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Discourses of colorblind racism on an internet forum

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes discourses of everyday racism and colorblind racism on an internet forum. While skin color is invisible online, identities as black, white and shades in between show through participants' perspectives and communicative behavior in discussions about racism. Critical race theory and whiteness studies argue that there is a perception gap between black and white perspectives on racism, linked to positionality in social structures, which influences experiences and shapes perceptions of the world. This paper shows how black participants in online discussions tend to be more conscious of racial issues and skilled at recognizing racism, while whites often reflect a colorblind discourse that denies structural racism and reproduces everyday racism. Starting with critical perspectives of conscious blacks on the forum and drawing on Cultural Discourse Studies and critical race theory, this paper examines power relations and cultural perspectives underlying white participants' claims, perspectives and speech acts.

Introduction

Most research on discourses of racism on the internet focuses on white-dominated settings, individual hate speech and white supremacist groups (Bliuc et al. 2018). In recent decades, however, subtle forms of 'everyday racism' (Essed 1991) and 'colorblind racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2013) often replace explicit racism in public discourse. Everyday racism consists of dominating behaviors and microaggressions similar to those that feminists identify as 'master-suppression techniques' (Ås 1981). Colorblind ideology holds that 'everybody is the same' and that racism will disappear if we ignore skin color (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 2013), making it illegitimate to speak about racial issues and thus marginalizing minority perspectives and denying experiences of racism. Colorblindness is what Shi-xu (2009) calls a 'universalizing discourse' that imposes a Eurocentric definition of reality. Newer empirical studies of online racism focus on microaggressions and colorblind racism (Love and Hughey 2015) in white-dominated settings, e.g. Joseph-Salisbury (2019) identifies denial of racism and accusations of reverse racism in online comments to a newspaper article, and Young (2014) finds minimization of race issues on an online forum.

Aims and scope

The empirical setting for this paper is an antiracist forum dedicated to black empowerment, the *Africa Speaks* discussion forum (www.africaspeaks.com), moderated by black people. The paper examines the ways in which black and white participants talk about race, white privilege and racism. It uses perspectives from critical race theory (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 2013; Collins 2000; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Essed 1991; hooks 1994, 2000; Van Dijk 1993), critical whiteness studies (Doane 2003; Frankenberg 1993, 1994; Mills 2003), and Cultural Discourse Studies (Asante 2006; Bolívar 2010; Gordon 2007; Makoni 2012; Shi-xu 2009, 2016). I examine power relations and cultural perspectives underlying discursive expressions of colorblind racism and everyday racism in interactions between white and black participants. An interesting dimension is the ways 'conscious' *white* participants have learned from black perspectives and apply these in interaction with other white participants. I include the perspectives of 'conscious' participants, both black and white, as 'local knowledge' (Makoni 2012) in analytical dialogue with theoretical perspectives.

Theoretical approach

Contrary to the claims of colorblind discourse that everyone is equal and the same, the premise of this paper is that black and white discourses are not equivalent. Nonwestern perspectives show clearly that power inequalities and cultural differences continue to divide individuals and communities. From the perspective of Cultural Discourse Studies, Shi-xu (2016) argues that 'Westcentrism' (or Eurocentrism), as an ideological system of practice, remains a major problem in contemporary multicultural and globalized societies. Conscious participants on the forum share Asante's (2006) criticism of dominant western discourse as a Eurocentric construction of reality that perpetuates white supremacy. In critical race theory, Mills (2003, 36–37) quotes Frances Lee Ansley's definition of white supremacy, encompassing three dimensions of material power structure, cultural discourses, and individual behavior:

> A political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white sub-ordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.

For the purposes of my analysis, this means that individual white participants enact white dominance in interaction with black participants, through microaggressions, dominating behavior and everyday racism (Essed 1991). At the level of discourse, white participants hold cultural perspectives that include unconscious and taken-for-granted assumptions of white privilege (Frankenberg 1993) and colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 2013). At a deep level, there is continuing western hegemony, which universalizes and imposes western definitions of reality (Shi-xu 2009).

