The Relationship of Demographic and Experience Variables to White Racial Consciousness Among Student Affairs Practitioners

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Using the Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form (Choney & Behrens, 1996), researchers examined the White racial consciousness (WRC) of 534 White student affairs practitioners. Of particular interest in this study were the demographic and experience variables that were related to WRC. Experience with multicultural issues, self-identification with a socially marginalized group, discussions with supervisors on race and multicultural issues, and interest in working with culturally diverse students and staff were all significantly related to several dimensions of WRC. Suggestions for future research and practice are offered.

The increasing number of students of color on college and university campuses across the nation has often been one of the most common rationales for the need for increasing multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills of the student affairs professionals. Yet, there has been...
little discussion about the racial identity or consciousness of higher education administrators who are predominantly White (close to 80\%) (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998, 1999; Talbot, 1992; Woodard & Komives, 1990). This reality suggests that most students of color are likely to rely on White staff members to address their academic, career, and personal needs and issues. Although there is no evidence suggesting that White student affairs professionals are less effective when assisting students of color, there are certain realities that may affect their ability to work in a multicultural context. For example, White student affairs practitioners may have less interaction with people of color (Fulton, 1994) and may have fewer opportunities to work with Whites who stress the significance of race and racial identity (Carter, 1995).

Many multicultural experts believe that awareness of self as a racial being (i.e., racial identity or racial consciousness) is paramount and necessary for one to be effective in multicultural helping interactions (Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990; Ponterotto, 1988; Sue & Sue, 1999). According to Carter (1995), “racial identity operates as a filter for one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and shapes his or her worldview” (p. 114) and “ultimately one's relationships with others who are racially similar and different.” Mueller (1999) highlighted the importance of White student affairs practitioners being conscious of their cultural assumptions and prejudices in order to create multicultural campuses. There is increasing evidence of a link between White racial identity and multicultural competence, here defined as “the ability to be culturally sensitive and responsive, coupled with the multicultural awareness and knowledge essential to creating multicultural campuses” (Mueller & Pope, 2001, p. 133). A growing number of studies have found a direct connection between level of multicultural competence in either counseling or student affairs work and racial identity or consciousness (Fulton, 1994; Mueller & Pope, 2001; Ottavi, 1996, Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994). Carter (1990) found that the more individuals were unaware of their White identity, the more likely they were to indicate increased levels of racist attitudes.

While racial identity research has been limited in the student affairs literature, it has flourished in the counseling psychology literature and is viewed by many multicultural experts as one of the most significant
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and promising advances to the field of multicultural counseling (Sue & Sue, 1999). Racial identity has been a cornerstone of multicultural counseling for several decades and, from its inception, has been based on the premise that "individual differences within racial groups were as compelling as those between racial groups" (Reynolds & Baluch, 2001, p. 153). Numerous racial identity models (cf., Cross, 1971, 1978; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992; Helms, 1984, 1990; Jackson, 1976; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994) have been proposed, although few have been empirically validated and researched. The bulk of racial identity models and research have focused on Black and White racial identity. However, there have also been racial identity frameworks proposed for Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latino Americans (cf., Bernal & Knight, 1993; Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robins, 1995; Lee, 1991; Meyers, Speight, Highlen, Cox, Reynolds, Adams, & Hanley, 1991; Ruiz, 1990; Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1999).

During the last twenty years, several White racial identity or consciousness models have been proposed (c.f., Carney & Kahn, 1984; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984; 1990; Ponterotto, 1988; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Until recently, the six-stage model of White racial identity (Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy) developed by Helms (1984) was the only framework that had been validated and extensively researched in the literature. The White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (WRIAS), created by Helms and Carter (1990), measures the stages of White Racial Identity offered by Helms (1990) and has been one of the most studied theories within racial identity research.

