

How do social institutions respond to racism and racial violence?

A study on more than 500 solidarity statements following the killing of George Floyd

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Stanford
SPARQ

On May 25th, 2020, George Floyd was killed by the police and his death reignited a national call for racial justice. Many organizations across the U.S. release public statements in response.

Walmart  Our Story Newsroom Global Responsibility Investors Suppliers Ask Walmart

Heartbreaking Events in Minneapolis and New York

Google The Keyword Latest stories Product updates Company news

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Standing with the Black community



Sundar Pichai

Sundar sent the following email to Google employees today.

Hi Googlers,

I realize that nothing about this week feels like business as usual—and it shouldn't. Our Black community is hurting, and many of us

 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY News Events Work at Princeton Links for Alumni Giving 



Statement from President Eisgruber on the killing of George Floyd and the importance of confronting racism

Amherst College Bicentennial Arts & Museums Athletics Library News & Events Visit Give

Racism, Truth, and Responsibility

OUR PRESIDENT **May 31, 2020**

Biography Dear Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni,

Why does it matter?

- Institutions shape perceived norms and can potentially mobilize collective action (Tankard & Paluck, 2017)
- *How* institutions talk about racism is crucial for collective action
 - Sharing personal experiences when discussing politics fosters more respect than sharing facts (Kubin et al., 2021)
 - Structural (vs individual) attributions increase awareness of outgroups and foster intergroup solidarity (Burson & Godfrey, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2009)
- These statements can have lingering effects on stakeholders' perceptions
 - Expressing remorse demonstrates empathic concern and increases trust and costly apologies appear more sincere (Brooks et al., 2013; Ohtsubo et al., 2009)
 - Engaging in corporate social responsibility can enhance attitudes and increase word-of-mouth (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2020)

Study 1

Research Questions

- What topics frequently come up when institutions respond to racial violence?
- How do companies and schools differ in their response?

Method

- Archival study
- Collected 544 official press releases and statements from leadership published between 5/25/20 and 6/25/20:
 - 227 from Fortune 150 companies
 - 317 from US News Top 150 universities/LACs

Analysis

- NLP topic modeling, LIWC, lexical analysis
- RA qualitative coding

Study 1 Analysis Approach

Computer-coded constructs

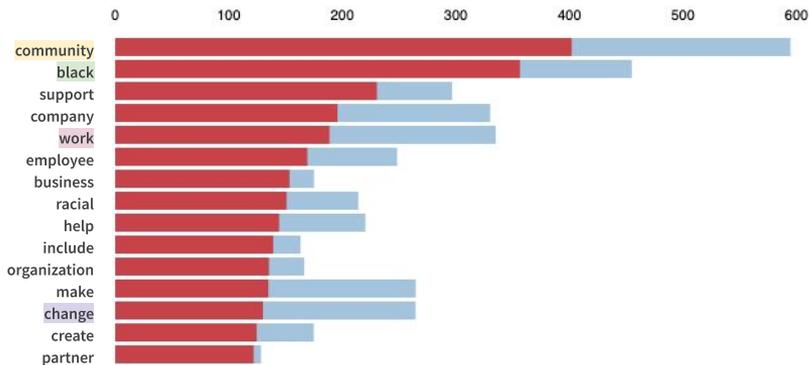
- **NLP Topic Modeling**
 - [Latent Dirichlet Allocation](#) identifies topics over word distributions and associated terms
- **Global linguistic features**
 - Word count
 - Readability (Flesch-Kincaid score)
 - Emotional tone (Cohn et al., 2004)

RA-coded constructs

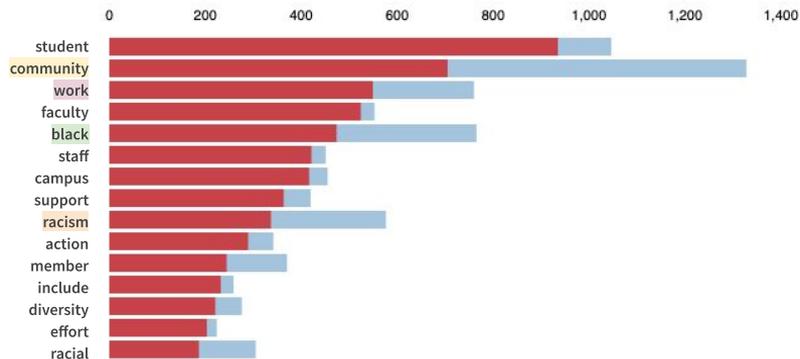
- **Key features**
 - Acknowledges past wrongdoing
 - Uses personal narrative
 - Conveys a systemic perspective of racism
- **Potential covariates**
 - Mentions race of the author
 - Mentions existing values and efforts
 - Specific action steps
 - Includes call to action
 - “Skimmability”

