

**COMPREHENSIVE
REVIEW**

Shifting systems of racial inequity: Applying critical race psychology to advance racial justice

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Abstract

Since the murder of George Floyd in 2020, a renewed and more mainstream attention to systemic racism emerged. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has permeated the larger public discourse around race more than ever before. Yet, social, scientific, and political backlash intended to silence conversations about the systemic and power-driven nature of racism have also characterized these years. 30+ years have passed since CRT's introduction as a critical analysis of how the legal system fails minoritized groups; 20+ years have passed since CRT's introduction into the social psychological field. Although psychology provides a strong foundation for the CRT tenets, incorporating CRT into the field of psychology has lagged behind many other fields (e.g., sociology, education). In two installments, this special issue (re)introduces psychological researchers to CRT and Psychological Critical Race Theory (PCRT), underscores CRT's importance and limitations in the context of psychological research, features novel applications and directions in CRT, and addresses the current political climate of opposition to discussions of CRT. This second installment looks outward highlighting psychological research applying (P)CRT frameworks to advance racial justice. We

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conclude with reflections on the history of CRT and PCRT and the shifts necessary in our scholarship-activism to dismantle systems of racial oppression.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

In the years since George Floyd's murder in 2020, there has been both a renewed attention to systemic racism and a backlash against conversations about race. Critical Race Theory (CRT), in particular, has played a bigger role in public conversations about race and policy (see Salter et al., 2024 for a more detailed discussion of this history). Although CRT developed in the 1980s as a critical approach in legal studies and began to interface formally with social psychology in the 1990s (see Jones, 2024 for a contextualized historical account of the informal and often unspoken role of psychology in the first conceptualization of CRT), researchers' engagement with CRT has been more limited in psychology than in other fields. In this special issue, we aim to move the conversation about CRT forward within the field of psychology.

In two installments, this special issue (re)introduces psychological researchers to Critical Race Theory (CRT), underscores CRT's importance and limitations in the context of psychological research—including principles that theoretically and methodologically frame psychological critical race work as presented by Jones (2024), features novel applications of and new directions in CRT, and addresses the current political climate of opposition to discussions of CRT. The previous installment (see Salter et al., 2024) featured articles that looked inward to take stock of the role of CRT in psychology research and education. This second installment looks outward to highlight psychological research that uses CRT frameworks to advance racial justice in society. Together, this two-part special issue aims to both highlight the field's accomplishments in this area and to challenge ourselves to continue building toward change.

INSTALLMENT 2: DOING THE WORK: APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CRITICAL RACE PSYCHOLOGY

The second installment of this special issue features applications and implications of Critical Race Psychology or Psychological Critical Race Theory (PCRT; Jones, 1998, 2024). The pieces in this installment illustrate how to conduct psychological research through a (P)CRT lens, using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods in applied contexts ranging from the justice system to higher education. This installment has four sections following this introduction: (II) Voicing Resistance and Survival Amongst People of Color, (III) Neoliberal Discourse and Attitudes about Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism, (IV) CRT Analyses Applied to the Study of Social Issues, and (V) Conclusions and Implications.

Section II: Voicing resistance and survival amongst people of color

Section II of the special issue highlights research on resistance and survival amongst people of color. The pieces in this collection vary in their methodologies, perspectives, and applications of CRT in both domestic and international contexts. However, drawing heavily on CRT's tenet to contextualize counter narratives, they all center the voices and experiences of people of color

as they resist and flourish in systems of racial oppression. Marchand et al. (2024) offer a critique of institutional racism in secondary school education, qualitatively analyzing Black parents' lived experiences engaging with their children's schools. Their accounts demonstrate a high level of engagement, which contradicts dominant deficit-based narratives of Black parents' school involvement. Telling an asset-based story instead, Marchand and colleagues outline how Black parents' analysis of educational racial inequity motivates their engagement.

Bonam (2024) demonstrates a similar motivation in her autoethnography, highlighting this method as an essential tool for critical race analysis in psychology. She shares her experiences confronting racism denial and advocating for race-conscious social policy as a mixed Black mother, scholar, and activist in her son's mostly White and Asian K-8 public school district. She focuses on her son's 2019–2020 kindergarten year, which coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, George Floyd's murder, and controversy surrounding the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Through a detailed account of her autoethnographic methodology, she reflects on the implications of her experiences for Psychological Critical Race Theory and praxis, including recommendations for conducting psychological research and K-12 best practices.

