The Relationship Between Multicultural Competence and White Racial Consciousness Among Student Affairs Practitioners

John A. Mueller  Raechele L. Pope

Researchers investigated the relationship between multicultural competence and racial consciousness of 534 White student affairs practitioners using the Multicultural Competence for Student Affairs—Preliminary 2 Scale (Pope & Mueller, 2000) and the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale—Preliminary Form (Choney & Behrens, 1996). Experience with multicultural issues and identification with a socially oppressed group were among background variables significantly related to multicultural competence. When background variables were statistically controlled for, White racial consciousness types predicted a significant amount of the variance in multicultural competence. Implications for professional preparation, practice, and future research are explored.

The significance of racial attitudes and identity in helping relationships and in educational settings has been extensively highlighted by a wide variety of scholars (cf., Carter, 1995; Carter & Helms, 1992; Cheatham, 1991; Ponterotto, 1988; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991; Sheets & Hollins, 1999). These researchers have maintained that the more aware White counselors and educators are of their own racial identity, the more effective they will be when working with clients or students who are culturally different from them. Similarly, according to Mueller (1999), "the more White student affairs practitioners are aware of their biases and cultural influences, the more effective they can be in creating more multicultural campuses through programs, policies, and services" (p. 7).

Student affairs practitioners have devoted increasing attention to multicultural issues (Pope, 1992), yet many student affairs graduate students and professionals have received little or no training in multicultural issues (Hoover, 1994; McEwen & Roper, 1994; Talbot, 1992, 1996). The growing complexity of multicultural dynamics at many institutions necessitate that student affairs professionals acquire the awareness, knowledge, and skills to work effectively with culturally diverse populations (Ebbers & Henry, 1990; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Sheets & Hollins, 1999; Talbot, 1996).

This complexity is further heightened by limited racial diversity among student affairs professionals. Although the percentage of students of color has increased nationally on college campuses, the composition of college administrators continues to be predominantly White (nearly 80%) (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998, 1999; Talbot, 1992; Woodard & Komives, 1990). Students of color, therefore, are more likely to seek assistance and gain support from White staff members. Many multicultural issues and concerns are also presumably addressed through programs and policies designed and implemented by White administrators. Although White student affairs professionals are able to be as culturally sensitive as administrators of color, they may have had less contact and exposure to people of color (Fulton, 1994) and fewer role models that stressed the critical importance of viewing themselves as racial beings (Carter, 1995).

This ability to be culturally sensitive and responsive, coupled with the multicultural...
awareness and knowledge essential to creating multicultural campuses, can be conceptualized as multicultural competence (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). The term “multicultural competence” is relatively new and unexplored in the student affairs literature (Pope & Mueller, 2000). Likewise, literature examining White racial identity of student affairs professionals is also quite limited.

Building on the efforts of Barr (1993), Creamer et al. (1992), Delworth and Hanson (1989), and Moore (1985) to detail the various competencies necessary for effective student affairs practice, Pope and Reynolds (1997) have suggested that multicultural competence needs to be integrated into what they have identified as the core competencies for student affairs professionals: (a) administrative, leadership, and management skills; (b) theory and translation skills; (c) helping and interpersonal skills; (d) ethical and legal knowledge and decision-making skills; (e) training and teaching skills; (f) assessment and evaluation skills; and (g) multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. They have proposed that all student affairs practitioners need basic awareness, knowledge, and skills in each of these seven areas; however, based on individual interests and work experiences, some professionals will develop more expertise in particular areas. Similarly, although not all student affairs practitioners will become multicultural experts, they need to acquire basic multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to work effectively with individuals who are culturally different from them. Pope and Reynolds also have asserted that multicultural competence constitutes a unique category of the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for effective student affairs work. These competencies may assist student affairs practitioners in creating multiculturally sensitive and affirming campuses. However, according to Pope and Reynolds, multicultural competencies should be integrated into the other core competencies.

