Racial Attitudes Among Incoming White Students: A Study of 10-Year Trends

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*Racial attitudes were found to be equally negative among incoming White students in 1978 and 1988. Implications **for** student affairs professionals are discussed.*

Various authors have documented the unfriendly social climate that Black students experience on predominantly White campuses (Allen, 1985; Fleming, 1984; Sedlacek, 1987). Although racism is often thought of as an overt phenomenon, racism on campus may also be characterized by apathy and unresponsiveness on the part of White students and faculty toward Blacks (Hughes, 1987; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1980; Regan & Sedlacek, 1989).

For example, Regan and Sedlacek (1989) found that, over the years 1978-1988, incoming White students became more likely to advocate active recruitment of Black students by the university. Even in 1988, however, they tended to be neutral in their level of commitment to this issue. In both 1978 and 1988, incoming Black students were significantly more likely than Whites were to agree that the university should actively recruit Blacks and that it should use its influence to improve social conditions.

Such neutrality, or ''benign neglect,'' of racial equality by White students corroborates the evidence that U.S. race relations have shifted from blatant discrimination to more subtle forms of racism (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1986; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981; Pettigrew, 1979). Over the last 20 years, Sedlacek and others (e.g., Carter & Sedlacek, 1987; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984; Miyares & Sedlacek, 1976; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970; White & Sedlacek, 1987) have documented negative attitudes toward Blacks among incoming White students.

In previous studies, negative attitudes toward Blacks have been detected in a variety of personal-social and educational-vocational situations (e.g., Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984). It has been suggested that White students react most negatively toward Blacks in the context of close and sustained personal contact, such as when a friend becomes engaged to a Black person (e.g., Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970, 1976). White students, however, have tended to be more positive toward Blacks than toward persons of unspecified race when a service-delivery role was described. This reaction has been interpreted in light of the persisting stereotype of Blacks as being well suited for serving Whites (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970, 1976).

Although one purpose of such research is to document White student attitudes toward Blacks at specific points, it is also useful to identify trends in White racial attitudes. In a study of

4-year trends, Miyares and Sedlacek (1976) found that incoming White students had become more negative toward Blacks in three situations: being stopped for speeding by a Black police officer, having a Black magazine salesperson come to one's door, and having Black students hold a campus demonstration. White students also seemed to be more positive toward Blacks in three situations: having a group of Black men loitering on a corner, having a Black person joining one's social group, and having to stand while on a bus full of Black people. These observed differences, however, were not tested for significance, and they were based on responses to the original form of a survey that has since been revised to include situations of more current relevance (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984). Also, the study has never been replicated using a longer time frame or a more recent period.

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of White incoming students toward Blacks over the lo-year period from 1978 to 1988. A specific goal was to determine whether White racial attitudes had become more positive or negative over time. Such documentation can aid student affairs professionals in their efforts to assess the campus racial climate and make appropriate interventions.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were incoming White students attending summer orientation in 1978 and 1988 at a large, eastern university (3,774 first-time freshmen enrolled in 1988) (Office of Institutional Studies, 1988). Participation was voluntary, and 98% of students attending the designated orientation sessions agreed to participate. The final 1978 sample (N =193) was 46% women; the final 1988 sample (N = 127) was 53% women. The mean age of participants in both years was 18.

Procedure

Data collection took place in a group setting. The data from the first time period were collected as part of a previous study (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984); data were again collected in 1988, specifically for the current study. In both years, students were randomly assigned

to Form A or Form B of the Revised Situational Attitude Scale (SAS; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984). All – White samples were obtained by eliminating the responses of non-White students (identified by a demographic item on the survey) from data analysis.

Instrument

The Revised SAS (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984) used in the current study is a revision of the original instrument (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1972). Respondents are presented with 10 personal and social situations that have some relevance to a racial response. Reactions to each situation are measured on 10 bipolar semantic differential scales (e.g., happy-sad) (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). Two separate forms of the Revised SAS were developed: Form A is the control form, which makes no reference to race; Form B is the experimental form, in that the racial referent *Black* is included in each situation (see Appendix A, p. 252).

Sedlacek and Brooks (1972) reported that the SAS is internally valid because students are randomly assigned to form and all other experimental conditions are held constant. Thus, any mean difference in student responses between forms can be attributed to the word *Black* in the Form B situations. When the Revised SAS was administered to 259 White incoming students, Minatoya and Sedlacek (1979, 1984) found significant differences on 59 of the 100 items. These researchers reported that the median communality for combined Forms A and B was .60, a conservative representation of the internal consistency reliability of the Revised SAS.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) at the .05 level with form, year, and sex as the main effects. The reliability of the Revised SAS (coefficient alpha) ranged from .74 to .96 across the situations, with a median reliability of .90.

