

RUNNING HEAD: A Study of Racism on the Campus of Milligan College

A Study of Racism on the Campus of Milligan College

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Abstract

Racism is a social issue that is still happening today. Racism, as defined in this study, is an act of aggression toward a person of one race from a member of a different race. Many colleges and universities struggle with racial equality. Racism may be expressed by students, faculty, and staff on college and university campuses. Forms of racism may include: verbal, nonverbal, written, or physical acts of aggression based on racial prejudices. In light of learning about racism on other college and university campuses, I have conducted a research study to see where Milligan College stands from student perspectives on racial equality. To do this, I developed a survey that was distributed to a sample of 157 traditional undergraduates enrolled in the Fall-2016 semester. I looked at two groups: GOAH Diversity Scholars and Non-GOAH students. I used a stratified systematic random sample to select participants from the general student body for the Non-GOAH group and sent surveys to all of the GOAH Diversity Scholars. Of the 157 selected participants, 79 finished the survey. The results of this study show that racism is an issue on Milligan's campus in terms of student-to-student relations. A lot of the racism that occurs on campus, according to the present study, is expressed in the form of inconsiderate comments and racial jokes. This may be due to lack of familiarity with people of other races than oneself. Diversity classes could help lessen the divide between the white majority student body and those of different races on the campus of Milligan College.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Racism is an issue that American society has not yet escaped. Many areas within American society face racism and struggle with how to deal with it every day. One such area is higher education; specifically, colleges and universities. When looking at what different colleges and universities have to offer, diversity is often displayed. While universities and colleges promote diversity programs, they certainly do not display the racism that may be happening on their campuses, yet that does not mean that racism does not exist in these institutions.

Studies that have examined racism on College and University Campuses (CUC) have found a wide range of racist aggressions (Chao, Mallinckrodt, and Wei, 2012; Harwood, Hunt, and Mendenhall, 2013; Kordesh, Spanierman, and Neville, 2013; Marcus et al., 2003; Mohamed, 2010). Marcus et al. (2003) surveyed students on when they experienced racism on their CUC. Students were selected as participants if they had visited an on-campus counseling center within the last three semesters before the study was being conducted. The only qualifier to become a participant was to have reported “racism” as a cause for seeking help. The researchers designed a survey with three sections of inquiry: the general campus, instructor-student relations, and student relations. The questions within these sections were designed to rate on-campus incidents of racism expressed by a person of one race toward another person of a different race. The study surveyed only white and black students. The results were significant for African American students reporting that they had been victims of racism. Shockingly, the section with the highest significance on all questions was instructor-student relations. These questions had to do with instructors ignoring black students multiple times, instructors belittling intelligence in class and privately, and instructors giving unfair grades. Gender also was found to have significance in this

study for African American students when women scored significantly where men did not. Two-thirds of all of the questions were significant based on racial discrimination.

Classrooms are not the only source of racism on CUCs. Harwood, Hunt, and Mendenhall (2012) interviewed 81 students from a predominately white university about campus racism. The participants chose to be in the study by responding to an email that was sent out from the researchers. This was not a representative sample. They found the consistent theme of microaggressions occurring in dorm rooms and in student relations. Racist jokes, often presented by friends or roommates, made participants feel like an outsider in those situations. Microaggressions were not only spoken. In one case, a participant explained that white students on his hall were pranking him due to his racial heritage and his resident advisor would not intervene, saying that the other students were probably “just drunk”. This event happened many times and the student went directly to his resident director, who also brushed off the events. This case, and others within the study, depict that racial microaggressions also take place on an institutional level. Harwood et al. discovered that the CUC under their review displayed many institutional racist habits. The CUC clumped all colored girls into the back of a dormitory, remarked one participant. Another stated that the predominately colored dorms on campus were referred to by staff and students as “the projects”. And all participants discussed how different public and private spaces within the predominately colored dorms had different rules and policies than the other dorms on campus. It appears at the end of Harwood et al.’s results that the institution itself was a main source of racism.

A practical way to lower racism on CUCs could be through diversity classes. Kordesh, Spanierman, and Neville (2013) results would support this conclusion. In a study that divided participants into two focus groups (Antiracist and Non-Antiracist), Kordesh et al. found that the

predominate difference in students' attitudes was found by who had, or had not, taken a diversity course. The sample was composed of only 11 students. These students had been selected from another study that the researchers had conducted. Students in the Antiracist group were very aware of racism on their CUC. These students were open to discuss the problems of racism, supported equality, and had emotional reactions to racial issues. The Non-Antiracist group was not open to discuss problems of racism, unknowingly held racist attitudes, and wanted to stop talking about racism on their CUC. Participants within the Antiracist group also stated that the university could do more to reduce racism on campus, such as stopping racist parties in fraternities and sororities. Participants in this study had similar backgrounds other than diversity courses at their CUC, such as being white, middle class, and having been born and raised in the United States. These courses may be a significant source of promoting racial equality.

