many people who were just meeting for the first time. Dwayne further emphasizes this point by stating, "We have a new community. We are in fact family. We are now a tribe!"

Participants' journey of healing on this trip was not only defined by each individual but was often enmeshed with others' experiences. This insight is in line with Black psychology in that, for Black people, healing often happens in community (Nobles, 2013). This deep level of connection and collective healing is also emphasized as a key aspect of radical healing (French et al., 2020). For many, this theme was also enmeshed with feelings of placelessness, the feeling that one has no land to claim as home. Many of us on the trip being African American, don't know where in Africa our direct lineage might have descended from, but being in Ghana created feelings of home. Being in the United States knowing that we descend from ancestors that were forcibly brought here (although African American culture is robust and a source of cultural connection and pride), can aide in not feeling a connection to this land. Many felt a connection with the land in Ghana, and with the Ghanaian people, being so welcomed into a country created feelings of home, and kinship with each other and with the people in Ghana.

Land Embodiment

The physical aspect of the land had an immense impact on participants. Describing not only being in Ghana, but particularly at Assin Manso, where we removed our shoes and socks, and felt the water of the river, was especially impactful for participants.

Xavier expresses:

I think when we went to the river yesterday that was a big moment of healing for me. Yeah, just to feel empowered. And it was very spiritual, like, not only reconnecting with, like, the history, but also with the nature, I think and feeling in touch with, like, this was my ancestors, it was their land too.

Similarly, Scott also says,

So, I really felt that there was a washing, like we could wash away some of the hurt and the pain [and] the trauma that we have, like, held for 400 years. I felt the sense of relief in washing away that burden.

For many, the Assin Manso River, was a space of deep spiritual connection. A connection not only to the land itself, but participants felt an openness, and a spiritual connection with our ancestors, even more so than when we visited the dungeons the following day. Many have emphasized how nature can allow for these connections in ways that go beyond the physical realm. As Scott states, being in nature, specifically the water, allowed for a release of emotions, a "washing away" of trauma that can be held in the body, through generations.

The healing that occurred at the river, was insurmountable. Analyzing quotes from this theme involved a lot of reflection and validation for me. Reading through participants expressing that they felt so much more emotional in the water than they did in the dungeons, was so aligned with my own experiences there. The release of tears and emotions when you step foot in that water, was one I cannot fully describe, so reading my fellow community members reflections about the experience really helped me name some of the things I was feeling and experiencing there. In the spirit of ubuntu, these connections with the land allowed many participants to feel such a deep connection to their ancestors and experience embodied healing that specifically occurred by physically being in the water.

Closing Thoughts

The radical healing framework posits that naming and acknowledging the harm is the very first and critical step to healing (French et al., 2023). In this study, actively naming our brutal history was crucial to the healing process. The land was a key driver of this healing. For Black Americans (as many of us were), going back to the motherland was an experience in itself, but standing on the land, putting our bare feet in the water, and touching the walls where our ancestors were held captive in the dungeons allowed for a connection that cannot be summed up in words. Relatedly, these physical spaces facilitated deeper learning that many of us described as transformative. The United States is a country that often denies racism through its policies, white-washing of our history, and outright denial that slavery ever happened. It was eye-opening for many of us to learn by seeing, feeling, and embodying the

history that has been hidden from us. Yes, reading and classroom education can help, but being physically present made the learning happen. In this way, the history was a tangible thing that we could see and touch.

Author and feminist scholar bell hooks states, “Rarely if any of us are healed in isolation” (pg. 215, hooks, 1999). This quotation emphasizes the need for community, and the community aspect of this trip made it what it was. Being able to spend time together and share tears and moments of joy, hold hands, hug, and reflect together, made the healing even deeper. A lot of this was done through intentional means, through the many healing circles that RJOY facilitated throughout the trip. The role of community was imperative to the processing of what we were all going through.

Scholars have discussed the concept of Endarkened Third Spaces, which is a concept describing how Black women and girls cultivate havens to process trauma and healing, often connecting with ancestors (Amimashaun & Bell, 2023). That is exactly what was created on this trip: It was a space free of whiteness, patriarchy, and colonization. It was a space that allowed us to commune with spirit and the ancestors, and where we brought our whole Black selves, fully and unapologetically.

Limitations

While participants shared a great deal of evidence for healing on this trip, interviews were conducted while still in process, that is they were conducted while still in Ghana, and some the same day as visiting some of the sites. More time could have allowed participants to process their experiences, as these testimonials do not

showcase the long-term healing impacts that might be at play. Additionally, since this was secondary data analysis, the study could have used a more fleshed out interview protocol, allowing participants more time to share additional insights into their experiences. Follow-up work might also include focus groups to lean into the community dynamics that were so powerful during our journey to Ghana.

Given the limited information gathered from the interviews, we do not necessarily know what the participants' individual experiences were, particularly regarding specific forms of intergenerational trauma people may have been coming in with and what they deemed they were healing from on this trip. However, evidence from my analyses provides some insight into the broad manifestations of intergenerational racial trauma and communal healing that can occur in Black communities.

Conclusion

As this study demonstrates, Black communities already hold the knowledge, spiritual technologies, and collective practices necessary for healing; that is rooted in community, land, and ancestral connection. It also offers further evidence that Black people don't need to wait for White people, and systems to recognize or acknowledge the long centuries of racism we have experienced and continue to today. Nor do we need them to continue to showcase our brilliance, resilience, and radical hope for a better future in our communities, we hold the power to do that for ourselves.

Most mainstream narratives, especially around slavery and the racist history of the United States center White narratives that often sanitize or sensationalize Black

trauma, these narratives often do not accurately reflect historical truths. These narratives often mischaracterize slavery as this morally wrong moment in history rather than an ongoing, embodied legacy with psychological, spiritual, and intergenerational consequences, that have been the foundation of anti-Black racism in the United States. In contrast, the findings of this study underscore the importance of centering Black voices, Black epistemologies, and Black cultural frameworks when engaging racial trauma and healing. Participants' experiences of healing at sites of historical oppression illuminate how truth-telling, when grounded in culturally congruent practices, can facilitate emotional alchemy, collective meaning-making, and renewed connection to ancestors and land.

Racism is a prevalent, ongoing system, which can produce trauma symptoms such as self-doubt, anxiety, changes in DNA, increase risk for depression, and diseases. As this study shows, one form of trauma can be intergenerational trauma, caused by centuries of anti-Black racism and slavery. This study provides evidence that trauma, when named within the community and held with reverence rather than as a spectacle, becomes not only something to survive but something that can be metabolized into gratitude, pride, and possibilities of a better future.

However, given that racism (i.e., the cause of racial trauma) is a system that Black people did not create, it is also imperative to explore how perpetrators of racism (i.e., White people) conceptualize racial trauma because these conceptions can impact individuals' responses (i.e., adequately addressing the harm) and their reactions (i.e., expressing empathy vs. denying one's experience). Furthermore,

insight into how interventions (such as learning about historical examples of racism) might influence perceptions of racial trauma are of great importance. These interventions can be crucial in stopping the cycle of harm.

Studies have examined how people conceptualize racism (e.g., Bonam et al. (2018); Nelson et al. (2013); Salter (2021), but none, to my knowledge have investigated White people's perceptions of the traumatic impact of racism. The system of racism and racial hierarchy was created by White people, who maintain power and privilege within this system, having decision making power in policy decisions, funding, and narratives. White people can act as perpetrators of racism (and racial trauma), so these perceptions are integral to mitigating the potential harm it can have on People of Color. The onus to dismantle these systems then should not fall solely on People of Color, however we should be involved in how racism is discussed and taught, to ensure it is an accurate source of accountability and learning accurate histories. Perpetrators of racism need to have a central role in dismantling this system, however, to have a holistic view of the problem of racism, and the experiences of those impacted by it, Black people also should be involved in this process (Shelton & Richeson, 2006). Shelton and Richeson (2006) argue that interracial dynamics are relational, and that they depend on the involvement of both parties, rather than individualistic view on one group or the other. I'm aiming to further that work by arguing that racial trauma and healing cannot be studied completely without studying both how Black people experience and heal from trauma, and how White people perceive this trauma. For that to happen, first White

people must understand the full extent of the impact racism has had and continues to have on People of Color. Acknowledging the traumatic impact of racism is one crucial step in this process.

Chapter 3

Countering Denial

In the following sections, I outline the manifestations of *direct racial trauma*, i.e., trauma directly experienced by Black individuals (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; Sue et al., 2007). I shift from intergenerational to direct trauma given that is the most robust area of research on White perceptions of racism. While future work should investigate perceptions of racial trauma in all forms (intergenerational, vicarious, etc.), I thought it important to explore direct racism first. People of Color experience direct racial trauma when directly experiencing racism at the individual, institutional, or structural levels, however, much of the literature focuses on individual or interpersonal forms of racial trauma. I discuss how direct trauma can result from experiencing various forms of racism, including interpersonal, institutional, and structural. I then review psychological and societal factors that contribute to White people's denial of racial trauma, and tacit denial of racial trauma by denying racism.

Direct Racial Trauma

Direct experiences of racism are prominent for Black people, which can result in direct racial trauma (i.e., trauma directly experienced by Black individuals; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; Sue et al., 2007). Yet, because racism can be experienced on many levels, direct trauma can also result from experiencing racism at various levels of social analysis (Feagin, 2006; Henry & Tator, 2006): the *individual* (i.e., individuals' racially biased perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, and/or prejudices,

which can lead to discriminatory behaviors in interpersonal interactions), *institutional* (i.e., practices and policies that disadvantage some and advantage others), and *structural* (i.e., group disparities, cultural norms, and social representations culminating from individual and institutional racism over time and across social systems).

Much of the literature on direct racial trauma focuses on the individual level, including incidents of interpersonal experiences of racism. Individual-level racism can occur in overt instances, like being stopped by a police officer and frisked because you are Black (Carter et al., 2011; Carter, 2007; Pieterse et al., 2022; Bird et al., 2021). They can also be subtle, more covert instances, such as *microaggressions*, which are brief slights that send deprecating or belittling messages to People of Color (Sue et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2013). Either overt or covert direct racism can cause trauma symptoms such as self-deprecating beliefs (Carter, 2007), low self-esteem (Bryant Davis & Ocampo, 2005a; Carter, 2007), and fear that another Black person's negative behavior will reflect negatively on oneself (Degruy, 2017).

Direct racism can also occur at the institutional level, which involves policies and practices that disadvantage Black people. One example is law enforcement practices that lead to racial profiling and excessive use of force by police, including killings of unarmed Black people (e.g., Bor et al., 2018; Lee & Robinson, 2019; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017). Evidence shows people display trauma symptoms after experiencing police brutality or being stopped-and-frisked, including hypervigilance,

avoidance of police officers, and nightmares (Aymer, 2016; Bor et al., 2018; Smith, Lee, & Robinson, 2019; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017).

At the structural level, institutional practices that occur over time and across various social contexts can produce racial disparities, such as Black people experiencing the highest rates of police brutality. Patterns like these contribute to harmful stereotypes (e.g., Black people are criminals) that get ingrained into societal narratives and social structures. (e.g., the workplace, police force, schools, media representations; Banaji et al., 2021; Feagin, 2006).

Denying Racial Trauma

Although there is a breadth of evidence for racial trauma, perpetrators of racism (i.e., White people) may deny its existence in several ways. When institutions and other social structures also deny this trauma, it can validate and magnify White people's denial of racial trauma. This denial of trauma can be outright, but racial trauma can sometimes be denied by denying racism itself.

Outright Denial of Racial Trauma

Individual people can deny racial trauma by claiming we are playing the “race card” or being overly sensitive (Lentin, 2018; Perez & Salter, 2019), which can lead to others thinking those experiencing racial trauma are “whining”. This denial can be traumatic as well. For example, when the perpetrator of a microaggression is confronted, they may gaslight the victim or make one feel guilty for speaking up (Johnson et al., 2021). The victim may then feel shame, guilt, anxiety, and self-doubt (Johnson et al., 2021).

Institutions can also deny racial trauma. The DSM-5 does not include racism in its definition of trauma, which is currently defined as “actual threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (p.1) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Since racism can, but does not always involve, death or physical violence, this exclusion can cause many to miss the trauma one might be experiencing due to racist experiences.

Dominant U.S. social structures and broader culture deny racism through the very ways we teach about racism in U.S. schools and in the ways racism is discussed in broader societal conversations. These teachings often minimize the trauma Black people face and omit the depth and severity of the trauma our ancestors endured (Perez & Salter, 2022; Salter, 2021). Conversations around racism in this country also contribute to racism denial, particularly around dominant conversations via media representations, racial socialization, and history books that downplay the role of systemic racism in reproducing racial trauma. This denial can lead White Americans to blame Black people for their struggles caused by systemic racism (Perez & Salter, 2019; Perez & Salter, 2022).

Tacit Denial: Racial Trauma Denial via Racism Denial

Acknowledging the traumatic impact of racism requires acknowledging racism itself. Racism denial also includes the denial of racial trauma. Scholars have highlighted many factors contributing to White Americans’ denial of racism, one of which is ignorance of historical racism. Specifically, ignorance of historical racism can lead White Americans to deny instances of systemic racism in the present

(Bonam et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2013). For example, when presented with examples of systemic and interpersonal racism (see Perceptions of Racism Scale; Adams et al., 2006), White participants are more likely to acknowledge the interpersonal examples more so than systemic examples of racism (Bonam et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2013). This pattern reflects not only perceptual bias but also deeper ideological commitments about the causes of social inequality.

The epistemologies of ignorance framework argues that this kind of ignorance is not merely a passive lack of knowledge, but an active, systemic process called *white ignorance*—a socially and politically constructed way of not knowing that is shaped by and serves white supremacy (Mills, 2007). White ignorance functions epistemically and morally, distorting perceptions of the realities of racism and insulating White individuals from acknowledging racial injustice, both past and present.

This structural form of ignorance is reinforced through dominant racial ideologies, particularly colorblind racial ideology, which includes two distinct components: *color evasion* and *power evasion* (Mekawi et al., 2020). Color evasion reflects the tendency to avoid acknowledging race altogether, often articulated through statements like “I don’t see color” and is associated with discomfort in discussing race and lower internal motivation to address prejudice (Neville et al., 2013; Mekawi et al., 2020; Knowles et al., 2009). Power evasion involves explicitly denying that systemic racism and racial inequalities exist, such as claiming racism is a thing of the past or suggesting policies like Affirmative Action unfairly advantage

People of Color, while ignoring the structural privileges afforded by whiteness (Neville et al., 2013; Mekawi et al., 2020).

The present work examines the color evasion facet of colorblind racial ideology in order to explicitly explore how avoiding race and racism, contributes to and can lead to outright denial of racism.

Racial colorblindness contributes to maintaining white ignorance by obscuring the realities of racial power and inequality. Neoliberal ideology further supports these frameworks by emphasizing individual responsibility and meritocracy, suggesting racial disparities result from personal failings rather than systemic barriers, and reinforcing the belief that racism no longer plays a significant role in contemporary society (Perez & Salter, 2019).

To empirically examine how individuals understand the causes of inequality, Study 2 includes a structural social problem attributions measure, which assesses whether participants attribute social problems to systemic factors or individual deficiencies (Hope, n.d.; Watts & Guessous, 2006). This measure is particularly relevant given both neoliberal and colorblind ideologies tend to promote individualistic explanations, making it difficult to recognize systemic harm. I also include measures of colorblind racial ideology (Knowles et al., 2009) and perceptions of racism (Nelson et al., 2013, Rojas et al., 2025) to test how these individual difference factors might influence participants' denial of racism.

Racial Trauma Acknowledgment: Epistemologies of Ignorance

The epistemologies of ignorance framework holds that white ignorance is not merely on the individual but is upheld by dominant cultural narratives and actively maintained through social norms and structures (Mills, 2007). A history intervention explicitly teaching about how racism was constructed in the United States has been shown to disrupt these processes (Bonam et al., 2018, Rojas et al., 2025). Ignorance of racism is often reproduced through educational systems by omitting or distorting the origins of racism and sanitizing racist practices (Perez & Salter, 2019). Accurate teachings of racism can confront these myths with concrete evidence of the historical and ongoing structural-level violence toward marginalized groups.

White ignorance is not only reproduced through individual ideologies but is embedded within social systems and institutions (Mills, 2007). Schools, for example, often minimize discussions of systemic racism and instead overemphasize interpersonal, individual acts of prejudice. This limited framing helps normalize a narrow understanding of racism in society more broadly and contributes to the persistent denial of systemic injustice. To address this, Study 2 also includes a measure of historical empathy, which measures the extent to which people empathize with past events and how they identify emotionally with tragedies from fictional or real-life historical situations. Previous research suggests emotional connection to historical injustice can increase systemic awareness and disrupt this form of ignorance (Leibetseder et al., 2007; Vernon-Dunngian et al., in prep).

Learning about racism can also create transformative dissonant encounters (Dancis & Coleman, 2022) for White people who believe in a just society and create

contradictions between what they believe and the realities of racism and its continued impacts. In this way, critical history interventions are not just an educational tool, but an intervention that challenges racism denial and the conditions under which white ignorance is sustained.

