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Race Differences in the Perception of African-American Inclusion on the UNH Campus

Kelby Mackell

ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that people of racial minorities feel that white people don’t understand how they feel in a community setting. This present study investigates whether students of racial minorities feel that black acceptance on the UNH campus is different than the way that white students view the acceptance of black students. A sample of 326 undergraduate students was surveyed to see how they perceived the acceptance of black on the UNH campus. The data was expanded to include how students of all races feel, not just white students and black students, because the N of black students was so low. It is hypothesized that white students would feel that black students are accepted on the UNH campus. It was also hypothesized that minority students would feel that black students are less included than white students believe. The results show that there is a significant difference between the way that white students view black inclusion and the way that minority students view black inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

As we depart the year 2011, many would think that racial tension would be at an all-time low, considering how far we have come from the nation’s past. In the United States we have progressed from slavery and segregation but unfortunately there is still much racial tension that still exists today. Although many might not see racial disparities it is manifested within the mind of many minorities, where “for them, racism materializes at every juncture of society... shaping every decision and guiding every step” (Morrison:2010). This manifestation not only shapes how a person of a racial minority interacts with the people around them, it also shapes how that person thinks of themselves. Attending a university that is very low in racial diversity, with the majority of students identifying as white, this racial division is greatly elevated. The current study seeks to examine the way white students think black students feel when it comes to being included on a mainly white campus. This view will be compared with how minority students think that black students feel. This research will provide a better understanding of how the racial majority views the social inclusion of the racial minority and if there is a significant difference. Further research can be done to educate both the minority and the majority of the way both parties view each other. For this paper, social inclusion is defined as “a psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community” (Hausmann 2008:660). Throughout the rest of this paper, “inclusion” is going to encompass “social inclusion”. Furthermore, this research will also allow integration on a white college campus to occur effortlessly because every part of the racial spectrum will have a better
understanding of each other. Hopefully, after presenting this research, there will be a deeper understanding of racial differences on the UNH campus and the racial gap can recede slightly.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Finding out how students in the majority race view the feelings of the minority races is an important part in the integration of a university campus. According to a study done by Leslie R.M. Hausmann, et al., “sense of belonging had a direct, positive effect on a students’ institutional commitment” (Hausmann 2008:665). Commitment will be defined as a sense of devotion or dedication. Having a commitment to the university that you attend makes for a better atmosphere for everyone to live in. If someone has a high sense of commitment to their place of education they are more likely to try academically and they are less likely to cause a disturbance in the college community. Throughout Hausmann’s study she talks about how important it is to feel “integrated into the social and academic systems of the university” (650) which is one of the main reasons this current study was conducted. This relates back to understanding the way white students view minority students. Students are unable help each other integrate if they do not understand how the other is feeling. Integration also cannot occur if student do not understand how important social integration really is.

The thought of racism is another cause of lack of integration and feelings of inclusion on a predominantly white campus. Many stereotypes have been placed on minority students and attending a college that is predominantly white may bring these racial labels to light. Even though these stereotypes may be untrue, students of minority races have to work hard to show that they don’t fit into the stigmas that have been given to them. A study done by Shaun Harper discusses how a student of color can show the college community that they can be academically successful, can work hard and that they are able to achieve success. In this way, many areas of the educational realm can begin to break down racial barriers that still exist today (Harper 2009:709). Changing stereotypes is only possible if students of color feel included on a white campus, allowing them to feel comfortable to branch out and interact more with the community around them.

Gina Zanolini Morrison conducted a study that focused specifically on students of color at predominantly white universities, a parallel to the study presented in this paper. This research revealed that lack of awareness of students of each race created “two separate worlds”. This means that neither race was integrated with each other, causing a lack of awareness in the way that each felt. It is commonly known that first year college students have a mixture of emotions, ranging from excitement to nervousness. However, students of color go into college with another emotion: frustration. “They felt “odd”, “out of place” and “left out”. They found it “hard to fit in” a campus culture in which so many of the white students, staff and faculty had so little experience with diversity” (Morrison 2010:997). This frustration is also escalated because the student of color “felt expected to play in educating the whites about diversity” (Morrison 2010:998). This study shows what is occurring on the UNH campus. There are programs, such as CONNECT and the Black Student Union, that white students feel
uncomfortable joining because of the lack of integration within the races. The fact that there is a lack of awareness between races and that it is repeatedly being reported, is a major cause of concern.

