Crystallising whiteness: engaging white students’ whiteness through Civil Dialogue®

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Crystallising whiteness: engaging white students’ whiteness through Civil Dialogue®

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ABSTRACT
As an interdisciplinary field of study, Whiteness Studies have examined rhetorical strategies that reinforce whiteness ideology and White privilege at both macro- and micro-levels. The current study adds to Whiteness Studies literature by demonstrating various performances of whiteness ideology by White people. In using dominant group theory as a theoretical framework and analytic lens, I demonstrate how Whites reinforce, impede, and dismantle whiteness ideology. That is, rather than exclusively seeking reinforcements of whiteness ideology, dominant group theory also provides a framework to understand ways one can challenge and disrupt the oppressive ideology. Such an approach engages crystallising to demonstrate various performances of whiteness. The study has implications for future research and pedagogy when teaching Whiteness Studies to White students and their various levels of readiness for grappling with their own whiteness.

Introduction

In early August 2017, a Unite the Right uprising broke out eleven days before classes began at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA. Unite the Right was supported by a group of far-right White supremacists. Also referred to as neo-Nazis, this group of predominantly White men marched across the University of Virginia’s campus chanting, ‘White lives matter,’ ‘blood and soil,’ and, ‘Jews will not replace us.’ The stated purpose of the uprising was to protest the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue from Emancipation Park (formerly known as Lee Park). The removal of the statue posed a threat to White supremacists who responded the next day with rioting – ultimately leading the death of an anti-White supremacist White woman, Heather Heyer. Heightened racial tension spread throughout college campuses as the 2017–2018 school-year commenced. It is within this context that the current study seeks to understand contemporary manifestations of whiteness ideology.

Whiteness Studies is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry with whiteness ideology at its forefront. Whiteness ideology is a socially constructed discursive formation that displays prejudice and discrimination towards people of colour while re-centring White as the norm and ‘preferred’ racial identity. Whiteness manifests through strategic rhetorical moves (Nakayama and Krizek 1995) which manifest everywhere and nowhere at the
same time (Lipsitz, 1995). While different from whiteness ideology, Whiteness Studies also examines key components of a White racial identity such as White privilege, White fragility (DiAngelo 2011), and White emotionality (Matias 2014). A key distinction between whiteness ideology and a White racial identity is that whiteness ideology may manifest through the rhetorical moves by people of any race. Contrary, White privilege, White fragility, and White emotionality are exclusive to those who maintain a White racial identity. The current study aims to understand ways that Whites, exclusively, reinforce, impede, or dismantle whiteness ideology.

Challenging one’s own pre-dispositions of the world requires strategic educational practices that counter oppressive ideology. Considering whiteness ideology and White students, there needs to be the simultaneous creation of creative pedagogical tools that encourage White students to confront their privilege and fragility without completely shutting down. As articulated by DiAngelo (2011), ‘Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides’ (p. 57). As such, when developing pedagogical tools, educators need to be mindful of strategic activities that can be used to challenge whiteness ideology as it particularly manifests from White students. Civil Dialogue® (CD) is the particular facilitation-based pedagogical method through which data is collected to assess the reinforcement, impediment, or dismantling of whiteness ideology from White students.

Throughout this essay, I engage the strategic rhetorical moves from both White supremacists and White anti-racists alike. That is, I am interested in how Whites come to both reinforce whiteness ideology as well as challenge whiteness ideology when it occurs. I first introduce relevant literature surrounding Whiteness Studies and dominant group pedagogy. I then introduced dominant group theory (Razzante & Orbe, 2018) as one particular theoretical lens that helps illuminate various strategies of Whites when reinforcing, impeding, or dismantling whiteness ideology. I then introduce Civil Dialogue as the particular educational tool to engage students in conversations where whiteness ideology may arise. I conclude the essay with a discussion regarding theoretical and pedagogical implications for scholarship regarding White students and whiteness ideology.

**Literature review**

As previously mentioned, whiteness ideology manifests from people of all races. However, one’s racial identity plays a role when confronting whiteness ideology. While not mutually exclusive, pools of literature may separate whiteness ideology from its manifestation from White bodies (see Carrillo-Rowe and Malhotra 2006). While recognising the importance to examine whiteness ideology from all races, there remains merit in exclusively focusing on whiteness ideology and White students alone. The following literature review is divided into two subsections. The first focuses on research in critical race theory generally, and whiteness studies specifically. The second section focuses on educational strategies to confront oppressive ideologies as they manifest from students who have privileged standpoints. I then conclude the literature review with a transition into dominant group theory as a particular theoretical framework to address my research question.
**Critical race theory**

Black public intellectuals have studied race, power, and law well before scholars in academic institutions. For example, Julia Copper and Sojourner Truth first traced Black feminist thought through the first wave of feminism in the mid- to late 1800s. (Crenshaw 1989). In the early- to mid-1900s, literary critics such as Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright all wrote about racial injustice towards people of colour (Roediger 1998). However, in the mid- to late-1980s legal scholars began to examine critical legal studies through an intersectional lens with race, gender, and class at the forefront (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). As a general field of study, critical race theory examines how race intersects with other social identities while informing communicative behaviour. One specific sub-field of critical race theory is whiteness studies.