Because Black people experience racism, we have to think about and therefore have more knowledge about racism (Carter & Murphy, 2015). It is important those who perpetrate racism are also knowledgeable about the ways it can manifest, in order not to reproduce harm. For example, emphasizing only interpersonal racism can lead to White Americans' denial of systemic racism and not acknowledging how different forms of racism are interconnected (Bonam et al., 2018; Perez & Salter, 2019).

Overview of Studies

Acknowledging racial trauma first requires acknowledgment of racism itself. Denying anti-Black racism, then, equates to denying the traumatic impact of racism on Black people. Individuals, institutions, and social structures can all deny racial trauma by denying racism. While Study 1 was focused on healing from racial trauma, Studies 2 and 3 turn towards examining White perceptions of racial trauma. Many have studied how people conceptualize perceptions of racism, but there is little work investigating White people's perceptions of the traumatic impact of racism. Study 2 aims to fill this large gap by exploring how White participants perceive racial trauma, and if they would deny trauma from structural racism over the trauma from

interpersonal racism², similar to how some deny systemic racism but not interpersonal racism. Due to the ongoing harmful patterns and practices (i.e., racial disparities in schools, discriminatory hiring practices) that can be ingrained into social structures like schools and the workplace, I also wanted to test these processes in multiple contexts. Study 3 extends Study 2 by aiming to increase people's acknowledgment of racism and racial trauma by introducing a critical history intervention. Prior work has shown that learning about the history of racism in the United States can increase people's understanding that racism is a systemic process that goes beyond isolated instances of interpersonal discrimination (e.g., Bonam et al., 2018).

Study 2: Tacitly Denying Racial Trauma

Study 2 examines tacit racial trauma denial: I expect to demonstrate for the first time that White people will deny racial trauma when they deny one's experience of racism. Consistent with prior work, I also expect to find evidence that racism denial will depend on racism type. Namely, denial will be greater when evaluating another person's experience of structural versus interpersonal racism. Moreover, this racism type effect will indirectly exacerbate racial trauma denial via its boost to racism denial. If racism level (i.e., interpersonal vs. structural) is indeed what is driving the indirect racism type effect, then it should become stronger the less one understands that racism operates systemically. Given that racial trauma denial is a new area of study, I will also explore whether the following individual difference

² I chose interpersonal racism because this form involves an interaction(s) between people often informed by stereotypes and beliefs.

factors strengthen the indirect racism type effect on racial trauma: acknowledging that social problems can be rooted in structural causes, believing that society has moved beyond race (i.e., colorblind racial ideology), and a tendency to empathize with historical tragedies.

Method

Participants

Balancing feasibility with experimental social psychology convention, I set sample size to 200 participants (50 per condition), exceeding minimum sample size required (i.e., 128) for 80% power to detect a small-to-medium ANOVA interaction effect (i.e., $f = .25$) comparing four groups. Throughout data collection I periodically analyzed only engagement and manipulation check responses and, based on pre-set exclusion criteria (see Appendix G), continued recruitment until reaching at least 50 analyzable participants per condition. Overall, 237 White U.S. American adults participated via Prolific (51.5% women, 46.8% men, .4% nonbinary/genderqueer; $M_{\text{age}} = 44.32$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.48$; $M_{\text{class}}^3 = 5.10$; $N = 206$ when excluding those failing engagement and manipulation checks).

Design and Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants completed this 2 (vignette racism type: interpersonal, structural) x 2 (vignette context: work, school) full factorial experiment online. They read a vignette describing a situation involving racism, responded to open-ended prompts to boost vignette engagement and recall

³ Class was measured on a scale from (1) *lower class* to (10) *upper class*.

(i.e., summarized the story, provided initial reactions, described how the main character felt)⁴, then completed primary dependent measures (i.e., racism acknowledgment, racial trauma acknowledgment) and potential moderators (structural social problem attributions, colorblind racial ideology, historical empathy, and systemic racism perceptions). Finally, participants provided demographic information (see Appendix I for verbatim items) and indicated if they wanted full study debriefing information after data collection ends.

Vignettes and manipulations. Vignettes (see Appendix D) were based on real world scenarios where one might experience racism and subsequent racial trauma. They varied by racism type experienced (interpersonal or structural) and context (school or workplace). In the school context, a Black woman was touring a new school for her child. In the work context, a Black finance worker was considering applying for a new job in his company. Interpersonal racism involved an authority figure (i.e., school: principal, work: team manager) denying the protagonist access to an aspect of the context (i.e., not providing a school tour vs. no invitation to apply for a new position within the company). Structural racism involved the protagonist noticing that Black students vs. employees were underrepresented in the relevant context.

Measures

See Appendix E for all verbatim items and response scales for each measure.

⁴ Future work will qualitatively analyze participants' responses to the prompts. See Appendix G for verbatim prompts.

Racism denial. I measured the extent to which participants denied racism in the vignette via five items ($\alpha = .94$), for example: “Do you think this situation involved racism?”, “Do you think race was a driving factor in any aspect of the scenario?” Participants responded from (1) *definitely yes* to (7) *definitely not* (adapted from Hoang et al., 2023). Higher numbers indicate greater racism denial.

Racial trauma denial.⁵ After reading a racial trauma definition (i.e. *the manifestation of trauma symptoms resulting directly from racist experiences or incidents and/or the psychological threat to one’s racial identity and cultural values*), participants indicated the extent to which the main character in the story experience experienced racial trauma, from (1) *definitely yes* to (7) *definitely not*. Higher numbers indicate greater racial trauma denial.

Structural social problem attributions. The structural social problem attributions scale ($\alpha = .90$) was adapted from Watts and Guessous (2006) by Hope (n.d.). It was created to assess whether people place more blame on individuals for social issues or attribute structural-level issues as the root of the problem. For example, one prompt was “People commit crimes because...,” and participants responded from (1) *they don’t care about the effects on others as long as they can get what they want* (i.e. structural attribution) to (7) *they are not supported well enough*

⁵ Participants also reported (1) a free response explanation for their trauma ratings, (2) likelihood that the protagonist experienced 14 established racial trauma symptoms, and (3) validation of the main character's reaction (see Appendix F for verbatim items). Future work will analyze these measures; likelihood of experiencing racial trauma symptoms was not correlated with racism denial and racial trauma denial ($ps > .07$).

by schools and community organizations (i.e. individual blame). Higher numbers indicate greater structural blame for social problems.

Colorblind racial ideology—color evasion. Four items ($\alpha = .89$; Knowles et al., 2009) assessed colorblind racial ideology, with a focus on the color evasion facet of this construct (e.g., “I wish people in this society would stop obsessing so much about race”). Participants responded from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Higher numbers indicate greater colorblind racial ideology.

Historical empathy. Ten historical empathy items ($\alpha = .83$; Vernon-Dunnigan et al., 2026, adapted from Leibetseder et al., 2007) measured the extent to which people empathize with past events and the extent to which they identify emotionally with tragedies from fictional or real-life historical situations (e.g., “I feel sad if I see depictions of tragedies throughout history”) from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Higher numbers indicate greater historical empathy.

Systemic racism perceptions (short). Participants responded to five items assessing whether they understand racism to be a systemic problem ($\alpha = .90$, Rojas et al., 2025). Specifically, they indicated whether short descriptions of systemic racism (e.g., “The portrayals of African Americans as criminals and/or unintelligent characters in most entertainment media”) were indeed examples of racism, from (1) *not at all* to (7) *certainly*. Higher numbers indicate greater systemic racism perceptions.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Substantive analyses began after fielding ended. Namely, I analyzed only completion time and engagement items among the first 20 participants and confirmed that the study was not too long, participants were remembering key details (see Appendix G for items), and no more than 10% of this initial sample met predetermined exclusion criteria. Once confirmed, data collection proceeded. (See Appendix G for verbatim engagement items and exclusion criteria. See Appendix B for details of three pilot studies preceding Study 2.) Engagement item results among the full sample also indicated that participants were engaged with the study. (See Appendix G for details.)

I conducted the following primary, secondary, and exploratory analyses with the full sample ($N = 237$) and only with participants not meeting predetermined exclusion criteria ($N = 206$). Overall result patterns and statistical conclusions did not change, so here I report results with the full sample ($N = 237$). (See Table 1 for correlations between measured variables; see Appendix C for these correlations by condition; see Table 2 for dependent measure M s by condition⁶).

⁶ Two-way between subjects ANOVAs confirmed the absence of condition effects on other measures that I planned to examine as potential moderators of condition effects on these primary dependent variables, all $ps > .2$.

Table 1
Correlations (r) Between Measured Variables in Study 2

Measure	2	3	4	5	6
1. Racism Denial	.60***	-.49***	-.43***	.33***	-.13
2. Racial Trauma Denial		.40***	-.38***	.18**	-.23***
3. Systemic Racism Perceptions			.66***	-.35***	.38***
4. Structural Attributions				-.33***	.35***
5. Colorblind Racial Ideology					.06
6. Historical Empathy					

Note: ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Structural Social Problem Attributions abbreviated to "Social Attributions"

Table 2
Means (SDs) by Condition for Study 2 Dependent Measures

Measure	School		$F(225)$	η^2	Work		$F(226)$	η^2
	Interpersonal ($n = 56$)	Structural ($n = 63$)			Interpersonal ($n = 54$)	Structural ($n = 55$)		
Racism Denial	2.21 (1.45)	3.60 (1.75)	23.89*	.10	3.05 (1.47)	2.82 (1.51)	.58	.003
Racial Trauma Denial	2.07 (.93)	2.76 (1.23)	11.47*	.05	2.72 (1.20)	2.60 (1.05)	.33	.001

Note: * $p < .001$

Primary Analyses

As expected, and replicating pilot study findings (see Appendix B for details), the more participants denied the presence of racism in the scenario they read, the more they denied that the protagonist would be likely to experience racial trauma resulting from the events described (see Table 1 above). The following ordinary least squares regression analyses use the SPSS PROCESS macro version 5 (Hayes, 2022) to further explore this relationship; 95% confidence intervals (CIs) excluding zero indicate significant effects at the $p < .05$ level. The following models test only the

hypothesized indirect effects, as we did not have hypotheses for the relevant total effects (See Boam, Yantis, & Taylor, 2020 for an example of this approach; see Hayes, 2022 for definitions of total, direct, and indirect effects).

Racism type indirect effect. A mediation analysis, using a custom PROCESS model, tested the indirect effect of racism type on racial trauma denial through racism denial. This indirect effect was significant, $b = .26$, $SE = .09$, $CI [.09, .44]$ (see Figure 2 for path estimates). As expected, results revealed participants in the structural (vs. interpersonal) condition denied racism more, which predicted increased racial trauma denial.

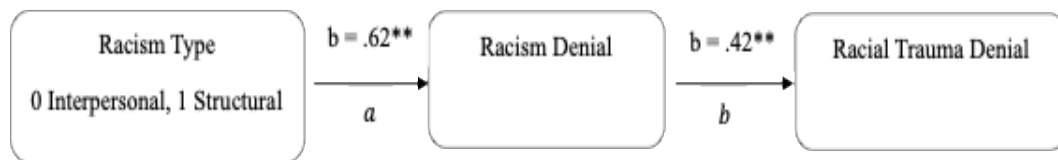


Figure 2. *Racism type indirect effect mediation model*

Systemic racism perceptions indirect effect. A mediation analysis using a custom PROCESS model indicated a significant indirect effect of systemic racism perceptions on racial trauma denial through racism denial, $b = -.18$, $SE = .03$, $CI [-.25, -.12]$: The data fit the predicted model where lower systemic racism perceptions led people to deny racism more, ultimately leading to greater racial trauma denial (See Figure 3 for path estimates).

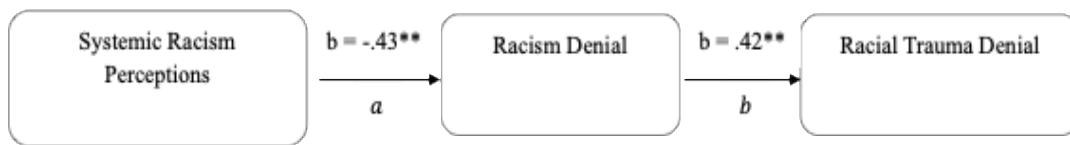


Figure 3. *Systemic racism perceptions indirect effect mediation model*

I also ran a custom PROCESS moderated mediation model with systemic racism perceptions as a moderator of the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma denial through racism denial (see Figure 4 for conceptual model; Figure 5 for statistical model).

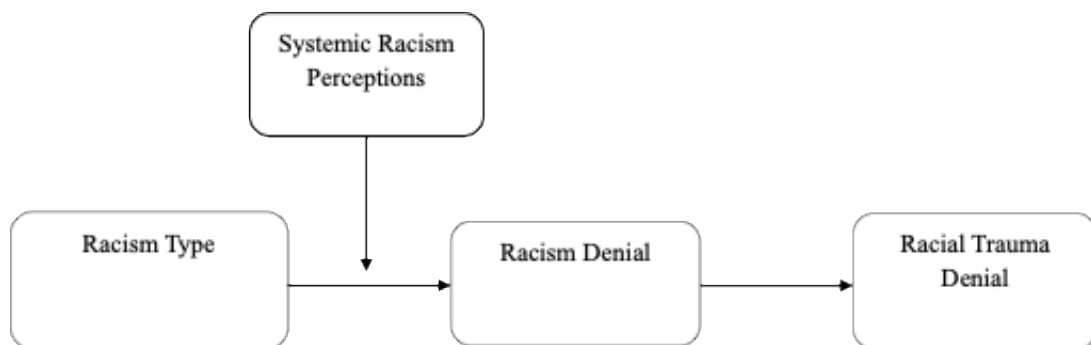


Figure 4. *Conceptual model for systemic racism perceptions moderated mediation*

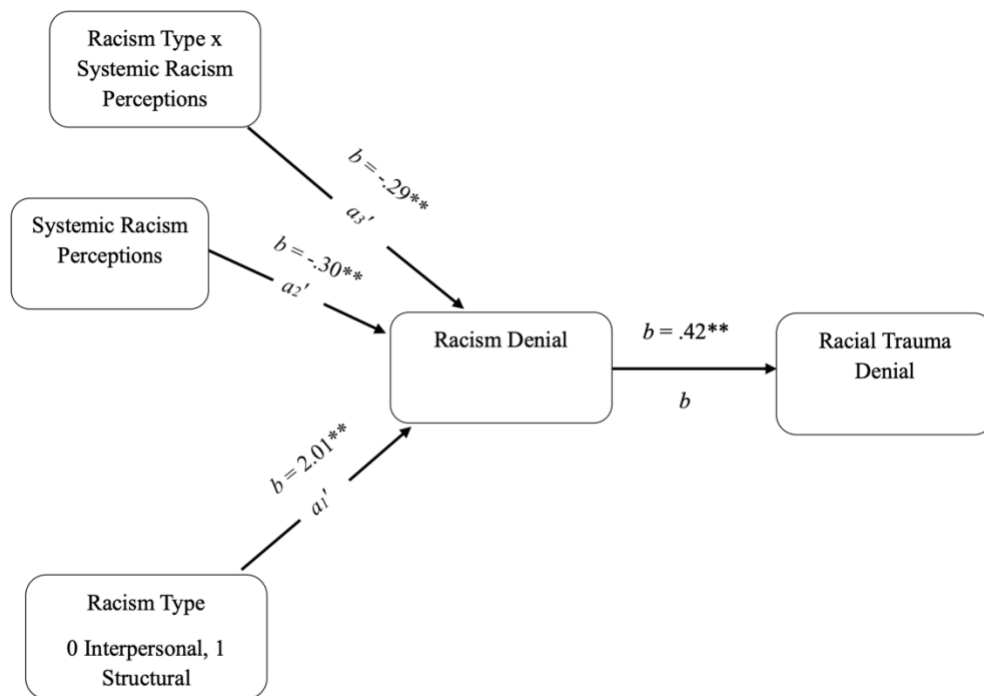


Figure 5. Statistical model for systemic racism perceptions moderated mediation

This moderated mediation was significant as expected, $b = -.12$, $SE = .05$, $CI [-.22, -.02]$. Recall, participants were more likely to deny that racism occurred in the vignette story when structural versus interpersonal in nature. This effect becomes larger as systemic racism perceptions decrease. Specifically, the effect is strongest at low levels of systemic racism perceptions, $b = 1.26$, $SE = .28$, $CI [.71, 1.81]$, moderate at moderate levels $b = .51$, $SE = .19$, $CI [.14, .88]$, and not present at high levels $b = .11$, $SE = .26$, $CI [-.41, .62]$ (see Figure 6 for interaction). This interaction carried through to predict the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma denial through racism denial: This effect became stronger as systemic racism perceptions decreased. Specifically, the effect was strongest at low levels of systemic racism perceptions, $b =$

.53, $SE = .14$, $CI [.24, .82]$, moderate at moderate levels $b = .21$, $SE = .07$, $CI [.07, .37]$, and not present at high levels $b = .05$, $SE = .10$, $CI [-.15, .25]$. In other words, as expected, those with a more systemic view of racism were less likely to demonstrate a gap in racism denial (and subsequent racial trauma denial) between the structural and interpersonal racism type conditions.