Unlike in student affairs, multicultural competence has been a flourishing area within the counseling psychology literature. Researchers have been particularly interested in understanding the factors that contribute to and influence multicultural competence. One factor that has received significant attention is self-awareness and racial identity (Altekruse, 1993; Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994; Ponterotto, 1988; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1992, 1994). Racial identity or racial consciousness has been a core and defining aspect of the multicultural counseling literature for the past 30 years, during which a variety of racial identity models have been proposed and several have been widely researched (e.g., Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984). These models describe how individuals perceive themselves as racial beings, which in turn influences their views of others and the world around them. The majority of racial identity research has focused on Black and White racial identity although additional models have explored the racial identity concerns of Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans, and Native Americans (Reynolds, in press).

Several models of White racial identity or consciousness have been proposed (cf., Carney & Kahn, 1984; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; 1990; Ponterotto, 1988; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994; Terry, 1977) although few have been empirically validated or researched. The Helms (1990) model of White racial identity development and the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (Helms & Carter, 1990), however, have been studied extensively. The Helms model identifies six progressively more complex and integrated statuses of White racial identity such that a person may possess multiple worldviews with associated feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, with one worldview dominating. A fundamental assumption of Helms racial identity development model is that movement from less mature to more mature statuses is associated with more positive interactions and a greater degree of personal adjustment (Carter, 1995).

Rowe et al. (1994) developed another conceptualization of White racial consciousness. They proposed a typology of White racial consciousness that describes the attitudes held by Whites about the significance of being White. Their model identifies seven types, which specify different views about what it means to
Multicultural Competence and Racial Consciousness

be White and related attitudes towards people of color. These types are: Avoidant (no exploration of racial issues); Dissonant (confusion about racial attitudes); Dependent (superficial and unreflective position on racial issues highly influenced by others); Dominative (a strong ethnocentric perspective which places Whites in a dominant and superior position); Conflictive (competing perspectives of equality among races vs. maintenance of White privilege); Reactive (compelling need to respond to racism, primarily at an intellectual level); and Integrative (realistic and complex views on race issues and how to address them). Choney and Behrens (1996) developed the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale—Preliminary Form (ORAS-P) to empirically test this model and provide researchers and practitioners an additional means to assess racial attitudes of White people.

Sabnani et al. (1991) proposed that a direct and positive correlation exists between White racial attitudes and multicultural competence. Three separate studies, using students in counseling and clinical psychology programs, were conducted to test this assertion (Fulton, 1994; Ottavi, 1996; Ottavi et al., 1994). All three of the studies offer support for Sabnani’s assertion, yet the findings remain generalizable only to students in counseling and clinical psychology programs. No such studies have been conducted on student affairs professionals or graduate students. In fact, Pope and Reynolds (1997) have argued that what research on multicultural issues in higher education exists has been largely focused on undergraduate students. Although Pope and Reynolds believe such work must continue, they also assert that this type of research must be focused on higher education—particularly student affairs—faculty and administrators and those in graduate preparation programs.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how White racial consciousness may be related to multicultural competence among White student affairs professionals. In addition to examining the relationship between racial consciousness and multicultural competence, other potentially significant background or attitudinal variables (e.g., demographics, multicultural experience, multicultural interest, and social desirability) were examined.

METHOD
Participants
A total of 720 instruments were mailed to individuals at various campuses across the nation, with 580 (81%) returned. Forty-six of the instruments were unusable because of incomplete information or because participants indicated a race other than White on a personal data form that accompanied the instruments. Hence 534 (74%) White student affairs practitioners were included in this investigation. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 66 years with a mean age of 34.2 years. The largest percentage of the sample (28.7%) fell within the age range of 25 to 29 years old. The sample consisted of 338 (64%) women and 196 (36%) men. More than half of the sample (59%) had at least a master’s degree in student affairs, higher education administration or a related field.

The participants in the sample represented a broad range of position levels including: graduate students (25%), entry level (33%), middle management (38%), and senior level managers (4%). With regard to functional areas, the largest percentage of the sample (32%) indicated that their current position is in the residence life area. Other functional areas representing considerable percentages of the sample included: student union and activities (8.8%), student affairs central administration (8.2%); counseling (8.2%); career planning and placement (6.6%); and academic advising (4.1%). The remaining 32% of the sample occupied positions in 20 other functional areas in student affairs.