A study done by Matthew Hughey examines participation of minority students in predominantly white sororities and fraternities sheds some light into how integration does occur on predominantly white campuses. This study found that even though students of color are joining these predominantly white organizations, integration is still not occurring the way it should (Hughey:2010). Minority students are immersing themselves into the white community rather than allowing the white students a chance to be a part of the minority community. One finding in the study showed that a fraternity brother’s “race qualified him for the domain of service work”. It also stated that his “black identity gave [him] “insight” into poverty and qualified [him] for being a “better fit” for community service aspects of the [fraternity]” (Hughey 2010:661-662). This shows that even though there could be integration into the outside community through this racial outlet, there are still jobs that are racial divided and keep the line of division strong. The white students could take the time to interact with different races but because many believe that blacks come from impoverished communities they feel that community service in these communities are better suited for their black fraternity members. This is a regular occurrence on many predominantly white campuses because there are so many more predominantly white organizations. Many of these students of color who are joining these organizations have grown up in mostly white communities so it isn’t a big step for them to join these groups (Hughey 2010: 657). This is not an answer to closing the racial divide and is only perpetuating it. Students need to become aware of the social barriers that still exist and learn how to break them down.

The above studies, though helpful in gathering background information, do not offer much insight into how to change the problem of racial misinformation. There are many articles, dating back decades, that have examined the issue and unfortunately it is still a dilemma today. For these researchers, further information should have been gathered that examined ways to integrate students, lawfully and considerately. Another issue is that these articles lack tables or diagrams and it is hard to grasp their data. The research presented in this paper will include a series of solutions as well as present data in clear-cut tables.

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis for this study is that white students feel that African-American students are more included on the UNH campus than minority students feel that they are included in the UNH campus. The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between race and the feeling of inclusion of African-American students.

RESEARCH METHODS

Sampling
A survey was used to collect the data that was used to answer the research question. Prior permission was granted that allowed a group of students to conduct a survey in four introductory level sociology classrooms. Each participant was given the same survey with a wide variety of questions on it. The sample size was 326 students and a convenience sample was used.

Once the survey was constructed, it was submitted to the University of New Hampshire’s Internal Review Board. Upon approval from the IRB the survey was administered to the classes by groups of the students whose questions were on them. The participants were fully aware that the survey was completely anonymous. They were also informed that if they did not want to answer a question or if they did not understand it, they were welcome to skip over that question. Once the surveys were taken and returned the data was analyzed. The group of students who made the survey are the ones who did the analyzing. The data was entered into Excel spreadsheets and then administered to the researching students once it was all compiled.

Using a survey and surveying the classes that were selected was the easiest, although not necessarily the most accurate, way of attaining student’s view of the inclusion of minorities. This was not the most accurate way because there was a small number of minority students who were surveyed (N= 35). There may have also been some inaccuracies in the way that people answered because the question that was asked of them may have been hard to answer, may have been uncomfortable to answer or some of the students may not have had many interactions with minority students since the number on campus is so low.

The main disadvantage of using a survey to collect data is that the question may have been unclear. There was no definition of “inclusion” provided so the question was left up to the interpretation of the participant. For many, inclusion many have a universal meaning but some people may stray from the dictionary definition or not know what inclusion means altogether. The question also only asked for “inclusion” and not “social inclusion” so some of the participants may have answered the question differently if “social inclusion” was used instead.

