

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

#CommunicationSoWhite

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Racial inequalities and the colonial legacies of White supremacy permeate scholarly and public discussions today. As part of an ongoing movement to decenter White masculinity as the normative core of scholarly inquiry, this paper is meant as a preliminary intervention. By coding and analyzing the racial composition of primary authors of both articles and citations in journals between 1990–2016, we find that non-White scholars continue to be under-represented in publication rates, citation rates, and editorial positions in communication studies. We offer some analysis as to why these findings matter in our current political moment, and propose steps the field might take towards further documenting and rectifying race and representation in the production of disciplinary knowledge.

Keywords: Communication, Race, Racism, Representation, Inequality, Publication, Citation.

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Those with little social power or dominant doctrine backing them have but one alternative for gaining attention and authority in rational public discourse. It is to say: ‘If you don’t believe it, here is how to ascertain key parts of it for yourself.’ –George Gerbner, (1983, p. 364).

We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression. – Combahee River Collective (1977, p. 267).

Introduction

If communication is the study of public discourse, understanding social power requires this intervention, as signaled by the Combahee River Collective Statement in 1977, six years before the Journal of Communication’s special issue “Ferment in the Field.” These queer, Black, socialist feminists speak to the forgotten radical roots of U.S. identity politics, arguing: “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (Combahee River Collective, 1977). The original Journal of

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Communication reflection on the field by a group of mostly White, male scholars failed to address the anti-colonial and racial ferment of the 1960s and 70s that paved the road to the Reagan-Thatcher era marking its publication (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 2013). In this article, we ask how race and racial representation in our field has changed since then. We begin by accounting for the representation of race-related topics, using publication and citation rates within National Communication Association (NCA) and International Communication Association (ICA) journals between 1990–2016 (See Table 1).¹ Our data provides a limited introduction to what we hope will be a sustained engagement with questions of race in the heterogeneous field of communication.

We broach this topic while racial violence and the colonial legacies of White supremacy permeate scholarly and public debates, including the perpetual war on terror, the racialization of Islam, capitalism punishing working-class “third world looking people” (Hage, 2017), and the global resurgence of right-wing ethno-nationalism. Simultaneously, we see oppositional and intersectional movements call for Black liberation, decolonization, and reimagined terms of social justice (Taylor, 2016). We know that these politics are unequally mediated, and communication scholarship at large² needs to pay more attention to the persistent marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities in today’s complex media systems (Dávila & Rivero, 2014; Said, 2008).

Our paper draws from critical theories accounting for global racial hierarchies to inform a dynamic, relational conceptualization of race where racial differences are articulated across lines of skin color, ethnicity, class, and caste. Our approach to race is analytically distinct from what Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) identify as the dominant social science method, focusing on “the effect of race.” We avoid the commonly-held assumption, prevalent in communication, that race causes discrimination or disadvantages. Instead, we find Barnor Hesse’s (2016, p. viii) formation of race and colonial power allows us to account for different articulations of racial power and to conceptually distinguish between White and non-White populations across Western polities. Hesse argues that race is the “political relation of antagonism between institutionally dominant White populations and dominated non-White populations” and an “an inherited western, modern-colonial practice of violence, assemblage, subordination, exploitation and segregation” (Hesse, 2016, p. viii).³ This historical grounding of modern European racism allows for more analytic clarity on how race is normalized and institutionally re-articulated in the present, whether through the split between West/non-West, White/Black and Brown, or citizen/foreigner. Given the limited availability of the racial demographic data at hand, we operationalize the “political relation of antagonism” between White and non-White scholars through a relatively narrow conception of racial dynamics.

We undertook this study because we observed the absence of non-White scholars from the canon of communication across all subfields; the marginal position of non-White scholars in key institutional spaces; the persistent ghettoization of race-related panels and discussions on conference program agendas; and the greater visibility of White scholars’ work on race and inequality. This paper provides some empirical, baseline justification that both confirms and complicates these “common sense” understandings.