Of the participants, 87% indicated that they had attended multicultural workshops and although 40% indicated that they discussed multicultural issues with their supervisor on a regular basis, two thirds of the sample indicated that they did not. Almost half of the participants (47.8%) self-identified as a member of one or more socially marginalized groups such as female, non-Christian, lesbian, gay, or bisexual,
TABLE 1.
Alpha Coefficients, Means, and Standard Deviations for all Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Desirability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe-Crowne</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White Racial Consciousness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Avoidant</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dependent</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dissonant</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dominative</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Conflictive</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Reactive</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Integrative</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multicultural Competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCSA-P2</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ORAS-P = Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form; MCSA-P2 = Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs-Preliminary 2 Scale.

MCSA-P2. Multicultural competence was assessed with the MCSA-P2 (Pope & Mueller, 2000), which is based on the characteristics of a multiculturally competent student affairs practitioner as Pope and Reynolds (1997) described. It is a 34-item instrument designed to measure multicultural competence in student affairs practice. Participants use a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all accurate) to 7 (very accurate) to describe themselves. MCSA-P2 shows a satisfactory level of internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .91 (Pope & Mueller). The coefficient alpha for the current sample was .93.

ORAS-P. White racial consciousness was measured by administering the ORAS-P (Choney & Behrens, 1996), a 50-item self-report instrument that measures racial attitudes and behaviors associated with the seven types of White racial consciousness that Rowe et al. (1994) proposed. Participants use a 5-point Likert-type scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to describe themselves. Choney and Behrens reported Cronbach alphas for each of the seven subscales ranging from .68 to .82. Studies by Pope-Davis et al. (as cited in Mitchell, 1997) and Ottavi (1996) reported similar reliability coefficients. The subscale coefficient alphas for the current sample are reported in Table 1.

MC-SDS. Self-reports tend to be influenced by social desirability effects (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), particularly for sensitive issues like racial identity and competence (including multicultural competence) (Fulton, 1994). Therefore, to control for social desirability, the MC-SDS (Crowne & Marlowe; Reynolds, 1982) was administered. The original MC-SDS consists of 33 true-false items and has an internal consistency of .88 and a test-retest stability coefficient of .89. A shorter version of the instrument (Form C) consists of 13 of the original 33 items and has a correlation of .93 with the standard form. Reynolds recommended using the short version when measuring social desirability response tendencies. The coefficient alpha for the current sample was .75.

PDF. To examine and control for their potential influences on multicultural compe-
Multicultural Competence and Racial Consciousness

tence, background information about the participants' demographics and experiences with multicultural issues was obtained through a PDF. Demographic information included age, gender, race, and identification with any other socially marginalized groups (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual or religious minorities). Background items about participants' current professional practice such as the functional areas and professional level as well as types of diversity experiences in training and supervision were also included.

Procedure

One hundred fourteen ACPA members were sent letters seeking their interest in assisting with this study by serving as site coordinators. The potential site coordinators were identified from three sources: (a) individuals with whom the researchers had developed professional relationships through mutual participation in ACPA; (b) individuals who indicated interest in this research while attending the researchers' ACPA convention workshops on multicultural competence; and (c) faculty members in student affairs preparation programs from a variety of geographic locations. The site coordinator served as the primary link between the researchers and actual participants on a given campus. Of the 114 individuals originally contacted, 60 agreed to be site coordinators.

An envelope containing 12 sets of instruments was mailed to each site coordinator. Each site coordinator was asked to distribute the packets to 12 randomly selected White student affairs practitioners on their campus, with each packet containing the four instruments described above. In instances where a campus had 12 or fewer White practitioners, site coordinators distributed a packet to each practitioner. Participants received the instruments in common order of consent form, MCSA-P2, ORAS-P, MC-SDS, and PDF. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine background, experiences, and perspectives on multiculturalism in student affairs practice. Participants were asked to return the instruments anonymously in a sealed envelope to the site coordinator, who returned the completed packets to the researchers.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for each of the three measures are reported in Table 1. Pearson product-moment correlations of the variables of interest with the MCSA-P2 are presented in Table 2. To explore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification as SM-women</td>
<td>.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification as SM-LGB</td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Supervision</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Training</td>
<td>.50**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Implementation</td>
<td>.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Interest</td>
<td>.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlowe-Crowne</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Racial Consciousness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Avoidant</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dependent</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dissonant</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dominative</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Conflicitive</td>
<td>-.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Reactive</td>
<td>.58**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Integrative</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. MC = multicultural; SM = socially marginalized; ORAS-P = Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form; MCSA-P2 = Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs-Preliminary 2 Scale.

