

**Disrupting White Fragility and Colorblind Racism:  
Using Games to Measure How Race and Ethnicity Courses Change Students' Racial  
Ideologies**

Alicia L. Brunson, PhD  
Georgia Southern University

Chris Benedict Cartright, MFA  
Georgia Southern University

**Abstract**

This research provides instructors teaching race and ethnicity a tool to assess the racial ideologies of their students in the form of “race talk.” In particular, Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) concepts denoting colorblindness and DiAngelo’s (2018) concept of white fragility were measured before and after completing one race and ethnicity course by having students play a live version of the game “Guess Who” (Hasbro Co.). At the end of the course, student responses during the game, and their subsequent reflections, revealed a significant decrease in white fragility. Using this game, instructors can assess students’ racial ideologies and whether or not they have acquired an improved understanding of systemic inequalities by analyzing changes in students’ race talk.

**Keywords:** white fragility, games, race talk

## Introduction

Courses focusing on race and ethnic inequality address the needs of students of color, consider social issues in more nuanced ways than other courses, and allow universities to demonstrate commitment to diversity and inclusion (Kowalski 2000; Richardson, Volberding, Zahl 2020; McClellan, Nakai, Neufeld, Remer, Minieri, & Miserocchi 2019). Professors must know the social locations of students and their corresponding lived experiences and ideologies, especially in race and ethnicity courses, because it affects the ways we teach race. Surveys and other tools used at the beginning of a course can help instructors get to know their students and assess their knowledge of the subject matter (Brielle, Thurber & Bandy 2019). The identities of instructors and students influence how race and ethnicity courses are taught and received. The first author, the course instructor, is a black woman; the second author is a black man. We understand how students may negatively perceive the social groups to which we belong (Brielle, Thurber & Bandy 2019; Delano-Oriaran & Parks 2015). This is one reason why the instructor used a game to measure students' racial ideologies before interaction with the instructor and the course content could influence how students performed their race talk.

The purpose of this research is to understand how students perform race through language, allowing us to measure students' learning about racism using a modified version of the game Guess Who. We examine students' racial ideologies before and after exposure to the content of a race and ethnicity course which students may take as one option to fulfill their diversity course requirement in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Our research extends the work of Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, Ariely's (2006) Guess Who methodology for studying racial ideology. In addition, we use Bonilla-Silva's work on colorblind ideology in our assessment of students' ability to learn about race and racism. Previous studies about teaching race and ethnicity courses focused on various tools to assist students in recognizing white dominance, white privilege, and racial inequality as represented in the media (Khanna & Harris 2015; Upright 2015). Other research centers on using service-learning to explore how students understand and speak about race (Becker & Paul 2015). Oral histories have been used to introduce students to discussions of race and ethnicity (Johnson & Mason 2017). Small-group discussions facilitated by a team were used to teach student core concepts concerning race and student-centered discussions facilitated by a cross-racial team enabled students to engage in a racial justice course (Wenizimmer & Bergdahl 2018; Davis & Ernst 2017). Other students have found that students are able to recognize structural patterns of racial inequality such as segregation with the use of an interactive racial dot map and infant mortality using a white privilege activity (Sequin, Nierobisz, & Koxlowski 2017; Cebulak & Zipp 2019). Like Chong (2019), this research uses experiential learning in the form of a game. However, the game used in our research is primarily used to assist instructors in their assessment of their course curriculum.

Our primary research questions are:

1. Do undergraduates beginning an introductory race and ethnicity course hold colorblind ideologies?
2. How do undergraduate students express their racial ideologies when describing strangers before and after race and ethnicity content?

### 3. How does course content change students' race talk?

Teaching race and ethnicity courses are also difficult because of the widespread belief that the United States is a post-racial society (Mohr 2017). Post-racial ideology assumes that race and racial inequalities do not play a major factor in determining life chances (Dawson & Bobo 2009). One of the learning objectives in the class is for students to understand the wide-reaching systemic oppressions and limited life chances that result from racial oppression. Another course objective is to illustrate the relationship between the performance of race and larger social structures (Lewis 2004).

## Review of Literature

In *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (2010), Bonilla-Silva makes four assertions to explain how a post-racial perspective is a racial ideology that perpetuates contemporary racial inequality. In a post-racial perspective, people: (1) do not see or recognize racism; (2) think that individual failures create inequality rather than racial discrimination; (3) think that structural and institutional disparities are due to the racial and ethnic minority group's dysfunctional culture; and (4) think that social and public reform is not needed to achieve racial equity because inequality is a natural occurrence.

In the case of this research, the authors theorized another aspect of post-racial ideology: the minimization of race. Minimization of race refers to statements indicating that race does not exist, and especially not racial prejudice and racial discrimination. Colorblindness is also a post-racial perspective, and the perspectives described above conform to how most Americans think about colorblindness (Apfelbaum, Norton, &

Sommers 2012). A post-racial perspective suggests that America has overcome its contentious racial history and that racial ills have largely been eradicated (Crenshaw 2010; DiAngelo 2018). More accurately, however, Forman and Lewis (2015) explain that modern forms of racism have simply replaced overt Jim Crow racism and continue to justify large racial and ethnic disparities with new language and strategies. Durham (2015) suggests that this post-racial perspective does not ignore race, but rather focuses on a select group of people of color. These few exceptions, or tokens, are successful under capitalist standards and uphold the rationale that culture, and not systemic racism, is the impediment to assimilation and achievement (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009). Lewis and Jhally (1994) argue that this is an example of enlightened racism. With this perspective, one can employ the relative growth of the black middle class to argue that race doesn't matter anymore. Both colorblind racism and the post-racial perspective allows the status quo of racial inequity to persist (Forman & Lewis 2015).