This paper contributes to challenge and transform Eurocentric reality constructions by including nonwestern perspectives in analytical dialogue with western paradigms (Shi-xu 2009). This study includes perspectives of 'conscious' black and white participants, which closely align with critical race theory, as 'local knowledge' in analytical

dialogue with western and nonwestern theory to bridge the gap between universalized western principles and grassroots realities (Makoni 2012). Critical race theory (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 2013; Collins 2000; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Essed 1991; hooks 2000; Van Dijk 1993) grows out of an African American critical tradition, which analyzes and theorizes racism as experienced by black people. African Americans encounter racism in daily social interaction (Collins 2000) and systematically experience forms of everyday racism, such as being denied a promotion, harassed by the police, or not being hired for a job, and blacks experience these subtle forms of everyday discrimination regardless of their economic position (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Drawing on critical race theory, Critical Whiteness Studies (Doane 2003; Frankenberg 1993, 1994; Mills 2003) argues that experiencing hierarchical structures from the bottom up, potentially enables a critical awareness of the social system (Frankenberg 1993), which is largely invisible from a privileged standpoint (Frankenberg 1994). Black people are more likely than whites to be conscious of racism, and whiteness is often invisible to white scholars (Doane 2003).

While personal experience plays a role in developing critical knowledge of everyday racism, some white people learn from black people's experiences. hooks (1994) points out that we can only end racism if white people 'unlearn racism', that is, to become aware of it and stop 'doing' it. Several white participants on the forum have acquired a level of 'general knowledge of racism' (Essed 1991) and join 'conscious' black participants to perform a sort of critical and cultural discourse analysis of other white participants' discursive behavior.

The internet forum

The *Africa Speaks* discussion forum is a community website run by the *Self Empowerment Learning Fraternity* in the Caribbean island of Trinidad, dedicated to black empowerment with a Rastafari orientation. While some participants identify as Rastafari and others do not, Rastafari expressions and references occur in many discussion posts. The forum has a global reach with hundreds of participants from all continents, including many whites. Core participants, administrators, moderators and the most active participants, are blacks with critical consciousness of racism. Remaining participants split between Caribbean and American Blacks, and white Americans, Europeans and Australians, the latter attracted to Rastafari by the global popularity of Bob Marley and other reggae musicians. The forum features discussion threads on various topics including Rastafari, African history, critical news analysis, political discussion, Eastern and Western spirituality. In discussions on a variety of topics, the issue of white or light-skinned participants' dominating behaviors within the discussions comes to the surface. Racial issues emerge regardless of topic, because 'conscious' moderators expose and challenge white participants' microaggressions and Eurocentrism as they arise. Thus, the forum features very sophisticated discussions of racism and white privilege. Most white participants understand racism only as intentionally discriminating individual behavior, and are unaware of racism as group dominance, structural inequality, and cultural hegemony, which is central to black perspectives. Since the setting is an explicitly antiracist and black-moderated forum, white participants' expressions of colorblind racism and microaggressions are unintentional and unconscious.

Studying racism online. While early internet scholars believed that racial identities would not matter in online communication where skin color cannot be seen, empirical studies (Love and Hughey 2015; McKee 2002; Young 2014) show that participants bring their racialized experiences, knowledge and perspectives with them when they join online interaction. McKee (2002) suggests that internet forums may offer a safe space for honest discussions on racial issues, where marginalized voices can articulate their rage and break with enforced politeness and rationalist communication. These confrontations can potentially lead whites to examine unconscious racist attitudes and change dominating behavior. She argues that in face-to-face conversations, both sides fear confrontation; whites act politically correct, and blacks hold back criticism. Online discussions provide good opportunities for learning, especially since participants can reread previous discussions.

Methods

Sampling. The empirical data for this paper consists of selected quotes from the message boards of the *Africa Speaks* website, which differ from live chats because discussions are archived, allowing participants – and researchers – to read past discussions, post comments on 'old' threads, or start new discussion topics (Love and Hughey 2015). Using purposive sampling, I selected comments relevant to theoretical themes in critical race theory, including examples of 'conscious' black perspectives, and white participants' expressions of 'colorblind racism' and 'forms of everyday racism', regardless of discussion topics.