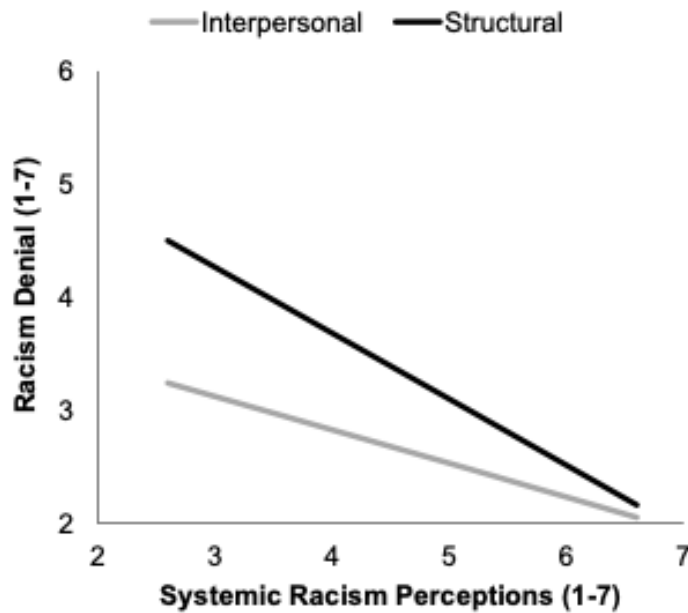


Figure 6. *Interaction between racism denial and systemic racism perceptions*

Secondary Analyses: Context Effects

A regression analysis using Model 1 of the SPSS PROCESS macro version 5 (Hayes, 2022) unexpectedly revealed a larger racism type effect on racism denial in the school context versus work context, $b = -1.62$, $SE = .41$, $CI [-2.43, -.81]$ (see Table 2 for M s and simple effects; the racism type effect is not present in the work

condition). Moderated mediation regression analyses, using a custom PROCESS model (see Figure 7 for conceptual model; Figure 8 for statistical model), revealed—unexpectedly—that this interaction carried through to moderate the racism type indirect effect through racism denial on racial trauma denial, $b = .68$, $SE = .19$, CI [.32, 1.1]: It was present in the school context, $b = .58$, $SE = .13$, CI [.33, .87], but not the work context, $b = -.09$, $SE = .12$, CI [-.35, .14].

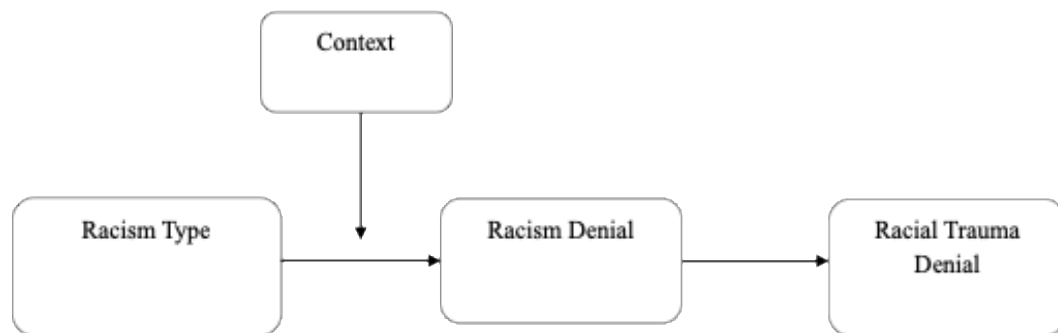


Figure 7. *Conceptual model for context moderated mediation*

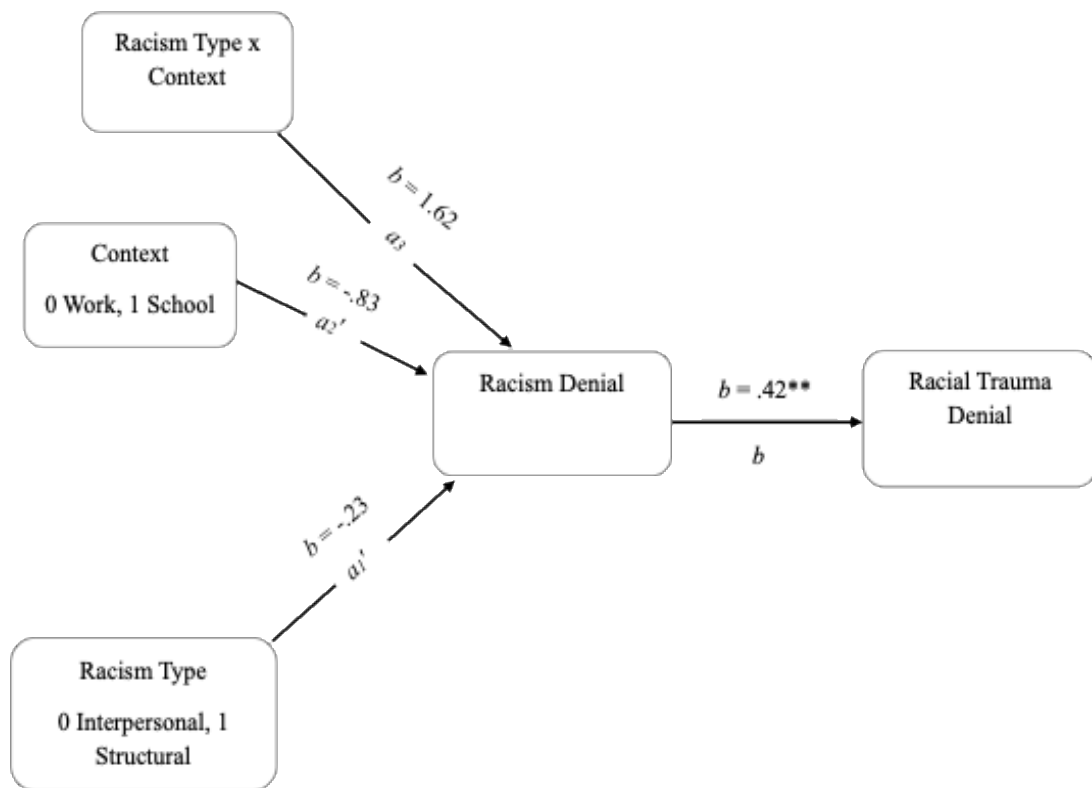


Figure 8. Statistical model for context moderated mediation

I tested moderated moderated meditation using a custom PROCESS model to include systemic racism perceptions as an additional moderator (with context) of the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma denial through racism denial. As expected, there was no evidence of moderated moderated meditation, $b = .07$, $SE = .09$, $CI [-.10, .27]$.

Exploratory Analyses

Recall that, in the overall sample (see Table 1), lower structural social problem attributions and higher colorblind racial ideology predicted more racism denial; lower structural social problem attributions, higher colorblind racial ideology,

and less historical empathy predicted more racial trauma denial. Exploratory regression analyses examined whether these factors moderated the conditional (i.e., conditional upon school vs. work context) indirect racism type effect through racism denial on racial trauma denial.

Structural social problem attributions. Moderated moderated mediation regression analyses using a custom PROCESS model (see Figure 9 for conceptual model; see Figure 10 for statistical model) revealed that the conditional indirect racism type effect was not moderated by structural social problem attributions, $b = -.17$, $SE = .10$, $CI [-.38, .02]$.

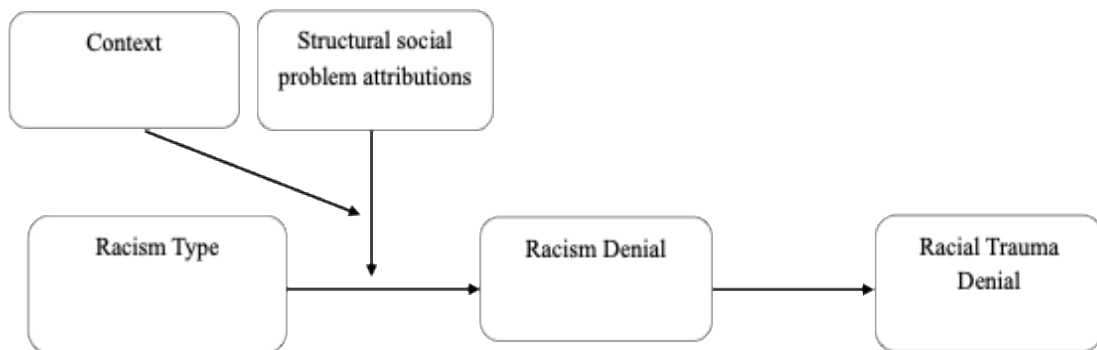


Figure 9. *Conceptual model for context & structural social problem attributions moderated moderated mediation*

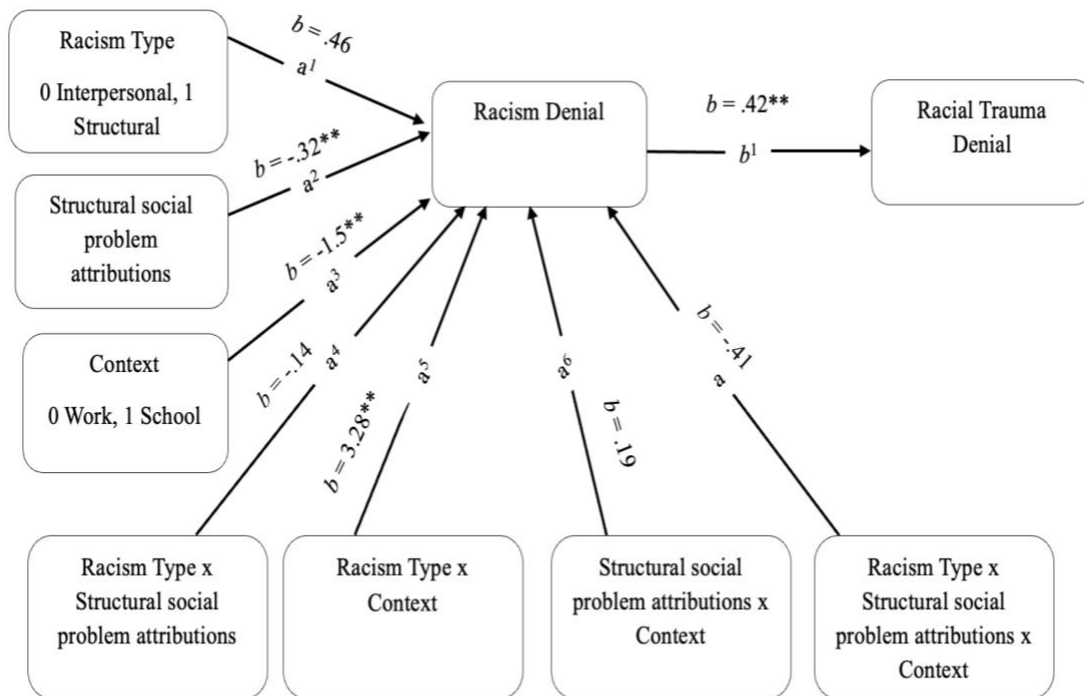


Figure 10. Statistical Model for context and structural social problem attributions moderated mediated mediation.

Given that these are exploratory analyses, I probed the non-significant interaction between racism type, context, and structural social problem attributions to find no interaction between racism type and structural social problem attributions in the work condition $b = -.14$, $F(1, 220) = .75$, $p > .2$, but there was an interaction between racism type and structural social problem attributions in the school condition $b = -.56$, $F(1, 220) = .13$, $p < .001$ (See Figure 11). Within the school condition, as expected, racism denial was higher in the structural (vs. interpersonal) condition. This effect weakens as one's acknowledgment of structural social problem attributions increases. That is, the effect is strongest at low levels of structural social problem attributions, $b = 2.22$, $SE = .37$, $p < .001$, CI [1.48, 2.96], moderate at moderate levels

$b = 1.25$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$, $CI [.75, 1.75]$, and non-significant at high levels, $b = .28$, $SE = .37$, $p > .2$, $CI [-.45, .99]$.

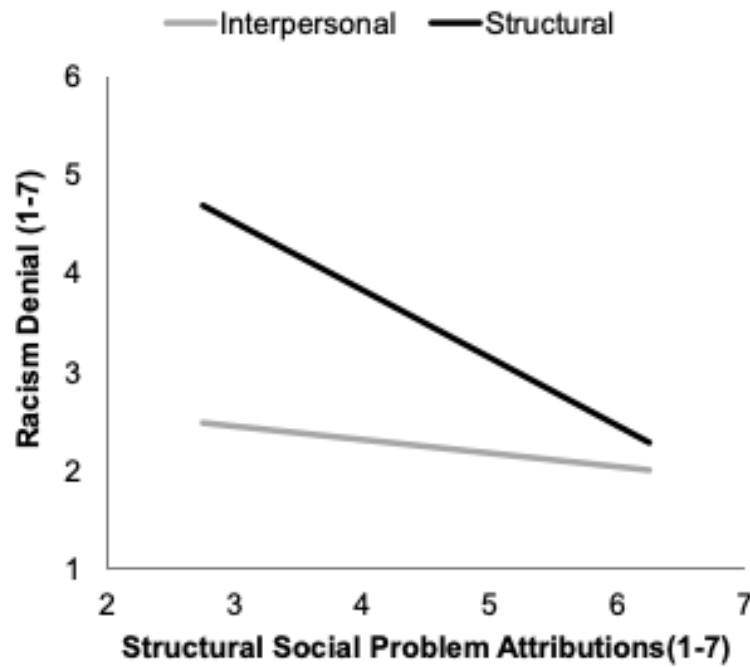


Figure 11. *Interaction between level and structural social problem attributions in the school condition.*

This interaction carried through to the indirect racism type effect on racial trauma denial through racism denial in the school condition, $b = .23$, $SE = .07$, $CI [.09, .37]$, but not the work condition $b = .06$, $SE = .07$, $CI [-.08, .20]$. Within the school condition, as expected, this racism type indirect effect was higher in the structural condition vs. the interpersonal condition. The size of this effect becomes smaller as one's acknowledgment of structural social problem attributions increases. That is, the effect is strongest at low levels of structural social problem attributions, b

= .93, $SE = .21$, $CI [.52, .13]$, moderate at moderate levels, $b = .53$, $SE = .12$, $CI [.29, .77]$, and not present at high levels $b = .12$, $SE = .13$, $CI [-.13, .39]$. These findings indicate that those who attribute more structural blame to social problems are less likely to deny racism—and subsequently racial trauma—when the racism being experienced is structural (vs. interpersonal) in nature.

Colorblind ideology and historical empathy. Given correlations within the overall sample, I tested these two custom PROCESS models: (1) moderated moderated mediation with colorblind attitudes (and context) moderating the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma denial through racism denial (with both moderating the racism type to racism denial path), (2) moderated moderated mediation with historical empathy (and context) moderating the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma denial through racism denial (with context moderating the racism type to racism denial path and historical empathy moderating the racism denial to racial trauma denial path). These models yielded nonsignificant results (i.e., no three-way or two-way interactions within the school or work contexts, all $ps > .2$, all CIs included 0; see Appendix C for full analyses).

As a follow-up, I used a custom PROCESS mediation model to test the indirect effect of colorblind racial ideology on racial trauma denial through racism denial, $b = .12$, $SE = .03$, $CI [.08, .18]$ (see Figure 12 for path estimates). Results revealed participants with more colorblind racial ideology denied racism more, which predicted increased racial trauma denial.



Figure 12. *Colorblind racial ideology indirect effect mediation model*

Discussion

Study 2 tested whether racism denial leads to racial trauma denial (tacit racism denial). Overall, this hypothesis was supported: To acknowledge the traumatic impact of racism, one must first acknowledge racism itself.

Additionally, consistent with prior literature (Bonam et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2013), White participants were more likely to deny a structural example of racism than an interpersonal example, which ultimately explained why they were more likely to deny that one might consequently experience racial trauma. Affirming that the structural (vs. interpersonal) nature of the racism type manipulation was driving this indirect effect, these relationships were larger among those less likely to understand that (1) racism generally operates systemically and (2) social problems often stem from structural issues.

Surprisingly, I found evidence of this tacit racial trauma denial mediation in the school context but not the work context. Though unintended (and given the pattern of means in Table 2), it is likely that the racism examples in the school context were more ambiguous or subtle than the racism examples in the work context. It will be important to continue examining the subtle nature of racism as another

factor (in addition to structural vs. interpersonal forms of racism) impacting when White people are likely to tacitly deny racial trauma. Follow-up experiments will first explore this factor further by editing the workplace vignette to make those racism examples more ambiguous. I would expect to find evidence of tacit racial trauma denial in the workplace context when doing so.

Although colorblind racial ideology did not moderate the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma denial, it did predict racism denial, ultimately likely boosting racial trauma denial. Notably, this pattern was equally strong whether participants read about an interpersonal or structural racism example. This evidence suggests colorblind racial ideology predicts racism denial regardless of racism type and the context in which it occurs. In other words, as people deepen their belief that race does not matter, they become unwilling to acknowledge that racism—in any way—is happening. So, whereas structural social problem attributions and systemic racism perceptions may dictate the type of racism White Americans may deny, colorblind racial ideology dictates if they deny racism period. I also expected that those who empathize with historical atrocities (such as wars) would acknowledge racial trauma more. I found evidence of this relationship whether the racism experienced is structural or interpersonal in nature. Across the entire sample, then, evidence suggests those who are better able to connect emotionally with past atrocities are also better able to empathize with people who experience racial trauma.

