

## Everyday Racism and Social Representations in Faulkner's *Dry September: A Critical Discourse Analysis*

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Email: girisbohara@gmail.com | DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jdl.v2i1.65397>

### Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of racial discourse and social representations of people in everyday situations. It begins with a brief discussion of how everyday racism differs from the general understanding of racism. Relying on the review of some previous works on racism, van Dijk's "socio-cognitive model" and some discursive mechanisms (rationalization, emotionalization, and stereotypization) by which racism can be initiated, practiced, maintained, or terminated are discussed and used as the conceptual framework to analyze the elite discourse. This article employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a research tool to unravel the complex webs of racial associations and representations that go into everyday communication with illustration and evidence from William Faulkner's short story, "Dry September." The results show that the racist people use discourse as a means of promoting their supremacy and group interests, and use it to legitimate their courses of action as well. CDA, as the sole non-recursive methodology, can reveal how the dominant group frames social inequalities using various discursive strategies and maintains power and privilege over the vulnerable one.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Dry September, everyday racism, sociocognition, rationalization

### Introduction

Racism, generally, means the superiority of one race over another. For Grosffoguel (2016), racism is "a hierarchy of superiority/inferiority along the line of the human" and this hierarchy can be "constructed and marked in diverse ways" (p. 9). The superior group considers it better and unfairly treats another group solely on the differences of skin color, culture, and appearance. Racial practices are never value-free and innocent. Fairclough (1995), a prominent practitioner of Critical Discourse Analysis

(CDA), argues that the assumptions of the supremacy of one race or ethnicity over another are “ideologically driven and motivated” (p. 134). In the same line, Reisigl and Wodak (2000) claim that racism, as a social practice, and as an ideology, manifests itself discursively (p. 2). These definitions indicate that racial practice is not simply a personal behavior but an ideologically driven social construction.

Everyday racism is a form of racism, which involves structured, familiar everyday discriminatory practices. It refers to the subtle, often unconscious, forms of racial discrimination and prejudice that occur in daily interactions, institutions, and societal structures. Essed (1991) in her famous book *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* differentiates everyday racism from other racism. The concept of everyday racism, for her, counters the view that racism is an individual problem, a question of “to be or not to be a racist” (p. 3). According to her, the crucial criterion distinguishing racism from everyday racism is that the latter involves only systematic, recurrent, familiar practices. It reinforces negative stereotypes or prejudices about people based on their race, color, or ethnicity. The concept of 'everyday racism', for Essed, is intended to integrate macro- and micro-sociological dimensions of racism. She argues that everyday racism can be characterized as the integration of racism into everyday situations through practices (cognitive and behavioral) that activate underlying power relations (p. 16). Experiences are supposed to be suitable sources of information for the study of everyday racism.

Social representations are a system of beliefs, values, ideas, metaphors, and practices that serve to establish social order, orient participants and enable communication among the members of groups and communities. The CDA, as van Dijk (1997) mentions, shows how discourse expresses and reproduces underlying social representations of 'Others' in the social and political context. Racism, for him, is “a complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse in general, and by elite discourses in particular” (p. 362). The dominant group exercises power by deploying various kinds of discursive structures, strategies, and moves, and the dominated people are manipulated to form or confirm the social representations that are consistent with a conservative, supremacist ideology (p. 363). The superior race often uses various discursive strategies to legitimize its racist beliefs and maintain domination over the inferior one.

United Nations identifies human rights as “universal”, “inalienable” and “indivisible”; and recognizes “all individuals equal as human beings and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each human person” (Forsythe, p. 250). However, based on social perceptions of biological differences or some shared inherited traits, the superior group 'everyday' practices racism by directing prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism against other people of a different race or ethnicity. So, it is important to critically analyze how people of superior race or ethnicity exert power over the inferior race or ethnicity. In this paper, based on illustrations from William Faulkner's short story “Dry September,” I will argue that the elite discourse uses discursive mechanisms particularly rationalization, stereotypization, and emotionalization to legitimate its racist beliefs and actions, and it plays a significant role in the “enactment and reproduction” (p. 362) of racial/social inequalities.

### **Literature Review**

A lot has been written regarding racism and its strands using various linguistic and critical theories. Drawing from the literature, I have focused on some key ideas and discourses relevant to the issues of racism and social representations to create the context for the study.