A more recent theory of White racial consciousness (WRC) developed by Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) proposed a typology of WRC that describes the diverse perceptions White people may have of themselves which, in turn, influences their attitudes towards people of color. The framework for the WRC model is rooted in the work of Phinney's (1989) minority ethnic development model, an extension of Marcia's (1966, 1980) theory on ego identity. Two important concepts from Marcia's theory, exploration and commitment, are adopted and serve as the organizational apparatus for the WRC model. Four of the types in the Rowe et al. (1994) WRC model—Conflictive, Dominative,
Integrative, and Reactive—are grouped into the Achieved WRC status. WRC types within the Achieved status involve both exploration of racial issues and commitment to some position on these matters. The Unachieved WRC status is comprised of three types: Avoidant, Dissonant, and Dependent. For each of these types, either exploration or commitment (or both) are absent. The Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale - Preliminary Form (ORAS-P) (Choney & Behrens, 1996) was developed as a measurement tool for this model. The ORAS-P offers researchers and practitioners another theory and instrument to understand and assess White racial attitudes. The seven types of WRC (Rowe et al, 1994) are next described in greater detail.

The Avoidant types have neither explored nor taken a stance on racial issues, resulting in a lack of consideration of their own racial identity or racial issues. Minimizing racial issues or identity can occur for several reasons—a person may find exploration of these issues aversive, anxiety provoking, or simply inconvenient (Rowe et al., 1994; Rowe, Behrens, & Leach, 1995).

The Dependent types demonstrate some degree of commitment to a set of attitudes regarding racial issues; however, they typically have not personally explored alternative perspectives. Instead, their attitudes are often superficial and largely dependent upon what significant others in their lives think about racial issues (Rowe et al., 1994; Rowe et al., 1995).

The Dissonant types are characterized by high exploration of, yet low commitment to, racial issues. Often, they are in a transition period from one set of racial attitudes to another. Experiences that challenge their current racial attitudes may lead to a sense of confusion about racial issues. They may seek new information; however, there is typically a lack of commitment to these fluctuating ideas (Rowe et al., 1994; Rowe et al., 1995).

The racial attitudes of the Dominative type are grounded in a strong ethnocentric perspective that views White culture as the ideal standard by which all other racial groups are evaluated. There is often limited knowledge about other racial groups beyond commonly held stereotypes. The behaviors of the Dominative type range from passive modes (e.g., tolerating interactions with a person of color only when
in a dominant role) to more active modes (e.g., physical or verbal abuse) (Rowe et al., 1994, 1995).

Confictive type persons typically repudiate overt forms of discrimination toward people of color. However, they are not likely to demonstrate support for programs or ideas that are designed to reduce or eliminate discrimination. The term “confictive” is used to describe how two traditional American values—equality and individualism—are at odds with one another. While such individuals have high regard for the principles of fairness, they also maintain that people of color should not be given advantages over Whites, and there is no need for remedies such as affirmative action or job training programs (Rowe et al., 1994, 1995).

Individuals characterized by the Reactive type are aware of racism in the United States as well as the extent to which Whites maintain power and privilege. They may possess an intellectual acceptance of other racial groups and seek information about them. They also may over-identify with romanticized aspects of other cultures yet ignore how individual responsibility and behavior may contribute to the challenges faced by many racial minority groups. Finally, they may engage in paternalistic behavior or feel guilty about being White (Rowe et al., 1994, 1995).

Integrative individuals do not operate from anger or guilt, nor do they oppress or idealize people of color (Rowe et al., 1994). Instead, they “value a culturally pluralistic society and often have a more complex or sophisticated understanding of the sociopolitical factors affecting racial/minority issues” (Rowe et al., 1995, p. 141). Individuals who display this perspective are comfortable with their Whiteness and maintain genuine contacts with people of color. The authors caution that this type should not be construed as the summit of WRC. How one deals with issues of race and racism is always in process and subject to human frailty and error (Rowe et al., 1994).