Overall, Study 2 provided evidence for racism denial as a tacit form of racial trauma denial. Study 3 aims to boost White peoples' acknowledgment of systemic racism to ultimately lessen this tacit denial.

Study 3: Learn Critical History; Acknowledge Racial Trauma

Study 3 aims to replicate and extend Study 2, with the addition of an intervention to educate people about the history of racism in the past (i.e., *critical history*). First, I expect to replicate Study 2 findings in the school context, such that people reading about how a Black person experiences structural (vs. interpersonal) racism will be less likely to acknowledge this form of racism and, in turn, its potential for producing racial trauma. As in Study 2, this effect should become smaller as one's structural social problem attributions increase. Second, learning relevant critical history should boost one's understanding that racism operates systemically, in turn leading to greater acknowledgment that a person has experienced structural (but not necessarily interpersonal) racism, and that this experience could result in racial trauma.

Method

Participants

It is unclear which power analyses will ensure adequate sample size for detecting conditional process effects (Hayes, 2022). However, given current literature on sample size for mediation analyses (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007), I set the sample size to 406 participants for 80% power to detect a small-to-medium indirect effect. This sample size exceeds the minimum target sample of 204 participants required for

80% power to detect a small-to-medium (i.e., $d = .35$) interaction between racism type and racism perceptions.

Overall, 409 White U.S. American adults participated via Prolific (54% women, 44.9% men, 0% nonbinary/genderqueer; $M_{\text{age}} = 45.05$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.61$; $M_{\text{class}} = 3.49^7$; $N = 374$ when excluding those who failed an engagement check⁸, $n = 22$, and those not identifying as White in my demographic survey although they identified as White via Prolific's, $n = 13$.⁹

Design and Procedure

This study was a 2 (critical history intervention: treatment vs. control) X 2 (racism type: structural vs. interpersonal) full factorial experiment. Study 3 followed the same procedure as Study 2, with these exceptions: School context was held constant (i.e., I removed the workplace vignettes). Before reading the vignettes, participants engaged in a critical history intervention and completed a racism perceptions measure. Given the nature of the intervention, participants may have demonstrated social desirability response bias. To account for this potential dynamic, participants also completed an external motivation to respond without prejudice measure along with the structural social problem attributions moderator from Study 2 (colorblind racial ideology and historical empathy were not measured in Study 3).

⁷ Class was measured on a scale from (1) *lower class* to (5) *upper class*.

⁸ These participants chose the same response for every single item on at least one multi-item measure.

⁹ I conducted all analyses reported in the main text with these 35 participants excluded. When conducting these analyses with these 35 participants included, all conclusions remained the same.

Before providing demographic information, participants completed intervention engagement and manipulation check questions (see Appendix H for verbatim items).

Critical history intervention and pilot study. Participants were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control intervention condition. This intervention was adapted from Bonam and colleagues' (2017) intervention, which used a short audio clip about the history of racially driven housing discrimination to shift people into a more systemic understanding of how racism generally operates in the present. For this study, a new treatment clip consisted of an edited video clip (4 minutes and 47 seconds) from a youtube video (converted to audio only) with Sami Jarroush from an episode of "WHAT THE HISTORY" by PBS, in which he discusses how the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling did not actually lead to desegregation for many schools in the South (American Experience | PBS, 2023). He describes the resistance that made school desegregation difficult, especially lacking enforcement structures. The control condition featured the same race-neutral audio clip (10 minutes and 12 seconds) from Bonam and colleagues' intervention. It was an interview with journalist Barry Estabrook about his research on pig intelligence (Gross, 2015a). (See Appendix H for all audio clip engagement items.) Next, participants reported open-ended initial reactions to the audio clip to increase engagement with the intervention (see Appendix G for verbatim reaction prompt and links for streaming the audio clips in Appendix H). All participants included in the

final sample reported listening to the audio clip in its entirety¹⁰. I piloted this intervention with 189 ($n = 93$ control condition, $n = 96$ school condition) White U.S. American adults on Prolific.¹¹ An independent samples t-test revealed that the treatment (vs. control) audio clip boosted participants' understanding of racism as a systemic issue, $t(187) = -2.10, p < .04, d = -.31$.

Measures

See Appendix F for all verbatim items and response scales for each measure.

Isolated racism perceptions. Participants completed a measure of isolated racism perceptions (Nelson et al., 2013; 5 items, $\alpha = .79$). Participants indicated the extent to which they thought examples of isolated interpersonal racial discrimination were indeed examples of racism, from (1) *not at all* to (7) *certainly*. Here is one example item: “Several people walk into a restaurant at the same time. The server attends to all the White customers first. The last customer served happens to be the only person of color.” Higher numbers indicate more isolated racism perceptions.

External motivation to respond without prejudice. External motivation to respond without prejudice (9 items, $\alpha = .83$; Plant & Devine, 1998) measures the extent to which external concerns (e.g., avoiding disapproval from others or pressure from others) motivate people to hide their prejudice toward Black people. Participants

¹⁰ Prior work (Bonam et al., 2018) excluded participants who reported not carefully listening to the entire audio clip. In the current study, four participants reported not listening to the entire audio clip, but these participants were already excluded from analyses for either not being White or failing a different engagement check.

¹¹ This pilot study also tested two other intervention conditions (the original from Bonam et al., 2018 and another audio clip about environmental racism) being used for other ongoing UC Santa Cruz Race and Social Justice lab studies. All three treatment conditions boosted systemic racism perceptions relative to the control.

rated these items from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Higher numbers indicate greater external motivation to respond without prejudice.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Although the full sample included ($N = 409$), the number of usable participants given our strictest inclusion criteria was ($N = 374$), 16 of the participants did not identify as White, the other 19 participants were excluded due to engagement. I conducted the following primary, secondary, and exploratory analyses only with participants not meeting predetermined exclusion criteria ($N = 374$). (See Tables 3 and 4 for M s by condition; see Table 5 for correlations; see Appendix D for these correlations by condition.)

Table 3

Means (SDs) by Condition for Study 3 Dependent Variables

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Audio: Critical History</u>		<u>Audio: Control</u>	
	Interpersonal ($n = 104$)	Structural ($n = 99$)	Interpersonal ($n = 80$)	Structural ($n = 91$)
Racism Acknowledgement	5.23 (.76)	4.08 (1.36)	5.12 (.88)	4.28 (1.19)
Racial Trauma Acknowledgement	3.81 (.89)	3.30 (1.17)	3.81 (.80)	3.44 (1.06)

Table 4*Between Group Differences in Means for Study 3 Measured Variables*

<u>Measure</u>	<u>Audio</u>	
	Critical History <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Control <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Systemic Racism Perceptions	4.66 (1.72)	4.64 (1.65)
Isolated Racism Perceptions	5.19 (1.21)	5.02 (1.15)
Structural Social Problem Attributions	4.46 (1.48)	4.34 (1.60)
External Motivation	3.43 (1.68)	3.41 (1.56)

Note: None of the independent samples t-tests were different between critical history & control groups, all p 's $\geq .165$. External motivation to respond without prejudice abbreviated to "External Motivation".

Table 5*Correlations (r) Between Measured Variables in Study 3*

Measure	2	3	4	5	6
1. Racism Acknowledgement	.50***	.55***	.44***	.47***	-.08
2. Racial Trauma Acknowledgement		.40***	.29***	.37***	-.08
3. Systemic Racism Perceptions			.69***	.72***	-.15**
4. Isolated Racism Perceptions				.51***	-.10
5. Structural Attributions					-.15**
6. External Motivation					

Note: ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Structural social problem attributions abbreviated to "Structural Attributions". External motivation to respond without prejudice abbreviated to "External Motivation".

Replication Analyses

As expected, and replicating Study 2 findings, the more participants denied the presence of racism in the scenario they read, the more they denied the protagonist would be likely to experience racial trauma resulting from the events described (see Table 5 above). The following ordinary least squares regression analyses use the

SPSS PROCESS macro version 5 (Hayes, 2022) to further explore this relationship; 95% confidence intervals (CIs) excluding zero indicate significant effects at the $p < .05$ level. As in Study 2, the following models test only the hypothesized indirect effects, as we did not have hypotheses for the relevant total effects (See Boam, Yantis, & Taylor, 2020).

Racism type indirect effect. Replicating Study 2, a custom PROCESS model testing the indirect racism type effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment revealed that participants in the interpersonal (vs. structural) condition acknowledged racism more, which in turn predicted increased racial trauma acknowledgment, $b = -.43$, $SE = .06$, CI $[-.56, -.31]$ (see Figure 13 for path estimates).

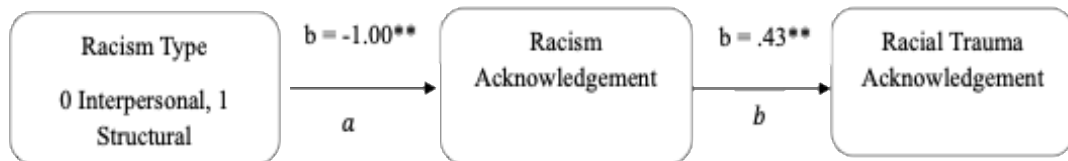


Figure 13. *A statistical depiction of Study 3's racism type indirect effect model.*

Additionally, I ran a custom PROCESS moderated mediation model with systemic racism perceptions as a moderator of the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment (see Figure 14 for conceptual model; Figure 15 for statistical model).

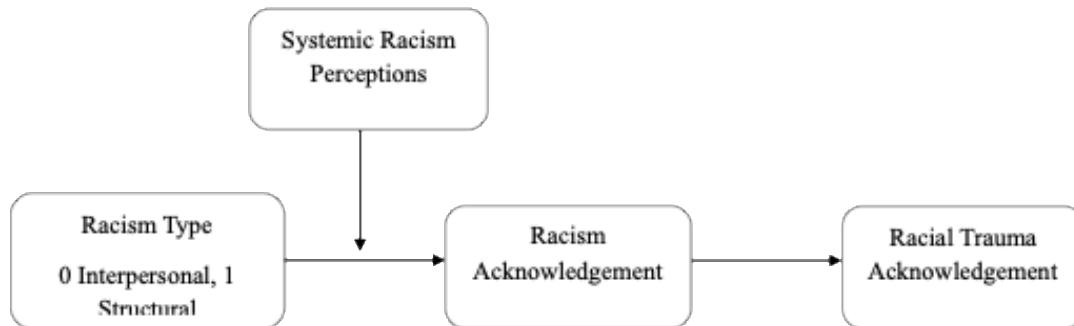


Figure 14. Conceptual model of moderated mediation with racism type and systemic racism perceptions

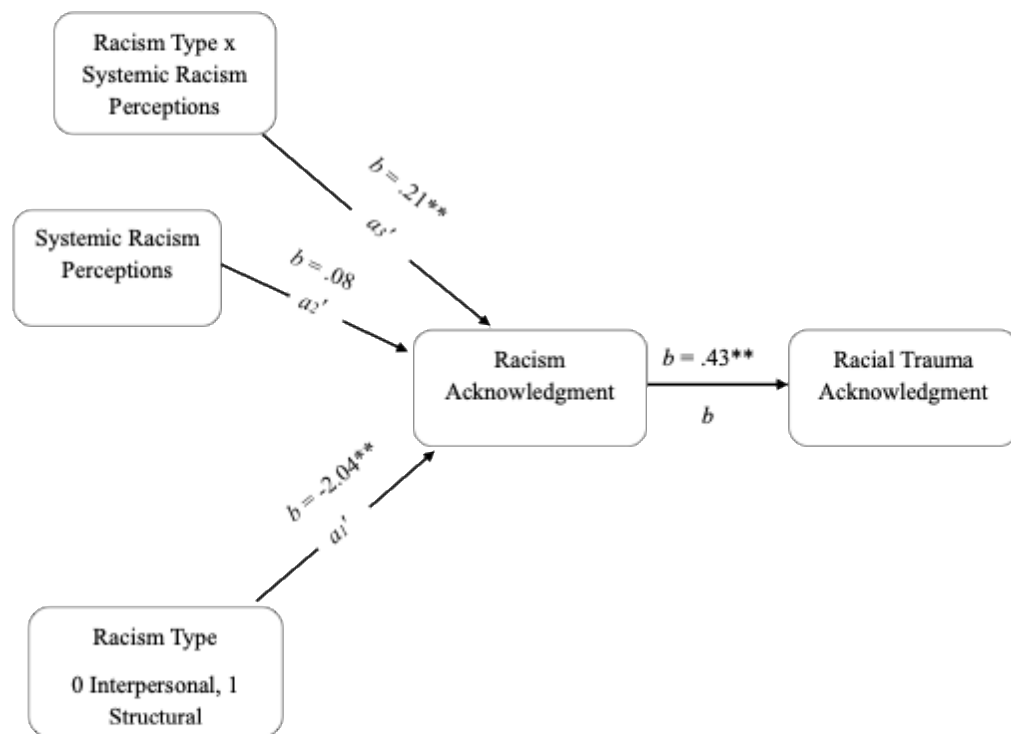


Figure 15. Statistical model for systemic racism perceptions moderated mediation

This moderated mediation was significant, as I expected, $b = .09$, $SE = .03$, CI [.04, .14]. (Additional exploratory models in Appendix D.) The interaction between

racism type and systemic racism perceptions on racism acknowledgment was significant, $b = .21$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, $CI [.11, .31]$ (see Figure 16).

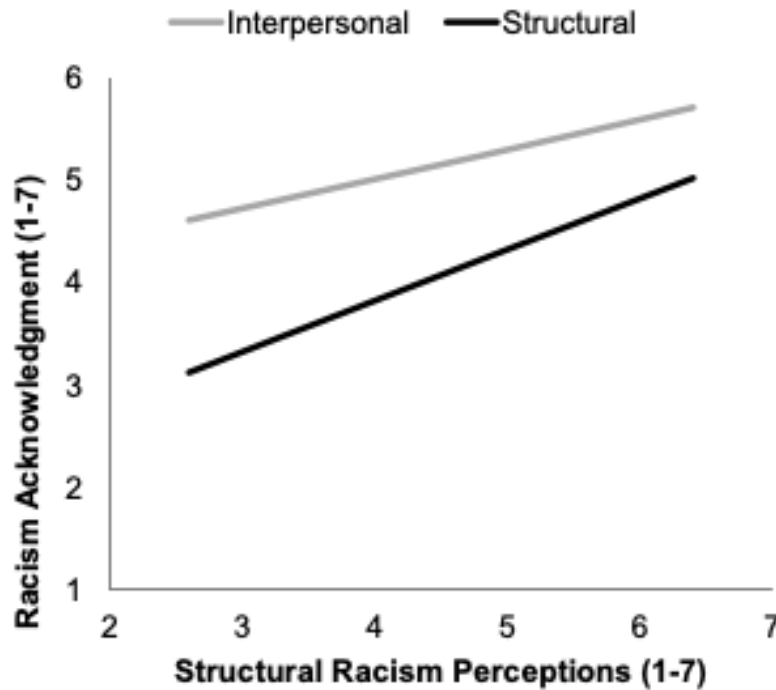


Figure 16. *Interaction between racism type and structural racism perceptions*

As expected, racism acknowledgment was lower in the structural vs. interpersonal condition. This effect becomes smaller as one's systemic racism perception increases. That is, the effect is largest at low levels of systemic racism perceptions, $b = -1.49$, $SE = .13$, $CI [-1.76, -1.23]$, moderate at moderate levels, $b = -1.03$, $SE = .09$, $CI [-1.19, -.86]$, and smallest at high levels $b = -.69$, $SE = .12$, $CI [-.93, -.45]$. Accordingly, the indirect racism type effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment was largest among those with low systemic racism perceptions, $b = -.64$, $SE = .10$, $CI [-.84, -.45]$, moderate at moderate

levels, $b = -.44$, $SE = .06$, $CI [-.56, -.32]$, and smallest at high levels, $b = -.29$, $SE = .05$, $CI [-.41, -.19]$ (see Figure 15 for path estimates).

Racism perceptions indirect effect. Two custom PROCESS models tested the indirect racism perceptions effects on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment. As expected, both isolated and systemic racism perceptions predicted more racism acknowledgment, in turn predicting more racial trauma acknowledgment, $b_{systemic} = .13$, $SE = .02$, $CI [.09, .18]$, $b_{isolated} = .17$, $SE = .03$, $CI [.12, .23]$. (See Figure 17 for path estimates).

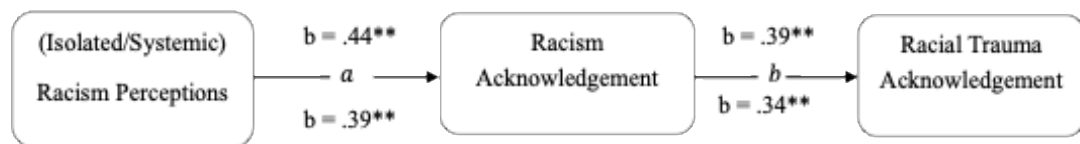


Figure 17. A statistical depiction of Study 3's model. Unstandardized path estimates predicting isolated and systemic racism perceptions are above and below the lines, respectively.

A custom PROCESS moderated mediation model examined racism type as a moderator of the systemic racism perceptions indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment (See Figure 18).