**p < .01.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Partial</th>
<th>Part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM-Women</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM-LGB</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .08$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{change} = .08$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{change} (4, 511) = 11.36^{**}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Supervision</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Training</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>4.58^{**}</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Implement</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>7.22^{**}</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .37$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{change} = .29$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{change} (3, 508) = 76.70^{**}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC-Interest</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.94*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .41$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{change} = .04$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{change} (1, 507) = 38.30^{**}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowne-Marlowe</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .41$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{change} = .00$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{change} (1, 506) = 2.49$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Racial Consciousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Avoidant</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-6.20^{**}</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dependent</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dissonant</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dominative</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-2.35^{**}</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Conflicting</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-4.94^{**}</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Reactive</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>4.76^{**}</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Integrative</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.99</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .61$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2_{change} = .20$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{change} (7, 499) = 36.19^{**}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. MC = multicultural; SM = socially marginalized; ORAS-P = Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form; MCSA-P2 = Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs-Preliminary 2 Scale.

* p < .05.  ** p < .001.

Journal of College Student Development
the relationship between White racial consciousness and multicultural competence, the researchers conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to examine the extent to which ORAS-P subscales accounted for variance in multicultural competence above and beyond that accounted for by social desirability, demographic, and experience variables. The ordering of steps in the hierarchical regression involved the following variable blocks: (a) demographic variables, (b) experience variables, (c) interest in working with diverse people, (d) social desirability, and (e) White racial consciousness (seven types of attitudinal sets). Given the preset order of variable block entry, \( R^2 \) (i.e., the amount of variance accounted for by each block) and \( R^2 \) change (i.e., the difference in the amount of variance accounted for from one variable block to the next) became the indices that held the most potential for understanding the relationship between White racial consciousness and multicultural competence (see Table 3).

The demographic variables accounted for significant variance (8%) in multicultural competence. The experience variables accounted for significant variance (29%) above and beyond that accounted for by the demographic variables. Interest in working with diverse students and colleagues accounted for significant variance (4%) in multicultural competence above and beyond the demographic and experience variables. The social desirability scale accounted for nonsignificant variance in multicultural competence. Thus, for this sample, social desirability did not appear to predict multicultural competence. Finally, the combination of White racial consciousness types accounted for significant additional variance (20%) above and beyond that accounted for by demographic variables, experience, interest, and social desirability.

A closer examination of the influence of White racial consciousness revealed that only certain racial consciousness types significantly contributed to variance in multicultural competence. The Avoidant \( (t = -6.20, p < .001) \), Dominative \( (t = -2.35, p < .05) \), and Conflictive \( (t = -4.94, p < .001) \) subscales, in the negative direction, significantly accounted for variance in multicultural competence. The Reactive subscale significantly predicted multicultural competence in the positive direction \( (t = 4.76, p < .001) \). The Dependent, Dissonant, and Integrative types failed to account for significant variance in multicultural competence.

**DISCUSSION**

Regression analysis revealed that the ORAS-P subscales explained the variance in multicultural competence above and beyond that accounted for by demographic, experience, and interest variables, and social desirability. Four of the seven White racial consciousness subscales were found to uniquely account for most of the significance.

The Avoidant subscale had a negative relationship with the MCSA-P2. Individuals who reported high multicultural competence tended to score lower on the Avoidant subscale. This is consistent with White racial consciousness theory because the Avoidant type is characterized as lacking awareness of their racial identity and resisting exploration of racial issues. Multicultural competency theory, on the other hand, views exploration and understanding of racial issues as necessary components of multicultural competence. The Dominative subscale also had a negative relationship with MCSA-P2. Higher scores on the MCSA-P2 are indicative of more positive views of and interactions with people from other racial groups. This stands in stark contrast to the Dominative type who tends to be ethnocentric and engages in passive or active forms of bias and discrimination.