**Whiteness studies**

Whiteness Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that has roots in sociology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), education (DiAngelo 2011), and communication (Nakayama and Martin 1999). I first preview general assumptions help by scholars from all fields before moving into communication scholars’ articulations. Public intellectuals have written and spoken about whiteness ideology for a long time (see Roediger 1998). However, the rise of Whiteness Studies in higher education became an ‘official’ area of study in the late 80s and early 90s in response to the rise of critical race theory (Johnson 1999). A key component of Whiteness Studies is its motive of illuminating the ways in which whiteness ideology is created, maintained, and transformed as a mechanism to re-centre White as ‘normal,’ ‘preferred,’ and even ‘superior’ to alternative racial identities and ideologies.

In the field of sociology, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) has conducted studies examining the phenomenon of colour-blind ideology. As articulated by Bonilla-Silva, racial ideology, ‘frames or set paths for interpreting information … after people filter issues through them, they explain racial phenomena following a predictable route’ (p. 74). One such racial ideology manifests through colour-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva identified four central frames through which colour-blind racism manifests: 1) abstract liberalism (one remains in their location based on the choices they made as an individual), 2) naturalisation (one remains in their location because that’s the way it is), 3) cultural racism (one remains in their location due in part to their cultural memberships), and 4) minimisation of racism (discrimination is not a central factor anymore). At the communicative level, communication studies scholars have applied a similar lens to studying micro-level interactions.

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) article explored six rhetorical strategies used to create, maintain, and transform whiteness ideology. Rather than defining whiteness, Nakayama and Krizek demonstrated how whiteness ideology permeates everyday discourse by ‘viewing whiteness as a rhetorical construction’ (p. 91). The following are the six strategies they identified: 1) tying ‘White’ to power, 2) defining oneself by what they are not, 3) naturalising whiteness as a scientifiﬁc deﬁnition (rather than social construction), 4) confusing whiteness with nationality (i.e., only Whites are Americans), 5) refusing to use labels (not identifying one’s own race), and 6) using European ancestry as a way out of whiteness in the U.S. By examining the rhetorical moves of whiteness
ideology, communication scholars can examine the constitutive nature of communication.

**Dominant group pedagogy**

Challenging whiteness ideology in the classroom works against institutional forces that promote whiteness in the first place (Gusa 2010; Hytten & Warren, 2003; Leonardo 2007). Working within institutional forces to impede or dismantle whiteness ideology requires effective pedagogical tools. Within the context of the classroom, aggressive confrontations of White students’ use of whiteness ideology may cause them to shut down intellectually and/or emotionally due to the lack of affective skills to deal with privilege (DiAngelo 2011). Foundational educational psychology literature suggests all students need a certain level of challenge and support (Sanford 1966/1968). That is, too much challenge with too little support may cause students to crumble under the pressure. Conversely, too little challenge with too much support prevents students from complicating their predispositions. As such, a balance between challenge and support is needed when teaching students. This need for a balance becomes heightened when teaching White students about whiteness ideology. Considering White fragility as a barrier for learning, educators need creativity and anticipation when developing effective pedagogical tools for engaging whiteness ideology.

When talking about racial difference in the classroom, White students oftentimes have difficulty identifying manifestations of whiteness ideology (Neville Miller and Harris 2005; Moon 2016). Hytten and Adkins (2001) developed a ‘pedagogy of whiteness’ which advocates the creation of an inclusive classroom environment for mutual engagement, critique, and direction for action. Pedagogy of whiteness rests on the assumption that Whiteness Studies does great at identifying rhetorical strategies of whiteness and it can do better in offering specific steps for action. However, in taking action, scholars also note the potential of reifying whiteness through educational practices (Carrillo-Rowe and Malhotra 2006; Endres and Gould 2009; Hytten & Warren, 2003). More specifically, Warren and Hytten (2004) offer four potential pitfalls of engaging whiteness ideology in the classroom. Productive conversations regarding action steps may only fall within a ‘critical democratic’ approach that balances intellectual humility, reflexivity, and active listening before asserting solutions. Intercultural dialogue offers one venue through which a critical democratic approach may manifest.

When teaching White students about whiteness ideology, instructors may meet resistance through White emotionality (Matias 2014; Matias, Henry, and Darland 2017). White emotionality manifests when Whites’ emotional expressions of guilt are used to protect the ego from being challenged. For example, when talking about race and racism, people might become tense, defensive, or even act out (Sue 2015). Albeck, Adwan, and Bar-On (2006) present a strategy for working through such resistance in the confrontation model of intercultural dialogue. The confrontational model is one that forces dominant group members to face the privileges they maintain. More specifically, they note that the confrontational strategy ‘attempts to empower members of the majority group and to help members of the dominant group develop new insights into their own construction of identity and the effects of their respective positions of power’ (p. 157). In order to find the balance between challenge and support, pedagogical tools
would benefit from creating environments where students can enter into the conversation based on their current standpoint and level of readiness. However, too much patience may lead to the ultimate evasion of having to deal with privilege.

Civil Dialogue is one such pedagogical tool that enables students to entertain provocative topics such as whiteness ideology (Genette, Olson, and Linde 2018). The structured dialogic format allows space for different voices to be heard with ground rules based on active listening, speaking with conviction, and the curiosity to learn others’ points of view. Additionally, Civil Dialogue is set up in a manner where five participant-volunteers speak on the topic with each other while an audience watches. In other words, students that want more of a challenge can verbally participate as a volunteer-participant whereas students that need more support may sit and observe the conversation from afar. Through active listening, audience members may start to engage in transformative learning to challenge pre-existing predispositions. In order to address whiteness ideology as it manifests from White participants, I turn towards dominant group theory as an informative framework.