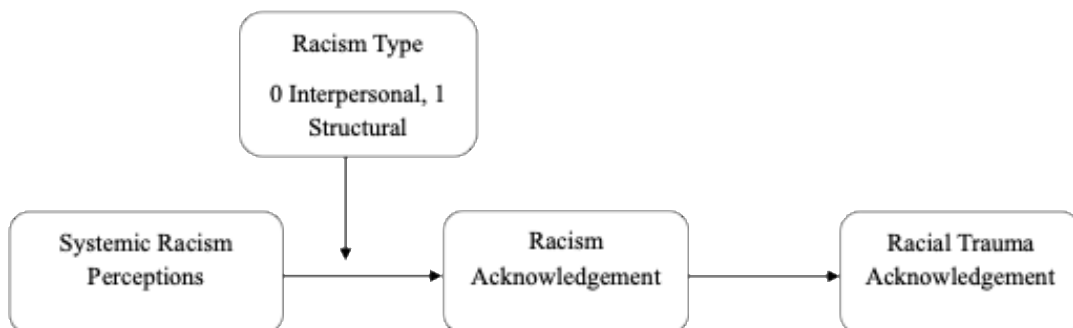


Figure 18. Conceptual model of moderated mediation with racism type and racism perceptions

This moderated mediation was significant, as expected, $b = .09$, $SE = .03$, $CI [.04, 14]$. Recall, participants were more likely to acknowledge that racism occurred in the vignette when the racism experienced was interpersonal versus structural in nature (see Figure 19 for statistical model).

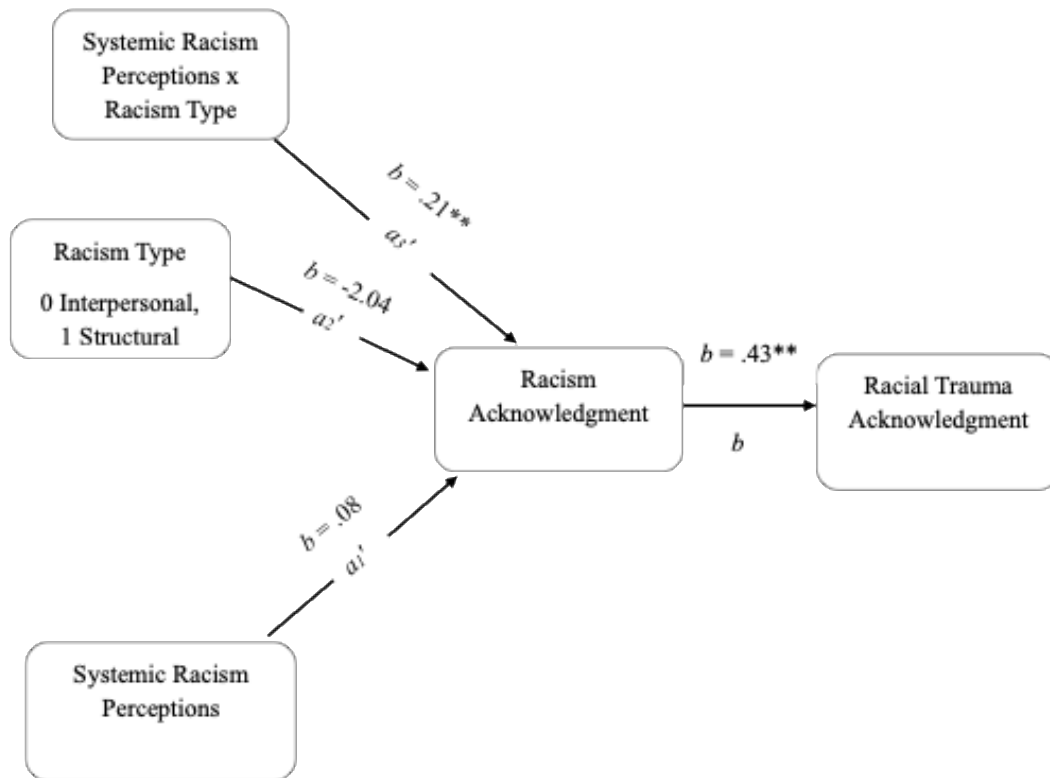


Figure 19. Statistical model for racism type moderated mediation

The interaction between systemic racism perceptions and racism type on racism acknowledgment was significant, $b = .21$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$, $CI [.11, .31]$ (See Figure 20), indicating that those with a more systemic understanding of racism were more likely to acknowledge racism in the structural condition, $b = .49$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$,

CI [.43, .57], which was also present, but weaker in the interpersonal condition, $b = .29$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, CI [.21, .36].

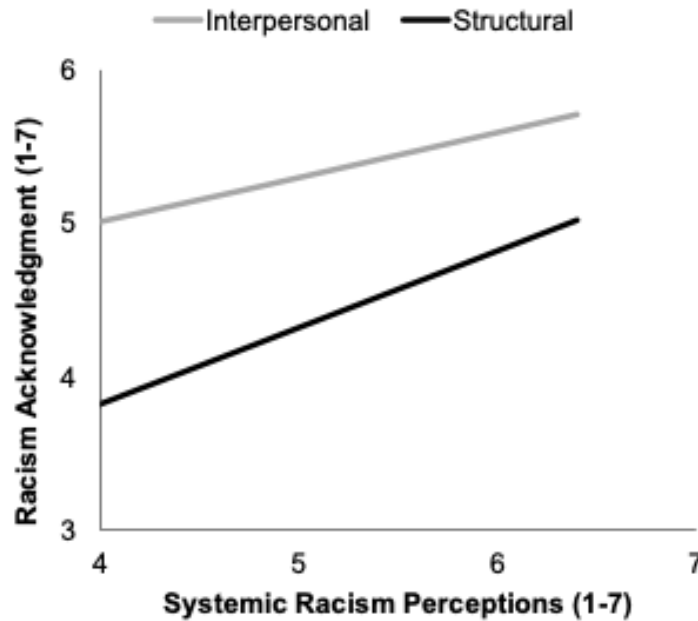


Figure 20. *Interaction between racism acknowledgment and systemic racism perceptions.*

As expected, this interaction carried through to the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment, where the effect was larger in the structural racism type condition, $b = .21$, $SE = .03$, CI [.16, .27], than in the interpersonal condition, $b = .12$, $SE = .02$, CI [.08, .17].

Consistent with predictions, racism type did not moderate the isolated racism perceptions indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment, $b = .06$, $SE = .04$, CI [-.01, .14], and there was no interaction between isolated racism perceptions and racism type on racism acknowledgment, $b = .14$, $SE = .07$, $p = .061$, CI [-.01, .28].

Primary Analyses: Critical History Intervention

I also used a custom model (Figure 21) to test a serial mediation with systemic racism perceptions and racism acknowledgment mediating the path from critical history intervention to racial trauma acknowledgment, with the racism type condition moderating the path from perceptions of racism to racism acknowledgment. This moderated mediation was not significant $b = -.005$, $SE = .03$, $CI [-.05, .06]$. Additionally, the serial mediation, with systemic racism perceptions and racism acknowledgment mediating the path from critical history intervention to racial trauma acknowledgment, was not significant. (Additional exploratory models can be found in Appendix C.)

I also tested if the critical history condition moderated the racism perceptions indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment. Unexpectedly, this was not significant $b = -.13$, $SE = .10$, $CI [-.33, .05]$.

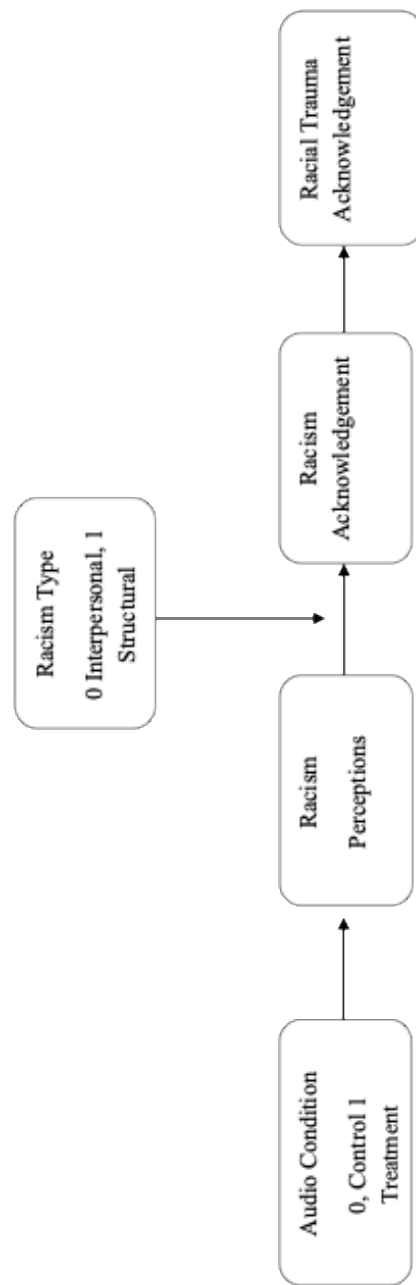


Figure 21. *Conceptual model of serial moderated mediation for Study 3*

Exploratory Analyses

Structural social problem attributions. A custom PROCESS model with structural social problem attribution as the single moderator of the racism type

indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment was significant, as I expected, $b = .08$, $SE = .03$, $CI [.03, .14]$. Recall, participants were more likely to acknowledge that racism occurred in the vignette story when interpersonal versus structural in nature. This effect becomes smaller as one's structural social problem attributions increase. The effect is highest at low levels of structural social problem attributions, $b = -1.29$, $SE = .14$, $CI [-1.57, -1.01]$, moderate at moderate levels, $b = -.96$, $SE = .09$, $CI [-1.14, -.77]$, and lowest at high levels, $b = -.67$, $SE = .14$, $CI [-.94, -.40]$. Accordingly, the indirect racism type effect on racial trauma acknowledgment through racism acknowledgment was largest among those with low systemic racism perceptions, $b = -.55$, $SE = .09$, $CI [-.75, -.38]$, moderate at moderate levels, $b = -.41$, $SE = .06$, $CI [-.53, -.31]$, and smallest at high levels, $b = -.29$, $SE = .05$, $CI [-.40, -.19]$, indicating that those who place more blame on structures for social problems are more likely to acknowledge racism (and subsequent racial trauma).

External motivation to respond without prejudice. I also used PROCESS Model 1 to test if external motivation to respond without prejudice moderated the relationship between racism acknowledgment and racial trauma acknowledgment. I did not get significant results (see Appendix C for full analyses).

Discussion

Overall Study 3 results replicated Study 2, in that the effect of racism type (interpersonal vs. structural) on racial trauma acknowledgment was mediated by racism acknowledgment. However, the critical history intervention did not yield the

expected results (surprisingly inconsistent with critical history intervention pilot study findings). Exploratory analyses revealed more republican participants in Study 2 versus the pilot study, so I plan to examine political ideology and party as potential moderators of the intervention effect on perceptions of racism, and its downstream consequences for racism acknowledgment and racial trauma acknowledgment. Further, I did not meet my target sample because some participants switched their racial identity when completing my demographic survey. To address this issue, I will collect more data until I reach the pre-set target sample size and then conduct all analyses again.

Participants' open-ended responses to the questions immediately after the audio clip do indicate that at least some learned new information about the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Their reactions to this new information were at times consistent with *transformative dissonant encounters* (i.e., when someone's beliefs are starkly changed by conflicting information, causing a shift in their perspective) from prior work investigating White people's engagement with learning critical history (Dancis & Coleman, 2022). These patterns show promise for the intervention's efficacy and suggest further testing is needed. These dissonant encounters also reflect the idea that our systems and institutions change the way we teach about racism in schools, and that conversations and the media can impact how people process and think about racism. The impact teaching about racism can have is why it is integral that educational institutions adjust our policies and laws around teaching racism, so that schools do not leave it up to the individual to educate themselves. This essential

education must be embedded into learning systems, including standard curricula, their implementation policies, and accountability mechanisms for their implementation.

Replicating Study 2 results, systemic racism perceptions predicted greater racism and racial trauma acknowledgment. Further, systemic racism perceptions again moderated the racism type indirect effect on racial trauma acknowledgment, affirming again that the structural (vs. interpersonal) nature of this manipulation was driving its indirect effect.

Structural social problem attributions moderated the mediation path from racism type to racism acknowledgment, consistent with Study 2 findings: Those more likely to blame individuals for social problems (e.g., homelessness) are also more likely to deny structural racism. As expected, then, this evidence suggests acknowledging structural racism requires one to recognize that social structures and institutions can be the root cause of social problems.

Studies 2 and 3 Discussion

Studies 2 and 3 provide strong evidence that, when White people deny racism, they deny its traumatic impact. Denying racism then becomes a catalyst for denying centuries of historical and continuing trauma that Black people and other People of Color face, often on a daily basis. The denial of this trauma can compound the initial trauma that racism itself produces (Johnson et al., 2021). When and if Black people choose to confront racism is already a risk, and meeting this resistance with denial can add to the traumatic impact of racism.

This denial, then, not only impacts the individual level, but—as the epistemologies of ignorance framework suggests—it impacts social systems and institutions as well (Mills, 2007). If White people and those in positions of power continue to deny racism, and the traumatic impact it can have, there will be no motivation to mitigate and address the harm caused by racism. When this denial continues, particularly at the institutional and structural levels, resources, interventions, and support for healing from racial trauma are may be unavailable or underfunded. Although I show compelling evidence of racial healing occurring for Black communities without these social structures (See Study 1), this healing and support does not have to fall solely on communities of color.

While the Study 3 intervention did not boost systemic racism perceptions, I did find evidence that the critical history intervention shifted racism perceptions in a pilot study. Future work will seek more robust evidence for successfully boosting racism perceptions. Preliminary Study 3 qualitative analyses also suggest the intervention is promising and should be explored further in future work.

Prior work does show that critical history education can shift racism perceptions, and that critical race education is a key component in racism acknowledgment (Boam et al., 2018; Salter, 2021). Institutions need to integrate these insights into their policies and practices. For example, the push for critical race education in public school systems can be seen in California Assembly Bill 101, which dictates that an ethnic studies course is a graduation requirement for California high school students (California Legislative Information, n.d.). This step will be

crucial for ensuring young people receive critical race education, but many schools do not have mechanisms to enforce this bill. This policy is now functioning as more of suggestion than a requirement, without an accountability mechanism in place at the institutional level. To truly educate and increase awareness of racism and its traumatic impacts, however, U.S. American society must start with how it talks about and teaches about racism. In addition to Black people and other communities of color healing internally, the perpetrators of racism must begin to address the harm before it continues to happen.

Chapter 4

General Discussion

Racism is a socially constructed, cyclical, and evolving construct, operating in many different ways, and manifesting differently across individuals, institutions, and our social structures (Richeson & Sommers, 2016). Because Black people have experienced racism differently throughout history, and continually face systems of oppression in different ways, it is important to constantly reinvestigate the ways in which racial trauma manifests for the Black community. The work on racial trauma has emphasized that racism can cause trauma symptoms, which can often be chronic for Black people. One key institutional change that is clear in the racial trauma literature is that racial trauma is psychologically damaging, and needs to be defined and including in clinical diagnoses. It is just as traumatic as physical trauma, and institutions and people need to emphasize the psychological harm as much as the physical (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo 2005a, 2005b; Williams et al., 2022; Carter, 2007).

This trauma not only manifests from the experience of racism itself, but the knowledge that racism persists throughout institutions and social structures. This awareness of how pervasive racism is can also be a source of racial trauma for Black people. To heal from this trauma, Black people must first be able to name its cause and how the trauma manifests in our communities. Healing must be informed by the cultural tools, values, and principles of our community to be most effective and take a holistic approach to addressing this trauma. My work shows evidence that Black

people hold the tools needed for healing, and that, by centering place and community, deeper learning and healing can occur. This deeper healing fosters visions of hope and liberation for our people. The present healing work took place in Ghana; therefore, future work should explore other land-based healing for Black communities in the United States. This investigation could look at sites from slavery in the United States (i.e., plantations), which are sometimes a site of reverence and history; however, some plantations are used for events (e.g., weddings) that do not necessarily acknowledge what the land used to be. If these sites were to instead center history, that would bolster slavery acknowledgment and be a catalyst for acknowledgment of anti-Black racism. Indeed, this acknowledgment could be a crucial source of healing from racism denial. Acknowledgment could also extend to museums and other historical landmarks (such as former slave auction markets), which often do not have markers of historical acknowledgment (e.g., signage sharing this history).

White people tend to deny racism, due to ignorance about racism (Bonam et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013; Perez & Salter, 2019; Salter, 2021), the desire to protect one's White racial identity (Nelson, 2013), and neoliberal, color-blind, and power evasive ideologies (Neville et al., 2013; Mekawi et al., 2020; Yi et al., 2022). This denial is not merely a product of these ideologies, but it is in fact a system of ignorance that is upheld and bolstered by lack of knowledge about racism itself, especially throughout our history (Mills, 2007).