Bobo (2011) provides evidence that we are not living in a post-racial society. Specifically, economic inequality is worsening, and whites are socially and physically isolated from people of color, perpetuating stark racial inequalities. The reality of these inequalities and the strongly held belief that America is the land of freedom and opportunity should create dissonance. This dissonance results in overt celebrations of freedom, equality, and democracy which fail to result in concrete action to reach those goals. Those who hold a colorblind or post-racial perspective ignore institutional barriers and, therefore, do not support government action to overcome those barriers. Instead, in this perspective, only behavioral or cultural changes will allow racial minorities to earn the rewards of a capitalist society (Bonilla-Silva 2017).

## **White Fragility**

In addition to Bonilla-Silva's concepts of colorblind racism, this research also addresses DiAngelo's concept of white fragility. DiAngelo (2018) describes white fragility as a defensive reaction to racial stress experienced by white individuals. Defensive reactions result from challenges to individuals' racial worldviews along with their belief that they are good, moral people. Smith and Mayorga-Gallo (2017) explain that many people understand colorblindness as a marker of racial tolerance in the supposedly post-racial era. In this view, racist individuals are "bad" people who intentionally harm others (Mueller 2011); "good" people ignore race.

Unconscious racial bias is another characteristic of white fragility. Because of the belief that racial bias is necessarily intentional, and because of people's self-perception as open-minded individuals, evidence of unconscious racial bias can make white people defensive. Public presentations of white fragility are characterized by speakers who present themselves as not complicit with the systems and practices of racism, or statements that they are not racist (Burke 2018). One type of defensive response is withdrawal from situations that induce racial stress. However, retreating to maintain comfort perpetuates the racial status quo which keeps whites in a dominant social position and marginalizes people of color. Challenging and changing these perspectives is difficult because "we can't change what we refuse to see" (DiAngelo 2018, p. 42). White fragility results from a process of socialization which maintains white supremacy.

## **Race-Talk and Socialization**

There are various "semantic moves" or strategies whites use to state their views about race in order to avoid negative sanctions (Bonilla-Silva 2010, p. 105). This enables

those who hold a colorblind ideology to avoid accusations of being racist while at the same time perpetuating systemic inequalities through inaction (Becker & Paul 2015). How one uses race talk depends on their position in a racialized hierarchy (Embrick & Henricks 2013). People of color view race on an institutional level and focus on impact. Whites view race on a personal level and focus on intent. Whites also have a difficult time speaking of race directly. Instead, they employ race talk to dispel accusations of racism (Apolon 2011). Race talk is dialogue about race, racism, whiteness, and white privilege. Race talk often is characterized by invoking intense emotion and a sense that an individual's worldview is threatened (Sue 2016). Often race talk is used in relation to "others," usually African Americans (Lewis 2004). Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, and Ariely (2006) argue that colorblind ideology is useful for whites because being labeled racist produces very negative feelings. If one does not acknowledge or speak about race, they cannot be called racist.

Socialization influences how we speak about race (Burke 2018; Forman & Lewis 2015; Sue 2016). Where an individual grows up may provide or limit exposure to groups unlike their own. Although residential segregation is illegal, it has not decreased (Forman 2004; Lewis 2003). Because of this, white Americans may have fewer face-to-face interactions with people of color (DiMaria 2007). Family of origin also contributes to the adoption of particular views and ideologies. Some families may teach their children to consider everyone the same and to be colorblind when describing others (Hagerman 2016; Lewis 2003). Colorblindness is closely tied to individualism, another valued ideology in America (Liu 2011). Individualism and colorblindness assert that individual actions and words, rather than group identification and social structures, determine a

person's worth (Liu 2011; DiAngelo 2018). DiAngelo (2018) argues that white individuals may rely on colorblind ways of speaking because they have been taught that any race-informed viewpoint is biased.

Media images and narratives shape our worldview. Media representations disseminate racial ideologies, including colorblindness, which is a racist ideology that upholds white supremacy (Burke 2018; DiAngelo 2018; Gallagher 2003). Because we have fewer face-to-face interactions due to segregation, media messages are particularly powerful (DiAngelo 2018). These and other agents of socialization reinforce colorblind racism, and thus maintain white supremacist ideology—and all of the racial inequality that rests at the foundation of this perspective (Weinzimmer & Bergdahl 2018).

Classrooms also provide a site of socialization. Students learn new content and new ways to think about that content. While teaching, it is important to emphasize the relationship between the daily performance of race and larger social structures. This helps students “recognize that race is always simultaneously about both ideas and resources” (Lewis 2004, p. 629). When incorporating lessons on institutional discrimination and racial ideologies, students acquire the language to describe what they observe in their own environments (Strmic-Pawl 2015). Students may become more self-reflective and think about the ways they understand and talk about race. Therefore, capturing how students perform race through language provides one indicator to determine if students are understanding how racism functions and how it is perpetuated contemporarily.