Table 1 Summary of Key Journal Characteristics

Journal	N	% of Dataset	First Year in Dataset	% First Authors of Color	% of Ed Board POC	% With Race-Related Keyword
Comm & Critical Cultural Studies	179	3%	2010	14%	33%	4%
Comm, Culture, Critique	179	3%	2013	32%	20%	8%
Communication Education	543	10%	1990	8%	6%	1%
Communication Monographs	492	9%	1990	10%	6%	5%
Communication Theory	380	7%	1994	14%	14%	4%
Human Communication Research	550	11%	1990	14%	9%	9%
Journal of Applied Comm Research	407	8%	1995	5%	4%	3%
Journal of Communication	936	18%	1992	22%	16%	9%
Journal of Computer-Mediated Comm	493	9%	2005	18%	23%	5%
Political Communications	504	10%	1994	4%	10%	10%
Quarterly Journal of Speech	398	8%	1990	3%	10%	1%
Text and Performance Quarterly	229	4%	2008	5%	16%	2%

Academia's pervasive White masculinity

Discussions about representation and the racial and gender inequities within the U.S. academy were first raised during the late-1980's "canon wars," focusing on Eurocentric, male-authored texts, largely in the humanities. Affirmative-action gains were visible in practice, including admissions and hiring gains among women, as well as students and faculty of color (Ferguson, 2012; Melamed, 2006). However, in the last decade we have seen the ongoing dismantling of affirmative action and other redistributive policies. Moreover, the growing "adjunctification of the professoriate" in the academic labor market (Sterne, 2011) has been disproportionately shouldered by women and people of color (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). These factors, in addition to institutionalized racism and academia's publish-or-perish mantra, perpetuate racial disparities (Gunning, 2000). New racial justice movements, from Black Lives Matter in the United States to Rhodes/Fees Must Fall in South Africa, have revived questions about representation within the academy and exposed ongoing inequities, including the prohibitive cost of higher education, insufficient attention to race and racial inequality in curricula, and racially hostile campus climates.

Decades of scholarship show that publication and citation practices reproduce institutional racism and sexism. For example, a recent editorial on gender bias within communication points to a "stubborn persistence of power regimes over our own disciplinary knowledge" (Mayer, Press, & Verhoeven, 2017). Even in majority-female fields like anthropology, research has shown a "tendency for women social scientists to be cited far less frequently than are men" (Lutz, 1990). In communication, Mayer et al. (2017) found that while articles with lead female authors increased substantially between 1991–2005, they received approximately two-thirds fewer citations than those by men; and that "men cite men (at a rate double to women)" creating "cohesive networks of male authorship and citation" and also a "closure penalty" (Mayer et al., 2017, p. 11) that affects women and other marginalized scholars.

Citational practices structure a collective body of work: disciplines that cohere around masculinity and Whiteness (Ahmed, 2012). The physical presence of marginalized scholars does not necessarily entail their legitimation as producers of knowledge, either in terms of publications or citations (Dade, Tartakov, Hargrave, & Leigh, 2015). As scholars in cognate fields have observed, Whiteness continues to be institutionalized in disciplinary fields (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Pulido, 2002; Rosa & Bonilla, 2017). Disciplinary norms and the reproduction of canonic knowledge diminish the centrality of racial power as a theoretical and scholarly focus, despite the relative increase of non-White scholars within the academy (Bonilla-Silva & Baiocchi, 2001; Christian, 2007).

Publication and citation practices produce a hierarchy of visibility and value. This has material consequences on the field's quality of knowledge and on the social, emotional, professional, economic, and political lives of people of color who have traditionally been marginalized within the academy (Ahmed, 2012; Harris & González, 2012; Spalter-Roth & Erksine, 2007). In this way, the seemingly narrow scope of citation also

functions as what Omi and Winant (2015) call a “racial project”: the co-constitutive ways that racial meanings translate into social structures where resources are organized and distributed along racial lines.

Methods

We examine non-White scholars’ representation, citation, and contribution to racial topics in 12 peer-reviewed communication journals. Our dataset⁴ (see Table 1) contains several article- and author-related metrics. Race is a primary variable, derived by coding each article’s first authors. Race/ethnicity data for authors is not uniformly collected at any institutional level or through publicly-accessible data. Scholars trying to conduct varying forms of disparity analyses are left to either abandon the analysis altogether or find reliable ways to infer individual race/ethnicity. Communication scholars have traditionally relied on visual images in media to infer individuals’ racial group affiliation (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Mastro & Stern, 2003; McIlwain & Caliendo, 2011). In fields conducting disparity analyses (notably, public health), researchers reliably infer individuals’ racial group affiliation using validated lists of classified surnames (Elliot et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2010), where names are correlated with individuals’ actual race self-identification (for example, how frequently an individual with the surname “Lopez” identified as “Hispanic”). We use both visual data and surnames to infer the race of authors.