This work shows that White people tend to deny structural racism more than interpersonal racism. The denial of racial trauma goes hand in hand with the denial of

racism, because denying the harm itself denies its traumatic impact. I contend that Black people can experience racial trauma through experiencing structural racism, including merely knowing about this type of racism. When individuals deny racial trauma, it is likely similar to the trauma one might experience after being the target of a microaggression, where the perpetrator denies committing it. Black people might often feel guilt and shame, especially if denial occurs publicly. They may also question racist incidents and whether they were microaggressions, leading to negative self-judgment and self-doubt (Johnson et al., 2021). When institutions and social systems deny racism, Black people might shut down or even experience feelings of numbness, which many might not recognize as a trauma response (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo 2005a, 2005b). Black people might also feel helpless and fearful when knowing that social systems and institutions continually create policies in a society that often disadvantages us as individuals and our communities. Although Study 1 provides evidence that Black people can heal from racial trauma, more work is needed to fully understand how Black people experience racial trauma denial and ultimately heal from it.

It is even more crucial, then, that perpetrators of racism (and those who benefit from this system) acknowledge all forms of racism. More work should be conducted to test which interventions can be most useful in bolstering a systemic understanding of racism to move toward racial healing and dismantling systems that uphold racist ideologies and structures.

Concluding Note

My work provides insight into how imperative it is that people are aware of the many ways racism (and subsequent trauma) can manifest. Denial of racial trauma goes hand in hand with the denial of racism, because if you deny the harm itself, you are then denying the traumatic impact of it as well. Investigating the perceptions of racial trauma can help to mitigate this denial and move toward acknowledging the many harms racism has on Black communities.

Across three studies, this dissertation builds a layered understanding of racial trauma by examining White perceptions of racial harm, testing an intervention aimed at disrupting denial of this harm, and centering healing grounded in Black cultural knowledge and ancestral connection. Ultimately, my dissertation seeks to name, challenge, and disrupt the denial of racial trauma. My goal is not only to name the harms of racial trauma, but to imagine paths toward collective healing, by emphasizing that healing cannot happen without acknowledgment, and acknowledgment must be rooted in truth. My work emphasizes the need to support culturally grounded healing practices that affirm Black life, dignity, and a more just future. I hope my work can act as a call to expand what counts as trauma, whose pain is validated, and how I move together toward justice and collective healing.

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Appendix A

Study 1 Codebook

Theme	Code	Definition
Sankofa	A call	Wanting more Black people to experience this trip, and feel the impact of the communal healing.
	Radical hope	Participants discuss the trip making them more hopeful for the future, now. Looking back, propelled them to think about looking forward.
	Learning new critical historical knowledge	Participants elude to learning about the history of slavery in a more hands on way, and not having to rely on secondary information (i.e. teachings in school, books, etc.).
Emotional Alchemy	Release	Discusses the anger turning into something else, an appreciation, gratitude, a release of anger.
	All the feels	Participants discuss feeling a wide range of emotions on the trip, all at once.
	Radical acceptance	Although pain is an inevitable part of life, radical acceptance involves moving away from emotional reactions and helplessness toward calm and logical thought.
	Sadness	Sadness about what our ancestors went through and the atrocities they went through.
	Gratitude	Immense gratitude for the resilience the ancestors and reverence.
	Need for deeper healing	Experiencing the sadness, and wanting/needing time to process the experience.
	Ancestral/ Cultural pride	Expressing deep cultural pride and appreciation for the ancestors, proud that we descend from strong people.
Ubuntu	They did, so I will	Participants speak about the resilience of the ancestors, prompting them to want to do more, being as a sort of motivator to push through hard times.
	Kinship	Participants describe feeling a deep connection to the land and the people of Ghana.
	Community Centered Healing	Participants discuss the impact of being on the trip in community, and moments of deep vulnerability with others throughout the trip, which aided healing.
Land Embodiment	Ancestral Connection	Participants talk about the sites (river, dungeons) making them feel connected to the ancestors.
	Healing power of water	Mentions of the river being a space of healing, and connectedness.

Appendix B

Pilot Study Data

Pilot Study 1

To test these vignettes, I conducted two pilot studies (pilot studies 1 & 2) on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) with White participants to ensure our vignette manipulations produced the intended effect. That is participants were not getting over 10% of our memory and manipulation questions wrong, and that they were identifying the race of the characters in the scenarios (i.e. Black for the protagonist and White for the principal, and manager).

Participants

A racially diverse sample of 106 participants completed an online pilot survey on Amazon's Mechanical Turk service. I excluded non-White participants from analyses, resulting in total of 93 participants for our analysis.

Procedure

All participants completed the study online, was administered on Qualtrics. They then provided consent and read 1 of 4 vignettes. Each vignette described a situation of racism differing by racism type (interpersonal vs. systemic) and situational context (school vs. work setting). Afterward, participants completed items to assess acknowledgment of racism. Participants were also given a series of psychological symptoms associated with racial trauma and asked if they thought the main character in the story might experience any of those symptoms. Participants then read the definition of racial trauma, completed ratings of the trauma symptoms

again. I also asked participants to indicate which race they associated with the names of the main characters in the scenarios, along with a series of memory and manipulation check questions. Finally, participants completed a series of demographic questions and had the opportunity to be redirected to a separate survey to receive a full debriefing of the study.

Stimuli

Vignettes. 1 of 4 vignettes (see Appendix D for verbatim vignettes). Each vignette described a situation of racism differing by racism type (interpersonal vs. systemic) and the situational context (school vs. work setting). I drafted a series of vignettes based on real word scenarios in contexts where one might experience racism and subsequent racial trauma. They varied by racism type experienced (interpersonal or structural) and context (school or workplace). In the school context, a Black woman was touring a new school for her child. In the work context, a Black finance worker was considering applying for a new job in his company. Interpersonal racism involved an authority figure (i.e., school: principal, work: team manager) denying the protagonist access to an aspect of the context (i.e., not providing a school tour vs. no invitation to apply for a new position within the company). Structural racism involved the protagonist noticing that Black students vs. employees were underrepresented in the relevant context.

Measures

Racism denial. I measured racism denial via the question Items included asking participants, “To what extent do you think this situation involved racism?”, rated on a scale of 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Certainly*.

Racial trauma denial. Participants were provided with the definition of racial trauma: *Racial trauma is defined as the manifestation of trauma symptoms resulting directly from racist experiences or incidents and/or the psychological threat to one’s racial identity and cultural values.* I then asked, “Do you think the main character in the story experienced racial trauma?” on a Likert scale from 1 = *Definitely yes* to 5 = *Definitely not*. Participants also provided a free response explanation for their trauma ratings. Given this is a new growing area of research, this explanation was important for providing some insight into White people’s perceptions of racial trauma. This block also included a matrix with various symptoms that can occur as a result of racial trauma (e.g. depression, anxiety, nightmares, avoidance, anger, hypervigilance, etc.) and asked, “How likely or unlikely do you think it is that the main character might experience these symptoms as a result of the story you read earlier?” and rate on a scale from 1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*.

Reaction questions. After reading the four vignettes, participants were asked to summarize the story they just read in their own words. I also asked them to provide any initial reactions about what happened. Finally, I asked them, "How stressful or not stressful do you think the situation was for the person(s) in the story?" 7-point scale from 1 = *not at all stressful* to 7 = *very stressful*.

Structural social problem attributions. The structural social problem attributions scale ($\alpha = .90$) was adapted from Watts and Guessous (2006) by Hope (n.d.). It was created to assess whether participants place more blame on individuals for particular social issues or attribute structural-level issues as the root of the problem. For example one of the prompts is, “People commit crimes because...” and participants have to choose along a spectrum of two choices on slider scale “They are not supported well enough by schools and community organizations” (i.e. structural attribution) to “They don’t care about the effects on others as long as they can get what they want.” (i.e. individual blame).

Racial Attitudes. Developed by Bonam and colleagues (2016), this item measures how participants feel about White and Black people. Participants will be presented with a thermometer and rate how they feel about each racial group (in random order) from *0 = very cold or unfavorable feeling* to *100 = very warm or favorable feeling*.

Historical empathy. Historical empathy ($\alpha = .83$) (Vernon-Dunnigan et al., in prep) is a scale adapted from Leibetseder and colleagues (2007). It is used to measure how participants feel about events of the past (e.g., “I feel sad if I see depictions of tragedies throughout history.”) and rate the items from *1 = strongly disagree* to *7 = strongly agree*.

Perceptions of racism scale. The perceptions of racism scale is used to measure the extent to which participants identify instances of racism across 10 items ($\alpha = .90$). I combined the isolated perceptions of racism subscale (Nelson et al., 2013)

(e.g., “Several people walk into a restaurant at the same time. The server attends to all the White customers first. The last customer served happens to be the only person of color.”), and the short form systemic perceptions of racism scale (Rojas, 2025) (e.g. “The practice of racial profiling – using only information about race in the decision to make traffic stops, police searches, etc.”).

Demographics

Demographic questions included racial/ethnic background, political party affiliation and leaning, income, age, gender, socioeconomic background, education level, marital status, and additional question to gauge how participants engaged with the study. I also included a question to gauge participants social networks, specifically asking them to list their 5 closest friends, and their racial backgrounds. Studies have demonstrated that for White people, having at least one close nonwhite friend can positively impact their views on race and racism (McClelland & Linnander, 2005).

Pilot Study 1 Vignettes

Interpersonal School

A Black couple is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching public schools to enroll their child in. They called ahead to each school to get some background information and schedule visits weeks in advance. When they arrive at The Newsly School, the principal meets them at the entrance and says that they are not admitting any new students, and they don’t see them on the schedule. The parents

told the principal they just confirmed the visit via phone the day before. The principal said there must have been a mistake and dismissed the family.

Structural School

A Black couple is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching public schools to enroll their child in. They called ahead to each school to get some background information and schedule visits weeks in advance. When they arrive at The Newsly School, the principal meets them at the entrance, and they begin their tour of the school. While on the tour they get to observe some classes. As they walk into each classroom, the family notices that there are mostly White children in the classrooms, and only 1 or 2 Black children.

Interpersonal Work

The Brockwell Group is hiring for Senior Director of Finance. The hiring manager invites multiple members of the finance team to apply for the position. A Black employee who is the most experienced person on the team, and has stellar performance reviews was the only person the hiring manager did not invite to apply. When the Black employee asks the manager why he wasn't invited to apply, he says it's because he thought the job would be too much for him to handle.

Structural Work

The Brockwell Group is hiring for Senior Director of Finance. The hiring manager invites multiple members of the finance team to apply for the position. A Black employee who is the most experienced person on the team, and has stellar performance reviews is applying. While preparing, this person reads the company's

annual report and learns that the talent acquisition team reported that over 52% of applicants to the company overall are People of Color, 37% being Black. Black employees make up only 12% of the company, with only 1.3% of those being in senior-level roles.

Findings

Overall acknowledgment of racism correlated with acknowledgment of racial trauma $r = .61$, $p < .001$. Racism ratings did not differ significantly, with the structural conditions $M_{struc.work} = 6.05$ $M_{struc.school} = 5.80$ having higher racism ratings than the interpersonal conditions $M_{int.work} = 5.58$ $M_{int.school} = 5.40$. These findings were consistent with the ratings of racial trauma. In the work condition $M_{interpersonal} = 3.84$ $M_{structural} = 3.95$ and the school conditions $M_{interpersonal} = 3.45$ $M_{structural} = 3.79$. I asked participants to rate the racial trauma symptoms twice to see if reading the definition of racial trauma might shift their responses and provide higher (possibly lower) symptom ratings after reading the definition, however those trauma ratings did not differ significantly.

Pilot Study 2

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to further pilot the vignettes after we made some substantive edits to them after Pilot Study 1.

Participants

A racially diverse sample of 112 participants completed an online pilot survey on Amazon's Mechanical Turk service. I excluded any non-White participants from this sample, resulting in total of 76 participants for our analysis.

Procedure

Procedure was identical to pilot study 1, except I added one question after the racism rating question *"If you had to choose, would you say this situation was just a miscommunication or an example of racism?"* rating on a scale from 1 = *very likely just a miscommunication* to 7 = *very likely an example of racism*.

Vignettes. 1 of 4 vignettes (see Appendix D for verbatim vignettes). Each vignette described a situation of racism differing by racism type (interpersonal vs. systemic) and the situational context (school vs. work setting). I drafted a series of vignettes based on real word scenarios in contexts where one might experience racism and subsequent racial trauma. Vignette topics were identical to Pilot study 1, with some wording changes (See below for exact wording).

Measures

Racism denial. I measured racism denial via the question Items included asking participants, "To what extent do you think this situation involved racism?", rated on a scale of 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Certainly*.

Racial trauma denial. Participants were provided with the definition of racial trauma: *Racial trauma is defined as the manifestation of trauma symptoms resulting directly from racist experiences or incidents and/or the psychological threat to one's racial identity and cultural values.* I then asked, "Do you think the main character in

the story experienced racial trauma?” on a Likert scale from *1 = Definitely yes* to *5 = Definitely not*. Participants also provided a free response explanation for their trauma ratings. Given this is a new growing area of research, this explanation was important for providing some insight into White people’s perceptions of racial trauma. This block also included a matrix with various symptoms that can occur as a result of racial trauma (e.g. depression, anxiety, nightmares, avoidance, anger, hypervigilance, etc.) and asked, “How likely or unlikely do you think it is that the main character might experience these symptoms as a result of the story you read earlier?” and rate on a scale from *1 = not at all likely* to *7 = extremely likely*.

Reaction questions. After reading the four vignettes, participants were asked to summarize the story they just read in their own words. I also asked them to provide any initial reactions about what happened. Finally, I asked them "How stressful or not stressful do you think the situation was for the person(s) in the story?" 7 point scale from *1 = not at all stressful* to *7 = very stressful*.

Structural social problem attributions. The structural social problem attributions scale ($\alpha = .90$) was adapted from Watts and Guessous (2006) by Hope (n.d.). It was created to assess whether participants place more blame on individuals for particular social issues or attribute structural-level issues as the root of the problem. For example one of the prompts is, “People commit crimes because...” and participants have to choose along a spectrum of two choices on slider scale “They are not supported well enough by schools and community organizations” (i.e. structural

attribution) to “They don’t care about the effects on others as long as they can get what they want.” (i.e. individual blame).

Racial Attitudes. Developed by Bonam and colleagues (2016), this item measures how participants feel about White and Black people. Participants will be presented with a thermometer and rate how they feel about each racial group (in random order) from *0 = very cold or unfavorable feeling to 100 = very warm or favorable feeling*.

Historical empathy. Historical empathy ($\alpha = .83$) (Vernon-Dunnigan et al., in prep) is a scale adapted from Leibetseder and colleagues (2007). It is used to measure how participants feel about events of the past (e.g., “I feel sad if I see depictions of tragedies throughout history.”) and rate the items from *1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree*.

Perceptions of racism scale. The perceptions of racism scale is used to measure the extent to which participants identify instances of racism across 10 items ($\alpha = .90$). I combined the isolated perceptions of racism subscale (Nelson et al., 2013) (e.g., “Several people walk into a restaurant at the same time. The server attends to all the White customers first. The last customer served happens to be the only person of color.”), and the short form perceptions of systemic racism scale (Rojas, 2025) (e.g. “The practice of racial profiling – using only information about race in the decision to make traffic stops, police searches, etc.”).

Demographics

Demographic questions included racial/ethnic background, political party affiliation and leaning, income, age, gender, socioeconomic background, education level, marital status, and additional question to gauge how participants engaged with the study. I also included a question to gauge participants social networks, specifically asking them to list their 5 closest friends, and their racial backgrounds. Studies have demonstrated that for White people, having at least one close nonwhite friend can positively impact their views on race and racism (McClelland & Linnander, 2005).

Stimuli: Pilot Study 2 Vignettes

Interpersonal School

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a woman who is moving to a new neighborhood.

Shanice is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching private schools to enroll her child in. She called ahead to each school to get some background information and schedule visits weeks in advance. First up to visit was the Newman School.

When Shanice arrives at the Newman School, Principal Miller meets her at the entrance, sees Shanice, then pauses for a moment and says, "Oh there must be some sort of mistake, we're not admitting any new students at this time." Shanice looks confused and responds, "But I called to confirm our appointment for a tour today with the intention to enroll my daughter, and was assured that there were plenty of spots

left." Principal Miller says, "Well, there must have been a mix-up somewhere, then, my apologies. My secretary will show you the way out." This really troubled Shanice.

Structural School

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a woman who is moving to a new neighborhood.

Shanice is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching private schools to enroll her child in. She called ahead to each school to get some background information and schedule visits weeks in advance. First up to visit was the Newman School.

When Shanice arrives at the Newman School, Principal Miller meets her at the entrance, and they begin their tour of the school. While on the tour, Shanice gets to observe some classes. As she walks into each classroom, she notices that there are mostly White children in the classrooms, and only 1 or 2 Black children. This really troubled Shanice.

Interpersonal Work

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a man who works at a consulting firm.

The Brockwell Group is a private consulting firm and is hiring for Senior Director of Finance. The hiring manager, Bill, invites multiple members of the finance team to apply for the position. Jerome, who is the most experienced person on the team and has stellar performance reviews, was the only person the hiring manager did not

invite to apply. When Jerome asks the manager why he wasn't invited to apply, Bill says, "Well, I thought the job would be too much for you to handle." This really troubled Jerome.

Structural Work

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a man who works at a consulting firm.