Racism is a belief system based on social perceptions of differences in terms of skin color, culture, or appearance. The superior group considers itself better and unfairly treats another group solely on these differences. Racism may also mean prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people of a different race or ethnicity. Grosffogue (2016) offers an interpretation of racism as a system that establishes a hierarchical order, with one group being perceived as superior and another as inferior, based on human distinctions. He further suggests that this hierarchy can be created and delineated through various methods. From a social functional point of view, 'race' is a social construction. Similarly, Fairclough (1995) contends that the notions of one race or ethnicity being superior to another are not devoid of values or innocent; instead, they are driven by ideology and motivated by specific beliefs. As he explicates, 'race' has been used as a legitimizing ideological tool to oppress and exploit specific social groups and to deny them access to resources and rights.

As a type of racism, the notion of everyday racism significantly differs from a

common understanding of racism. Essed (1991) defines everyday racism with three intrinsic values:

Everyday racism is a process in which (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations. (p. 52)

The concept of everyday racism, for her, counters the view that racism is an individual problem. According to her, the crucial criterion distinguishing racism from everyday racism is that the latter involves only systematic, recurrent, familiar practices. It consists of practices that can be generalized.

In addition, everyday racism reinforces negative stereotypes or prejudices about people based on their race, color, or ethnicity. With this negative judgment, the accuser wants to legitimize his or her privileges or aggressions. It involves the perpetuation of stereotypes, biases, and unequal treatment based on race or ethnicity in everyday situations. The concept of 'everyday racism', for Essed, is intended to integrate macro- and micro-sociological dimensions of racism (p. 16). She argues that everyday racism can be characterized as the integration of racism into everyday situations through practices (cognitive and behavioral) that activate underlying power relations.

For van Dijk (1997), critical discourse analyses deal with the relationship between discourse and power, and discourse plays a significant role in the (re)production of inequality (pp. 362-63). The continuity of the sociocultural tradition of negative images about the Other also partly explains the persistence of dominant patterns of representation in contemporary discourse, media, and film. He professes that the group in control wields authority through the utilization of diverse forms of verbal frameworks, tactics, and actions, while the subordinate individuals are influenced to adopt or validate societal portrayals that align with a traditionalist and supremacist belief system. In short, the social actors of the dominant race use language as a social practice to legitimize their exercise of power to create domination.

A significant volume of works has reflected partially or wholly on the topic. But none of them has seriously explored the issue of the research I intended. Thus, this review of the literature will justify for the research project to take place and also exhibit

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how this study deviates from what has already been done.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are various theoretical frameworks to understand, analyze and mitigate racial and other social inequalities under critical discourse analysis. However, I have used Teun A. van Dijk's "socio-cognitive model" and some discursive mechanisms as conceptual frameworks to support my research study.

Sociocognition as a dominant construct in CDA deals with cognitive analysis, which focuses on the role that cognitive processes play in social interactions. Van Dijk (1995) in his famous article "Critical Discourse Analysis" categorizes sociocognition as personal and social cognition. For him, language users as social actors have both personal and social cognition: personal memories, knowledge, and opinions, as well as those shared with members of the group or culture as a whole (p. 354). According to van Dijk, language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication belong to the microlevel of the social order, whereas power, dominance, and inequality between social groups belong to a macro level of analysis. Both types of cognition influence the interaction and discourse of individual members, whereas shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group. But, in my study, I have used the 'socio-cognitive' model to analyze mostly the macro-level social order.

Van Leeuwen (2007)'s conceptual framework of rationalization is employed in this study to accentuate how language constructs legitimization for everyday communication in society. Among others, rationalization is more relevant because it provides reasons for why social practices are performed and reactions are captured (p. 151). For him, rationalization is "a form of legitimation that gives purposes to social and institutionalized practices and actions" (p. 153). Under this view, two main sub-categories can be found, namely, instrumental and theoretical. I have employed Leewen's notion of rationalization to analyze the data from the story.