We collapse race into a binary variable, identifying the first author as either White or non-White.⁵ To code the approximately 7,259 authors in our bibliographic dataset, each author surname was matched against frequently-occurring surnames in the 2010 census.⁶ For each of the 162,255 surnames in the census dataset, a percentage is given based on the proportion of instances in which an individual with a given surname self-identified as either White or non-White. There are 3,378 unique first authors in the dataset. Those whose surnames are identified with a specific racial/ethnic group 90% or more of the time were coded as belonging to that group. Those that fell in the 80–89% range were categorized based on a surname match and human-coded categorization, based on visual and other author data. Finally, those authors whose surname matches fell below 80% or whose surname ID and visual coding did not match were coded individually based on all available information, including biographical data. Other key variables in our analysis include: first-author citation count, a measure of how many times the first author was cited among the dataset; the journal in which the document was published; document keywords; first-author country; publication year; and document citation score.⁷

We use U.S.-based racial classifications because 86% of all editorial board members across each of the 12 journals studied are affiliated with U.S. institutions, and 83% of all articles are first-authored by a scholar at a U.S. institution. Clearly, we recognize our categorical limitations of imposing U.S.-centric racial and ethnic differences, muting the fluidity and multiplicity of racial self-identification, and holding constant the shifting global racial/ethnic categories. Nevertheless, we see its necessity in demonstrating whether racial disparities do in fact exist (McIlwain, 2016; Morning & Sabagh, 2005).

Findings: Ongoing underrepresentation

Non-White scholars were virtually absent in journal publications as recently as the 1990s. Non-White authors in these publications, however, increased to 6% by the end of 1990, and 12% by the end of 2010. In general, non-White scholars are underrepresented among the published first authors in communication journals, authoring only 746 out of 5,262 (14%) documents published from 1990 to 2016. Non-White representation varies significantly depending on the journals in which their work appears, from 32% in *Communication, Culture, and Critique* to 3% in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.

Given this variation, we questioned why non-White scholars publish work in some journals more than others. As the overall number of published articles increases, so does the number of articles first authored by non-White scholars ($R = .75, p < .00$). Expanding venues for publication helped to increase publications of non-White scholars, but this does not account for the representational disparity we see between journals. For example, the journal with the highest percentage of first authors of color, *Communication, Culture, and Critique*, began publishing in 2013, publishing the fewest number (179) of articles in the dataset.

We argue that an article's subject matter would better account for these differences. Six percent of all published articles include at least one race-related keyword. The proportion of non-White scholars' articles containing one or more race-related keywords is double the proportion of White authors (Chi-Square = 34.44, $df = 1, p < .00$). Non-White scholars' representation in the field's literature strongly relates to race being addressed in that literature, suggesting that increasing non-White scholars' representation in the field is necessary to increase theorization and empirical research on race-related phenomena.

Citation Matters

While including more non-White scholars is positive, it unfortunately does not reduce the disparity in recognition, distribution, and value of that work, as measured by author and article citations. As work by non-White scholars increases, so does the gap between citations of their work compared to White scholars. Non-White first authors are cited significantly fewer times than their White counterparts (16 to 25, respectively; $p < .00, t = 5.60, df = 5071$). Articles authored by non-White scholars⁸ are cited significantly fewer times, on average, than White authors (1.7 to 2.5, respectively; $p < .00, t = 4.30, df = 5069$). This is troubling for at least two reasons. First, it means that work by non-White scholars does not receive equal circulation. Moreover, to the degree that citations are a measure of the quality and value associated with research, it suggests that lesser value is placed on work authored by non-White scholars. This has negative professional implications both for non-White scholars, in terms of contract renewals, tenure, and promotion, and for the field in general, in terms of the visibility of and attention to the knowledge produced.

In articles that explicitly address race, the difference in mean author citation count between non-White and White scholars (22 to 23, respectively) appears insignificant, as does the difference in mean document citation count (2.7 to 2.5, respectively). However, since White scholars are half as likely to produce race-related scholarship, the overrepresentation of White scholars working on race shows that their published work addressing race has higher visibility and circulation.

Citational segregation, disparity, and socialization

Citational disparities in our dataset do exist between White and non-White authors. Looking at which authors cite whom, there is strong evidence that these disparities are due to structural factors. The author citation network generated from our data fits a very well-known pattern of what we might refer to as citational segregation (a preference for citing authors who are members of the same group), resulting from established patterns of racialized professional socialization (Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Pulido, 2002).