Dominant group theory

Dominant group theory (Razzante & Orbe, 2018; DGT) offers a specific communicative framework through which to analyse how dominant group members use their privilege to reinforce, impede, or dismantle oppressive structures. Dominant group theory operates under the premise that a social hierarchy exists which privileges some and marginalises others. Those that maintain positions of privilege (cisgender, heterosexual, White, etc.) employ specific communicative strategies to either reinforce, impede, or dismantle structures that allow for their own privilege and others’ marginalisation. With roots in co-cultural theory (Orbe 1998), DGT consists of nine communication orientations and that complicate the ways in which dominant group members reinforce, impede, or dismantle structures of oppression (see Figure 1).

Communication orientations

Dominant group theory works to break the dichotomy that people either reproduce or challenge oppressive structures (racism, cis-sexism, ableism, etc.). Rather, DGT offers a framework to analyse discourse through a more nuanced understanding of power and privilege. More specifically, Figure 1 offers nine particular communication orientations through which one might reinforce, impede, or dismantle whiteness ideology. Table 3 offers more specific strategies that Whites may use to reach specific interactional outcomes either consciously or unconsciously. In what follows, I review each of the nine orientations to illustrate, theoretically, how dominant group members may reinforce, impede, and challenge oppressive structures. This preview leads to my research question of how DGT can be used as a framework to examine Whites’ performances of whiteness ideology.

Non-Assertive reinforcement

Non-Assertive communication orientations are those that seek to place the needs/desires of other interlocutors before one’s own. Much of the existing research in Whiteness
Studies falls within the reinforcement interactional outcome. That is, discourse falling within this interactional outcome creates, maintains, and reproduces whiteness as central, normative, and preferred. Taken together, a non-assertive reinforcement of whiteness ideology comes in the form of ignoring one’s privilege and remaining neutrally silent.

**Assertive reinforcement**
Assertive communication orientations are those that seek to negotiate the needs/desires of all interlocutors involved. Through assertive reinforcement, White interlocution (un)consciously reinforces whiteness ideology through their negotiation with racial minority’s needs/desires. Non-Assertive reinforcement strategies include redirection and resisting group essentialism.

**Aggressive reinforcement**
Aggressive communication orientations are those that put one’s own needs/desires before those of their interlocutors. White participants’ aggressive reinforcement of whiteness ideology manifests through endorsing the status quo, dismissing co-cultural concerns, victim blaming, and microaggressions.

**Non-Assertive impediment**
As explored with non-assertive reinforcement of whiteness ideology, a non-assertive communication orientation is one that seeks to put the needs/desires of others before one’s own. Rather than reinforcing whiteness ideology, an impediment of whiteness ideology manifests through micro-level interactions. When taken
together, a non-assertive impediment of whiteness ideology occurs when one recognises their own White privilege, and through their engagement in critical self-reflexivity.

**Assertive impediment**

An assertive impediment is one that negotiates the needs and desires of all interlocutors while working to impede whiteness ideology. While this communication orientation lies within the middle of Figure 1, readers should be careful not to assume that assertive impediments are the ‘best’ or ‘most effective’ communication orientation when confronting whiteness ideology. Competent impediments/dismantling of whiteness ideology require phronesis or practical wisdom (Flyvbjerg 2001). Phronesis requires a critical attunement to particular cases in order to make pragmatic choices of which communication strategy to employ. In the context of dominant group theory, a pragmatic choice is dependent on one’s field of experience, abilities, situational context, and perceived costs and rewards. Assertive impediments of whiteness ideology manifest through affirming co-cultural concerns, educating others, and setting an example for others.

**Aggressive impediment**

An aggressive impediment of whiteness ideology occurs when one seeks to impede whiteness ideology based on preconceived notions of what impediments could or should look like. For example, students reading Whiteness Studies literature may rely upon the literature exclusively in order to act in ways that impede whiteness ideology. While at times effective, aggressive impediments fail to explore the needs and desires of co-cultural interlocutors in specific contexts. Communication strategies that fall within this orientation are confronting oppressive rhetoric and microaffirmations.

**Non-Assertive dismantling**

The final column offers ways to dismantle whiteness ideology. Within the context of dominant group theory, dismantling signifies communicative strategies that focus on meso- and macro-level attempts to dismantle oppressive structures. While a non-assertive dismantling of oppressive rhetoric is rare, some people might sacrifice-self in order to achieve this end. Sacrificing self are those strategies that come with significant personal cost. For example, a White employee challenging racially discriminatory hiring practices of an employer risks losing their job for speaking out against authority.

**Assertive dismantling**

An assertive dismantling of whiteness ideology is similar to an aggressive impediment. However, rather than focusing on preconceived labels associated with micro-level interactions, an assertive dismantling focuses on meso- and/or macro-level discourse. An assertive dismantling of whiteness ideology occurs when Whites challenge oppressive ideologies, identify as a co-cultural ally, and/or assume responsibility for action. Employing these strategies comes from the constant negotiation with racial minorities in order to seek their needs/desires in particular contexts.
Aggressive dismantling

Finally, too much of anything is not good, as is the case with aggressive approaches to dismantling oppressive structures. An aggressive dismantling of whiteness ideology takes from when Whites forcing their agenda or taking advantage of their White privilege. Ultimately, an aggressive dismantling of whiteness ideology may even have similar effects to those of reinforcing whiteness ideology. What follows is an in-depth analysis of how these strategies played out or could play out in anti-racism discourse.