### **Usefulness of Games as a Pedagogical Tool**

Games are useful pedagogical tools. Games can promote students' interest and motivation (Dorn 1989; Greenwood-Erickson, Fiore, McDaniel, Scielzo, Cannon-

Bowers, Mundy 2006; Simpson & Elias 2011). Playing games allow students to engage in ways that differ from traditional avenues like media sources and classroom lectures (Greenwood-Erickson, Fiore, McDaniel, Scielzo, Cannon-Bowers, Mundy 2006). Games provide interactive and experiential ways for students to process information (Simpson & Elias 2011). Games help challenge students' presumptions and can guide them to understand the implications of structural inequality of life chances (Harlow 2009; Dorn 1989).

Inspiration for our version of Guess Who came from Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely's (2006) experiential study on race-talk avoidance. In the version used by Norton et al., the investigators pre-selected cards with images of people's faces, half of them white, half of them black. Subjects worked in pairs and their objective was to identify which image their partner was holding as quickly as possible by asking "yes" or "no" questions. Findings suggested that even when subjects could eliminate half of the options by asking questions pertaining to race, subjects avoided those questions. In particular, Norton et al. (2006) found that white players avoided using questions pertaining to race to perform in ways that suggested they were not racist. Interestingly, Norton et al. explained that when individuals avoided questions about race, their partners perceived them as more biased. Norton et. al. also found that the age of the players influenced if questions about race were asked. Younger players were more likely to ask questions about race, whereas older players were not. This suggests that older players are socialized to not talk about race in public spaces. Norton et. al. discerned that this effect was not about color, but rather about race when using white and black dots. Participants in Norton's et. al's study would reference the color of the dots when playing the game, but

not the race of the individuals on the cards that they were to identify. Those playing the game were not colorblind. Rather, participants managed their expressions of racial consciousness depending on the context and characteristics of their partners.

## **Methodology**

### **How to Play the Game**

Guess Who is a board game in which the objective is for players to identify their opponent's card using yes-or-no questions based upon characteristics of the individual on the card. We adapted Norton et al.'s (2006) experiential study by using live subjects as cards in the game. Using live subjects allows for a more realistic experience of how we assess individuals in social contexts. Using images or cards would not provide as much urgency to think deeply and critically about how we speak about demographic characteristics of individuals.

Students' descriptions of strangers were evaluated to measure race-talk. Playing the Guess Who activity on the first day of class provided the baseline to measure if course content influences how students talk about race. This was the pre-test. The instructor assigned same activity and reflection at the end of the semester to measure if students' race talk changed<sup>1</sup>. This post-test consisted of using the same Guess Who experiential method to measure if a semester's worth of course content in an introductory race and ethnicity course affects students' race talk and expression of racial ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Student volunteers were asked to play the "cards" during the second round of the Guess Who game. The students may not have been the same as those who played the "cards" during the first round of the game.

<sup>2</sup> For the game students choose their own partners. Students were not required to have the same partner for the games.

The instructor used the experiential learning activity in race and ethnicity courses at a large, predominantly white four-year institution in the Midwest. Classes ranged from 35 to 60 students (see Table 1 for student demographics). Students played the game during class<sup>3</sup>. Before introducing the game, the instructor informed students of their rights according to university IRB policies. She then explained the objective of the game, which was to identify the card their partner has chosen. She also explained the roles students could play. One of the roles was to play one of the “cards”. At the start of the game, six self-selected volunteers came to the front of the room. The volunteers at the front of the class represented the cards. The students volunteering for this role were instructed to stand in front of the room while classmates tried to guess their partner’s choice of card. The instructor asked if students understood the activity or had any questions. Volunteer “cards” were also informed that if at any time they felt uncomfortable, they could stop being the card and simply go back to their seat.<sup>4</sup>

Those remaining in their seats paired up. One student was the “picker.” In this role, the student selected a “card” and answered only “yes” or “no” to the questions. The other student was the “guesser.” In this role, the student asked yes-or-no questions to identify the correct “card.” There were no other objectives, such as identifying the card quickly or with the fewest number of questions. In addition, the instructor did not tell students to ask or avoid any types of questions. While the instructor did not explicitly instruct students to avoid rude or demeaning remarks, she was prepared to intervene if

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<sup>3</sup> A prerequisite course is not required for this course.

<sup>4</sup> Although I did not assign the “cards,” each section that played the game had at least one student of color who volunteered as a card. This occurrence may be due to the course being an elective. Students of color and others open to ideas of diversity and inclusion tend to self-select to enroll in these courses (Bowman 2009).

necessary by pulling students out of the activity and speaking with them outside of the classroom. She did not have to intervene in any of the classes participating in the activity. Overall, the instructor attempted to avoid priming students as much as possible.

During the game, each player wrote down their own questions along with their partner's questions<sup>5</sup>. Players then reversed roles so that each player could be the guesser and picker at least once.

At the conclusion of the game, the instructor gave students the following prompts to reflect upon their experiences:

Partner

- (1) Why did your partner ask certain questions?
- (2) Why did your partner avoid certain questions?