The Brockwell Group is a private consulting firm and is hiring for Senior Director of Finance. The hiring manager, Bill, invites multiple members of the finance team to apply for the position. Jerome, who is the most experienced person on the team and has stellar performance reviews, is applying. While preparing, he reads the company's annual report and learns that the talent acquisition team reported that over 52% of applicants to the company overall are People of Color. White employees make up 57% of the company, 31% being in senior roles. Latino employees make up 13% of the company, 12% of those are in senior roles. Asian employees make up 9% of the company, 8% being in senior roles. Native American employees make up 8% of the company, 1% of those are in senior roles. Black employees make up only 3% of the company, with only 0.8% of those being in senior-level roles. This really troubled Jerome.

Results

Consistent with pilot study 1, overall acknowledgment of racism correlated with acknowledgment of racial trauma $r = .49$, $p < .001$. Racism ratings in the work condition were not significantly different in the structural condition ($M = 6.00$)

compared to the interpersonal condition ($M = 6.04$), $p = 1.34$. In the school condition, racism ratings were consistent with the findings from pilot study 1, with structural racism ratings ($M = 4.81$) being higher than interpersonal racism ratings ($M = 4.59$). Racial trauma ratings elicited the same trend of results. However, findings also revealed participants were denying racism in the interpersonal condition more than the structural condition, inconsistent with previous empirical work in this area. More than 10% of participants were also getting the race of the characters in the scenarios wrong. So, I decided to switch recruitment platforms and ran one pilot study (pilot study 3 described below) on UCSC's SONA platform.

Pilot Study 3

The main purpose of this pilot study was to get a sense of the timing for our survey.

Participants

I recruited 40 racially diverse undergraduate students through University of California Santa Cruz's SONA platform.

Procedure

The procedure was identical to pilot studies 1 & 2.

Stimuli

Vignettes. Vignettes subject were identical to Pilot studies 1 & 2, we made substantive changes to some of the language (See below for exact vignette wording).

Measures

Racism denial. I measured racism denial via the question Items included asking participants, “To what extent do you think this situation involved racism?”, rated on a scale of 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Certainly*.

Racial trauma denial. Participants were provided with the definition of racial trauma: *Racial trauma is defined as the manifestation of trauma symptoms resulting directly from racist experiences or incidents and/or the psychological threat to one’s racial identity and cultural values.* I then asked, “Do you think the main character in the story experienced racial trauma?” on a Likert scale from 1 = *Definitely yes* to 5 = *Definitely not*. Participants also provided a free response explanation for their trauma ratings. Given this is a new growing area of research, this explanation was important for providing some insight into White people’s perceptions of racial trauma. This block also included a matrix with various symptoms that can occur as a result of racial trauma (e.g. depression, anxiety, nightmares, avoidance, anger, hypervigilance, etc.) and asked, “How likely or unlikely do you think it is that the main character might experience these symptoms as a result of the story you read earlier?” and rate on a scale from 1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *extremely likely*.

Reaction questions. After reading the four vignettes, participants were asked to summarize the story they just read in their own words. I also asked them to provide any initial reactions about what happened. Finally, I asked them, "How stressful or not stressful do you think the situation was for the person(s) in the story?" 7-point scale from 1 = *not at all stressful* to 7 = *very stressful*.

Structural social problem attributions. The structural social problem attributions scale ($\alpha = .90$) was adapted from Watts and Guessous (2006) by Hope (n.d.). It was created to assess whether participants place more blame on individuals for particular social issues or attribute structural-level issues as the root of the problem. For example one of the prompts is, “People commit crimes because...” and participants have to choose along a spectrum of two choices on slider scale “They are not supported well enough by schools and community organizations” (i.e. structural attribution) to “They don’t care about the effects on others as long as they can get what they want.” (i.e. individual blame).

Historical empathy. Historical empathy ($\alpha = .83$) (Vernon-Dunnigan et al., in prep) is a scale adapted from Leibetseder and colleagues (2007). It is used to measure how participants feel about events of the past (e.g., “I feel sad if I see depictions of tragedies throughout history.”) and rate the items from *1 = strongly disagree* to *7 = strongly agree*.

Perceptions of racism scale. The perceptions of racism scale is used to measure the extent to which participants identify instances of racism across 10 items ($\alpha = .90$). I combined the isolated perceptions of racism subscale (Nelson et al., 2013) (e.g., “Several people walk into a restaurant at the same time. The server attends to all the White customers first. The last customer served happens to be the only person of color.”), and the short form perceptions of systemic racism scale (Rojas, 2025) (e.g. “The practice of racial profiling – using only information about race in the decision to make traffic stops, police searches, etc.”).

Demographics

Demographic questions included racial/ethnic background, political party affiliation and leaning, income, age, gender, socioeconomic background, education level, marital status, and additional question to gauge how participants engaged with the study. I also included a question to gauge participants social networks, specifically asking them to list their 5 closest friends, and their racial backgrounds. Studies have demonstrated that for White people, having at least one close nonwhite friend can positively impact their views on race and racism (McClelland & Linnander, 2005).

Stimuli: Pilot Study 3 Vignettes

Interpersonal School

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a woman who is moving to a new neighborhood.

Latoya Johnson is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching private schools to enroll her child in. The new town she's moving to is very racially diverse, and she finds a private school close by, in her neighborhood. Ms. Johnson called ahead to each school, she calls and says "Hello this is Latoya Johnson. I'm interested in enrolling my child at your school and would like to schedule a visit in a few weeks, if available". First up to visit was the Newman School. When Latoya arrives at the Newman School, Principal Wagner meets her at the entrance, and they begin their tour of the school. While on the tour, Latoya gets to observe some classes. As she walks into each classroom, she notices that there are mostly White children in the

classrooms, and only 1 or 2 Black children. This leaves Latoya feeling confused and unsettled, and she gets a pit in her stomach.

Structural School

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a woman who is moving to a new neighborhood.

Latoya Johnson is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching private schools to enroll her child in. The new town she's moving to is very racially diverse, and she finds a private school close by, in her neighborhood. Ms. Johnson called ahead to each school, she calls and says "Hello this is Latoya Johnson. I'm interested in enrolling my child at your school and would like to schedule a visit in a few weeks, if available". First up to visit was the Newman School. When Latoya arrives at the Newman School, Principal Wagner meets her at the entrance, and they begin their tour of the school. While on the tour, Latoya gets to observe some classes. As she walks into each classroom, she notices that there are mostly White children in the classrooms, and only 1 or 2 Black children. This leaves Latoya feeling confused and unsettled, and she gets a pit in her stomach.

Interpersonal Work

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a man who works at a consulting firm.

Jermaine Johnson works at a company, The Brockwell Group, which is a private consulting firm. Jermaine has worked there for 11 years. The company is hiring a Senior Director of Finance. The hiring manager, Bill, invites multiple members of the

finance team to apply for the position. Jermaine, who is the most experienced person on the team and has stellar performance reviews, was the only person the hiring manager did not invite to apply. When Jermaine asks the manager why he wasn't invited to apply, Bill says, "Well, I thought the job would be too much for you to handle." This leaves Jermaine feeling bewildered, unsettled, and confused, and he gets a pit in his stomach.

Structural Work

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a man who works at a consulting firm.

Jermaine Johnson works at a company, The Brockwell Group, which is a private consulting firm. Jermaine has worked there for 11 years. The company is hiring a Senior Director of Finance. The hiring manager, Bill, invites multiple members of the finance team to apply for the position. Jermaine, who is the most experienced person on the team and has stellar performance reviews, is applying. While preparing, Jermaine reads the company's annual report and learns the talent acquisition team reported over 52% of applicants to the company overall are People of Color. White employees make up 57% of the company, and 71% of the senior-level roles in the company are held by White people. Latino employees make up 15% of the company, and 13% of those are in senior roles. Asian employees make up 13% of the company, 12% being in senior roles. Black employees make up 9% of the company, with 3% of those being in senior-level roles. Native American employees make up 6% of the

company, and 1% of those are in senior roles. This leaves Jermaine feeling unsettled, bewildered, and confused, and he gets a pit in his stomach.

Appendix C

Study 2 Additional Analyses

Context

I also tested a Model 1 to see what the interaction is between racism type and context on racial trauma denial, without the presence of the mediator. There was a significant interaction between racism type and context on racial trauma denial $b = .812$, $SE = .29$, $CI [.23, 1.39]$, $p = .006$. Which indicated that there is not a condition effect of racism type on racial trauma denial in the work condition $b = -.122$, $SE = .21$, $CI [-.54, .29]$, $p = .57$, but there is in the school condition $b = .69$, $SE = .20$, $CI [.29, 1.09]$, $p < .001$.

Structural Social Problem Attributions

In addition to the moderated moderated mediation, I also ran a custom model with structural social problem attributions as the single moderator on the mediation path from the racism type to racism denial path, which was significant, as I expected $b = .14$, $SE = .04$, $CI [.04, .23]$. With those participants placing less structural social problem attributions to social problems, also having higher perceptions of racism denial.

Historical Empathy

I ran a Model 21 of the SPSS Process Macro to test a moderated moderated mediation, with context moderating the path from racism type to racism denial, and historical empathy moderating the path from racism to racial trauma denial. There

was not evidence of moderated moderated mediation $b = -.05$, $SE = .06$, $CI [-.17, .05]$, and the interaction was not significant $b = .03$, $SE = .03$, $CI [-.03, .09]$, $p > .2$.

Colorblind Ideology

I tested a moderated moderated mediation using a custom model of the Process Macro to include colorblind ideology as a moderator (in addition to context) on the racism type to racism denial path, testing the indirect effect of racism type through racism denial on racial trauma denial. There was not evidence of moderated moderated mediation denial $b = .02$, $SE = .09$, $CI [-.17, .22]$. I also ran a Model 7 (moderated mediation) with colorblind ideology as the single moderator on mediation path from the racism type to racism denial, testing the indirect effect of racism type through racism denial on racial trauma denial which I did not find evidence of $b = .03$, $SE = .05$, $CI [-.07, .12]$.

Additional Correlation Tables

Table A1
Correlations (*r*) Between Measured Variables in Study 2

A. Interpersonal Conditions												
Measure	Work						School					
	2	3	4	5	6		2	3	4	5	6	
1. Racism Denial	.78***	-.44***	-.40**	.11	-.004		.61***	-.25	-.16	.40**	.01	
2. Racial Trauma Denial		-.49***	-.46***	.08	-.18			-.31*	-.32*	.07	-.25	
3. Structural Racism Perceptions			.70***	.24	.33*				.75***	-.37***	.41**	
4. Structural Attributions				-.32*	.35**					-.34*	.57***	
5. Colorblind Racial Ideology					.09						.13	
6. Historical Empathy												
B. Structural Conditions												
Measure	Work						School					
	2	3	4	5	6		2	3	4	5	6	
1. Racism Denial	.40**	-.62***	-.46***	.24	-.13		.54***	-.63***	-.65***	.45***	-.32*	
2. Racial Trauma Denial		-.23	-.1	.16	-.13			-.47***	-.50**	.30***	-.31*	
3. Structural Racism Perceptions			.61***	-.38**	.32*				.56***	-.36**	.49***	
4. Structural Attributions				-.25	.14					-.37**	.35**	
5. Colorblind Racial Ideology					.04						.007	
6. Historical Empathy												

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Structural Social Problem Attributions is abbreviated as "Structural Attributions"

Appendix D

Study 3 Exploratory Analyses

Critical History Intervention

I also ran a Model 1 to see if audio condition moderated the path from racism type to racism acknowledgment. This interaction was not significant $b = -.13$, $SE = .21$, $CI [-.54, .27]$, $p = .524$. I also used a custom model to test a serial mediation with systemic racism perceptions, and racism acknowledgment mediating the path from critical history intervention to racial trauma acknowledgment. This moderated mediation was not significant $b = -.005$, $SE = .03$, $CI [-.05, .06]$.

Perceptions of Racism

I also ran a Model 1 to see if structural perceptions of racism moderated the path from racism acknowledgment to racial trauma acknowledgment. This interaction was not significant $b = .03$, $SE = .02$, $CI [-.01, .08]$, $p = .18$.

External Motivation to Respond without Prejudice

I ran a Model 1 to see if external motivations to control prejudice moderated the path from racism acknowledgment to racial trauma acknowledgment. This interaction was not significant $b = .01$, $SE = .02$, $CI [-.03, .05]$, $p = .50$.

Additional Correlation Tables

Table A2*Correlations (r) Between Measured Variables in Study 3*

Measure	2	3	4	5	6
1. Racism Acknowledgement	.50***	.44***	.55***	-.47***	-.08
2. Racial Trauma Acknowledgement		.29	.40***	-.37***	-.08
4. Structural Perceptions of Racism				-.72***	-.15**
5. Structural Attributions					.15**
6. External Motivations					

Note: ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Structural Social Problem Attributions abbreviated to "Structural Attributions"

Table A3
Correlations (*r*) Between Measured Variables in Study 3

<i>A. Control</i>	Interpersonal					Structural				
	2	3	4	5		2	3	4	5	
Measure										
1. Racism Acknowledgement	.59***	.54***	.44***	-.10		.35***	.60***	.48***	.09	
2. Racial Trauma Acknowledgement		.43***	.45***	-.06			.31**	.28**	.10	
3. Structural Perceptions of Racism			.73***	-.07				.72***	-.09	
4. Structural Attributions				-.15*						-.20
5. External Motivations										
<i>B. Critical History</i>	Interpersonal					Structural				
	2	3	4	5		2	3	4	5	
Measure										
1. Racism Acknowledgement	.42***	.60***	.43***	-.18		.53***	.73***	.65***	-.28	
2. Racial Trauma Acknowledgement		.40***	.32***	-.15			.53***	.47***	-.24*	
3. Structural Perceptions of Racism			.70***	-.18				.75***	-.23*	
4. Structural Attributions				-.02*					-.22*	
5. External Motivations										

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Structural Social Problem Attributions abbreviated to "Structural Attributions"

Appendix E

Vignettes Study 2 & Study 3

I. School- Interpersonal

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a woman who is moving to a new neighborhood.

Scenario Issue: applying for a new school

Main Character: Latoya Johnson

Latoya Johnson is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching private high schools to apply to for her child. Ms. Johnson called ahead to each school. When calling, she says, "Hello this is Latoya Johnson. I'm interested in enrolling my child at your school and would like to schedule a visit in a few weeks, if available. My child has a stellar academic record and years of active experience in student organizations and other extracurriculars." She is able to schedule a few visits, and first up is the Newman School. When Latoya arrives at the Newman School, Principal Wagner meets her at the entrance.

He sees Latoya then pauses for a moment and says, "Oh, I'm sorry Ms. Johnson. There must be some sort of mistake because we're not admitting new students at this time." Latoya responds, "But I called to confirm our appointment for a tour today, with the intention to apply for my daughter. I was assured that there were plenty of spots left." Principal Wagner says, "Well, there must have been a mix-up somewhere, then, my apologies. My secretary will show you the way out."

This leaves Latoya feeling unsettled and she gets a pit in her stomach.

II. School- Structural

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a woman who is moving to a new neighborhood.

Scenario Issue: applying for a new school

Main Character: Latoya Johnson

Latoya Johnson is thinking about moving to a new town and is researching private high schools to apply to for her child. Ms. Johnson called ahead to each school. When calling, she says, "Hello this is Latoya Johnson. I'm interested in enrolling my child at your school and would like to schedule a visit in a few weeks, if available. My child has a stellar academic record and years of active experience in student organizations and other extracurriculars." She is able to schedule a few visits, and first up is the Newman School. When Latoya arrives at the Newman School, Principal Wagner meets her at the entrance.

Principal Wagner and Latoya begin their school tour, and, while on the tour, Latoya gets to observe some classes. As she walks into each classroom, she thinks about how the school is in a very diverse city. She then notices that there are mostly White children in the classrooms, with only 1 or 2 Black children.

This leaves Latoya feeling unsettled and she gets a pit in her stomach.

III. Work- Interpersonal

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a man who works at a consulting firm.

Scenario Issue: applying for a new job at work

Main Character: Jermaine Johnson

Jermaine Johnson works at a company, The Brockwell Group, which is a private consulting firm. Jermaine has worked on the finance team there for 11 years. The company is hiring a Senior Director of Finance. Jermaine, who is the most experienced person on the team and has stellar performance reviews, is applying. The hiring manager, Bill, encourages multiple members of the finance team to apply, but he does not encourage Jermaine to apply. When Jermaine asks the manager why he wasn't invited to apply, Bill says, "Well, I thought the job would be too much for you to handle."

This leaves Jermaine feeling unsettled and he gets a pit in his stomach.

IV. Work- Structural

In the following scenario, you'll read a story about a man who works at a consulting firm.

Scenario Issue: applying for a new job at work

Main Character: Jermaine Johnson

Jermaine Johnson works at a company, The Brockwell Group, which is a private consulting firm. Jermaine has worked on the finance team there for 11 years. The company is hiring a Senior Director of Finance. Jermaine, who is the most experienced person on the team and has stellar performance reviews, is applying. While preparing, Jermaine reads the company's annual talent acquisition report. He learns that Over 52% of applicants to open positions in the company are People of

Color and about 30% of current employees are People of Color. He also notices the following about current employee demographics:

White employees make up 65.1% of the company overall and 71% of senior-level roles.

Asian employees make up 13.4% of the company overall and 16% of senior-level roles.