In this study, I am interested in isolating White participants as the primary focal point through which I use dominant group theory as an analytic tool. That is, I am interested in how White students work to reinforce, impede, or dismantle whiteness ideology. As previously stated, much work in Whiteness Studies looks to demystify ways that whiteness ideology reinforces oppressive structures of racism. The current study continues to locate ways whiteness ideology is reinforced. At the same time, the study shows glimpsed of how Whites might use their standpoint to challenge whiteness ideology when it manifests. Crystallising whiteness in this manner nuances how whiteness is performed. As such, the current study seeks to answer the following research question: What are the variety of ways White interlocutors reinforce, impede, or dismantle whiteness ideology across a broad spectrum of communicative strategies?

Methods

Facilitation-based qualitative research methods have been used as a means of applied communication (see Hartwig 2014). Civil Dialogue is one specific facilitation-based method that can be used when collecting data about provocative current events topics (Genette, Olson, and Linde 2018). When used this way, facilitation-based methods allow participants to engage each other as people who are intersubjectivity bound by a socially constructed society. Rather than trying to win people over, Civil Dialogue embraces dialogic civility (Arnett, 2001) as a core component for engaging each other. That is, as a facilitation-based method, Civil Dialogue offers space for people to speak to provocative current events while taking ownership for their standpoint and vice-versa. As such, heeding scholars’ advice, Civil Dialogue offers a platform for fostering an environment that enables understanding through listening and speaking from one’s own standpoint (Hosking and Pluut 2010; Hytten and Adkins 2001; Warren and Hytten 2004).

Facilitation-based methods can create an environment where participants are challenged and supported within the confines of the method itself (Sanford 1966/1968). Sanford’s theory or challenge and support highlights individual readiness as a key aspect for learning. In the context of teaching through provocation (Mills, 1998), one’s level of readiness highly informs how a participant enters the dialogic space. In the context of whiteness, some people may be comfortable and willing to engage in current events. However, others may remain silent – yet still present. Civil Dialogue is one particular method that allows participants to enter the dialogue from various standpoints based on levels of readiness.

A Civil Dialogue begins when a facilitator reveals a provocative statement that encourages participants to explore their own relation to the statement. Among the statements used for the data analysis were, Memorials erected to commemorate Confederate heroes should be permanently removed, racial minorities are more welcome
on college campuses than White students, and Colin Kaepernick is experiencing racial discrimination from the NFL. At that time, participants are encouraged to take one of five chairs (strongly) disagree, disagree (somewhat), neutral (undecided), agree (somewhat), or (strongly) agree (see Appendix A). After taking their spots, the facilitator requests each person to share their name and their motive for choosing the chair they did. The facilitator then opens the dialogue to the five participants for 10–15 min. After that time, the facilitator then turns the dialogue to the audience members for questions or comments. Following audience participation, the facilitator then rejoins the five participants for final remarks and key learning moments.

Seven Civil Dialogues were conducted in total – six of those were used for data analysis. A total of 77 people participated as audience members or volunteers for the core dialogue (see Tables 1 and 2 for demographics of all participants). Thirteen White participants chose chairs as volunteers. The comments analysed for this project came from the 13 White volunteers and White audience members. Dialogues were audio recorded and transcribed either through full or abridged transcriptions. Once collected, I then applied dominant group theory to make sense of the ways in which participants reinforced, impeded, or dismantled whiteness ideology. I specifically used the nine communication orientations in Figure 1 and the 21 communication strategies in Table 3 to code the data. What follows is my analysis of three particular performances of whiteness ideology: reinforcing whiteness, dismantling whiteness, and reinforcing through attempts to dismantle whiteness.