Given the amount of contact and responsibility that White student affairs professionals have for the academic success and emotional well-being of students of color, it seems crucial that greater attention be focused on the influence of racial consciousness on the effectiveness of White student affairs practitioners. Since there is very limited litera-
ture examining the racial identity or consciousness of White student affairs professionals, research is needed to explore their White racial identity or consciousness as well as the contributing demographic and background variables and factors.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine WRC among White student affairs professionals. In particular, this study sought to identify potential correlates with the seven WRC types previously described. These correlates included a variety of demographic and experience variables.

Method

Participants

The nationwide sample of 534 White student affairs practitioners who participated in this study ranged in age from 22 to 66 years with a mean age of 34.2 years. The sample consisted of 338 (64%) women and 196 (36%) men. Over two thirds of the participants (69%) possessed at least a masters degree in student affairs, higher education administration, or a related field.

Participants represented a variety of position levels including: graduate students (25%), entry level (33%), middle management (38%), and senior level managers (4%). The majority of the sample (32%) reported working in the residence life area. Other functional areas with significant representation 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%).

With regard to multicultural issues, most participants (87%) reported participating in multicultural workshops. Although 40% of the sample indicated that they regularly explored multicultural issues with their supervisor, the majority (59.9%) indicated that they did not. Almost half of the participants (47.8%) reported being a member of at least one group in which members are targets of discrimination (e.g., female, non-Christian, lesbian, gay or bisexual, or persons with disabilities).
The participants came from sixty \( (n = 60) \) institutions across the United States, from twenty-five states, mostly from northeastern and north central regions. Almost all of the institutions in this sample were four-year private and public institutions.

Measures

The data for this study were collected using three self-report measures: the ORAS-P (Choney & Behrens, 1996), the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC-SDS) Short Form C (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Reynolds, 1982), and a Personal Data Form (PDF) designed by the researchers.

**ORAS-P**

WRC was measured by the ORAS-P (Choney & Behrens, 1996). The ORAS-P is a self-report instrument that assesses racial attitudes and behaviors according to the seven types of WRC proposed by Rowe and Bennett (1994). Participants responded to 50 items using a 5-point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Choney and Behrens (1996) report Cronbach alphas for each of the subscales as follows: Avoidant, .68; Dependent, .82; Dissonant, .75; Dominative, .77; Reactive, .80; Conflictive, .72; and Integrative, .79. Other researchers have reported comparable reliability coefficients (Ottavi, 1996; Pope-Davis et al. as cited in Mitchell, 1997). Choney and Behrens (1996) also maintain that the construct validity for this version of the instrument is "sufficiently valid to warrant wide use in research settings" (p. 236). The subscale coefficient alphas for the current sample are reported in Table 1.

**MC-SDS**

Research based on self-report data is influenced by social desirability effects (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Fulton (1994) suggests that social desirability may be even more influential with sensitive issues like racial identity. The MC-SDS Short Form C (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Reynolds, 1982), therefore, was used to measure any social desirability effects. The original MC-SDS has 33 true-false items and reports an internal consistency of .88 and a test-retest stability coefficient of .89. A shorter version of the instrument (Form C), with a correlation of .93 with the standard form, has been recommended (Reynolds, 1982). The coefficient alpha for the current sample was .75.
Table 1
Alpha Coefficients, Means and Standard Deviations for all Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Alpha Coefficient</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marlowe-Crowne</td>
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<td>1.41</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Racial Consciousness</td>
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<td>ORAS-P Avoidant</td>
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<td>1.73</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dependent</td>
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<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dissonant</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Dominative</td>
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<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Conflicte</td>
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<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Reactive</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORAS-P Integrative</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ORAS-P = Oklahoma Racial Attitudes Scale-Preliminary Form

**PDF**

Background information about the participants’ demographics and multicultural experiences was gathered using a PDF. In order to explore possible relationships with WRC, demographic information such as age, gender, race, and self-identification with any other socially marginalized groups (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual or religious minorities) was collected. Information on the participants’ professional experiences (including functional areas, professional level, and multicultural experiences in training and supervision) was also assessed.