Latino employees make up 8.9% of the company overall and 6.4% of senior-level roles.

Black employees make up 8% of the company overall and 3% of senior-level roles.

American Indian and Alaska Native employees make up .1% of the company overall and 0% of senior-level roles.

Employees of unknown racial/ethnic background make up 4.5% of the company overall and 3.6% of senior-level roles.

This leaves Jermaine feeling unsettled and he gets a pit in his stomach.

Appendix F

Additional Measures Study 2 & Study 3

I. Reaction Questions

1. Please give a summary of the situation you read about in your own words.
2. Please describe any initial reactions to the story you just read.
3. How do you think the main character felt in the situation?

II. Main Character Reaction & Racial Trauma Symptoms

1. To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?
 - a. This situation was stressful for the main character.
 - b. The main character's reaction was believable.
 - c. The main character's reaction was justified.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Slightly disagree
4 = Neither agree nor disagree
5 = Slightly agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly agree

2. How unlikely or likely is it that the main character might experience any of the following as a result of what happened in the story?

1 = Not at all likely , 2 = Moderately unlikely, 3 = Slightly unlikely, 4 = Neither likely nor unlikely, 5 = Slightly likely, 6 = Moderately likely, 7 = Extremely likely

Increased heart rate
Depression
Fear
Self-hate
Intrusive thoughts
Anger
Hypervigilance
Low self-esteem
Avoidance
Sadness
Self-doubt
Nightmares
Flashbacks

Difficulty Sleeping

III. Racism Acknowledgment

[Scale 1 = No, definitely not to 7 = Yes, definitely]

1. Do you think this situation was just a miscommunication? (r)
2. Do you think the main character was discriminated against or treated unfairly because of their race?
3. Do you think this situation involved racism?

IV. Racial Trauma Denial (S2) Acknowledgment (S3)

1. Trauma Definition

Please read the following definition: *Racial trauma* is defined as the manifestation of trauma symptoms resulting directly from racist experiences or incidents and/or the psychological threat to one's racial identity and cultural values.

2. Do you think the main character in the scenario experienced racial trauma?

- 1 = Definitely not
- 2 = Probably not
- 3 = Might or might not
- 4 = Probably yes
- 5 = Definitely yes

4. Please explain your answer to the questions above.

V. Colorblind Racial Ideology Scale (Knowles et al., 2009)

Below is a set of questions that deal with social issues in the United States (U.S.). Give your honest rating about the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement. Please be as open and honest as you can; there are no right or wrong answers.

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree

1. I wish people in this society would stop obsessing so much about race.
2. People who become preoccupied by race are forgetting that we are all just human.
3. Putting racial labels on people obscures the fact that everyone is a unique individual.
4. Race is an artificial label that keeps people from thinking freely as individuals.

VI. Structural Social Problem Attributions (Watts & Guessous, 2006; adapted by Hope, n.d.)

Below is a list of things that may cause problems for your community. Drag the slider towards the explanation that you think best describes the root cause of each problem. You can put the slider anywhere between the two explanations to indicate the degree to which one is a better explanation compared to the other.

1. Gun violence is a problem because:

The laws make it too easy to get guns		People will always be violent regardless of whether they have guns
---------------------------------------	--	--

2. People commit crimes because:

They are not supported well enough by schools and community organizations		They don't care about the effects on others as long as they can get what they want
---	--	--

3. People are targeted by police because:

Police forces are biased and too focused on punishing people.		Young people are disrespectful, violent, or prone to criminal behavior
---	--	--

4. People end up homeless because:

There is not enough affordable housing		Some people don't want to find a job or aren't capable of holding a job
--	--	---

5. Poverty is a problem in our society because:

Resources are distributed unfairly		Some people are lazy and don't work hard enough
------------------------------------	--	---

6. Health problems are prevalent in our society because:

People have inadequate access to preventative health care		People make irresponsible personal choices that lead to health issues
---	--	---

7. People drop out of school because:

Social systems are not adequately funded and do not meet their needs.		They don't want to put in the effort to succeed academically.
---	--	---

VII. Historical Empathy (Vernon-Dunnigan et al., in prep)

In the following, you will read a series of statements containing certain (generalized) human characteristics or reactions. Please evaluate how well the statements apply to you.

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree

1. Thinking about past wars and killings upsets me.
2. I am often very moved by thinking about historical events.
3. I often feel dismay or sympathy for people from the past who were less fortunate than me.
4. The misfortunes of historical figures do not affect me very much.
5. I feel sad if I see depictions of tragedies throughout history.
6. Learning about historical events has a great influence on my mood.
7. Seeing images of people from the past suffering unsettles me.
8. When I see images of people from the past celebrating, I often imagine how I would have felt if I had been there.
9. When learning about historical injustices, I tend to imagine myself in the positions of the people involved.
20. It upsets me more than other people to see images of historical injustice.

VIII. Perceptions of Racism (Nelson, 2013 (interpersonal); Rojas et al., 2015 short-systemic)

The following items describe a situation, policy, or existing state of affairs.

Please select a number from the scale below to indicate how much YOU, personally, think prejudice, discrimination, or racism play a role in each.

Please note that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these statements; we are interested in your honest reactions and opinions.

1 = Not at all, 4 = Not Sure, 7 = Certainly

1. Several people walk into a restaurant at the same time. The server attends to all the White customers first. The last customer served happens to be the only person of color.
2. An African American man goes to a real estate company to look for a house. The agent takes him to look only at homes in low-income neighborhoods.
3. An African American man was pulled over for speeding by a White highway patrol officer. Unknown to the man, his registration had expired earlier that month. Rather than give him a ticket and let him continue, the officer impounded the vehicle at the man's expense.
4. An African American woman made reservations for a car rental over the phone, but when she arrived in person to collect the car, the agent informed her that no cars were available.
5. Lashandra Jenkins and Amy Conner applied for the same job. They have nearly identical qualifications. Amy gets called for an interview and Lashandra does not.
6. The portrayals of African Americans as criminals and/or unintelligent characters in most entertainment media.
7. High rates of incarceration of African American men relative to other ethnic/racial groups in the USA.
8. High rates of unemployment in African American communities.
9. The use of American Indians as mascots by high school, college and professional sports teams.
10. Increased attention to People of Color since the 9/11 terrorist attacks from airport screeners, law enforcement agencies, and the Department of Homeland Security.

IX. Motivation to Respond without Prejudice: External Motivation Scale (Plant & Devine, 1998)

Please indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Slightly disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Slightly agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree

1. Because of today's PC (politically correct) standards I try to appear non prejudiced toward Black people.
2. I try to hide any negative thoughts about Black people in order to avoid negative reactions from others.
3. If I acted prejudiced toward Black people, I would be concerned that others would be angry with me.
4. I attempt to appear non prejudiced toward Black people in order to avoid disapproval from others.
5. I try to act non prejudiced toward Black people because of pressure from others.

Appendix G

Vignette Memory, Manipulation Checks and Results Study 2

Note: The following responses were counted as incorrect if Ps actively chose an incorrect response (i.e., I don't remember was not counted as incorrect).

I. Memory Checks

1. Where did this situation occur?

- The Newman School (correct- school conditions)
- The Brockwell Group (correct- work conditions)
- Someone's home
- Grocery Store
- Vacation
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 1

Structural Work ($n = 55$): 1

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 0

Structural School ($n = 63$): 0

2. What was the main character's name?

- Renee
- Terell
- Latoya (correct- school conditions)
- Avery
- Jerome (correct- work conditions)
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 1

Structural Work ($n = 55$): 1

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 0

Structural School ($n = 63$): 0

3. What kind of schools was the main character researching?

- Public Schools
- Private Schools (correct)
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal School ($n = 51$): 2

Structural School ($n = 63$): 7

4. What position was the Brockwell Group hiring for?

- Administrative Assistant
- Senior Direct of Finance (correct)
- Data Analyst
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 0

Structural Work ($n = 55$): 2

II. Manipulation Checks

**Indicates key questions used as exclusion criteria.*

1. *What happened in the scenario you read about? – School Interpersonal

- the principal dismisses the main character; she doesn't get a tour (correct)
- the principal takes the main character on a tour; she loves the school
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 0

2. *What happened in the scenario you read about? – School Structural

- on the tour, the main character notices the school has mostly White kids (correct)
- on the tour, the main character notices the school has mostly Black kids
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Structural School ($n = 63$): 0

3. *What happened in the scenario you read about? – Work Interpersonal
- The hiring manger invites the main character to apply for a senior role.
 - The hiring manager does **not** invite the main character to apply for a senior role. (correct)
 - I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)
Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 0

4. *What happened in the scenario you read about? – Work Structural
Note: Added after 20-person pilot study

- The company hires mostly People of Color to their senior level positions
- The company hires mostly White employees, with the majority of those being in senior roles; despite People of Color being 52% of applicants (**correct**)
- I don't remember

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)
Structural Work ($n = 55$): 6

5. *What happened in the scenario you read about? – Work Structural
Note: Added after 20-person pilot study

- White people are even more represented in senior level roles than they are in the company overall, while Black people are even less represented in senior level roles than they are in company overall (**correct**)
- Black people are even more represented in senior level roles than they are in the company overall, while White people are even less represented in senior level roles than they are in company overall

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)
Structural Work ($n = 55$): 0

III. Perception Questions

1. *What do you think the main character's race was?
- Black (**correct**)
 - White
 - Asian
 - Pacific Islander
 - Indigenous American or Native Alaskan

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 2

Structural Work ($n = 55$): 2

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 2

Structural School ($n = 63$): 0

2. *What do you think the manager's race was?

- Black
- White (**correct**)
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Indigenous, Native American, or Native Alaskan

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 0

Structural Work ($n = 55$): 1

3. *What do you think the principal's race was?

- Black (**correct**)
- White
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Indigenous, Native American, or Native Alaskan

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 1

Structural School ($n = 63$): 1

4. What is your recollection, or best guess, about the student demographics of the school

the main character was visiting?

- Mostly Black
- Mostly White (**correct**)
- Very Diverse

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 1

Structural School ($n = 63$): 1

5. What is your recollection, or best guess, about the demographics of the neighborhood

the main character was in?

Note: Added after 20-person pilot study

- Mostly Black
- Mostly White
- Very Diverse (**correct**)

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal School ($n = 56$): 0

Structural School ($n = 63$): 7

6. What is your recollection, or best guess, about the employee demographics of the consulting firm?

- Mostly Black
- Mostly White (**correct**)
- Very Diverse

Results (# of p's who got question **wrong** by condition)

Interpersonal Work ($n = 54$): 1

Structural Work ($n = 55$): 0

The following questions ask about your engagement with this survey overall. Please answer these questions honestly. Your honest answers will help with the validity of this study's findings.

Overall, would you say that you took this survey seriously?

Yes
No

Overall, did you carefully read the instructions and questions throughout this survey?

Yes
No

Overall, did you answer the questions throughout this survey honestly?

Yes
No

Please indicate how carefully you read the survey instructions and questions overall:

Not at all
Somewhat
Moderately
Very
Extremely

Please indicate how honestly you answered the survey questions overall:

Not at all
Somewhat
Moderately
Very
Extremely

Appendix H

Study 3 Audio Engagement Measures

Audio Clip Links can be found here: [here](#)

The next set of questions ask about the extent of your engagement with the audio clip you listened to earlier.

Please answer these questions honestly. Your honest answers will help with the validity of this study's findings.

1. Did you experience any technical difficulty playing and/or hearing the audio clip?
Yes (If yes, explain)
No

2. Did you *carefully* listen to the audio clip?
Yes
No

*All participants included in the sample indicated yes.

3. Please indicate the **amount of effort** you put into listening to the audio clip:
None at all
A little
A moderate amount
A lot
A great deal

$$M_{Treatment} = 4.71 \ M_{Control} = 4.71 \ t(372) = -.031, p = .975, d = -.003$$

4. Please indicate the extent to which you learned something new from listening to the audio clip:

None at all
A little
A moderate amount
A lot
A great deal

$$M_{Treatment} = 3.61 \ M_{Control} = 4.05 \ t(372) = 4.01, p < .001, d = .416$$

5. After listening to the audio clip, to what extent do you personally disagree or agree with the information and views presented in the audio clip?

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Slightly Disagree
Neither Disagree Nor Agree
Slightly Agree
Agree
Strongly Agree

6. More specifically, please indicate the extent to which the audio clip helped you learn more about:

(Some topics are unrelated to the audio clip you heard. Your responses to these unrelated items will be used to assess the validity of this study.)

1 = *None at all* to 5 = *A great deal*

connections between the past and the present
the history of racism in the United States
types of behaviors indicating animal intelligence
ecology and migration patterns
this history of pigs in the United States
policies related to racial segregation in schools

7. More specifically, please indicate the extent to which you personally disagree or agree with the following statements: (Some statements are unrelated to the audio clip you heard. Your responses to these unrelated items will be used to assess the validity of this study.)

1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Slightly disagree*, 4 = *Neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *Slightly agree*, 6 = *Agree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*

- The government did not do enough to support school integration
- School and racism are not related
- Past federal schooling policies helped cause present-day school racial segregation in the United States.
- Pigs are intelligent animals.
- Some pigs display behaviors that show they are smarter than what most people assume.
- Generally speaking, pigs are not very smart.

Attention Checks: Treatment

Note: Answer choices in parentheses; correct answers bolded.

1. The conversation in this clip was about (the intelligence of pigs, **schooling policies and segregation**, technology and white collar work).
2. The conversation in this clip was between (**one man**, two women, a woman and a man).
3. What was one of the main pitfalls directly after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling? (most schools were already integrated, students didn't want to integrate, **courts had no guidelines to enforce it**)
4. How did White families resist school desegregation? (building their own schools, protesting at the Supreme Court, **leaving cities and moving to Suburbs**)
5. What year did the landmark Brown v. Board of Education ruling get passed? (**1954**, 1992, 1978)
6. Fill in the blank: Almost 10 years after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, only ___ of Black students in the South attended integrated schools. (**about 1%**, about 50%, about 10%)

Attention Checks: Control (Bonam et al., 2018)

Note: Answer choices in parentheses; correct answers bolded.

1. The conversation in this clip was about (residential segregation, technology and white collar work, **the intelligence of pigs**).
2. The conversation in this clip was between (**two men**, two women, a man and a woman).
3. How much do wild pigs breed. (not very much, about the same as rabbits, **better than rabbits**)
4. Which of the following statements best describes wild pigs' sense of smell? (it's pretty bad, they can only smell sweet things, **they can smell food 7 miles away**)
5. Which state has the worst wild pig problem? (**Texas**, New York, Illinois)
6. Pigs can recognize themselves in a mirror. (**True**, False)

Appendix I

Demographics Study 2 & Study 3

The following (and final) section requests basic demographic information.

1. Age

2. To which gender do you most identify?

1 = Male

2 = Female

3 = Transgender Male

4 = Transgender Female

5 = Non-Binary/ Gender Queer

6 = Gender not listed (please specify) _____

7 = Prefer not to answer

3. Racial/ethnic background (please CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

White

Black/African American

East Asian

South Asian

Latine/a/o/x or Hispanic

Native American/ Indigenous/ Alaska Native/ American Indian

Middle Eastern/Arab

Racial category or identity not listed (please specify):

4. With which racial/ethnic group do you MOST CLOSELY identify?

White

Black/African American

East Asian

South Asian

Latine/a/o/x or Hispanic

Native American/ Indigenous/ Alaska Native/ American Indian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Middle Eastern/Arab

Racial category or identity not listed (please specify):

5. Is English your first language?

Yes

No

6. Think of the following scale as representing where people stand in **our society**. At the **top** of the scale are the people who are the best off, those who have the most

money, most education, and best jobs. At the **bottom** are the people who are the worst off, those who have the least money, least education, and worst jobs or no jobs. Please click on the button that best represents where YOU think you stand.

Top - the people who are the best off

Middle

Bottom - the people who are the worst off

7. In terms of education and income, with which socioeconomic group do you most closely identify?

Upper class

Upper middle class

Middle class

Lower middle class

Working class

Working poor

8. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than High School

High School / GED

Some College

2-year College Degree

4-year College Degree

Masters Degree

Doctoral Degree

9. Please indicate your marital or partnership status:

Single

Domestic Partnership

Married

Separated

Divorced

Widowed

Other (please state) _____

10. How many children do you have? (if none, enter 0)

11. What is your annual household income? (please round to the nearest thousand)

12. Please list the names of your 5 closest friends

13. Please list the racial background of your 5 closest friends.

Friend 1 _____

Friend 2 _____

Friend 3 _____

Friend 4 _____

Friend 5 _____

14. What is your political party affiliation?

Republican

Democrat

Independent

Libertarian

No affiliation

Other (please specify): _____

15. Please use the scale below to indicate your overall/primary political ideology:

Very Conservative

Moderate

Very Liberal

16. How long have you lived in the United States?

0-3 years

4-7 years

8-10 years

More than 10 years

17. Where did you first learn about this study?

UCSC Psychology Participant Pool

Prolific

Other (please specify) _____

18. What device did you take this study on?

Laptop

Desktop computer

Cell phone

Tablet/Ipad

Other (please specify) _____

19. What web browser did you use to take this study?

Google Chrome

Safari

Internet Explorer

Firefox

Microsoft Edge

Other (please specify) _____