Risks and benefits to subjects

There were very minimal risks for the participants of this study. If some of the variables were analyzed together then it was possible to discover a student’s identity. However, UNH’s Internal Review Board restricted the study so that certain variables could not be analyzed together, making this a very safe study. The benefits of this study for the participants are that they were able to assist many students in their research. This gives participants a chance to benefit from conclusions drawn about their society and have a better understanding of the views around them.
Variables

The independent variable measured in this research is race and the dependent variable is view of minority inclusion. The reason a survey was used to measure these variables is because it was the easiest way to see how UNH students felt about minority inclusion. The question that was asked to measure the dependent variable was “African Americans are very included on the UNH campus” and was measured using a Likert scale with the categories of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The independent variable was measured by asking what the student’s race was with the categories of American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino/a, white or Caucasian, multi-racial or other.

RESULTS

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a White or Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White or Caucasian</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>89.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Views of Inclusion Based on White and Minority Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Do you feel that African Americans are included on the UNH Campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson's chi²(30) = 51.6570 Pr = .008

Table 1 shows how many people from each racial category participated in the survey. True to the UNH campus, a very strong majority of the students identified as white. According to the 2010 UNH Profile, 92% of the students who are enrolled at UNH identify as white. This sample is very representative of the UNH campus considering 89% of my sample is white. Table 2 is a breakdown of how the question “African-Americans are very included on the UNH campus”. This table has two categories, non-white and white, where the non-white category is a combination of students who selected American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black or African-American, Hispanic or Latino/a, white or Caucasian, multi-racial or other on the survey. This table shows that 48% of the students who identified as white felt that African-American student were included on the UNH campus whereas only 25% of the students who selected a race other than white felt that African-American student were included. The majority of the students who did not identify as white disagreed or strongly disagreed with the surveyed statement. Out of the 35 students that are non-white, 13 felt that African-American students were not included on the UNH campus, or 37%. This differs greatly from the white population that was surveyed; only 16% of them felt that African-American students were not included on the campus.

According to the research, the null hypothesis was rejected meaning that based on an alpha level of .05 the research presented is statistically significant. There is a distinct difference between the way non-white students and white students view the inclusion of African-Americans.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the null hypothesis was rejected indicating statistical significance. White students and non-white students have a very different view on the inclusion of African-American students. A Chi² significance test was used to measure the probability of the result occurring from chance using a .05 alpha level. The results show that there is a .008 alpha when comparing non-white students and white students view of African-American inclusion.

This is a very important study to note when looking at the UNH campus. UNH is a community that is focused on increasing the amount of diversity on their campus. Before expanding diversity there needs to first be focus on making every students view of each race’s inclusion in the UNH community the same. It is virtually meaningless to encourage diversity on a campus where minority students feel that inclusion doesn’t occur.

One weakness of this study is that there is no examination of what grade level the participants belonged to. This is very important when examining this question because this would show how long they had been a part of the UNH community and whether they had the time to interact with the community extensively. If the pool of participants were freshmen and sophomore students I think there is hope for the UNH community to start forming a stronger feeling of inclusion among minority races. There is a greater possibility of creating inclusion among first and second year students because they have more time on the campus to be educated about the problem and do something about it.

Another weakness of this survey is that the question that was used to measure the dependent variable was open to a significant amount of interpretation. The students who were taking this survey could have thought that inclusion meant something other than what the researcher intended, skewing the data altogether. As stated before, inclusion means social inclusion. Social inclusion encompasses inclusion within extracurricular groups, social groups and the community as a whole.

Overall, this study was very representative, proportionately, of the UNH population. The majority of the students were white which is correct of the UNH campus. One of the reasons why the students who were non-white felt that there was so little inclusion is because they see a majority of the same race on campus. Not seeing students of different races may make is seem that students aren’t included on campus but in reality, the students who are of minority race may actually feel included. In this case, inclusion wouldn’t be defined as social inclusion but rather presence in a group.

In future research interviews may be a better route to take. This would allow an in-depth view of how students of racial minority really feel and why they do feel this way. Interviews would be helpful in finding out why students who identify as white feel the way they do as well. The interview process will not only uncover how a student views inclusion but also
why they feel that way as well. Finding out exactly why students feel the way they do will allow the community to take steps towards racial inclusion.

REFERENCES