**Procedure**

This study used site coordinators as a means of collecting data on campuses across the country. Site coordinators came from three sources:
(a) individuals with whom the researchers had developed professional relationships through mutual participation in the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), (b) individuals who indicated interest in this research while attending previous ACPA convention workshops on multicultural issues presented by the researchers, and (c) faculty members in student affairs preparation programs from a variety of geographic locations. The site coordinator was the main connection between the researchers and the participants on each campus, and each was provided with detailed guidelines for facilitating the data collection process on their respective campus. Sixty of the individuals originally contacted by letter agreed to serve in this role. This current study was part of a larger study that included additional instruments and research questions.

Each site coordinator was mailed an envelope containing 12 sets of instruments. She or he was asked to randomly distribute, per instructions from the researchers, the packets to 12 White student affairs practitioners on his or her campus. In instances where there were 12 or less practitioners on campus, site coordinators distributed a packet to each practitioner. Participants received the instruments in common order of consent form, ORAS-P, MC-SDS, and PDF. Using this procedure, a total of 720 instruments were sent out, with 580 returned. However, 46 of the instruments were unusable because of incomplete information or because participants indicated a race other than White. Hence, 534 (74%) White student affairs practitioners were included in this investigation. Participants were informed by the researchers, in writing, that the study was examining the background, experiences and perspectives on multiculturalism of student affairs. Participants were instructed to complete the instruments anonymously and return them in a sealed envelope to the site coordinator, who then mailed all packets to the authors.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and alpha reliability coefficients for both measures. The alpha coefficients for all the scales and subscales, with the exception of the ORAS-P's Integrative subscale, evidence adequate reliability.
For the analysis, all the variables represented in the data were conceptually organized into variable groups including: demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, institutional characteristics, identification with socially marginalized groups); experience variables; and interest in working with multicultural issues (MC-interest). Social desirability was also analyzed to identify the degree to which the ORAS-P may be susceptible to the construct.

With regard to the experience variables, it should be noted that because of the high correlation among several of the items on PDF that asked about the participants' professional preparation/development and professional experiences with multicultural issues, a new set of experience variables was established. Six initial items from the PDF were conceptually collapsed into two new experience variables: (1) the participants' experience in learning about multiculturalism through training and development (MC-training); (2) the participants' experience in implementing multicultural interventions on campus such as programs and policies (MC-implement). A third variable was also included in this experience grouping: discussions with supervisors on multicultural issues (MC-supervision). In the end, the variables of interest in relation to the seven WRC types were: age, gender, identification with socially marginalized groups, MC-interest, MC-training, MC-implement, and MC-supervision. These variables are presented in the form of a correlation matrix in Table 2 and are discussed next in greater detail.

While gender was not found to significantly correlate with scores on the ORAS-P, age was found to have a mild, but significant, relationship with two of the WRC types: dependent (r = -.17) and dissonant (r = -.16). This particular relationship suggests that as age increased among participants in the sample, there was less confusion about and less reliance on others for perspectives on racial issues. Another demographic characteristic that emerged as significant in the analysis was the participants' identification with a socially marginalized (or oppressed) group. Identification with one of two socially marginalized groups—women and/or lesbian, gay, bisexuals—was significantly related to the Reactive type (r = .21). This finding suggests that iden-
Correlations between the three experience variables and the ORAS-P subscales indicated that there was no correlation among the experience variables and Dependent, Dissonant and Integrative subscales. There were, however, moderate correlations between MC-Supervision and the Avoidant \( (r = -.27) \), Dominative \( (r = -.25) \), Conflictive \( (r = -.30) \), and Reactive \( (r = .34) \) subscales. Slightly lower correlations were found between MC-Training and the Avoidant \( (r = -.23) \), Dominative \( (r = -.22) \), Conflictive \( (r = -.26) \), and Reactive \( (r = .30) \) subscales. Finally, with regard to MC-Implementation, the following correlations were found: Avoidant \( (r = -.17) \), Dominative \( (r = -.15) \), Conflictive \( (r = -.25) \), and Reactive \( (r = .21) \) subscales. Given the direction of the correlations above, these findings suggest that experience with multicultural issues is related to more positive attitudes toward people of color.
Interest in working with diverse students and colleagues (i.e., MC-Interest) had moderate correlations with several of the ORAS-P subscales: Avoidant \( (r = -0.33) \), Dominative \( (r = -0.34) \), Conflicitive \( (r = -0.34) \), and Reactive \( (r = 0.29) \) subscales. Again these findings suggest that less negative attitudes toward people of color are related to interest in working with them and diversity issues.