Table 1. Racial make-up of Civil Dialogue audience (including core dialoguers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Audience</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latinx</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-Racial</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Racial make-up of Civil Dialogue core dialoguers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Core Dialogue</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latinx</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-Racial</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Sample Strategy Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Assertive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
<td>A lack of awareness of, or outright refusal to acknowledge, the societal privilege that comes with dominant group status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining neutrally silent</td>
<td>Recognition of oppression but not speaking out to avoid conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
<td>Highlighting aspects of one’s identity that reflect disadvantage as a means to deemphasize one’s own privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting group essentialism</td>
<td>Objections to criticisms by others that generalise majority group members into one large homogenous group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggressive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
<td>Communicative messages that rationalise, support, and/or endorse existing ideologies, values, and oppressive institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing co-cultural concerns</td>
<td>Communication that regard co-cultural concerns as trivial, illegitimate, or false</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim blaming</td>
<td>Assigning responsibility to co-cultural groups to remove themselves from oppressed positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaggressions</td>
<td>Everyday exchanges that feature denigrating messages to others because of their co-cultural identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Assertive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impediment</td>
<td>Verbal acknowledgements of one’s own societal privilege that increase awareness for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-reflexivity</td>
<td>Ability and willingness to reflect on the consequences of individual thoughts and actions as dominant group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impediment</td>
<td>Acknowledging the legitimacy and magnitude of co-cultural issues and the realities of societal oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming co-cultural concerns</td>
<td>Drawing from one's own growth – cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, etc. – to facilitate the growth in others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating others</td>
<td>Communication that can serve as a model for other dominant group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting an example for others</td>
<td>Everyday exchanges that feature affirming messages to others because of their disadvantaged co-cultural identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aggressive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impediment</td>
<td>Explicitly naming dominant group messages as ignorant, hurtful, and/or discriminatory to co-cultural group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confronting oppressive rhetoric</td>
<td>Everyday exchanges that feature denigrating messages to others because of their co-cultural identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaffirmations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Assertive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismantling</td>
<td>Efforts to challenge institutionalised oppression that come with significant personal cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrificing self</td>
<td>Questioning the legitimacy of policies that unfairly discriminate against co-cultural group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assertive</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismantling</td>
<td>Communication that challenge policies that negatively affect co-cultural group members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging oppressive ideologies</td>
<td>Assuming an action-oriented approach that utilises one’s own privilege to work against systems that foster that very privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying as co-cultural ally</td>
<td>Pushing your agenda to advocate for societal change with little, to no, regard for dominant group members’ concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming responsibility for action</td>
<td>Using one’s societal standing to challenge oppressive structures at the expense of co-cultural group’s agency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reinforcing whiteness ideology

Jim, a White male college student takes part in a Civil Dialogue on whether Confederate statues should be removed or not. Along with him in the core dialogue are a Black male and a Black female who both agree that Confederate statues should be removed. Jim and a White woman sit in the disagree chairs arguing that Confederate statues should not be removed. In between the distinctive racial difference lies a self-identified Hispanic male who is undecided on the issue. The conversational flow of the core dialogue coalesces into the following statement from Jim:

I personally don’t think that it matters the year it was put up, because no matter what, history is history, culture is culture. People still look at it as if it’s their culture so I don’t think it matters when it was put up. It could have been put up during a controversial time but it’s still someone’s culture. Like he said, a lot of people were fighting for the Confederacy, not for slavery, but they were fighting for their hometown, their home state.

Jim’s contributions to the Civil Dialogue align most closely with traditional Whiteness Studies literature. For example, Bonilla-Silva (2014) might call Jim’s contribution colour-blind racism through the minimisation of racism. In Jim’s last comment, he removes slavery from the picture of Confederate statues. Rather, he focuses on state pride and nationalism as a rallying cause for the war. Under the lens of dominant group theory, one can see a different angle through which Jim reinforces whiteness ideology.

Whether he intended it or not, all of Jim’s contributions fall within the interactional outcome of reinforcing whiteness ideology. First, Jim takes part in an assertive reinforcement through resisting group essentialism by fracturing Confederates’ cause for war. Rather than claiming slavery as a war to preserve the southern economy through slavery, Jim splits the Confederate identity into one where soldiers fought for their state and hometown exclusively. While complicating identities is encouraged, such a strategy reproduces whiteness ideology when a racist identity is left out of the reconstruction of a Confederate’s identity.

Jim’s comment may also have come off as an aggressive reinforcement of whiteness ideology through the use of a microaggression towards Black students. The removal of slavery from the conversation removes racial oppression through years of colonialism and enslavement. Microaggression literature identifies three specific forms of micro-aggressions: micro-assaults (overt denigrations), micro-insults (subtle snubs), and micro-invalidations (nullifying the realities of marginalised groups) (Sue 2010). While he may not have intended to, Jim’s interactional outcome dismisses the experiences of Black Americans whose ancestry, as a people, traces back to slavery. Removing slavery from the identity of Confederate soldiers ultimately nullifies the Black experience in the U.S.

Jim’s participation with the excerpt above demonstrates what Whiteness Studies does well. That is, scholars are able to identify how whiteness is created, maintained, and transformed through discursive strategies. Dominant group theory adds another analytic lens to map onto the discursive moves that reinforce whiteness ideology as an oppressive ideology. More specifically, DGT adds another dimension to Whiteness Studies literature through the introduction of different communication orientations. That is, one might reinforce whiteness ideology through non-assertive, assertive, or aggressive approaches. Such a lens helps to complicate one’s understanding of the ways in which interlocutor’s
Desires/needs are negotiated when creating, maintaining, or transforming oppressive rhetoric.

As demonstrated with Jim’s comment above, he engages in both assertive and aggressive approaches. An assertive approach shows how Jim tries to negotiate the needs/desires of all interlocutors involved by refocusing attention to state-pride rather than slavery. Such a strategy minimises race as relevant and heightens everyone’s emotional state towards state/nationalistic pride. Jim also takes part in an aggressive strategy of reinforcing whiteness ideology by disregarding the ancestral history of his racial minority interlocutors. Through his micro-invalidation, Jim disregards colonial traces of racial tension from the dialogue. Such a strategy places his own needs/desires before those of his Black peers.

**Dismantling whiteness ideology**

Kristen, a White female audience member of a Civil Dialogue participates by challenging the core dialoguer’s conversational flow. The core dialoguers were discussing whether racial minority students had an easier time in college than White students. The conversation spanned various topics such as classroom climate, walking around campus, and access to scholarships. Kristen, a two-time graduate from college critiques the conversation from not distinguishing the difference between individual prejudice and racism from institutional racism.