Methods of analysis. Bolívar (2010) points out that western discourse studies, such as critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1993; Wodak 1996), tend to focus on how texts represent social contexts, rather than on how participants of communicative events create reality, how they feel from their own cultural perspectives, and how smaller communities contribute to change. Inspired by Van Dijk's (1993) point that critical discourse analysis of racism should start with the perspectives of 'conscious' minority persons, this study draws on Cultural Discourse Studies (Bolívar 2010; Shi-xu 2016) and focuses on the *people* who participate in dialogical interaction, power relations between them, and their cultural perspectives. Participants create, reinforce and challenge social realities through discursive interaction, rather than representing social context through text.

Thematic analysis. I examined the discussion threads from the message board with the aim to identify quotes relevant to my focus on black perspectives and white discourses of colorblind racism and everyday racism, which I then coded into themes from critical race theory. Samples include expressions of dominant white discourse, and conscious black and white participants' criticism and explanations of those. I present the findings and analysis in two sections. The first section discusses black participants' perspectives in relation to mentioned theories and makes the analytical dialogue explicit. I coded and organized these into three themes: (1) the perception gap, (2) analyzing discourse beyond words, and (3) white privilege and 'passing for white'. The second section applies conscious participants' local knowledge and mentioned theories to examine examples of colorblind racism, coded and organized into five themes of 'everyday racism' (Essed 1991, 180–181): (1) colorblindness, (2) denial of racism, (3) self-pity,

claiming oppression and reverse racism, (4) authoritarian behavior, rudeness and ridicule, and (5) patronizing, giving charity, and expecting gratitude.

Analysis of black perspectives

Theme 1: the perception gap

Conscious black participants on the forum point out a 'cultural divide' (Shi-Xu 2009) between white and black perspectives of which white participants are largely unaware, which critical race theory calls the 'perception gap' (Essed 1991; Frankenberg 1993). Ayinde, a black man from Trinidad, moderator and community leader on the forum, explains this gap:

> Dark-skinned Blacks who are very sensitive and receptive have […] deliberately studied the history and/or they have received very traumatic negative experiences in the system. […] These Blacks are usually more sensitive […] to the motivations of people. Some can falsely feel that we have special problems instead of realizing that we may have special insights.

Following critical race theory, the experience of racism creates this 'perception gap' (Essed 1991; Frankenberg 1993) between blacks and whites, so that the 'racial' specificity of whites is more visible to those who are not white. Being located at the bottom of race, class or gender hierarchies tends to give special insights (Frankenberg 1993), a 'double consciousness' (Du Bois 1969) arising from being socialized into a dominant discourse while experiencing the system from a marginalized position (Collins 2000). Blacks with personal experiences of racism and critical knowledge of it, are more sensitive to its subtle manifestations, which are often imperceptible to those lacking such experiences. Ayinde explains:

> Whites and light-skinned […] people are at a material advantage in […] this […] Eurocentric system, but they have a natural sensitivity disadvantage. This is the gap that light-skinned ones do not perceive. […] Others do not get the depth of what we say. We must use the same words, but our understandings are not the same.

The observation of a 'perception gap' between Black and white perspectives supports a key point in Cultural Discourse Studies. Shi-xu (2016) points out, that cultural discourses are not simply diverse, but divided, and 'culture' consists not only of innocent differences, but also of historically evolved power relations between communities, including communicative practices of domination. While westerners often believe that their perspectives are neutral and universal, people outside the west feel differently. Nonwestern people experience that these universalized western conceptions do not reflect their realities, and struggle to reclaim their voices in the face of western dominance.

Theme 2: analyzing discourse 'beyond words'

The perception gap between black and white perspectives extends to a cultural divide between different ways of understanding discourse. White participants tend to present ideas detached from the *people* who speak and listen, following dominant western communication forms of abstract liberalism (Bonilla-Silva 2013), rationalist individualism (Asante 2006), and Eurocentric epistemology (Collins 2000). Like Cultural Discourse

Studies (Bolívar 2010; Shi-xu 2016), conscious black and some white participants focus on relations between people, including their feelings, bodies (Gordon 2007), character and behavior. They go beyond western rationalist argumentation and engage in cultural discourse analysis that sees discourse as 'more than words'. A 'conscious' white American woman, Tracey, comments:

> On the internet … many altered and split personas come onto the screen to play with the various points of views […] one is a bit anonymous, as the body is seemingly hidden behind the screen and all we have is their word […] or do we? Certainly there is much more …

Kelani, a moderator and a black African woman living in the US, adds:

> How can we be really sure if anyone here is who they say they are? […] Being Black is more than just a physical appearance; it is a frame of mind. There is a way to tell who or what a person are on this board.