There was a significant relationship between social desirability and two of the WRC types: Dependent \( (r = -0.26) \) and Dissonant \( (r = -0.27) \). The correlations with two of the seven ORAS-P subscales suggest that the ORAS-P may be susceptible to social desirability.

Discussion

Relationship Between Demographic Variables and WRC

The primary purpose of this study was to examine WRC or identity among White student affairs professionals. The demographic variables of interest in this study were age, gender, and social marginalization of the participants. While there was no significant relationship between gender and racial consciousness, there was a mild yet significant relationship between age and two of the WRC types (Dependent and Dissonant). These relationships suggest that age is related to less confusion about and reliance on others with regard to racial issues. Although the relationship is mild, it does raise the question of whether this model of racial consciousness has a developmental component. The creators of the WRC model do not believe this model is developmental; however, further research may be needed to assess this issue.

Most racial identity or ethnic identity models available report a developmental component in terms of sequencing of the various racial identity stages, although there has been criticism of the stage-model approach (Meyers, et al., 1991; Reynolds & Pope, 1991).

When considering the relationship between gender and White racial attitudes, previous research has yielded mixed results. Several studies have shown differences in White racial attitudes between men and women (Carter, 1990; Mitchell, 1997; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1992, 1994). These studies generally show that men, more than women, report attitudes that reflect racist beliefs. However, other studies that have looked at gender and racial attitudes have reported no relation-
ship (Ottavi et al., 1994; Ottavi, 1996). No gender differences were identified in the current sample. Why gender emerges as significant in some samples and not in others may be explained by varying composition of the samples in these various studies (e.g., undergraduates, counseling graduate students, professionals) or other unidentified influences.

There was a significant and positive relationship among the participants who self-identified as socially marginalized (in terms of gender or sexual orientation) and the Reactive type of the WRC. The Reactive type manifests a greater understanding of how racism operates as a way of maintaining White privilege and dominance. As supported in other research such as Ottavi (1996), women, lesbians, and gay men may have a deeper understanding of racism because of their own experiences with sexism or homophobia. These findings lend further empirical support to Ottavi's suggestion that models such as the WRC may need to consider other social identities and life experiences that Whites have and how they influence their overall worldview as well as their WRC attitudes. Reynolds and Pope (1991) strongly emphasized the importance of acknowledging and studying the complexity of the "multidimensional nature of human identity" (p. 179) in developing identity theories and models. WRC theory as well as other racial identity models may need to find ways to incorporate this multidimensionality into their models and their research questions rather than viewing individuals as unidimensional in nature.