Similarly, emotionalization as a discursive strategy plays a significant role to display how discourse is used to legitimate the values and identities of certain people. Particular expressions and lofty slogans have the performative power to arouse irrational tendencies within the audience (Wodak & Reyes, p. 201). Highlighting the power of emotional words in both positive and negative aspects, Koschut (2018) clarifies "how

particular emotion categories can strengthen relational structures of domination and resistance but can also lead to the transformation of social hierarchies in world politics” (p. 521). Inappropriately displaying strong emotional appeals elicits the manipulation of the recipient's emotions and feelings, which are labeled as pathos (Brown et al., 2015). In racial practices, mostly negative emotions such as fear, outrage, envy, hatred, and impatience are used to create social inequalities and dominance.

Stereotypization is mostly used in racial and gender contexts. Stereotypes, in Eagly (1987)'s terms, are generalized beliefs about the features and competencies of men and women in a particular culture and society (p. 85). Stereotypes are one of the most destructive and wide-reaching elements of racial tension. These racial stereotypes are essential to “combat their (mis)use in the representation of black people, indigenous peoples, and people of color today” (Lee et al., p. 103). Most of the negative stereotypes are either created in or reinforced through, news-media and everyday communication portrayals of minorities. African Americans, for example, are more likely to appear as perpetrators in drug and violent crime stories on network news (Entman & Rojecki, 2007). Thus, the superior group practices stereotypization to institutionalize racial inequalities and to exert power and dominance over the inferior one.

### **Research Methodology**

Based on the philosophical paradigm of interpretivism, this qualitative study has employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the research method. I have selected William Faulkner's 'Dry September’ as a sample and made a close reading of the text to provide concrete illustrations at the textual micro-level. After a close reading of the story, the key findings have been elaborated on and placed in their wider context. I have carried out the textual analysis to elaborate and exemplify conceptions of CDA principally based on the notions of different critical discourse analysis practitioners.

CDA is an integrated or interdisciplinary approach to the study of language and society. Eero Vaara (2015) presents CDA as “a methodology that can be applied in various ways” (p. 58). In a similar vein, Fairclough (1995) in “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method in Social Scientific Research” describes CDA as a method that can be used in social scientific research. CDA, in his view, is “as much theory as method – or, rather, a theoretical perspective on language and more generally semiosis” (p. 122).

Further, Reisigl and Wodak (2000) argue, “CDA often pursues anti-racist strategies and serves to criticize, delegitimize, and argue against racist opinions and practices” (p. 2). In similar vein, van Dijk (1997) considers CDA as “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p. 352). CDA focuses on “social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination.” (p. 96). These scholars define CDA as a non-repressive approach, which is used to mitigate inequalities and injustices. In other words, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society.

In brief, using CDA as a research tool this study examines the racial discourse as one of the communicative events that often consists of opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in everyday language. The focus of the searchlight is however on the discursive strategies employed to legitimize the enactment of power and dominance upon the culturally and racially marginalized group of people.

## **Textual Analysis and Discussion**

### ***Dry September and Sociocognition***

“Dry September,” a short story by William Faulkner, centers primarily on the issue of racial injustice. The story reflects how white people exercise power using different discursive strategies to maintain their supremacy and control over the racially discriminated black community. It describes a lynch mob forming without concrete evidence on a hot September evening to avenge an alleged and unspecified insult or attack upon a white woman by a black man. A rape charge has been leveled by a white spinster, Miss Minnie Cooper, against a black watchman named Will Mayes in Jefferson. He was attacked, insulted, and frightened for his alleged crime against the white without sufficient evidence. Eventually, the mob, fueled by the rumor and led by former war hero, McLendon, assaults and lynches the black man cruelly to retain their authority in the society.

In “Dry September,” most of the major characters such as Miss Minnie Cooper,

McLendon, the barber, etc. belong to the white race. Even the writer and some characters like the barber who is sympathetic to the Afro-American culture own both “personal and social cognition”—they possess “personal memories, knowledge, opinions and shared experiences” (p. 354) of being the members of the dominant race. Excluding the hardliners, even the 'liberal' white characters like the barber somewhat use the argumentative discourse, knowingly or unknowingly, which mirrors their racial mindset.