Muata, a mixed-race African American man, writes:

> Your color can't be seen here. So if your whiteness shows it's your reasoning, perspective, principalities, consciousness etc. that reveals it.

In light of critical race theory, these quotes indicate that 'race-conscious' participants read a person's racial identity out of their standpoint, experiences, attitudes and assumptions shown in their statements, indicating that people with different skin color have systematically different experiences and that these influence perspectives and consciousness (Frankenberg 1993). Obasogie (2013) found that even blind people 'see' race – they are socialized into visualizing race in terms of skin color and this shapes their social behavior. Studies of racism on the internet (Love and Hughey 2015; McKee 2002; Young 2014) find that racial identities matter even if skin color cannot be seen, since participants bring their racialized experiences, knowledge and perspectives with them when they join online interaction.

Similar to Bolívar's (2010) criticism of western discourse analysis, black participants see internet discourse as communicative events between people, while most white participants only perceive an exchange of words. A white American calling himself Kebo recognizes this:

> The reasoning forum also shows that there is no way to hide racism when individuals reason, it comes out and it looks hidden to the speaker perhaps but its on the page and this forum recognizes it, racism is always recognized here.

Gordon (2007) points out that, nonwestern perspectives on communication include relational, emotional, spiritual and communal dimensions, and go beyond the western focus on rational argumentation between individuals. Shi-xu (2009) writes that western critical discourse analysis has a bias that favors speakers' rational argumentation over dialogical relations with listeners. Its underlying epistemology takes for granted the Cartesian separation between mind and body, and western dualism between text and context. To expose and challenge white participants' dominating behavior, conscious participants go beyond the rationalistic approach and perceive discourse as including not only words, but also 'deeds' and speakers' characters and moral values.

Theme 3: white privilege and 'passing for white'

Analyzing communication beyond words, conscious participants point out that the receiver's perception counts as much as the speaker's conscious intention. For example, the receiver may perceive certain assumptions and expectations in a speech act, which the speaker is unaware of and does not intend to communicate. Ayanna, a conscious black woman from Trinidad, writes:

> When we look at the system, as it exists, we often have to realize that although we ourselves are not prejudiced (or so we think) it is often […] how we are perceived by others as much as how we perceive ourselves that counts. It's how we are perceived that benefits us in this system. As a white person you do benefit.

Critical race theory argues that racial identity is primarily about social classification by others rather than how we perceive ourselves (Makalani 2003). Understanding racism as a system of oppression, a central insight is the concept of 'white privilege' – 'the unearned benefits that flow to whites in the American racial order' (Doane 2003, 6–7) – privileges of which whites are largely 'unconscious'. No matter how much whites feel that their skin color should be irrelevant, they still enjoy 'white privilege' (Frankenberg 1993). Assuming that their own experiences are universal and perceiving the system as neutral and fair, white and light-skinned people tend to be unaware of the preferential treatment they receive.

In the Caribbean and Latin America, racism has traditionally been a continuum from white to black, where white privilege extends to light-skinned people as 'honorary whites' (Bonilla-Silva 2003) and light-skinned African Americans may 'pass for white'. In black communities, skin color correlates with social stratification (Makalani 2003) as white-controlled institutions 'show a preference for lighter-skinned Blacks, discriminating against darker ones or against any African American who appear to reject White images of beauty' (Collins 2000, 91). Whitening strategies are widespread among black American women (hooks 2000).

In this example, Tracey questions a light-skinned participant's perspectives on race.

Ras Legacy:	Is it really the skin color that matters, or the ideas beneath the skin?
Tracey:	you must know that it is a luxury only a white one can afford to say. […] It is my observation that it is only whites who come onto this board chanting that kind of rhetoric … I have yet to hear an African say anything of the kind. Why? Because that is not the reality for those whose experiences belie quite a different perspective.
Ras Legacy:	I am not white …
Tracey:	Are you 'light'? […] I ask because we have reasoned long time on these boards about this issue. […] speak from your experience and let the real story be told.