Self

- (1) Why did you ask certain questions?
- (2) Why did you avoid certain questions?

Volunteers who played the cards at the beginning and the end of the semester did not complete the reflection exercise because they were not partnered with another student. The instructor asked these volunteers to meet with her after class to share their perspectives about the experience and debrief. During these conversations, students reflected on how we identify and interact with people based upon prototypes we have learned through socialization. Throughout the 16-week course, all of the students in the class were debriefed about the power of stereotyping, prejudice, institutional inequality, and the influences of agents of socialization.

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<sup>5</sup> All questions are in yes-or-no format. Students also indicated the answer to their questions and their partner's questions with "yes" or "no" responses.

Encouraging students' reflexivity is central to racial justice education (Bozalek, Carolissen, Leibowitz, Nicholls, Rohleder & Swartz 2010; Smele, Siew-Sarju, Chou, Breton & Bernhardt 2017; Zembylas 2012). Reflexivity enables students to critically evaluate their own social location and socialization so they are better able to become aware of their racial biases and how these biases shape interactions and relationships (Brielle, Thurber & Bandy 2019).

Students' reflections on their own and their partner's choices were used to access attribution bias. Attribution bias occurs when people are more likely to give a more honest response when considering others' choices rather than their own. Individuals are likely to withhold their attitudes in order to save face and present themselves in a desirable way (Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner 2009; Ghosha, Lippard, Ribas, & Muir 2012). It is likely students will be more cautious in reflections about themselves compared to reflections on their partner's questions.

Students who participated in the activity as cards or players received extra credit toward their final grades. Students earned extra credit for both the online pre- and post-tests, administered at the beginning and end of the semester. Students who did not want to participate in the activity and/or the pre- and post-tests were given alternative opportunities to receive extra credit.

Participants submitted informed consent forms in a folder separate from the folder used for reflections. A research assistant collected both folders and shared with the instructor the reflections that were tied to the random number ID of students who consented to participate in the research. The research assistant removed those entries after the instructor entered extra credit. The instructor collected further data using a

demographic survey; demographic data was used in the coding process.<sup>6</sup> The survey and reflection worksheet included a line where students could write their random ID number. Students self-reported their sex, race, hometown size, class level, and college (Table 1).

The authors collected student assignments, consisting of the pre- post-test reflections, and analyzed these deductively using a typology based upon Bonilla-Silva's work on colorblind racism and DiAngelo's concept of white fragility. These frames allowed the authors to examine students' race talk and expression of racial ideologies.

Content analysis was used to code and analyzed students' responses (Neuendorf & Kumar (2015). Two judges were trained and each coded 20 student responses. Students' responses were initially free coded. Free codes were then sorted into the five categories previously described. Each individual student response was coded "1" for representation of the particular category and "0" when the response did not indicate that particular code. Including the principal investigator's coded student responses, the inter-rater reliability scores of the categories used to measure racial ideologies ranged from .78 to .83 for the pre-test and ranged from .80 to .85 for the post-test (See Table 2).

## **Findings**

### **Minimization of Race: Pre-Test Results**

Students' responses from the first round of the Guess Who game revealed that minimization of race, abstract liberalism, and white fragility were evident in students' race-talk and their partners' race-talk (See Table 3). In particular, students' reflections on their partners' questions suggest that their partners did not speak about skin color or other

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<sup>6</sup> Although international students also played the game, the assessment of students' responses focused only on US race relations.

factors pertaining to race. Examples like the following statements were coded as minimization of race:

My partner avoided asking any questions about physical appearance or race, even though she knew it would make her job a lot easier. Even though someone's skin color is usually one of the first things we notice about another person both of us stuck to material things that the person was wearing and stayed away from every physical trait a person could have asked about. [Female, White, Human Ecology, Sophomore, Urban]

Even though we are in the 21st century and reach equality milestones nationally each day, race and ethnicity are still very touchy subjects that I believe most people feel obligated to walk on eggshells over. To conform to my peers and play things safe, I would not openly say, "Is it the white girl?" while playing Guess Who with people who I barely know. Even though heritage is nothing to be ashamed of, in our current society it is a sore spot that makes people uncomfortable, along with religion, gender, and sexual orientation. [Female, White, Human Ecology, Sophomore, Urban]

We most likely avoided questions because we are different races and not very comfortable with asking a stranger of a different race these types of questions. Using questions about clothes was just as good as using race to distinguish between the participants. On the other hand, we both used

gender and we were both the same gender, but I don't think that played a factor since the tension isn't the same as the difference in gender. [White, Female, Arts and Sciences, Junior, Rural]

Race is minimized when students do not refer to race, speaking as if the respondent does not recognize race. In the first quote, this student explained that identifying a person by race would make the task of identifying the card easier. This student also recognizes that perceiving a person's race is one of the first things we do when we encounter someone for the first time. This response suggests that students have learned not to speak about race with people they do not know. The second quote demonstrates a lack of a critical understanding of American race and racism. This student minimizes the severity of current racial inequities by claiming that racial progress is evident each day. Although the United States is supposedly making racial progress, this student describes race as a "touchy" subject that we should avoid. She also explains that people avoid talking about race so that we can conform to others and not make others feel uncomfortable. The third quote also illustrates minimization of race by equating differences in clothing to differences in race. This student also states that using questions about gender was easier than asking questions about race because she perceived her partner as identifying with the same gender.