Relationships Between Experience Variables and WRC
Multicultural education and training, and experience with implementing multicultural programs and policies, and discussions with supervisors about multicultural issues were the experience variables for this study. While there was no correlation among the experience variables and several WRC types (Dependent, Dissonance, and Integrative), there were moderate correlations with both MC-Training and MC-Supervision and four WRC types (Avoidant, Dominative, Conflictive, and Reactive). More moderate relationships were found between MC-Implementation and Conflictive and Reactive types. These findings suggest that respondents who report high levels of multicultural educational opportunities, implementing multicultural programs and policies, and discussing multicultural issues with super-
visors tend to be more willing to explore racial issues. They also are more likely to possess more positive attitudes toward people of color, are less uncertain about their views on racial issues, and have an awareness and a desire to combat racism. These findings are consistent with previous research and discussions on multicultural training and racial identity (D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). These results do not suggest a causal relationship; it is unclear whether prior multicultural experiences influenced racial consciousness or whether a certain type of racial consciousness predisposed the participants to seek out multicultural experiences. Regardless of directionality, the implications of these findings for graduate professional preparation programs and professional development are significant. Research shows that increased opportunities for multicultural experiences seems paramount in efforts to positively influence both racial consciousness and multicultural competence (Mueller & Pope, 2001).

Interest in Variable’s Relationship with WRC
The positive and significant relationships found between MC-Interest and some of the WRC types (in the negative direction for Avoidant, Dominative, and Conflictive; and positive for Reactive) appear theoretically sound. These relationships suggest that interest in working with diverse students and colleagues is related to less avoidance of racial issues, more positive views of people of color, and a greater understanding of the effects of racial oppression.

Social Desirability’s Relationship with WRC
Significant relationships were observed between the MC-SDS and two of the seven WRC types (Dependent and Dissonant). Significant relationships were in the negative direction suggesting that participants reporting higher Dependent and Dissonant attitudes may have a lower need for approval. For the Dissonant type, this appears to be theoretically sound since this type describes individuals who are actively contemplating racial issues and, who because they are in this transtitory period, may have little need to appear in a more positive light. The negative relationship between social desirability and the Dependent type, however, is less clear and seems counter-intuitive. Since the Dependent type relies on others for their racial attitudes, one might
assume their need for approval would be higher. One possible expla-
nation might be that the Dependent type, who is unreflective by
nature, simply adopts the attitudes of others and may not contemplate
others' approval (or lack of) for adopting their perspective. Since the
authors of the WRC model do not propose definitive reasons why the
Dependent type mirrors the attitudes of those around him/her, specu-
lating on this relationship without further investigation is not sup-
portable.

Implications and Recommendations

The significance of multicultural issues and the impact that race and
racial identity have on higher education are increasingly areas of inter-
est for student affairs professional preparation and development, as
well as topics for future research. The results of this study have some
implications for student affairs preparation, professional development,
and research.

The findings suggest that some student affairs professional preparation
programs, as well as professional development efforts, may need to
clarify the specific content that is included when infusing multicultu-
ral issues within the curriculum. Including opportunities for White
students and professionals to explore their racial attitudes and to
process their past racial experiences may be important. As the WRC
model proposes, exploration of these issues is a necessary component
in attaining an achieved racial consciousness. Other studies have made
a link between WRC and multicultural competence (Mueller & Pope,
2001), which suggests that as individuals further understand them-
selves as racial beings they are more likely to demonstrate a higher
level of multicultural competence.

Exploration of one's racial attitudes is particularly relevant since there
may be a tendency to address racial issues without examining one's
personal responsibility for racism. Often multicultural training and
professional development focuses on knowledge about other racial
groups or about the conceptual aspects of oppression without encour-
multicultural training must include cognitive restructuring that chal-
lenges the individual's assumptions about the world, other racial
groups, and oneself as a racial being. Helms (1992), Katz (1978), Okun, Fried, and Okun (1999) offer group and individual consciousness raising exercises on White awareness that could be useful in helping White students and professionals move to deeper and more personal levels of understanding of racial issues.

It is important that training and development experiences on racial consciousness and multiculturalism be focused on all student affairs professionals rather than just students in graduate preparation programs or entry-level professionals. All professionals can gain from greater exploration of their racial consciousness and ways in which newfound awareness might influence their ability to work with racial issues on campus and with students and staff of color.