First, Ras Legacy asks whether skin color or ideas should matter, assuming a western dualistic perspective that detaches ideas from the speaker's body. Tracey points out that this reflects white privilege, because from a black perspective, experiences of racism influence people's perspectives. Ras Legacy says she is not white, and Tracey guesses that she is light-skinned. In another thread, five months later, Ras Legacy shares her experience of 'passing':

Ras Legacy:	When I was in junior high school … my white friends tried to 'help' me look 'cool'. They gave me white makeup to wear that had a much lighter tone than my skin color. Their main focus was to straighten my hair. […] I still find people who tell me that I am lucky, because I can pass for a Hispanic/Latina woman. When I first joined this board, I also thought that all people were equal, I reasoned with this concept, and found that there are many factors that bar InI [us] from coming together, mainly race.

The dialogue shows how a 'conscious' white participant applies her awareness and knowledge of how racialized experiences shape perspectives, to identify a light-skinned participant, who initially did not want to connect perspectives to racial identity.

To summarize, my analysis of black perspectives supports key points in critical race theory and Cultural Discourse Studies. There is a cultural divide between black and white perspectives, where black participants' understanding of discourse includes personal, relational and emotional dimensions beyond rational argumentation, and where white participants act from unconscious assumptions of privilege. Ayinde summarizes:

> Most Africans and other non-Whites feel that Whites deal with them with a superiority complex. […] Although Whites disagree on many things like all other people, this one 'character flaw' underlines their general conduct towards Blacks.

In the next section, I examine in detail various discursive manifestations of this 'superiority complex' and 'character flaw' and apply black participants' local knowledge in analytical dialogue with critical race theory and Cultural Discourse Studies. Black participants interpret everyday experiences of racism and colorblind ideologies as manifestations of global power relations of Eurocentrism (Shi-xu 2009, 2016) and white supremacy (Asante 2006). Asante (2006) identifies the cultural components of aggressive individualism, chauvinistic rationalism and ruthless culturalism, which underlie forms of everyday racism (Essed 1991, 180–181). I analyze the following themes: (1) colorblindness, (2) denial of racism, (3) self-pity, claiming oppression, and reverse racism, (4) authoritarian behavior, rudeness and ridicule, and (5) patronizing, giving charity and expecting gratitude.

Analysis of white perspectives

Theme 1: colorblindness

Expressions of colorblindness are explicit in the posts of these young white men on the forum:

Tidjani:	Only racists matter if white or black skin color
Nattydread:	Trying not to see people by the colour of their skin
Natty Fred:	Blacks/Whites/Spots & Stripes

Other whites claim that they do not care whether people are 'white, black, purple or green'. Ridiculing the notion of skin color as socially relevant by listing non-existent skin colors reflects the colorblind ideology (DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post 2003). Muata responds from a black perspective: 'Stop trying not to see color, it needs to be seen'.

Colorblindness claims to fight racial discrimination by not acknowledging racial categories, arguing that the solution to the problem of racism is 'not to see race' and

assert that 'everyone is the same' (Doane 2003, 13). This obfuscates a reality where skin color is visible and socially relevant (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). Colorblindness is 'a discourse in which it is not permissible to raise the issues of race' (Doane 2003, 13) and where inequality is explained and blamed on individual failure rather than structural oppression. Colorblind discourse imposes a Eurocentric definition of reality (Shi-Xu 2009). It leads whites to believe that they contribute to the elimination of racism by not acknowledging race, and that they are innocent bystanders rather than active participants in the reproduction of racism (DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post 2003). 'Race' becomes an illegitimate topic for discussion, and whites can accuse race-conscious blacks who insist on discussing racial issues, of reverse racism (Doane 2003).

Theme 2: denial of racism

Denial of racism (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Essed 1991) is typical of colorblindness, enabling subtle forms of 'colorblind racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2013). In this discourse, explicitly racist viewpoints are denied, while implicitly similar positions persist. Typical statements of denial include phrases like 'I'm not a racist, but … ' and 'I am colorblind' (Myers 2003). On the forum, Natty Fred, a white Englishman who identifies as a Rasta and uses Rastafarian expressions, writes:

> I grew up in Afrika (Botswana) […] I, my mother/father and ancestors have never had any positive involvement with this wicked Babylon System [the West]. Why […] does the narrow-minded Afrikan Rasta still see I as a downpressor [oppressor], and put the burden of responsibility and guilt unmovable on my shoulders?