The results of the F tests summarized in Table 1 indicate that there were significant differences for form, year, and sex, but not for any of the interactions. That the form by year interaction was not significant suggests that White attitudes toward Blacks remained stable over the 10 years studied.

TABLE 1

Significant Form, Sex, and Year Effects for Revised SAS Situations

Situation[a]	Effects Significant at $p < .05$ [b]
I. Apartment complex	F, S
II. Employee promotions	F
III. Busing	S, Y
IV. Electricians' training	F
V. Best friend engaged	F
VI. Stopped for speeding	F, S, Y
VII. Pool association	F, S
VIII. Medical school admissions	F
IX. Neighborhood residents	F, S
X. Financial aid	F, Y

Note. N = 320; SAS = Situational Attitude Scale.
[a]See Appendix A for complete situations. [b]Y = Year; F = Form; S = Sex.

Univariate tests demonstrated that there were significant form differences in all but one situation (III), suggesting that the presence of the racial referent *Black* caused students to respond differently to Form A than to Form B. For purposes of clarity, 1978 and 1988 Revised SAS data are reported in separate tables. For 1978 participants, means and standard deviations by sex and form are presented in Table 2. For 1988 participants, means and standard deviations by sex and form are presented in Table 3. From the 1978 and 1988 means of the nine situations significant for form, it is apparent that students were more negative toward the situations that referred to Black people (Form B) than toward the race-neutral situations (Form A), with one exception. In regard to Situation VI, "You are stopped for speeding by a (black) policeman," students were more positive when the situation included a Black referent than when it was race-neutral.

Other Analyses

The significant year and gender differences are described in a separate section because they pertain *only to the situations themselves,* regardless of whether respondents were assigned to Form A or Form B of the Revised SAS. In other words, the significant year and sex main effects do not directly address the issue of White racial attitudes as the form differences do.

The year main effect was significant, with attitudes toward three of the Revised SAS situa-

tions changing between 1978 and 1988. Although 1988 students felt more positive than the 1978 students toward the busing situation (III) and the financial aid situation (X), they felt more negative at the prospect of being pulled over for speeding by a police officer (VI).

The sex main effect was significant. with men and women responding differently to five of the SAS situations, regardless of form or year. In both 1978 and 1988, women were more positive than men were toward new neighbors in one's apartment complex (I), busing (III), a new neighbor joining the swimming pool association (VII), and new residents in one's neighborhood (IX). Men tended to respond more positively than did women to the situation in which one is stopped for speeding by a police officer (VI).

DISCUSSION

Several conclusions can be drawn about racial attitudes among incoming White students from the results of this study. Attitudes toward Blacks were not significantly different *between* the years 1978 and 1988, but *within* both years students displayed negative attitudes toward Blacks in the context of various educational-vocational and personal-social situations. This suggests that, while White students' racial attitudes may not have worsened over the last decade, they also have not improved.

The only situation that did not show a significant difference between forms across years was Situation III, which reads, "You learn that the children on your block are to be bused to a school in a new (black) neighborhood." Previous research (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984) has yielded similar results, which were attributed to the fact that busing has become symbolic of racial issues in this country. Students who completed the race-neutral Form A probably responded to the item's racial connotation, yielding group means that were similar to those of the Form B students who responded directly to a Black referent.

As in previous SAS studies (e.g., Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984), White students displayed negative attitudes toward Blacks in various educational-vocational situations. White students in both 1978 and 1988 felt negative about Blacks being given priority in job promotions (II), a vocational training program (IV), medical school admissions (VIII), and financial aid (X).

TABLE 2
1978 Means and Standard Deviations by Sex for Form A and Form B of the Revised SAS