So individual situations is one thing, systemically what we know is that people of color are incarcerated at higher levels than White people are at least when we talk about education and the school-to-prison-pipeline. With school resource officers, children of color are suspended from schools at much higher rates than White people are so there’s just a lot of systemic and historical background that can lead to some of those heightened emotions which makes it difficult to have a discourse like this without it being in this setting.

Through the current lens of Whiteness Studies, one might examine Kristen’s use of ‘people of colour’ as a re-centring of White as normal and/or preferred. For example, one rhetorical strategy used to reinforce whiteness ideology is defining oneself by what they are not (Nakayama and Krizek 1995). Through the use of ‘people of colour,’ Kristen separates Whites as not having colour and reinforces the idea that Whites are distinct from racial ‘others.’ Through the lens of dominant group theory, Kristen’s comment might be viewed as an aggressive reinforcement through endorsing the status quo. In this case, using ‘people of colour’ is a socially constructed trap due to the limitations of language.

A key element of dominant group theory is that the theoretical lens focuses on how Kristen impedes and dismantles oppressive rhetoric while also keeping an eye on how one might reinforce whiteness at the same time. Through her use of ‘people of colour’ and ‘White’ as separate, she reinforces the dichotomy between Whites, and racial ‘others.’ In considering such reinforcement, one might pay close attention to the limitations of language to re-present a socially constructed reality. Such tension can be illustrated by what Brenda J. Allen calls, ‘language traps.’ That is, language, as a noun, is a trap. At the same time language, as a verb, traps one from accurately re-presenting socially-constructed realities. Instead of being quick to label utterances as reinforcing whiteness
ideology, Whiteness Studies scholars may continue to focus on the tension of language traps in order to offer pragmatic ways to alter one’s use of language so people, like Kristen, can continue to impede and dismantle without worrying about falling into a language trap. While Whiteness Studies literature is quick to notice Kristen’s reinforcement of whiteness ideology, the current literature limits one’s ability to see the rhetorical strategies used by Kristen to impede and dismantle whiteness ideology.

Contrary to Jim’s comments before, Kristen attempts to impede and dismantle whiteness ideology. More specifically, she engages in assertive dismantling through challenging oppressive ideologies. By challenging school-to-prison-pipeline education for racial minorities, she brings into question systemic policies that reinforce discrimination. By definition, Kristen takes part in confronting oppressive rhetoric by, ‘explicitly naming dominant group messages as ignorant, hurtful, and/or discriminatory to co-cultural group members’ (see Table 1). In bringing attention to such oppressive rhetoric, she also engages in an assertive impediment of whiteness ideology through educating others. Prior to Kristen’s comment, the core dialoguers failed to examine oppressive rhetoric at the macro, systemic-level. As such, her participation educated the core dialoguers about such oppressive rhetoric. Additionally, she educated the core dialoguers through meta-communication by naming why it might be difficult to have conversations about systemic issues. Civil Dialogue as a pedagogical tool allows room for such metacommunication to emerge organically.

Little research explores ways in which people can impede or dismantle whiteness ideology. Hytten and Adkins (2001) ‘pedagogy of whiteness,’ and Warren and Hytten (2004) critical democratic performance of dialogue offer perspectives on how educators can cultivate spaces where impediments or dismantling may occur. That is, educators can create an environment through encouraging reflexivity, active listening, and intellectual humility that may lead towards challenges of whiteness ideology. However, few studies seek to examine how one actually challenges such rhetoric. Through the use of the Civil Dialogue format, audience members were able to make comments in regard to ideas left out by the core dialoguers. In Kristen’s example above, she begins to dismantle whiteness ideology by challenging the oppressive rhetoric the school-to-prison-pipeline. In doing so, she also impedes racist beliefs by educating others. Future research can continue to explore how Whites can use their positionality to impede and dismantle whiteness ideology from a standpoint of power and privilege.

**Reinforcing through attempts to dismantle**

When talking about race, Whites oftentimes engage in what Bonilla-Silva (2014) calls rhetorical incoherence. That is, one might stutter, frequently pause, use filler words, or speak in circles out of fear for coming off as racist. The following is a demonstration of Kerri’s rhetorical incoherence when talking about affirmative action. Kerri is a White female undergraduate student who is pursuing a degree in education. Here she takes part in a Civil Dialogue regarding affirmative action. The Civil Dialogue is open for audience participation and Kerri makes the following comment.

> Um, I am a future educator and I think that colleges are trying to rectify a problem that we see in elementary and secondary schools . . . However, the problem in our schools is that,
scientically, and research based, um, racial minorities are more likely to come from a lower socio-economic status, have access to fewer resources in schools, have worse teachers, and overall, just a worse educational experience. So the fact that colleges want more racial minorities is more because of they want the good racial minorities I would say, I guess. I agree with what Rosario said, ‘race has no place in education.’ And that’s why I want to teach in the future. I want to see my students as people who have needs and I am there to help them reach their academic success, whatever that may be.