While growing up as an Englishman in Africa probably implies a degree of complicity with colonialism, scholars of critical race theory point out that whites often feel 'feel picked on, victimized, and made to feel guilty' when issues of racism are raised (Doane 2003). When blacks insist on discussing racism, whites often feel personally indicted and become defensive (McKinney and Feagin 2003). They tend to protest against collective descriptions because they see themselves as individuals and do not recognize their common specificities as whites resulting from their privileged position (Frankenberg 1993). While most whites are unaware and take for granted the unearned racial privilege (McKinney and Feagin 2003), Tracey is aware of complicity:

> [I] had rather totally taken for granted many of the privileges I had, to float freely through society as I pleased without a thought or care as to who might […] harass me … or give me some negative comment, or disdainful look, based solely upon the color of my skin.

Frankenberg (1994) argues that it is more constructive to examine degrees of complicity instead of a dualism of individual racists versus non-racists.

From a Black perspective, Kelani criticizes denial of racism:

> Whites living in denial regarding what really ails the majority of Black men and women in this world […] they avoid facing how they […] benefit from Black oppression. […] trying to minimize the Black reality […] spread their ignorant, arrogant and paternalistic eurocentricity.

Similarly, Doane (2003) writes that minimization and denial of racism reinforce white hegemony and marginalize political claims of Blacks. This Eurocentric perspective universalizes western experiences and imposes a western definition of reality (Shi-xu 2009).

Theme 3: self-pity, claiming oppression and reverse racism

Claiming that everyone is equal, colorblindness enables whites to equate their own experiences with black experiences, and accuse blacks of overcompensating and putting their suffering above others (O'Brien 2003). hooks (2000) criticizes white feminists claiming that all women are equally oppressed, which denies the differential experiences of oppression caused by race and class. Next, another young man who identifies as white Rasta, claims oppression and two black men respond that his experiences are not equal to racism.

Nattydread:	Everyday at school I get sh*t from non Rastas who are also white who continually take the p**s quoting from Cool Runnings: 'easy Rasta' and other stuff like Rasta just ganja smoking hippies […] The oppression they give me hurts so much.
Muata:	If you don't want to offend, don't ever compare your petty little problems in school based on image and style with I Blackman's struggle'.
Benjamin:	The fact that as a young white boy you spot locz [wear dreadlocks] don't really alter the fact that you […] experience the privilege of been white.

Some whites 'play the white ethnic card' (Doane 2003) to claim that their ancestors also experienced oppression. Natty Fred, the white Rasta who grew up in Botswana, writes:

> I am white […] My mother's family comes from Israel, and my father's family is English, from a poor peasant background. […] Jews have been persecuted and oppressed […] English peasants were oppressed by the wicked Monarchy […] Not only Afrikans […] have suffered.

Elena, a woman of mixed race from Canada, also claims that oppression is equal:

> My mother is from Trinidad and my father is Greek. My ancestors on both sides have gone through slavery, genocide, land was taken from them, women were raped. […] The trial and tribulations were the same.

While it is not constructive to rank oppression, white people have systematically minimized the suffering of Blacks under racism and slavery. Claiming that oppression is 'the same' regardless of race serves to minimize black experiences.

Seeing racism as individual prejudice and ignoring the structural dimension, colorblindness enables whites to claim reverse racism. Some whites feel excluded from black activities and groups (Myers 2003), and feel it is unfair that blacks organize racially but when whites do, it is defines as racial discrimination (Gallagher 2003). On the discussion forum, several white participants identify as Rastafarians and want to belong to the community. Nattydread, a white Rasta, writes:

> On the reasoning boards I see a lot of should we accept white Rastas and do they feel the same as us black Rasta. […] Should we see people by the character or by the skin? […] To me character is the obvious one, but to you I'm not sure. […] I'm not […] prejudice to anyone […] I see people as equals.

Colorblindness enables whites to claim that blacks are racist when they insist that skin color still matters (Gallagher 2003). While black participants on the forum insist that skin color matters if we want to abolish racism, they are not opposed to white Rastas who acknowledge black experiences and support black perspectives.

Theme 4: authoritarian behavior, rudeness and ridicule

Natty Fred, the English white Rasta, claims reverse racism in a statement that exemplifies authoritarian behavior and rudeness, a form of everyday racism (Essed 1991, 180–181):

> The enslavement of Afrikans does not give Afrikans in the present day the right to have prejudice for every white man. Judge by a man's actions, not by his skin colour! […] Has slavery forced you to block that out of your mind?