We previously pointed out that the number of White authors publishing in our dataset of communication journals far exceeds non-White authors. This sets the parameters of the field's opportunity structure and offers implications for interpreting our findings. First, it means a certain amount of citational disadvantage is built into the disciplinary structure, limiting the range of citational choices. The existing representational disparity contributes to the citation disparity: White authors will always have a greater opportunity to be cited because White scholars have a greater number of publications. Secondly, when we model our publication data as a citation network, our data demonstrates a compounded structural disadvantage where in-group citations significantly exceed what would be expected given the opportunity structure (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

For this modeling, we include only publications that have been cited at least twice within the body of published work, resulting in 1,178 publications by White authors and 188 by non-White authors (almost the exact White-nonWhite ratio as the full dataset).⁹ Results show that White authors cite other White authors significantly more frequently than what would be expected by chance, and cite non-White authors significantly less frequently. For citations between White authors, the difference between expected and observed frequencies is significant ($p < .02$). Citations of non-White authors by White authors show a difference between expected and observed frequencies that is also significant ($p < .01$). Here, it is crucial to signal our understanding of race as a "political relation of antagonism" between dominant White and dominated non-White populations, in order to help explain this disparity (Hesse, 2016, p. viii).

We argue that such disparities are rooted in citation practices we are socialized to perform, practices based on perceived attributions of authority, quality, rigor, and topical fit. These attributions' filtering function reproduces hegemonic models of scholarship, as they are premised on the accumulation of iterative citations (Mott & Cockayne, 2017). Citational disparities are exacerbated by the racialized and

gendered foundation of a White- and masculine-dominated field. Our findings reinforce previously-mentioned scholarship on how disciplinary norms, including the reproduction of knowledge and the distribution of resources, continue to institutionalize Whiteness (Ahmed, 2012).

Challenging citational Whiteness: Limitations and what next?

In this article, we find that non-White scholars are significantly underrepresented as published authors and under-cited as producers of value in the field of communication. We also found that non-White scholars are more likely to engage race as an analytic in our field. We recognize the serious pitfalls of both essentialism and tokenism, and assume that further research and discussions take into account the complexities of class, gender, sexuality, and transnational histories of racial and ethnic difference that this short article cannot address.

Our findings about publication and citation rates of authors of color index larger implications that speak to critical interventions on epistemology and institutional politics going back decades in the field of communication, specifically those raised repeatedly at the margins within the subfield of cultural studies (Gilroy, 2013; Hall, 1986; Hooks, 2000; Martín-Barbero & Fox, 1993). Our attention to citational representation is not about pluralistic difference; it is about attending to structures of power embedded within knowledge production. We must all be more attentive to our own racialized (and gendered) citational practices. We often cite work we already know. Thus, one important way to counter citational disparities is to expand the range of scholarship with which we critically engage. In other words, we are not simply proposing adding scholars of color to extant sub-fields, but rather rethinking normative theories of communication. For example, scholars such as WEB DuBois and Frantz Fanon restructure our foundational understandings of liberal democracy and the public sphere through their analyses of colonialism, capitalism, and slavery. Sylvia Wynter's insights destabilize the singularized, overrepresented concept of the human that scholarship on human symbolic processes takes for granted. Both are examples that highlight how racial power is materialized, making impossible the normative ideals of neutral media networks and technologies, while at the same time pushing to decolonize our explanatory practices.

As such, we embrace Mayer et al.'s (2017) call to "apply pressure everywhere" by embedding race- and gender-focused scholarship in course syllabi, PhD exams, required reading lists, and pedagogic practice. Centering scholars of color in this way can increase "conscientious engagement" (Mott & Cockayne, 2017), rather than just increasing citational metrics. We must also ensure that panels, special journal issues, and edited handbooks and encyclopedias represent a broader range of scholars, avoiding the common practice of all-White and/or all-male line-ups. Marginalized scholars should not bear the unequal burden to "do" diverse scholarship or "be" markers of diversity; rather, what is required is a collective engagement with work that addresses racial antagonisms as central features shaping modern communicative practices.