Whereas Jim and Kristen’s excerpts were more clearly defined as either reinforcing or impeding/dismantling whiteness ideology, Kerri’s comment demonstrates the complexity rhetorical incoherence. At first, Kerri engages in an assertive impediment of whiteness ideology through affirming co-cultural concerns of systemic inequities. She is then quick to employ assertive dismantling through challenging oppressive rhetoric and assuming responsibility for action. Like Kristen, she challenges policies that reproduce educational inequalities for racial minorities. She additionally identifies as a future educator who is aware of the facts behind such inequalities. Taken together, Kerri sets out to dismantle whiteness ideology through her participation. However, the longer Kerri speaks, the more she reinforces whiteness.

Kerri aggressively reinforces whiteness ideology through victim blaming or what Bonilla-Silva (2014) calls abstract liberalism. Through the comment, ‘they want the good racial minorities,’ Kerri places responsibility onto racial minorities to remove themselves from poor educational environments that lack resources. This comment displays Kerri’s rhetorical incoherence through contradicting the information she learned about systemic influences that cause educational disparities to occur in the first place. Additionally, at a metacommunicative level, Kerri’s contributions to the Civil Dialogue can be considered aggressive dismantling through forcing. That is, Kerri, through her education, feels empowered to identify systemic injustices. However, her empowerment leads her to advocate for societal change that ultimately reinforces whiteness ideology. For example, she concludes that ‘race has no place in education,’ and that she wants to see her students as people.

Kerri’s excerpt above demonstrates how rhetorical incoherence may cause Whites to move along a spectrum from reinforcing, impeding, and dismantling whiteness ideology. Dominant group theory helps to add complexity to Whiteness Studies literature by offering a lens through which one might take part in multiple discursive strategies simultaneously. As a student, Kerri is talking through her recently learned knowledge as a means to advocate anti-racism.

However, in doing so, she reinforces whiteness ideology. As a heuristic device, dominant group theory can be used with students, like Kerri, to encourage them to continue fighting for anti-racism. At the same time, DGT can also attune students to the ways they might unconsciously reproduce whiteness ideology.

As explored through previous literature, teaching dominant group members about their privilege may come with a lack of self-reflexivity and fragility (Albeck, Adwan, and Bar-On 2006; DiAngelo 2011; Neville Miller and Harris 2005; Moon 2016). In recognising such fragility, educational tools such as Civil Dialogue offer space where students like Kerri can voice their rhetorical incoherence in a space where others can impede and dismantle her whiteness ideology before she reinforces whiteness through her future career as an educator. As such, educators and researchers can continue to create spaces for White students to mess up and be corrected before letting their whiteness ideology go unchallenged. At the conclusion
of the Civil Dialogue, the facilitator addressed the example above as a means to demonstrate the complexity of effectively impeding and/or dismantling whiteness ideology. Kerri’s comment was then used as an example to both critique and encourage self-reflexivity among those who claim to be anti-racist.

**Implications for future research and pedagogy**

The current study provides implications for future research and pedagogy. I divide the implications into two distinct sections. The first explores implication for future research from a theoretical perspective. The second section explores implications for pedagogical practices when teaching White students about whiteness ideology, White fragility, White emotionality, and/or White privilege. When taken together, the following implications can continue to develop the scholarly conversation regarding the development of responsible uses of privilege.

**Theoretical implications**

The current study in this essay examined the ways that White students reinforced and/or challenged whiteness ideology by using dominant group theory as an analytical framework. By using dominant group theory, I attempt to challenge Whiteness Studies to continue to look at rhetorical strategies that both reinforce and challenge whiteness ideology. Additionally, future studies would benefit from entering dominant group theory into conversation with co-cultural theory (Orbe 1998) to better understand how people of all races communicate from positions of privilege – marginalisation. Furthermore, future studies would need to employ more complex data analyses to match the complexity of the turn-taking processes between co-cultural and dominant group members.

Future studies should also examine the nuances of intersectional identities where one maintains both privilege and marginalisation within their social and cultural identities. An intersectional approach allows scholars to better understand how White men communicate differently from White women or how upper-class Whites communicate differently from working-class Whites, etc. An intersectional lens might provide great insight into how one’s communication orientation with exploring one’s intersectionality. An intersectional approach could have great implications when trying to understand ways in which certain groups employ specific strategies from multiple social locations. Exploring these nuances through research can lead to better educational practices.

**Pedagogical implications**

Students need an environment where they can (un)consciously reinforce whiteness ideology before moving to a place where they can consciously challenge whiteness ideology. Educators need to challenge and support students when challenging whiteness ideology (Sanford 1966/1968), especially when working through White fragility (DiAngelo 2011), and White emotionality (Matias 2014). When challenged without support, students may hesitate before sharing their deeply held beliefs about racial difference. Conversely, when supported without challenge, students may feel empowered to perpetuate ideologies of whiteness. Civil Dialogue
offers a means through which students’ narratives can emerge in relation to the narratives of their peers.

As a facilitation-based method of teaching and research, participants can enter the Civil Dialogue from various standpoints. Additionally, participants will vary based on individual readiness (Sanford 1966/1968). For example, Jim, Kristen, and Kerri all engaged whiteness from different standpoints and different levels of readiness. Additionally, not analysed were all the White participants in the audience who remained silent, yet still present. While beyond the scope of this study, one could glean great insight into how silent participants engaged the dialogues. However, when participants did speak, we could trace how individual readiness manifested through performances of whiteness.