In this example, he appears to impose his definition of reality on Blacks. Ayanna responds:

> Whites […] deciding what should be addressed and what is irrelevant. That attitude is not only arrogance and superiority but borders on downright racism. NO ONE can tell black people what their issues are.

When whites tell blacks how to fight racism, Ayanna identifies this as reflecting white superiority and as constituting a form of racism (O'Brien 2003). It is also denial of racism when colorblind whites define race as an illegitimate topic for discussion, and accuse race-conscious blacks of being racist (Doane 2003). The examples show what Asante (2006) calls 'chauvinistic rationalism' where Europeans define the issues and how to approach reality, reflecting an exceptionalist idea that rationality originates in Europe.

White privilege manifests in assumptions and expectations to be welcomed, accepted and trusted anywhere (O'Brien 2003). Tico from the Bahamas, a light-skinned man, shares the sense of entitlement in a sarcastic post:

> Since these people were all darker than me, I guess I should have […] asked them first? I also did lots of filming in Jamaica […] of random people […] I didn't ask them first either […] I was in a public place, the University of the West Indies, as a West Indian whose government subsidizes the existence of the campus. […] I have as much right to be on the campus as anyone else. […] I am humbly sorry that I with my light skin and bald head dared enter a Rastafari academic gathering. I should not have expected to find intelligent persons capable of judging me as an individual.

These expressions of authoritarian behavior and entitlement also correspond to what Asante (2006) defines as 'aggressive individualism' where Europeans see themselves as superior, and expect 'local people' to serve the European's interests.

Theme 5: patronizing, giving charity and expecting gratitude

By patronizing, giving charity and expecting gratitude, well-meaning whites may unconsciously reproduce racial power relations (Essed 1991, 180–181). Although a white person may simply want to help blacks, this is dominating behavior, especially when whites assume they know best what black people need. In critical race theory, 'false empathy' (O'Brien 2003) refers to a white person's assumption that blacks want the same as whites even though their experiences are different. Privileged people tend to assume that others are envious of their privileges and want to be the same as them: Whites assume that blacks want to be like them, and men assume women want to be men (Ås 1981). Paternalism was evident in the colonial 'white man's burden' and many whites still see themselves as 'world saviors' claiming to be altruistic missionaries or development workers, wanting to teach other cultures to become more Western. This corresponds to

what Asante (2006) calls 'ruthless culturalism' – the promotion of western ideals as the most correct form of human society. On the forum, Jeff, a white American, writes about white feminists wanting to liberate Black women:

> I have heard some white Rasta sisters say that they want to go 'liberate the sisters' in the [Jamaican] Rasta scene, and I can only smile and think about how they need to go and learn. This all stems from the whole colonialist mentality, the 'white man's burden' of 'civilizing the underdeveloped savages.'

Jeff is aware that this is patronizing, but then in another discussion thread, he offers giving charity to the Self Empowerment Learning Fraternity that runs the discussion forum.

> Jeff: Greets Ayinde … I wanted to email you concerning contributions to the center that runs these boards, money, barter or otherwise.
> Ayinde: Why highlight my name on this public forum to publicize your 'desire' to 'contribute'? It's all about a show for some people. I am certainly not a poor begging African.

Ayinde points out that some white people give charity 'for show' – to give themselves a positive image as caring and altruistic, boosting his feelings of superiority and reinforcing a relationship of dependency. The white English Rasta, Natty Fred uses a humanitarian mission to construct a positive self-image and a negative image of blacks:

> It is a mission of mine to help shorten the divide between black and white. […] I am involved in 2 anti-racism campaigning groups in […] England. I have worked in Malawi as a teacher, building schools and educating youth about child rights/human rights and HIV/AIDS prevention. […] If I cannot be accepted as a brother in the black community […] my mission becomes […] much harder.

A black Jamaican, Emmanuel, responds that it appears Natty Fred wants 'to collect rewards for deeds done', in other words, he is expecting gratitude from blacks for his anti-racist activities. Some white antiracists believe that while they are working against racism, black people are the real problem when they resist whites' efforts (McKinney and Feagin 2003).