Coleman and Yantis (2024) highlight university students' differing interracial perspectives on systemic racism. They use discourse analysis to examine White and Black students' perspectives of systemic racism through their experiences of a university mapping project. The authors show that White students tend to use rhetoric to distance themselves from systemic racism or to alleviate their cognitive dissonance, whereas Black students tend to examine the social systems in which systemic racism has thrived, often drawing from personal accounts.

Moving from the education system to the criminal justice system, Crain et al. (2024) use CRT as a lens through which to analyze how formerly incarcerated Black and Latinx physical trainers respond to and overcome racial microaggressions from their White clients. Using an analysis of structured interviews, the authors show how these formerly incarcerated men navigate stigma and racial discrimination during their journeys to reintegrate into society.

Perez et al. (2024) continue the exploration of Black resistance and survival by examining *intergroup forgiveness* (forgiveness granted by racially minoritized groups and individuals following acts of discrimination or violence on the basis of race). In a thematic analysis of newspaper articles concerning instances of intergroup forgiveness, the authors demonstrate that narratives of Black forgiveness are presented in ways that are detrimental to equality by ignoring Black suffering and inequality in favor of "feel good" stories of forgiveness.

Finally, Coşkan and Şen (2024) introduce new applications of CRT in an international context, specifically examining resistance and survival among Kurds in Asia and the Middle East. The Kurdish people are a diverse minoritized ethnic group whose population has been separated by the 19th- and 20th-century borders of multiple countries within the Asian subcontinent and the Middle East, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (Eppel, 2016). In contrast to the larger ethnic populations within these nations who are Turkish, Iranian, or Arab, respectively, Kurdish individuals are seen as "other" by fellow residents and citizens, speak a different language (Kurdish) than do their majority member counterparts, and participate in customs and traditions that often differentiate them from their neighbors. To explore the extensions of CRT for Kurdish identity within the context of the Turkish state, Coşkan and Şen interview Turkish Kurds, analyzing two major themes of their responses: Kurdish representations of power and boundaries of power in resistance to the forces of oppression maintained and heightened by the state.

Section III: Neoliberal discourse and attitudes about race, racism, and anti-racism

Section III of the special issue highlights empirical work focused on attitudes about race, racism, and anti-racism. Collectively, these pieces demonstrate new methods for examining attitudes about and elevating perspectives on race and racism (i.e., those of Black Americans and other people of color) that have typically been understudied.

Adams and Omar (2024) begin this section by offering an analysis of social psychology textbooks through a CRT lens. The authors find that textbooks often consider racism-relevant topics in one-to-two chapter discussions of basic processes, such as cognition and affect—most often at the individual rather than societal level, as applied to racial identities and interracial relations. The authors then contrast this standard approach with a vision of how social psychology education might be structured if it were truly informed by CRT and embedded throughout a wide range of social psychological constructs and processes.

Liu et al. (2024) employ CRT to critique the effectiveness of the Multicultural Competence (MCC) training model, exposing the pivotal roles of race and culture in the adoption and foster care systems. Using a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with child welfare supervisors, the authors find that merely acknowledging the existence of racial and cultural differences does not challenge the ideology and function of color-evasiveness. The authors argue that racism is so intertwined in the fabric of society and normalized in everyday interactions that it requires an intentional disruption to unmask and challenge racist practices across contexts.

The final two papers in this section highlight White racial identification and anti-racism amongst White individuals, highlighting the role of color-evasiveness in White attitudes. Collins and Walsh (2024) use survey data from White anti-racist activists and White people from the general public to examine the relationship between antiracist praxis, attitudes about White privilege, and color-evasive racial ideologies. They examine whether White privilege attitudes mediate the relationship between antiracist praxis and color-evasive racial ideologies.

Finally, Parigoris et al. (2024) explore cognitive and affective racial attitudinal patterns among White Americans using Latent Profile Analysis. The authors point to four profiles of White racial attitudes that emerge from the findings—Lower, Incongruous, Ambivalent, and Higher Racial Consciousness—which represent increasing endorsement of critical reflection around Whiteness and racism. The authors conclude by positing that the findings provide insight into the characteristics of current patterns of White racial attitudes and how researchers might better address them to increase critical racial consciousness and anti-racist action.