Situation Number[e]	Form A						Form B						Year Total	
	Men[a]		Women[b]		Total		Men[c]		Women[d]		Total			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I	2.62	0.63	1.96	0.54	2.34	0.67	2.62	0.76	2.47	0.69	2.55	0.73	2.44	0.70
II	2.61	1.00	2.43	1.01	2.55	1.02	4.08	0.85	4.16	0.80	4.10	0.83	3.26	1.21
III	3.62	0.59	3.24	0.76	3.46	0.69	3.63	0.86	3.50	0.74	3.56	0.79	3.51	0.74
IV	2.30	0.70	2.28	0.59	2.29	0.65	2.88	0.98	2.86	0.73	2.88	0.86	2.55	0.81
V	2.08	0.70	1.90	0.61	2.01	0.67	2.83	1.12	2.70	0.96	2.78	1.05	2.36	0.94
VI	2.77	0.65	2.95	0.47	2.84	0.59	2.22	0.62	2.40	0.54	2.31	0.58	2.60	0.64
VII	2.15	0.73	1.78	0.70	2.01	0.75	2.36	0.84	2.16	0.80	2.29	0.86	2.14	0.81
VIII	2.72	0.74	2.53	0.77	2.63	0.75	3.35	0.63	3.32	0.60	3.33	0.62	2.95	0.78
XI	3.00	0.65	2.51	0.77	2.79	0.74	3.06	1.00	3.02	0.92	3.05	0.95	2.91	0.85
X	3.61	0.97	3.83	0.66	3.70	0.85	4.16	0.84	4.13	0.68	4.14	0.77	3.89	0.84

Note. Means range from 0 to 5, with 0 being the positive end of the pole and 5 being the negative end. SAS = Situational Attitude Scale.
[a] $n = 61$. [b] $n = 45$. [c] $n = 44$. [d] $n = 43$. [e] See Appendix A for complete situations.

TABLE 3

1988 Means and Standard Deviations by Sex for Form A and Form B of the Revised SAS

| Situation Number[e] | Form A | | | | | | Form B | | | | | | Year Total | |
| | Men[a] | | Women[b] | | Total | | Men[c] | | Women[d] | | Total | | | |
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I	2.41	0.56	2.15	0.53	2.27	0.56	2.34	0.66	2.26	0.64	2.30	0.65	2.28	0.60
II	2.61	0.86	2.50	0.95	2.55	0.90	4.08	0.64	3.96	0.82	4.02	0.73	3.23	1.11
III	3.03	0.57	3.01	0.61	3.02	0.59	3.17	0.74	3.27	0.64	3.22	0.69	3.11	0.64
IV	2.32	0.76	2.13	0.75	2.22	0.75	2.76	0.81	2.72	0.86	2.74	0.83	2.46	0.83
V	2.36	0.80	1.97	0.76	2.15	0.79	2.67	1.00	2.63	1.02	2.65	1.00	2.38	0.93
VI	2.75	0.53	3.20	0.43	2.99	0.53	2.49	0.67	2.45	0.57	2.47	0.61	2.75	0.62
VII	2.24	0.65	1.94	0.72	2.07	0.70	2.35	0.88	2.22	0.90	2.28	0.88	2.17	0.79
VIII	2.69	0.59	2.65	0.58	2.67	0.58	3.21	0.54	3.13	0.48	3.17	0.51	2.90	0.60
IX	2.73	0.61	2.75	0.67	2.74	0.64	3.06	0.78	2.95	0.78	3.00	0.77	2.86	0.71
X	3.45	0.79	3.52	0.82	3.49	0.80	3.85	0.81	3.91	0.80	3.88	0.80	3.67	0.82

Note. Means range from 0 to 5, with 0 being the positive end of the pole and 5 being the negative end. SAS = Situational Attitude Scale.
[a] n = 31. [b] n = 37. [c] n= 29. [d] n = 30. [e] See Appendix A for complete situations.

This finding is consistent with Sedlacek and Brooks's (1976) observation that Whites tend to endorse the concept of integration, but are not accepting of actions that will further integrate their own environment.

The personal-social realm represents another area in which White students' negative attitudes toward Blacks have persisted. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Carter & Sedlacek, 1987; Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1979, 1984; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970; White & Sedlacek, 1987), incoming White students expressed negative attitudes toward Blacks in a variety of personal-social situations that include living in one's apartment complex (I) or neighborhood (IX), joining one's pool association (VII), or becoming engaged to one's best friend (V).

Negative attitudes toward these situations seem to relate to the construct of social distance (Bogardus, 1933). White student resistance to close or intimate contact with Blacks has been a theme since the inception of the SAS method in the early 1970s. Sedlacek and Brooks (1970) summarized the response of a hypothetical modal participant as, "It's o.k. to have Blacks sell me magazines, or be policemen, but they better not move next door or get engaged to any of my friends" (p. 979). More recently, Carter and Sedlacek (1984) surveyed incoming Black students and White students and found that Whites were relatively less open to interracial contact.

The form difference for the situation involving a (Black) police officer (VI) was as large as that in some of the educational-vocational and personal-social situations, again demonstrating that student attitudes varied significantly as a function of whether or not the word Black was present. It is notable, however, that attitudes toward the Black police officer were more *positive* than were attitudes toward the race-neutral police officer. As noted earlier, this recurring SAS finding has been interpreted as a perception by Whites that Blacks belong in service roles, specifically in service to Whites (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1970, 1976).