With Civil Dialogue being a facilitation-based method, however, participants are able to challenge each other when whiteness does emerge. The format of a Civil Dialogue is already embedded with a checks and balance system where participants in disagreeing chairs can voice their opinions. However, one potential risk and limitation of Civil Dialogue is the chance that White students perform White emotionality as a means to uphold whiteness ideology. Furthermore, such White emotionality can be used to further marginalise participants of colour (Matias 2014). If the core dialoguers do not educate one another, then an audience member has the chance to make a comment or question. At the very least, after the dialogue is concluded, the facilitator/educator can process ideological discourses that manifested in the dialogue.

Another pedagogical implication emerges from using dominant group theory as a particular heuristic device in teaching Whiteness Studies with White students. Research on implicit person theory demonstrates the influence of fostering growth mindsets versus fixed mindsets (Dweck 2015). When teaching White students about whiteness ideology, current literature may develop a fixed mindset among White students who feel no room to grow. In informal interactions, I often hear White students say, ‘no matter what I say, I’ll be considered a racist.’ Such a phrase limits any potential growth for students to work towards advocating anti-racism. Furthermore, such statements are expressions of White emotionality that upholds whiteness ideology (Matias 2014). Dominant group theory can encourage White students to better understand how they can use communicative strategies competently towards advocating anti-racism.

Current research already examines the tension from moving from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, without using the language of implicit person theory. For example, Frankenberg (1996) narrates her experience of transitioning into a White consciousness through the ‘micro-politics of racial cross-traffic’ in her neighbourhood (p. 15). Additionally, Warren and Hytten (2004) offer ‘the critical democrat’ as a performance of whiteness that engages reflexivity and intellectual humility as sites for growth. Finally, DeTurk’s (2011) work on allyship examines discursive practices that can be used to challenge oppressive ideologies through advocacy work, direct concrete support, and dialogue. By furthering research of strategies to impede and dismantle whiteness ideology, White students can further develop the language towards developing a growth mindset. Future studies can continue these scholars’ work by exploring how messages, framed through implicit person theory, can lead to anti-discrimination work.

Finally, the current study has implications for teaching whiteness studies from a phronetic lens. Borrowing from Aristotle, Flyvbjerg (2001) identifies three ways of using knowledge: episteme, techne, and phronesis. Episteme is knowing large amounts of information, techne is
using that information to achieve a particular end, and phronesis (practical wisdom) is knowing why one should use particular knowledge in a specific situation. Current Whiteness Studies literature defines and identifies large sums of information about whiteness ideology, White fragility, and White privilege. Future research and teaching should explore how and why one should use White privilege responsibly in particular contexts. However, as Roediger (1994) suggests, ‘activism that draws on ideas regarding the social construction of race must focus on its political energies on exposing, demystifying and demeaning the particular ideology of whiteness, rather than calling into question the concept of race generally’ (p. 12). In doing so, critical whiteness scholars can continue to shed light on how ‘whiteness is nothing but oppressive and false.’ As a result, scholars can also expose, critique, and demystify, what it means to be a White ally or White accomplice.

As a theoretical framework and pedagogical tool, dominant group theory encourages students and educators to examine whiteness ideology and its various interactional outcomes. Whether conscious or not, communication has consequences. By critically analysing particular contexts, one’s abilities, their field of experience, and perceived costs and rewards, Whites, and other dominant group members, can become more self-reflexive. Through critical self-reflexivity, White activists themselves can become more attune to how their efforts might re-centre whiteness. As a result, such an approach can build towards cultivating White students who use their White privilege responsibly.

**Conclusion**

For years, Whiteness Studies research has explored the ways people use rhetorical strategies to reinforce whiteness ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Nakayama and Krizek 1995). As demonstrated through research, engaging White students and their privilege may cause barriers to educators who wish to advocate anti-racism (Neville Miller and Harris 2005; Moon 2016). However, in order to overcome such resistance, educators may wish to create pedagogical tools that challenge and support students through their White fragility and White emotionality (Genette, Olson, and Linde 2018; Sanford 1966/1968; Warren and Hytten 2004). The current study adds to this existing pool of literature to add both theoretical and pedagogical implications when engaging White students and their whiteness. Dominant group theory (Razzante & Orbe, 2018) offers one particular heuristic device to address the contradictions and tensions of White activism (see Roediger 1994).

Dominant group theory maintains the assumption that a social hierarchy exists where some are privileged and others are not. In the context of racial identity, Whites are considered dominant group members. While whiteness ideology may manifest from people of all races (Carrillo-Rowe and Malhotra 2006), there remains merit in examining how Whites, specifically, reinforce, impede, and/or dismantle whiteness ideology. The current study demonstrates how dominant group theory can provide a theoretical and analytical framework to crystallise various facets of whiteness. That is, the theory can be used to see how Whites create, maintain, transform, and challenge whiteness ideology through their communication. As demonstrated by the current study, a more nuanced understanding of dominant group strategies is needed in order to understand how it is Whites both reinforce and challenge whiteness ideology. Future Whiteness Studies research can benefit from examining critical democratic approaches (Warren and Hytten 2004) of education that can work towards challenging whiteness ideology.
Note

1. Personal communication with Dr. Brenda J. Allen at the 2017 Aspen Engaged Conference in Aspen, CO.

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References


Appendix A

(Canette, Olson, and Linde 2018)