Section IV: CRT analyses applied to the study of social issues

The papers in Section IV illustrate the study of social issues through the lens of CRT, spanning from legal contexts to health implications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Casanova et al. (2024) begin by exploring the gap between the promise and the reality of diversity in higher education by examining transfer students' experiences in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), specifically those receiving large numbers of transfer students from community colleges. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the authors examine how institutional and interpersonal practices, attitudes, and policies at one HSI contribute to or inhibit transfer receptivity for transfer students of color. Casanova et al. articulate how the findings hold receiving institutions accountable for successfully serving transfer students of color and creating equitable access to higher education.

Drawing on the LatCrit literature, Willis Esqueda and Gilbert (2024) employ a critical race approach to examine attitudes toward Mexican American exonerees; in particular, negative stereotypes toward Latinx individuals, Latinx defendant rights, internal-focused criminal culpability (e.g., defendant characteristics & actions), and external-focused criminal culpability (e.g., police responsibility, legal system biases). The authors show that negative stereotypes influence notions of defendant rights, culpability, and criminality, and this negative stigma against Latinx individuals lends itself to racism against Latinx exonerees, as well as their children.

Stamps (2024) draws on CRT and minority stress theory to explore Black communities' experiences with anti-Blackness, stigma awareness, and psychological stress. Stamps finds a significant relationship between experienced anti-Blackness and cognitive, emotional, and physical stress, as well as a mediating role for stigma awareness, or an understanding of society's upholding of anti-Blackness, on emotional stress. Additionally, Stamps argues that quantitative methods can play an important role in efforts to shift away from White-centered and majoritarian-oriented research approaches. The conclusion highlights the implications of this work for policies that support Black wellness.

Finally, Trawalter et al. (2024) test the interest convergence hypothesis in the context of the COVID-19 vaccination policy. Using experimental methods, the authors show that, in this context, calling attention to and increasing knowledge about systemic racism may not be enough to shift White public opinion. They find that White Americans are generally unwilling to support redistributive policies—policies that they perceive as beneficial to Black people at costs to White people—unless they view the well-being of Black people as importantly linked to their own wellness. Consistent with the concept of interest convergence, the authors conclude that the results offer a sobering reminder that racial progress does not necessarily reflect shifts in White prejudice and consciousness, but rather shifts in White interest.

Section V: Conclusions and implications

Installment 2 concludes with a section that explores the insights and implications that stem from this special issue. As we discussed in the introduction to the first installment (see Salter et al., 2024), James Jones played a pivotal role in introducing CRT to psychologists in his conceptualization of Psychological Critical Race Theory (PCRT; Jones, 1998). Almost 30 years later, in our concluding chapter Jones (2024) reflects on what has changed, what has remained the same, and how we must advance the work of PCRT. Jones reminds the reader not just of the four tenets of CRT and the history of CRT's conceptualization in legal studies, but also tells the story of his own journey theorizing about race and racism. We read of how he and his colleague Derrick Bell, from their respective disciplinary lenses—psychology and legal theory, published foundational works on the persistent, pervasive, and systemic nature of racism (see Bell, 1987; Jones, 1972). It is through Jones' personal retelling of this historical context that we witness the degree to which psychology is intertwined with and essential to the legal theoretical conceptualization of CRT. In particular, he demonstrates the failings of color-evasive or uniform approaches to law and social structure in yielding racial equality, as they do not account for the multitude of disparate lived experiences of minoritized racial groups (Jones, 2024). With only slight updates from his first introduction of PCRT, Jones (2024) describes the underlying tenets of PCRT and seven principles that are core components necessary to authentically and effectively carry out PCRT work. Jones outlines the theoretical underpinnings of PCRT in these seven principles: race and culture cannot be disentangled; language is weaponized to maintain racial social dominance; racism operates at multiple

levels—individual, institutional, and cultural – that result in systemic racism; activism is a lever for social change through scholarship, advocacy, organization, and intervention; power drives racial inequity; narratives expose individuals to other racial perspectives; and diversity and racism are competing factors. Jones has provided us the contextualized understanding of from where we, and he, have come in our PCRT engagement and he provides a roadmap for the painstaking yet necessary drive to employ PCRT and disrupt deeply embedded systems of racial inequity.

CONCLUSION

Together with the articles featured in the first installment, the pieces presented here offer important insights about the role of CRT in current social and policy issues. We hope that this two-part special issue helps pave the way for psychologists to engage more fully with CRT in research and education. As Jones (2024) writes in his concluding chapter, “PCRT must contribute to understanding how social minds connect with social worlds to produce oppressive or liberating structures or ideas, policies or programs. It must also demonstrate the ways in which these adverse conditions are met with activism, purpose, and resilience to preserve the humanity that is at stake.”

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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