Research Implications

Future research should investigate the behaviors that follow from negative White racial attitudes. How do situational factors and social norms influence the expression of negative racial attitudes? Some research findings indicate that racism has only become more subtle over the last few decades (Crosby et al., 1980). Thus, researchers may be particularly challenged in their efforts to study the behavioral components of racism.

The effects of negative White racial attitudes on Black students need to be better understood. Although phenomenological studies have provided meaningful observations and insights, empirical work can document specifically how Black students respond to White racism, and how it influences their personal, social, and academic adjustment in college.

Future research should also investigate how Blacks and Whites relate in various campus situations, because certain types of interaction may reduce racial prejudice (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Cook, 1962). In a review of the literature on the "contact" hypothesis in ethnic relations, Amir (1969) outlined the specific conditions under which intergroup contact might lead to positive attitude change. Empirical work is needed to determine the degree to which these favorable conditions exist on college campuses, and whether or not they have a real effect on racial attitudes and relations.

Finally, research following from Carter's (1990) work on the relationship between racism and White racial identity holds great promise. Carter (1990) noted, "Scholars (Helms, 1984) . . . are beginning to recognize that Whites are not generally required to assess their own experiences and attitudes about being White in western society" (p. 46). Thus, research on White racial identity development has the potential to help us understand why Whites might not be sufficiently motivated to work with Blacks toward achieving full racial integration and equality.

Implications for Student Affairs Practitioners

The negative racial attitudes that White students bring with them to college present a difficult challenge to student affairs professionals. From our research findings, it seems that Whites may be missing opportunities and perhaps lacking motivation to develop a greater appreciation of racial-cultural diversity up until the time they enter the university. This conclusion is also supported by Carter and Sedlacek's (1984) finding that incoming White students were more likely than Blacks were to have lived in racially

homogeneous suburban areas (90% — 100% own race), and that Whites from predominantly White neighborhoods also preferred to socialize with members of their own race. In the context of such findings, it is not surprising that incoming White students who have had little interracial contact would react negatively to the "racially integrated" Revised SAS situations.

In the short term, student affairs professionals must communicate to new students the expectation that they respect the rights of others, regardless of race. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) proposed a six-stage behavioral model for eliminating racism and developed a workshop that was shown to positively alter racial attitudes among White participants in an orientation program (Sedlacek, Troy, & Chapman, 1976). Although such interventions might be helpful in promoting racial tolerance among White students, the ultimate goal should be to help students move beyond tolerance toward a genuine valuing of racial and cultural diversity.

Recent evidence has highlighted the importance of White racial identity in determining how Whites will perceive and interact with Blacks (Carter, 1990; Claney & Parker, 1988). Within the framework of Helms's (1984) model of White racial identity development, Carter (1990) found a relationship between sex, White racial identity attitudes, and racism. Specifically, White male students at all levels of racial awareness held racist beliefs and attitudes, whereas White female students tended to be most racist when their level of racial awareness was so low that they ignored or denied existing race differences.

Carter's (1990) findings suggest that White students at certain stages of racial identity development might not be ready to benefit from the programs and interventions offered by student affairs professionals. In addition, there might be gender differences in racial attitudes that necessitate different approaches for men and women. Generally, efforts to address the problem of White racism among students need to take into account the complexity of this issue, so that resulting attitudinal changes will reflect real growth along this very crucial dimension of student development.

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APPENDIX A

Revised Situational Attitude Scale Situations

I. A new (black) family moves into the all-white apartment complex where you live.

II. Your personnel office announces that current (minority) employees will be given preference in all promotions.

III. You learn that the children on your block are to be bused to a school in a new (black) neighborhood.

IV. The electrician's union has decided to expand its training program by adding 15% more new (black) apprentices.

V. Your best friend just became engaged to a (black) person.

VI. Your are stopped for speeding by a (black) policemen.

VII. A new (black) neighbor asks to join the swimming pool association.

VIII. Your state university's medical school has set aside 10% of its admission slots for (minority) students.

IX. You discover that your neighborhood now has over 25% (black) residents.

X. You go to the financial aid office to apply for a part-time job and are informed that the remainder of the positions have been reserved for new (minority) students.

Note to Appendix A. The racial referents in parentheses were included only in the Form B situations. Form A and Form B were otherwise identical. The terms *minority* and (lowercase) *black* and *white* were used to maintain consistency between the 1978 and 1988 surveys.