A negative relationship also was found between the Conflictive subscale and the MCSA-P2. One might assume the relationship could be positive because the Conflictive type typically opposes overt forms of discrimination. However, the Conflictive type is also not in favor of changing the status quo. Multicultural competence, as reflected in the MCSA-P2, can be conceptualized as the degree to which respondents are willing to challenge organizational and social structures that maintain racism (and therefore White privilege). The Conflictive type, therefore, would be unlikely to report high
levels of multicultural competence.

The Reactive subscale was the only one of the four predictive subscales that correlated with the MCSA-P2 in the positive direction. This positive relationship is consistent with the White racial consciousness theory. The Reactive type is aware of racism and often seeks out opportunities to learn about racial minorities. Individuals who see themselves as knowledgeable about multicultural issues and supportive of groups who experience racism are likely to report higher levels of multicultural competence.

Based on the above findings, less avoidance of, less uncertainty about, and less ethnocentric attitudes toward the meaning of being White in this society appear to be related to increased multicultural competence. In addition, the findings also suggest that an increased conceptual understanding of racism (i.e., Reactive type) is also related to increased multicultural competence. In general, these findings lend support to the hypothesis that the attitudes and meanings White student affairs practitioners attach to being White play an important role in their multicultural competencies.

As previously noted, the background variables served as covariates in determining the relationship between White racial consciousness and multicultural competence. Although the relationships between the background variables themselves and multicultural competence were not the primary purpose of the study, they were revealing and are worthy of some discussion.

Of the demographic variables of interest in this study only social marginalization of the participants showed a significant relationship to multicultural competence. Participants who identified as members of socially marginalized groups did report significantly higher scores on the MCSA-P2. This finding may be due to the participants' ability to generalize their own experiences to the experiences of non-Whites, and translate this information into their work with people from other racial groups.

The experience variables of interest in this study were education and training around multicultural issues, experience with implementing multicultural programs and policies, and discussions with supervisors about multicultural issues. All three of these experience variables were shown to be significantly correlated with multicultural competence. One might reasonably surmise that when issues of multiculturalism are included in the curriculum of graduate degree programs and professional development activities (including supervision), the participants in these training experiences gain greater multicultural awareness, knowledge, and abilities. This reasoning is consistent with assertions previously made in the student affairs literature (cf., Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Talbot, 1992).

Interest in working with diverse students and staff accounted for some of the variance in multicultural competence above and beyond what was accounted for by the demographic and experience variables. This finding seems consistent with the construct of multicultural competence as proposed by Pope and Reynolds (1997) where openness and willingness to establish effective and meaningful relationships with students and staff from different racial backgrounds is an important component of the construct.

Finally, as noted earlier, social desirability was examined in this study primarily to control for the potential influence of the participants' need for approval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). The MCSA-P2 had a negligible and nonsignificant zero-order correlation with the MC-SDS, indicating that social desirability was not a concern for this sample—a finding consistent with an earlier study of the MCSA-P2 (Pope & Mueller, 2000).

Implications

This study explored the relationship between multicultural competence and White racial consciousness and contributes to our understanding of multicultural competence in student affairs practice. The findings from this study have a number of implications for student affairs preparation programs, professional development, and research, specifically the measurement of racial consciousness and multicultural competence.

Results from this study suggest a strong relationship between White racial consciousness and multicultural competence. Student affairs
preparation programs and professional development programs may benefit from including opportunities for White students and professionals to explore their racial attitudes. One method might be to encourage participants to become actively involved in the further development of their own racial and cultural self-awareness, and culturally sensitive interpersonal skills. The use of learning-as-practice texts such as those offered by Helms (1992) and Okun, Fried, and Okun (1999) provide opportunities for individual reflection and group discussion. Similarly, the “Characteristics of a Multiculturally Competent Student Affairs Practitioner” (Pope & Reynolds, 1997, p. 271) might prove effective in helping the participants move from solely self-awareness to a more skill-based approach to position responsibilities. Specifically, it may identify areas for further reflection, study, and praxis.