Discussion and conclusion

Starting with the perspectives of conscious blacks, this paper analyzed a range of discursive claims and speech acts of well-meaning white liberals, and identified these as reflecting attitudes of white superiority and privilege. The specific forms of everyday racism found on the internet discussion forum correspond to those identified in the literature on everyday racism and colorblind racism (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Essed 1991), including minimizations and denials of racism, self-pity, claiming oppression and reverse discrimination, as well as authoritarian behavior, rudeness and ridicule, and patronizing, giving charity and expecting gratitude. Other studies of racism on the internet have found similar expressions. Joseph-Salisbury (2019) identified denial of racism, accusations of reverse racism, and claims of oppression in the comments to his online article. In both cases, the 'post-racial' discourse of colorblindness makes it possible for white people to label antiracists who speak about race as racists who oppress white people. Young (2014) found similar denial of racism on a white-dominated forum of a fan website. The similarities in comments in a mainstream (white-dominated) online

newspaper, and the (black-dominated) Africa Speaks discussion forum indicates that many white participants take the dominant discourse for granted to the extent that it does not make a difference whether racism is intentional or not. Joseph-Salisbury (2019) suggests that their self-identity is inextricably linked to white hegemony and they are deeply committed to maintain white supremacy.

From the perspectives of critical race theory, 'colorblind racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 2013) is covert and subtle and its mechanisms have become almost invisible to whites because they are hidden behind a colorblind ideology which allows whites to complain about reverse discrimination. These often-unintentional practices can be 'interpreted as racist practices when minority group members, on the basis of their generalized knowledge about racism, interpret them as such' (Van Dijk 1993, 25). Essed (1991, 146) writes, 'some experiences are obvious indications of racism, many others are concealed and subtle. Their understanding requires a certain degree of general knowledge of racism'. Whites are socialized into what Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls a 'white habitus'. Their habitual behavior is not the result of conscious choice, but a result of internalized ideas of white superiority. Such speech acts have in common an underlying assumption of 'white superiority' resulting from internalized Eurocentric ideology, but they are not particular to racism. Feminists (Ås 1981) have identified that men use similar suppression techniques and strategies of domination towards women, as those defined as racist if used by whites against blacks. According to Essed (1991, 49–53), everyday racism is the integration of racism into everyday situations through cognitive and behavioral practices that activate underlying power relations. Through this process, everyday racism becomes part of the expected, unquestionable, and normal practices of the dominant group.

Cultural Discourse Studies focuses on the underlying power relations and cultural perspectives behind ideology and everyday behavior. From this perspective, colorblind racism is a Eurocentric discourse that universalizes western cultural perspectives and marginalizes nonwestern perceptions of reality (Shi-xu 2009, 2016). On the forum, conscious black participants give voice to how they feel from their own cultural perspectives, drawing on a black perspective similar to Asante (2006), who discusses western attitudes and discursive means of domination associated with white supremacy that underlie everyday racism. Authoritarian behavior reflects an 'aggressive individualism' as a cultural attitude where self-interest becomes the overriding goal. Asante discusses 'chauvinistic rationalism' where Europeans believe there are in a superior position to define reality. Patronizing and giving charity reflect what Asante calls 'ruthless culturalism' – a belief in the superiority of western culture as the most correct form of human society. The divide between black and white perspectives also reflects different cultural perspectives on communication, as Gordon (2007) discusses. Dominant Western discourse favors rationalist argumentation between individuals over the relational, emotional, spiritual, and communal aspects of communication.

The findings support the general notion of a 'perception gap' between white and black perspectives in critical race theory (Essed 1991; Frankenberg 1993) and a 'cultural divide' between western and nonwestern perspectives in Cultural Discourse Studies (Shi-xu 2009, 2016). Experiences and perceptions of mixed-race people who can pass for white, adds complexity to the relationship between individual expressions and dominant discourses. Examples of 'conscious' white people who have learned to acknowledge minority

perspectives shows that perspectives and awareness are learned, not predetermined. If we wish to raise antiracist awareness and educate white people about the continuing existence of racism, Eurocentrism and western dominance, a first step in interracial dialogue is to acknowledge the perception gap resulting from differentiated white and black experiences of racial privilege and discrimination, and recognize critical nonwestern perspectives.

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