Topic modeling shows unclear topics and overlap in key terms

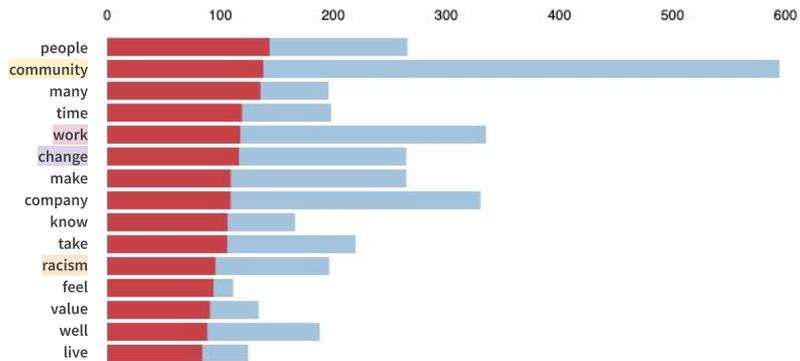
Company Statements Top 15 Terms for Topic 1



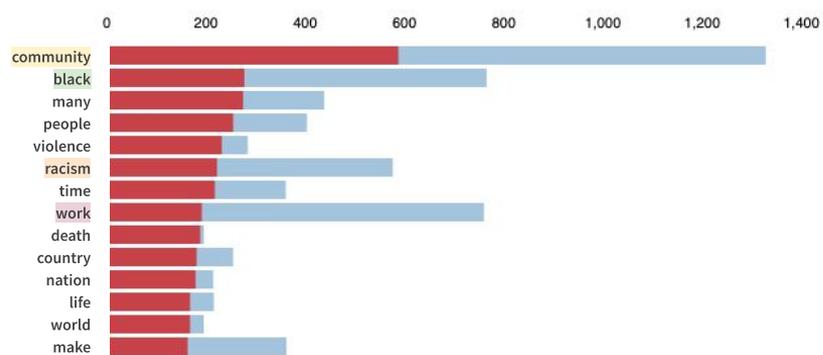
School Statements Top 15 Terms for Topic 1



Company Statements Top 15 Terms for Topic 2



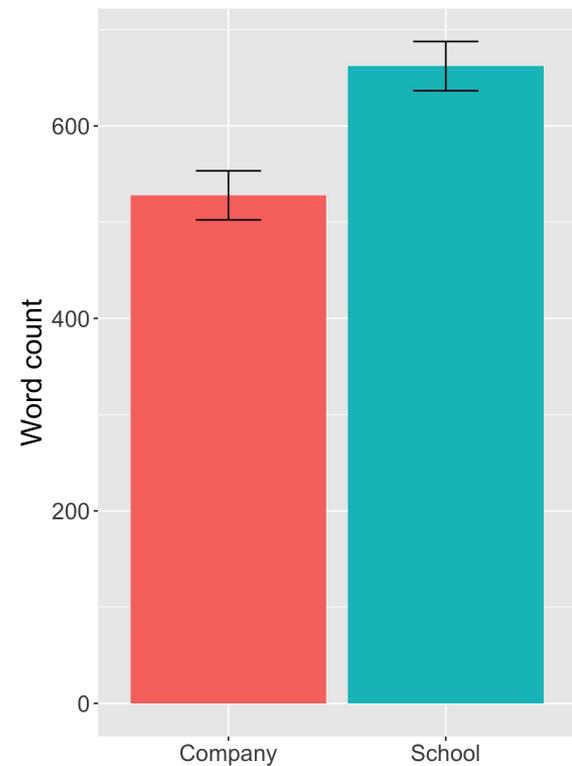
School Statements Top 15 Terms for Topic 2



Overall term frequency
Estimated term frequency within the selected topic

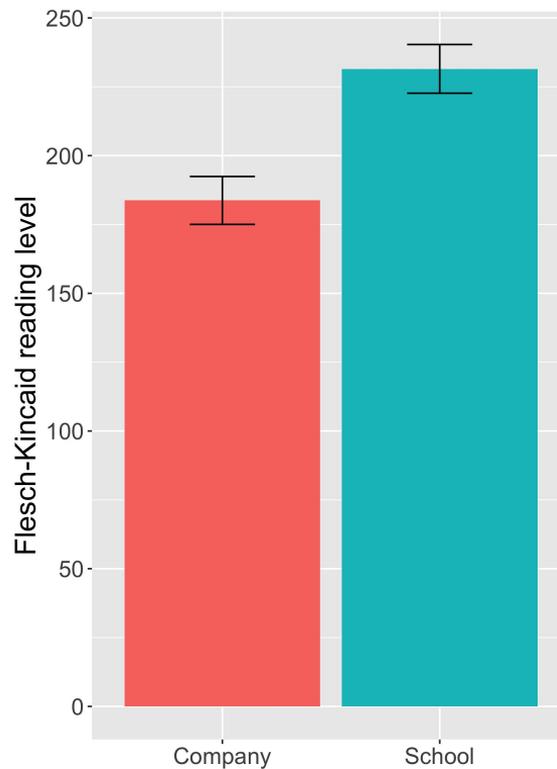
Overall term frequency
Estimated term frequency within the selected topic

Company statements were shorter, at an easier reading level, and more positive than university statements