The relationship between the Reactive type and identification with being a woman or being gay, suggests that training programs that allow participants to see and understand both the similarities and the important differences between the oppression of women, gays, and lesbians and the oppression of people of color. Such a realization may encourage and assist White women and White gays and lesbians in the exploration of their own Whiteness and the meanings they attach to it.

This study underscores the value of ongoing discussions on racial and multicultural issues with one's supervisor. Supervisors can have significant influence in the development of professional competence (including multicultural competence) of the supervisee. It is incumbent upon the supervisor to initiate discussions of race and multicultural issues because often supervisees may feel uncomfortable doing so (Constantine, 1997; D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991).

Finally, the findings suggest not only that White practitioners may benefit from training opportunities and discussions with supervisors on multicultural issues, but also by being more involved with program design and policy decisions related to multicultural issues. While some White practitioners, because of their racial consciousness, may be drawn to these activities, others may benefit by being encouraged or challenged to participate in such activities. Individuals who are involved in these program design and policy activities may need ongoing support such as: additional training, peer consultation and mentoring, and opportunities for skill development.
Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be noted when interpreting its findings. These limitations center primarily on the instruments used and on the generalizability of the findings. As a relatively new instrument, the ORAS-P has limited validity and reliability data and, as a self-report instrument, is influenced by potential response biases by the participants (Dawis, 1987). To lessen the effects of response bias, several methods were used (assuring anonymity, limiting use of language like “multicultural competence” and “racial consciousness,” and statistically controlling for social desirability).

Another concern is that the sample used in this study may limit the generalizability of the results. First, while site coordinators were provided with specific instructions on how to randomly select White student affairs practitioners on their campuses, there is no assurance that the participants were selected at random or that a random sample returned the instruments. While the return rate on the instruments was fairly high (i.e., 74%), there may have been individuals who did not participate because they prefer not to think about, or are defensive about, racial issues. Second, participation was not balanced across geographic regions of the country and institutional types. Very few instruments from the south and western regions of the United States were represented in this sample. Also, although two-year institutions (i.e., community colleges) enroll more than a quarter of all college students (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999), they were underrepresented in this sample.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are so few studies that explore the racial consciousness and racial identity of student affairs practitioners that numerous areas for future research exist. Additional research is needed to examine the relationships identified in this study between WRC and demographic variables, experience variables, interest in working with a diverse population, and social desirability.

One way to explore the relationship between racial consciousness and other multicultural variables would be to triangulate the methodology (Stage & Russell, 1992). This methodology involves using both qual-
itative and quantitative methods to expand the depth of data that only one method can provide. A good example of method triangulation can be found in the work of Christensen (1997), who used Helms' WRIAS to identify White students with more advanced racial identities and used written statements and interviews with these same students to identify common college experiences that influenced their racial identity development. A similar method could be used to understand the experience and backgrounds of student affairs professionals reporting more achieved and positive types of racial consciousness and the effect their racial consciousness has on their work.

Expanding the sample addressed for this study would be an additional significant area of research. Examining the racial consciousness of student affairs professionals at two-year colleges or historically Black colleges would be important since such institutions often have significantly more students of color than traditional four-year universities and colleges.

Summary

This study provides useful information to the student affairs profession about WRC among student affairs practitioners. In this nationwide study, 534 White practitioners completed several instruments to assess WRC, social desirability, and demographic information. Among the most significant relationships with WRC were experience with multicultural issues, self-identification with a socially marginalized group, and discussions with supervisors on race and multicultural issues. The findings from this study are useful in both research and practice in student affairs. They expand the growing research on multicultural issues and racial identity in higher education and student affairs and highlight the importance of including opportunities for all professionals and graduate students to explore their racial identity. Understanding theories and concepts such as WRC (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994) can be helpful to practitioners seeking to heighten their own racial awareness and using that awareness to promote more multicultural campus environments.
References


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