### **Minimization of Race: Post-Test**

At the end of the semester, students' reflections of their partner's and their own questions indicated a decrease in race talk indicative of minimization of race.

Students' reflections of their partners' questions indicated a reduction of minimization of race from 26 percent to 16 percent. Students' reflections of their own questions showed a decrease in minimization of race from 43 percent to 30 percent. The following examples reflect this reduction of statements indicating minimization of race: I also avoided questions that would be offensive. I, however, did ask a question about skin color. I didn't think it would be offensive because it's not like I was mocking or degrading the person. I was just asking a question to play a fun game. [White, Female, Arts and Sciences, Sophomore, Urban]

Some of the questions my partner asked sounded very confident, like he had no problem asking about anything he was trying to guess on. Like for example the second question he asked, "is your person white?" I think that since he has learned some different history and background on certain ethnicity in America, he doesn't have to be afraid to ask. Normally, like at the beginning of the semester, you would be afraid to ask questions like those, but now we have learned some valuable information, he has more confidence in saying things like that. [Asian, Male, Engineering, Junior, Urban]

After discussing with my partner, we came to the conclusion that we didn't ask questions based on things like race not only because those questions wouldn't have been as effective, but also because questions like

these have been programmed into our brains as “bad” and rude. In all reality, they shouldn’t have this negative connotation. We should notice people’s unique qualities, and it is ok to identify them by certain physical traits. The line begins to be drawn when we take these physical traits and begin discriminating against certain people because of them. [White, Male, Agriculture, Sophomore, Urban]

The first quote demonstrates that this student learned that talking about race does not have to provoke apprehensions about offending others. Race, for the purpose of the game, was a way of identifying an individual. Quote two demonstrates that the student perceived a change in their partner’s understanding of race. The student reflected that the class had provided a different view of the history of race relations in America. The student’s response also indicated a reduced fear of speaking about race. Although the third student did not use questions about race, he did reflect that he was socialized not to speak about race, and that was one of the reasons he avoided those questions. He also explains that individuals should be able to notice and discuss race; however, he cautions that talk about racial differences may lead to discrimination. This student demonstrates a new understanding of race, recognizing that perceptions of racial differences are tied to material consequences and other forms of inequality. The students’ quotes signaled that students were getting more comfortable talking about race (at least in the classroom). In addition, this student implied that conversations about race should occur to prevent and remedy racial discrimination.

### **Abstract Liberalism: Pre-Test**

Reflections on the first Guess Who activity demonstrated Bonilla-Silva's concept of abstract liberalism. Abstract liberalism is based on the values of equal opportunity, individual merit, and competition. In this view, social outcomes result from an individual's work ethic and moral standing, not structural inequalities.

In pre-test reflections, students described themselves as not discriminating and not being prejudiced. 29 percent of students' reflections on their partners' questions and 34 percent of students' reflections of their own questions indicated abstract liberalism. The following statements were coded as examples of abstract liberalism:

This assignment definitely made me think about how a lot of people can judge someone based on their race or what they look like. You can never do that especially because stereotypes are never true. My parents at a young age told me to treat everyone as equals and I have always done that no matter what they look like. [White, Male, Arts and Sciences, Junior, Urban]

Now this is where it gets interesting because it was narrowed down to only two possibilities where one of the men wearing white shirts was white, and the other was black. It seemed that the easiest way to decide who it was would be to ask if he is white or is he black. However, my partner noticed the difference in body language and asked if his arms were crossed and found out the correct answer. So it seems that my partner felt inclined to be politically correct with his questions and avoid offending any of the

subjects, which he probably has just met for the first time that day. [White, Male, Business, Freshman, Urban]

The idea that the topic of race is a sensitive subject in today's world, and is placed in the back of our minds. We may not think directly not to ask about race, but we already know intuitively not to bring it up. We also avoid stereotyping the people. We would not ask questions that categorize certain people. That kind of questioning can be seen as judgmental. The questions we ask reveal a little about how we have been raised and our morals. Parents have a great influence in the way their kids will grow up thinking and acting. Therefore, if parents put it into their child's head that race, religion, and stereotyping are off limit topics, chances are they will avoid confronting them when they get older. [White, Female, Arts and Sciences, Sophomore, Urban]

Although the first quote seems positive on the surface, the language indicates a colorblind perspective. This student's response suggests that they cannot be racist, and others can be free of racism, if they are simply taught not to be racist. Here, the student uses a moral rationalization to explain why they do not judge others based on race. Additionally, the phrase "stereotypes are never true" either can deflect problems within a social group or essentialize characteristics of social groups (Chao, Hong, & Chiu 2013). This student's response reflects a desire to present himself positively. Students who use parental socialization as a way to explain how they are not racist ignore the evidence that we live in a culture where racism is embedded in all our social institutions and structures (DiAngelo 2018). The second quote indicates abstract liberalism in that the student does

not think it is “politically correct” to speak about race. In this view, it is deviant to go against colorblind social norms. To do so would demonstrate an individual’s moral failure. The third quote shows that the student is not colorblind. She reflects that race is placed at the back of individuals’ minds, but we are socialized not to talk about race. Simply talking about race would indicate that she is judgmental and is stereotyping others based on race. Like the student who provided the first quote, she indicates that parents are responsible to socialize children not to talk about race.