Both types of cognition influence the interaction and discourse of individual members, whereas shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group (p. 354) in Faulkner's story. After an unexpected attack from the white, terrified Will Mayes says, “What you all going to do with me, Mr. John? I ain't done nothing. White folks, captains, I ain't done nothing: I swear 'for God.” (p. 337). McLendon instructs his fellow beings to push him on the car; his speech acts and they thrash and struck him. The “social representations” of the white and their shared values unite them to “struck him with random blows” (337) and take revenge for the alleged rape event against their community. Contrary to this, they control her discourse by consoling the white lady as a “poor girl” (p. 338).

Several shreds of evidence in the story reveal that the “Negro Mayes,” a night watchman who worked at Ice Plant, is innocent. However, the white “exert power by controlling discourse and people's minds” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 2). The “mind control” of the white characters in the story involves acquired beliefs of the race. The absence of public media, or authoritative sources shows that the white characters are not obliged to be “recipients of discourse.” The barber knows that Minnie Cooper was often the talk of the town among schoolmates, jealous of them, had a relationship with the cashier, who was a widower, and she often took whiskey (p. 334), and she could not have been raped by the good-hearted person like Will Mayes. However, his knowledge is unrecognized and devalued by the McLendona gang because he stood against his community. In the story, discourse plays a significant role in the enactment and reproduction of ethnic and “racial” inequality. The barber, although he is sympathetic towards Will Mayes, argues that “they all know there aren't any town where they got better black people than them in Jefferson” (334). By saying so he means that the black living in other parts of the country are bad. As van Dijk explicates, racism is a “complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse in general, and by elite discourses



in particular” (p. 362). In the story, the white discourse reproduces social inequality. Semantically and lexically, the black as Others is thus associated not simply with a difference, but rather with deviance and threat. Without sufficient evidence, Will Mayes, the black representative, is attacked and killed on September evening. As the socio-cognitive model exposes, there are intricate relationships between power, dominance, inequality, racism, and the imposition of an ideology through an underlying process of language production in the story.

### **Rationalizing Racism: Positive and Negative**

The superior race employs argumentation or rationalization, as a powerful discursive strategy, to maintain dominance and control over the inferior one. The first barber, who knew Will Mayes well, had a defendant's voice but the white people around him were not ready to accept that he was a good “nigger”. They believed in the white lady's words and were ready to confront anyone who comes on their way. Rather, the barber was blamed for not representing the white race and siding with the black community: “‘Believe, hell!’ a hulking youth in a sweat-stained silk shirt said. ‘Won't you take a white woman's word before a nigger's?’” (p. 330). This demonstrates how the white population employs argumentation or rationalization, as explained by van Leeuwen (2007), to uphold their dominance and exert control over the black community.

The barber, though he belongs to the white community doesn't believe Will Mayes did it as he knows him. The barber was sympathetic towards the black man. He positively rationalizes and provides supporting details to validate his position; however, the diehard white people were not ready to listen to his cross-racial argument. He provides several reasons why Will Mayes can't be a rapist. Mr. Hawkshaw (the barber) repeatedly urges the white boys who join the mob fueled by the rumor to find out the truth first. He argues why Mayes couldn't have wronged as Miss Cooper was a spinster and the “talk of the town many times,” accused a man on the kitchen roof, “watching her undress, about a year ago?” (p, 332), had a relationship with a widower cashier. Furthermore, Mayes was working in the Ice Plant when the boys were pursuing him. Although Hawkshaw and some other white people attempt to stop the boys from committing the crime against the black, they could not do so since the gang of white youngsters was irrational and was ready to do anything for the sake of their community.

It is rationalized that Southern America is the land of racial white people and the liberal Americans, who come from the Northern Province, have only rights there, not in their territory, to show sympathy and company to the black. The client to the liberal white says: “Do you claim that anything excuses a nigger attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you'll stand for it? You better go back North where you came from. The South don't want your kind here.” (p. 332). The right to discriminate is also promoted in Southern land to legitimize their exercise of power and maintain dominance and control over black people.

White characters in the story rationalize each act that supposedly sounds in support of their race. McLendon, for instance, is the most aggressive white man in the story; he negatively rationalizes his every action aimed at weakening black people. In a response to the third speaker, who seemed a bit defensive to the black, McLendon whirled on him saying: “Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?” (p. 334). The furious McLendon pounds upon the barber, who looked like men of different races: “You mean to tell me,' McLendon said, 'that you'd take a nigger's word before a white woman's?’” (332). He seems to rationalize that every white person should take the side of their fellow being. McLendon curses the others who didn't join him in the racial fight against the black. They chase Willy Mayes, then forcefully drag him into the car, and eventually kill him in the city square justifying that he was the enemy of their race and culture.