Too often, training and development on multiculturalism focused on knowledge about other racial groups or about the conceptual aspects of oppression without encouraging self-awareness. Pope (1995) argued that training on multicultural issues must also include cognitive restructuring that challenges the individual’s assumptions and beliefs about the world, other races, and oneself as a racial being. Group and individual consciousness-raising exercises on White awareness suggested by Helms (1992) or Katz (1978) can be useful in helping White individuals move beyond intellectualizing racial issues.

These findings also have implications for the training and development of current student affairs practitioners. Training and development experiences on racial consciousness and multiculturalism should not be limited to graduate preparation programs or to entry-level professionals. Student affairs professionals at all levels of responsibility and experience can benefit from multicultural training. Finally, this study demonstrates the importance of discussing racial and multicultural issues with one’s supervisor and how such exploration may be related to multicultural competence. These results suggest that the supervisor can play an important role in developing the professional competencies of the supervisee.

Limitations
This investigation has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. These limitations center primarily on the instruments used and on the generalizability of the findings. First, the two instruments used in this study, the MCSA-P2 and the ORAS-P are both new instruments and have limited validity and reliability data. Because both are self-report instruments, they are subject to inherent response biases in the participants (Thurndike & Hagen, 1969). To diminish the potential effects of response biases, a number of methods were employed in the study (assuring anonymity, limiting use of terms such as “multicultural competence” and “racial consciousness,” and statistically controlling for social desirability).

Another limitation of the study is in the sample, which may decrease the generalizability to all White student affairs practitioners. First, participation across geographic regions of the country and institutional types was not balanced. Very few institutions from the South and Western regions of the United States were represented in this sample. Also, two-year institutions (i.e., community colleges), which enroll more than a quarter of all college students (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999), were scarcely represented in this sample. This imbalance may be partially due to the means by which the site coordinators were identified, which did not involve random selection from the ACPA membership. Second, although site coordinators were asked and provided with specific instructions on how to randomly select White student affairs practitioners on their campuses, the researchers could not be assured that the participants were selected at random or that a random sample returned the instruments. Although the return rate on the instruments was fairly high (i.e., 74%), some individuals may not have participated because they preferred not to think about or were defensive about racial issues.
Recommendations for Future Research

The student affairs literature on the multicultural competence and racial identity of student affairs practitioners remains quite limited and hence a number of possible areas for future research exist. This study identified significant variables that are related to multicultural competence including experiences with training and implementation of multicultural programs and policies, personal identification with a socially marginalized group, and White racial consciousness. Future research could examine these variables more closely to help us better understand why and how these variables relate to one another.

Research on multicultural competence can only benefit from gathering data on the multicultural competence of practitioners through diverse research tools and methods. This might include qualitative studies as well as comparative assessments of the practitioner's competencies from supervisors, professors, or peers. Because multicultural competence also includes dimensions such as multicultural relationships (Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994) and interactions (Sabnani et al., 1991) with clients and students, another way to understand these skills may be to examine the outcomes of these relationships and interactions. Such studies could examine the correlation between practitioners' self-reported multicultural competencies and the climates they influence and are responsible for maintaining.

Another area for future research addresses a limitation of this study. The findings cannot be generalized to two-year institutions because these institutions were not well represented in the sample. Whereas community colleges enroll students of color at a higher rate than four-year institutions do (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999), an examination of the multicultural competencies of practitioners at these types of institutions—and a comparison with results at four-year institutions—may be beneficial.

Summary

The findings from this study are useful in both research and practice in student affairs. They lay an important foundation for further research on the fairly new concept of multicultural competence in student affairs practice. Also, the findings provide empirical support for a relationship between White racial consciousness and multicultural competence, thereby highlighting the need to include opportunities for all professionals and graduate students in student affairs to explore their racial identity. Theories and concepts such as White racial consciousness (Rowe et al., 1994) and multicultural competence in student affairs (Pope & Reynolds, 1997) can be useful in assisting practitioners realize personal and professional goals toward creating and maintaining multicultural campus environments.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to John A. Mueller, Student Affairs in Higher Education, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 206 Stouffer Hall, Indiana, PA 15705; jmueller@grove.iup.edu
REFERENCES


Helms, J. E. (1992). A race is a nice thing to have. Topeka, KS: Content Communications.


Moore, L. V. (1985). A model for evaluating job competencies of professional staff. Unpublished manuscript, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH.