### **Abstract Liberalism: Post-Test**

Post-test results of the game indicated a reduction of race talk reflecting abstract liberalism from 29 percent to 11 percent in students’ reflections of their partners’ questions. Students’ reflections of their own questions exhibited a more dramatic reduction of abstract liberalism from 34 percent to 11 percent. Below are some examples displaying this change in race talk:

I thought about asking if my person [was] white or the opposite way around, but I felt like I was grouping and eliminating people based off skin color, which is part of the game, yet I think I avoided it because there were other questions I could ask to reach my partner’s thought of the card. Sometimes I think I am scared to talk about race differences, especially outside of the classroom; however, talking about it more will help America progress and move forward. [White, Female, Arts and Sciences, Sophomore, Urban]

The old board game was not real people. They were completely made up. Playing the game with real people who we have already gotten to know or will get to know made the questions matter. They were no longer carefree questions, and I think this was taken into account subconsciously before asking each question. I know that how I speak about difference matters for others. How I speak or do speak has consequences. [Female, White, Human Ecology, Junior, Urban]

The first quote expresses why the student did not ask questions about race. Although the student has been socialized in a classroom focused on institutional inequalities, she admits to feeling afraid to talk about race outside the classroom. However, she acknowledges that talking about race will help race relations in the U.S. Overcoming inequality cannot happen if we do not talk about race and racism. The second quote comes from a student who has played the board game version of Guess Who as a child. The student reflects that playing the board game then did not have any real ramifications. Playing the game with real people has consequences. In addition, this student expresses awareness that how she speaks has consequences that extend outside of herself. She seems to take responsibility for how she speaks about race and the effect it has. These quotes illustrate that the classroom is socializing students to talk about race and helping them understand how their speech or silence plays a role in perpetuating or dismantling systems of inequality.

### **White Fragility: Pre-Test**

Along with Bonilla-Silva's classification of colorblind racism, we used DiAngelo's concept of white fragility to evaluate racial ideologies. Fifty-two percent of students' reflections of their partners' questions and fifty-nine percent of students' reflections of their own questions indicate white fragility (Table 3). Below are some examples of statements indicative of white fragility:

I avoided certain questions because of the same reason I mentioned earlier towards my partner. I wouldn't want to seem rude or racist either. To me, race and ethnicity are complicated issues to talk about to strangers. I question whether I should not mention their race so that I'm not entirely defining a person by their race. However, at the same time avoiding race all together doesn't seem like the answer either, because of course there's nothing wrong with anyone's race or ethnicity [White, Female, Arts and Sciences, Junior, Urban]

I can attest to the mixed messages I have experienced growing up. Being shushed as a kid when we would comment on the difference in what we just thought as skin tone not race. Then learning about racism and feeling guilty to be a white person because you couldn't understand how the white people could do such a thing. Then learning about "colorblindness" and white privilege and that people deny these things even though they are clearly true. Our generation is so worried about being socially correct in

all that we do because that is all we heard about growing up. [White, Female, Human Ecology, Senior, Urban]

I would really like to learn more about different cultures and what people do differently than others. That is why I am taking this class. In high school, I took a sociology class and it provided me an idea of some of these races and ethnicities, but I am ready to learn more. It would be nice if everyone would be ready to do the same thing so that there is not as much racial conflicts in this world. Everyone needs to understand that we are all different and you can offend someone so easily by saying one little thing to these people about their culture. They grew up learning things their parents taught them about their culture just like everyone else and we need to realize that and stop being so hateful towards certain things.

[White, Female, Arts and Sciences, Freshman, Rural]

The first student quote demonstrates white fragility. This student did not want to ask questions about race because they feared being perceived as racist or rude; race and ethnicity are simply too complicated to talk about. This student perceives the acknowledgment of a person's race as a harmful way to define them. In addition, the student states that there is nothing wrong with a person's racial or ethnic identity. The second student's quote illustrates that she does not talk about race because it brings up feelings of guilt. In addition, the student focuses on socialization. She was told not to make comments about race and she perceives her generation as being pushed into being "socially correct" due to socialization. Rather than considering her role in race relations,

she reacts to a perception of others' expectations of how she should speak and act. The third quote demonstrates white fragility by normalizing her experiences and making exotic the experiences of races and ethnicities not her own. She prides herself on wanting to know about "other" people. She acknowledges differences but indicates some defensiveness by explaining that "you can offend someone so easily by saying one little thing to these people about their culture." She reduces the differences between races to differences in parental socialization. Lastly, she states that if we can all come to the realization that she has, we can "stop being so hateful." This student may be well-intentioned; however, she does not understand that racism is more than just feelings toward a group or parental socialization.