### **Abusing Language and Everyday Sentiments**

The white characters in the story use discourses that appeal to the emotions of their fellow community to create public consent and legitimize their violent attack on the black man. As Wodak and Reyes (2011) explicate, some leading white characters use “particular expressions to arouse irrational tendencies” (p. 201) within them so that they could perform their action against the black. As it is rumored the presumed rape of a white woman, one client in the barber shop attempts to arouse the emotions of their fellow beings for solidifying communal unity: “If there ain't any white men in this town, you can count on me, even if I ain't only a drummer and a stranger. Damn if I'm going to let a white woman – ” (p. 331). Similarly, McLenedon, the former war-fighter who is bothered by the absurd discussion among the people, emotionalizes them:

'Well, are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?' (p. 331). These expressions are evident to disclose how the white people employ rhetoric that resonates with the sentiments of their fellow community and garner public support to validate their invalid assault on black individuals.

The story contains “particular emotion categories” that “strengthen relational structures of domination and resistance” more than they lead to the transformation of social hierarchies” in their communal politics (p. 521). McLendon, for instance, uses verbal expressions such as “daman,” “niggerlover,” (p. 331) to undermine and insult the white barber, who is sympathetic towards the accused Will Mayes. Similarly, the writer uses the terms knowingly or unknowingly like “Negro” to undermine black people. The white like the barber and another client, who hate the possible attack on marginalized people, do not follow the aggressive white youths. The client says: “‘Then you are a hell of a white man’ ... ‘Do you accuse a white woman of lying?’” (p. 333). They have the conviction that the white cannot speak lies in the matter of sexual violence.

Many people, based on social perceptions of biological differences or some shared inherited traits, believe that the superior group 'everyday' practices racism against other people of a different race or ethnicity. They attempt to expose that such a dominant group, through the medium of language, uses various discursive strategies to legitimate its racist beliefs and actions “in the enactment and reproduction” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 362) of social inequalities. However, some people disbelieve entirely in the notion of racism and discursive strategies in the changed situation; they argue that, excluding some events, there rarely exists racism in today's democratic world. This counterargument somewhat exhibits the contradictory realities in our political and social lives. Despite the presence of inclusive principles in certain democracies around the world, racial practices persist fairly in our everyday activities.

### **Conclusion**

This paper presents a critical analysis of racial discourse and social representations of people in everyday situations. As an ideology, racism is embedded in a variety of levels throughout society, and it manifests discursively. Based on the review of some previous works on racism, van Dijk's “socio-cognitive model” and some discursive mechanisms by which racism can be initiated, practiced, maintained, or terminated are

discussed and used as the conceptual framework to analyze the elite discourse. This article employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a research tool because CDA sees discourse as a form of social practice where language use is both socially influential and influenced. It uncovers how power is intertwined with discourses that are used to legitimize institutionalized texts and talk. Thus, using CDA as a methodological tool, this study has examined how racist beliefs and values are internalized and social inequalities are enunciated through the use of discourse even in the present time based on the data from William Faulkner's short story, "Dry September". The results show that the racist people use discourse as a means of promoting their supremacy and group interests, and use it to legitimate their courses of action. It is also found that not only the white hardliners but also the 'liberal' ones, like the barber in the story, somewhat use such mechanisms, knowingly or unknowingly, which discloses their racial mindset. Both types of cognition, personal and social, influence the interaction and discourse of individual members, whereas shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group. The white community occasionally uses abusive language and everyday sentiments to create public consent and legitimize their violent attack upon the black community. Although some people deny the existence of everyday racism in today's democratic societies, the critical analysis of racial discourse reveals that people of superior race practice racism using the mechanisms like rationalization, stereotypization, and emotionalization. It occurs in daily interactions, institutions, and social structures as the subtle, often unconscious, forms of racial discrimination and prejudice. And, only non-repressive approaches like CDA can expose how the dominant group practices different discursive strategies in everyday communication to maintain power and dominance over the culturally, socially, and politically marginalized group of people.

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