In examining the racial composition of current editorial boards of journals in our study, we found that editorial boards remain majority White (see Table 1). These institutional roles should come with increased responsibility of equity and excellence in the field. Editors and editorial boards could begin collecting author data about race (and other attributes such as gender, national origin, geography, etc.) and should use such data to help guide editorial decisions.¹⁰ For sustained accountability to representational disparities in our field, future research must be able to rely on nuanced methodological approaches to account for race, caste, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and other globally racialized markers of majority-minority difference. Our ability to understand why existing and potential disparate patterns exist depends on our ability to produce additional forms of data that allow us to do so. Developing ways to allow individual self-identification and thereby collect anonymous demographic information through our professional organizations and/or journal submission processes would be a place to start. To do this, of course, it will be necessary to develop mechanisms that track potential disparate outcomes while paying necessary attention to individual identity preferences, privacy concerns, or potential threats posed to minority communities under surveillance.

Beyond collecting demographic data, editors and editorial boards must prioritize ways to center issues of racial inequality. Reviewers could pay more careful attention to citational engagements, and also augment their role as gatekeepers, by providing feedback to potential authors that encourage, rather than stymie, future publication prospects. Increasing the number of published scholars of color obviously expands the pool of citable publications by authors of color, and prioritizing graduate recruitment, faculty hiring practices, and mentorship of emerging scholars of color are important steps toward changing the valuation of Whiteness in institutions (Ahmed, 2012).

We conclude in responding to a question posed by an anonymous reviewer of this very article: “To put it bluntly, why would White scholars listen?” This question, of course, speaks volumes. But to take it at face value, we would argue that while citational practices are a narrow indicator of the larger structures of racial inequality in the academy and society at large, they help to “reproduce a discipline” (Mott & Cockayne, 2017) that organizes and institutes social orders that have been universally detrimental and dehumanizing (Wynter, 2003). Knowledge production that reinforces Whiteness as its undisputed, unexamined frame is incapable of asking what we might learn from the experiences of those who have been, for decades if not centuries, dispossessed of their lands, policed, bombed, detained, indebted, and rendered illegal (Chakravarty & Ferreria da Silva, 2012; Moten, 2003). White scholars should listen because today’s political reality of a Trump presidency and its global parallels are embedded in this longer colonial history of racial power and violence alongside anti-colonial struggles for liberation.

Today’s politics play out in an unequally-mediatized world. In the absence of a deliberate racial analytic, communication scholarship normalizes Whiteness. Whether our scholarship is about individual psychology, social conflict, popular culture, media and information industries and policy, social movements and networks, rhetoric and

language, cultural and group formations, or structures and systems, any economy of knowledge production that perpetuates the ongoing universalization of a specific expression of humanity will continue to institute racial subjection. At this historical juncture, the field of communication, however disparate and fractured, is well served if it looks within on questions of representation and citations, and acts towards taking more seriously an account of race as a central analytic.

Notes

- 1 Political Communication is included because it is jointly sponsored by both the International Communication Association and the American Political Science Association.
- 2 We define communication as constituted by the NCA and ICA journals.
- 3 Hesse (2016), Ferreira da Silva (2007), and others point to the relational power differences within non-White populations, including Afro-descendent and indigenous peoples, which we recognize as an important area of future research.
- 4 We extracted Web of Science article publication data (excluding conference proceedings, book reviews, and anonymous publications) from 12 journals, 1990–2016, into CitNet Explorer (see Table 1). Article first author and the document (articles) each serve as primary units of analysis.
- 5 First-author surnames in a 1% sample of documents were independently coded by two coders. Intercoder reliability was measured using ReCal, which calculated 100% agreement; Scott's pi, Cohen's and Krippendorf's alpha = 1.
- 6 See "Frequently Occurring Surnames in the 2010 Census: Surnames Occurring at Least 100 Times Nationally." Available at: https://www.census.gov/topics/population/genealogy/data/2010_surnames.html. These surnames are matched to actual self-identified race/ethnicity.
- 7 A CitNet Explorer–derived variable, indicating article citation frequency amongst citations in the journal dataset.
- 8 Author citation and document citation are two different variables. The former counts the number of times the author's name appears amongst the works cited by each journal article in the dataset, the latter the number of times a specific journal article authored by a scholar appears in the same body of citations. Any given scholar's name may appear amongst these citations without having a cited document, if the work cited appeared in a journal other than the 12 included in this dataset.
- 9 We used UCINET network analysis software to calculate the expected and observed number of citations between White authors, between White and non-White authors, and between non-White authors.
- 10 The Journal of Communication, for example, collects such data and makes this practice possible.

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