### **White Fragility: Post-Test**

Language indicative of white fragility decreased significantly when comparing pre- and post-test scores examining students' partners' question choices. Post-test results of the game indicated a reduction of race talk characteristic of white fragility from 52 percent to 24 percent in students' reflections of their partners' questions ( $p > F = .030$ ). Students' reflections of their own questions also exhibited a significant reduction of white fragility from 59 percent to 34 percent ( $p > F = .0076$ ) (see Table 4). However, when students did use language reflective of white fragility, it was an attempt to avoid offending others. In addition, when students had a reduction of white fragility in their race talk, their responses demonstrated that they learned that race does not need to be such a sensitive issue.

Given we have been in this class a long time now, none of us are scared about race anymore. People are different and people need to accept each other for how they are. When we played the game at the beginning of the semester, I avoided race questions and things that may come off as offensive. Now after being in the class for a semester, I feel as though race isn't a touchy of a subject for anyone anymore, so the Guess Who game was a lot easier. [White, Male, Engineering, Freshman, Urban]

First off, I'm not just going to start off with, "are they white/are they black." That points out the differences between the groups but can make someone feel stereotyped or that there is a racial prejudice against them. I also don't want to offend the volunteers or my partner's chosen person. You have to see the differences among people that are all equal [White, Female, Arts & Sciences, Urban]

I asked questions about race and gender because those are the easier factors to see. At the beginning of the semester I avoided the race questions because I did not want to offend anyone, but now that we have all openly talked about it, I understand that it is okay to see and acknowledge race as long as you are respectful to others. I think that since the semester started I have gotten much more comfortable talking about race and the problems that follow it because it should not be a topic that is brushed away. [White, Female, Sophomore, Urban, Human Ecology]

These students reflected on how the course taught them ways to speak about race. Speaking about race *was* considered a taboo topic that could upset other people. The course provided a space for students to learn about institutional racism and a place to speak about their developing understanding of race. Speaking about race became more comfortable for these students in the classroom. These quotes, and others like it, demonstrate that the course provided students with the opportunity to receive a foundational understanding of race, racism, and their role in perpetuating or dismantling systems of racial inequality.

### **Discussion**

The findings from this study suggest that students beginning an introductory race and ethnicity course do hold colorblind ideologies. In particular, students' reflections individual minimization of race, white fragility, and abstract liberalism. After students engaged in the semesters' course content, their race talk demonstrated a decrease of minimization of race and abstract liberalism. White fragility significantly reduced. This research shows that we can demonstrate students' learning about race and institutional racism by the change in their race talk. Our study differed from Norton et al. (2006) in that we used live subjects rather than images on cards. It replicated Norton's finding that participants avoid questions concerning race while playing the game. Unlike the aforementioned study demonstrating that young people are more likely to ask questions concerning race than older adults, this research found that students are socialized to not ask questions concerning race. This work also confirms Burke's (2018) and Sue's (2016)

work in that various forms of socialization have effects on the development of race talk. In addition, our concept “minimization of race” should be considered when operationalizing a way to measure race talk as an expression of race talk in a classroom setting. Students may not have a clear understanding of racism or white supremacy at the start of the course. However, students do have a conception of race that can be measured using this tool. As demonstrated in this research, the classroom and course curriculum influence how students speak about race. Students’ initial hesitancy to speak about race, especially in a course focused on race and ethnicity, should be a concern for instructors. If students are not willing to acknowledge race, how will curriculum on racial institutional inequalities be received?

One limitation to this study is that the number of students participating in the post-test reflection portion of the activity is smaller than those participating at the start of the semester. There could be several reasons for the lack of participation, such as not needing extra credit and stress at the end of the semester (Harrison & Meise 2011). Students with higher grades are more likely to complete extra credit assignments than students with lower grades (Harrison & Meise 2011; Padilla-Walker, Zamboanga, Thompson & Schmursal 2005). In addition, students taking introductory level courses and who are just starting their academic journeys do not partake in extra credit assignments as often compared to more experienced students (Harrison & Meise 2011).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Games provide a useful tool for instructors teaching difficult subjects like race and ethnicity. Games allow students to engage in material in an interactive and experiential way (Simpson & Elias 2011). This research proposes that games can also

help instructors to evaluate the effectiveness of their course curriculum. The teaching technique described in this research uses a game, Guess Who, to measure how course content can reduce students' reliance on colorblind or post-racial ideology and their white fragility, both of which limit their ability to engage with race critically. Measuring students' change in race talk is imperative because students are told to talk and behave in ways that suggest that they do not see color (Mueller 2011). Colorblindness assumes that if we treat everyone the same racial inequality will end and race will no longer be a topic of concern. However, DiAngelo (2018) contends that it is not possible to teach someone to treat everyone the same because humans are not objective. In addition, treating people equally does not address the individual needs of people. This colorblind socialization is problematic because race is always seen (consciously or not), and racial and ethnic inequalities cannot be remedied without a basic recognition of difference. Students who fail to see race become complicit in the reinforcement and perpetuation of white supremacy, whether they acknowledge it or not. Changes in racial attitudes require social interaction and involvement that is deeper than incidental contact (Reason & Evans 2007; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen 1998).

Engaging with race and ethnicity curricula in a safe classroom environment allows students the time needed to develop a foundational understanding of their racial identities and how racism manifests itself in personal, individual, and systemic ways (Weinzimmer & Bergdahl 2018; Reason & Evans 2007). By not addressing the realities of race and racism, college students are more likely to bring a counterproductive colorblind ideology into the workforce and general society.