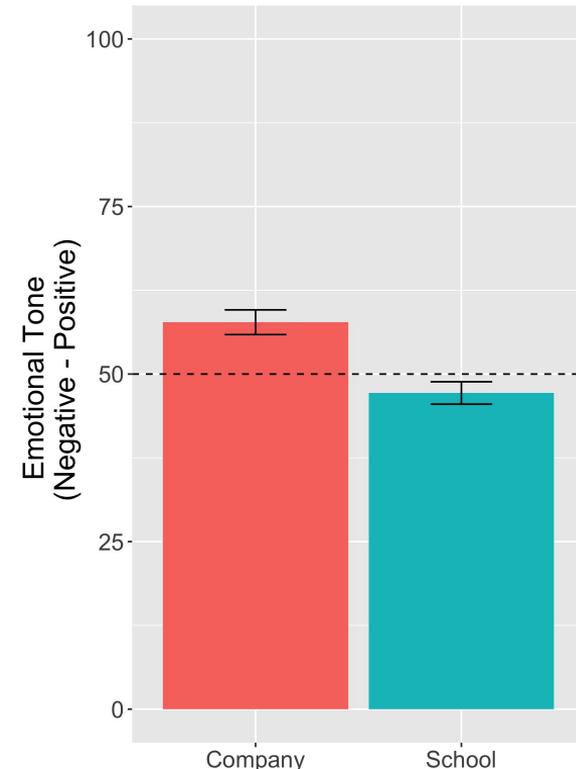
$p < 0.001, d = 0.319$

Source



$p < 0.001, d = 0.330$

Source



$p = 0.017, d = 0.366$

Source

Error bars represent standard errors

Few organizations shared personal experiences or acknowledged past wrongdoing, those that did were more often schools

Preliminary RA coding results (n = 32)

Examples of sharing personal experience

“I am the proud father of two precocious teenagers. Like many parents we have very purposely had “The Talk” – the unwelcome but necessary conversation about how to prepare for engagement with law enforcement.”

- University

“It is the pain of identifying, personally, with every case of an innocent person of color being threatened, harmed or killed in actions clearly shaped by racial animus.”

- Liberal arts college

“[company]’s commitment to social justice inspired me to join the company and more than 20 years later it’s one of the many reasons I’m still here.”

- Fortune 150 company

Examples of acknowledging past wrongdoing

“[School] is not immune from the toxic effects of racism in America, and we have seen recent reminders of that in bigoted posts on the anonymous Jodel platform”

- Liberal arts college

“Where our institutional structures promulgate racist or other negative stereotypes or create barriers to individual achievement, we must analyze, critique, modify or replace them.”

- Liberal arts college

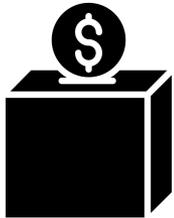
“As a [school] community with its own difficult history of racism and discrimination, particularly towards Black people, the path towards racial equity is one that has included progress and challenges”

- University

Companies are mostly making external commitments while schools are making internal commitments

Preliminary RA coding results (n = 32)

Top action steps from companies



Donating to racial justice nonprofits

For our society, I have directed our foundation to contribute \$10 million US dollars to racial justice charities. The charities are The National Urban League, NAACP, National Action Network, Leadership Conference for Civil Human Rights, Rainbow PUSH Coalition and National Coalition of Black Civic Participation.



Funding for small businesses or community members

[company] will help rebuild and reinvest in affordable housing and retail commercial businesses in impacted areas, and the company will launch a \$1 million Community Development Financial Institutions partnership program to award grants and commercial loans to organizations that qualify.



Diversifying employee recruitment

[company] is committed to doubling Black leadership over the next five years. Currently among the company's senior leadership, 41% are female, and 21% are racially or ethnically diverse; 6% are Black/African American.

Top action steps from schools



Holding town halls and discussions

Each year, [school] holds its Day of Dialogue to address bias, hate and inequity, and we -- along with President-elect White -- intend to do so again this year, in addition to hosting, facilitating and participating in other events and efforts inclusive of all staff, faculty and students.



Conducting climate assessments

Conducting an audit of the [school] Department of Public Safety (DPS), including a climate assessment of interactions with communities of color



Compiling and sharing resources

[School] has developed a list of readings, potential activities, and other resources which we encourage you to explore as you determine your response to this moment.

Takeaways & Next Steps

- Statements don't have clear, distinct topics - key terms are similar between companies vs schools and between topics *within* the same type of organization
 - RA qualitative coding will help go through these statements with a finer lens
- Company statements seem more accessible to lay audiences
 - They may be easier to process and more persuasive for readers, particularly those with less personal relevance (i.e., White and non-Black racial minorities)
- Schools are using personal narrative and acknowledging culpability more than companies
- Next phases will investigate what makes an *effective* solidarity statement
 - Examine how linguistic features impact people's perception of a) the statements, b) the organization, c) the greater movement, and d) their own social role using correlational and experimental methods
 - Identify key moderators: e.g., Audience race? For-profit vs. non-profit institution?