Classes can change students' racial ideologies, as demonstrated through changes in students' race-talk. Due to the results from the pre-test, the instructor considered making changes to the curriculum to achieve the objectives for the course. The instructor developed curriculum changes as she evolved in her own understanding of teaching race and ethnicity for several years. The assessment tool and findings were used to give the instructor early feedback to determine what students need to meet the student learning outcomes. The instructor changed the course the following semesters to move away from teaching units about specific racial and ethnic groups to focusing on particular institutions and how racially minoritized groups navigate those institutions.

Instructors can use this game to also assess if changes are needed for their courses. Race and ethnicity course curriculum can change students' cognition. Students accumulate knowledge and resources to make sense of a world that is not colorblind, but rather a world where race is a social factor that determines the life outcomes of many. Racism is not merely thought about; it is felt and experienced (Breille, Thuber & Bandy 2019, p. 22). Affective change and social empathy are very difficult to ensure, but these can be taught using sociology courses (Rockwell, Vidmar, Harvey, & Greenwood 2019). Courses on race and ethnicity can measure student learning of both institutional inequalities and empathy. Measuring changes in race talk can demonstrate this evolution.

Playing this version of Guess Who game can give instructors a way to measure whether or not their curriculum is creating change in students' racial ideologies. This version of the game provides a sense of urgency because instead of using cards, students have to describe real people, simulating how we quickly identify people in the real world. The results of this study suggest that participation in an introductory race and ethnicity

course focusing on institutional inequalities resulted in changes to students' race talk; these changes include reductions in statements indicating minimization of race, abstract liberalism, and white fragility. Many students understood that racism is not merely individual prejudice. Rather, structures and institutions that were designed to maintain a racial hierarchy perpetuate racial inequality, maintaining the dominance of whiteness and the subordination of racial minorities. This change in paradigm reinforces the argument for understanding the classroom as another agent of socialization. As students gain a deeper understanding of institutional inequalities, their language changes.

Future research can investigate whether or not there are regional differences in the performance of race talk. For instance, do students express racial ideologies differently in the Midwest compared to the West or South? One of our concerns is that the Midwest has a different demographic makeup and might have different understandings of race and racism. Addressing regional differences in racial ideologies will give instructors a more nuanced understanding on how to construct their curriculum. The pedagogical tool used in this research can be used to measure students' ideologies for other demographics categories such as gender, (dis)ability, and class. Lastly, instructors can use the results from their class's pre-test results to construct particular units that address aspects of colorblindness and white fragility.

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**Table 1. Student demographics**

		Pre-test	Post-test
Sex	Female	94 (49%)	35 (57%)
	Male	96 (51%)	26 (43%)
Race	International Student	22 (12%)	7 (11%)
	POC	33 (17%)	16 (38%)
	White	135 (71%)	38 (62%)
Hometown	Medium	10 (5%)	-
	Rural	17 (9%)	15 (25%)
	Urban	163 (86%)	46 (75%)
Class level	Freshman	48 (25%)	7

			(11%)
	Sophomore	83 (44%)	3 (5%)
	Junior	26 (14%)	15 (25%)
	Senior	33 (17%)	15 (25%)
College	A&S	72 (38%)	17 (28%)
	Agriculture	8 (4%)	2 (3%)
	Architecture	3 (2%)	-
	Business	25 (13%)	11 (18%)
	Education	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
	Engineering	35 (18%)	19 (31%)

	Human Ecology	48 (25%)	11 (18%)
	N	190	61

“-” means data that there is no data available in those fields.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2. Mean correlations or inter-rater reliability scores between pre-test and post-test items of racial ideologies**

		Mean r
Minimization of race	Pre-test	.82
	Post-test	.85
Abstract liberalism	Pre-test	.79
	Post-test	.81
Cultural racism	Pre-test	.78
	Post-test	.85
Naturalization	Pre-test	.80
	Post-test	.81
White Fragility	Pre-test	.83
	Post-test	.84

<sup>7</sup> Bivariate analysis did not indicate significance due to sex, race, hometown size, college, class level for any of the dependent variables.

**Table 3. Descriptive Summary of Racial Ideology Distribution**

	Variable	Pre-test N=194	Post-test N=61
Partner	Minimization of Race-0	45 (74%)	162 (84%)
	1	16 (26%)	32 (16%)
	White Fragility-0	93 (48%)	42 (69%)
	1	101 (52%)	31 (24%)
	Abstract Liberalism-0	137 (71%)	52 (85%)
	1	57 (29%)	9 (15%)
Self	Minimization of Race-0	35 (57%)	135 (70%)
	1	26 (43%)	59 (30%)
	Abstract Liberalism-0	127 (65%)	54 (89%)
	1	67 (34%)	7 (11%)
	White Fragility-0	79 (41%)	40 (66%)

	1	115 (59%)	21 (34%)
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“-“ means data not available in those fields.

**Table 4. Test of Between Sub Effects**

	Mean-Pre-test	Mean-Post-test	p>F
White Fragility-Partner	0.1208	0.08759	0.0304
White Fragility-Self	0.1314	0.08846	.0076