College students are not the only people to experience racism on CUCs. Faculty members who are of an ethnic minority experience more judgment from other staff members and students alike (Mohamed, 2010). Although many CUCs state that they have increased diversity among staff and faculty, Mohamed found this is often not the case from his own investigation. As CUCs have grown they have continued to hire faculty of diverse ethnic backgrounds at the same percentage as they did when they were substantially smaller. CUCs often overlook or blatantly refuse to hire a colored individual based on bias; this is most evident when the applicant is more qualified for the position than the person who receives the job. This is true of predominately white institutions. Mohamed discusses that hiring diverse faculty members could benefit CUCs' ethnic students. Students of minorities do not always have good role models and sometimes do not relate to white instructors. Hiring faculty members of diverse ethnic backgrounds could enhance these students' time at their given CUC.

In a study by Hall and Closson (2005) a new perspective was explored. Hall and Closson chose to focus not on black students at a Traditionally White Institution (TWI), but instead on whites attending graduate school at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Specifically, the researchers wanted to see if whites, who were now the minority, would have similar experiences at a HBCU campus as blacks at a TWI. Hall and Closson found that whites at the HBCU under review did not experience the same negative racial aggressions that blacks do at TWIs. Focus groups, consisting of black and white students, were conducted. The 25 participants described their time at their HBCU. Unlike the other studies of TWIs, in this review both black and white students did not have trouble approaching faculty members with questions or concerns. Black students within the study also stated finding a sense of community at the HBCU that white students did not report. An interesting feature that Hall and Closson found was that none of the black students within their study could cite any specific racist event, comment, or aggression to have occurred at the HBCU in question. This was unique to this study alone.

Another study to explore the success of African Americans at CUCs was conducted by Harper (2006). Participants were selected from six predominately white, Midwestern universities. Participants for this study were selected by “key administrators [who] were asked to identify high-achieving African American male student leaders,” (Harper, 2006). Thirty-Two students were selected for this study. Harper explored the support network of these individuals, such as family relations, friendships with same-race and other-race individuals, and mentors. The hypothesis expected these men to have little support from the African American community due to their “acting white” (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Harper found the opposite to be true. The greatest support for these high achieving African Americans was from other African Americans. The participants explained that they helped support each other and found support in others

around them who wanted them to succeed. They had never been told that they were “acting white” as past researchers had hypothesized. African American community, instead, was a source of their success.

The topic of racism on college and university campuses is not only important for equality but also for mental health. Many African Americans report suffering from extreme anxiety and depression from racial discrimination on CUCs. Chao, Mallinckrodt, and Wei (2012) survey 1,555 African American students from seven predominately white Midwestern universities who sought help from campus counseling centers due to racial discrimination. Many of these individuals were suicidal. Severity of racial discrimination was higher for women who sought help than for men. Some of the reported racist occurrences were from students, but many were by faculty, staff members, and the larger institutions themselves. Distress from these events caused physical and mental health problems as well as trouble sleeping. Racial discrimination was the main cause for these physical and mental problems on these campuses.

Gender may also come into play when talking about racial acceptance or rejection. In a study conducted by researchers Poteat and Spanierman, 342 white college students were examined. The researchers wanted to look at the effects that social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and racial color-blindness had on modern racism. Participants for this study were selected from undergraduate psychology courses. Different scales were used to assess the levels of social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, racial color-blindness, and modern racism for each participant. These scales were then found to be strongly correlated with each other. Scores from the first three scales were taken into account for the score that participants received on the modern racism scale. Poteat and Spanierman found that men scored very high on social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and racial color-

blindness and were found to hold more racist attitudes than women (Poteat and Spanierman, 2012).

Another study that factored gender into their equation was done by Smith, Senter, and Strachan. These researchers investigated how racial resentment levels differed by gender. They stratified a sample on gender and class year; 326 undergraduates chose to participate. “This study used a scale derived from Kinder and Sanders (1996) and Sears and Henry (2003) to measure racial resentment,” (Smith, Senter, and Strachan, 2013). Smith et al. found that white women had lower racial resentment scores and were more likely to embrace diversity efforts at the university under review than white males. Female white participants were also more likely than men to be “social or human services major[s]” (Smith, Senter, and Strachan, 2013). Both males and females were largely unaware of racism on their campus.

Racial awareness may be one way to lower racial resentment. In a cross-sectional analysis from a larger longitudinal study, researchers McClelland and Linnander were able to see how learning about racism lowers racist attitudes. The cross-sectional analysis observed survey responses from first-year freshman and senior-year undergraduates at the University of Windsor. The researchers found that liberals had more positive racial feelings than conservatives (McClelland and Linnander, 2006). Women also in this study were found to be less racist than men, but only in the cross-sectional study; longitudinally there was no difference. The main point that McClelland and Linnander took away from their study is that if a person spends more time with someone who is racially different than himself or herself, he or she will end up having more positive feelings toward other races. Time and contact were the only variables that mattered. The person’s relationship with someone of another race was not as important; the other person could be anyone from a professor, to a resident assistant, to a significant other. Familiarizing oneself

with someone who is racially different, either in person or in study, was found to significantly lower one's racial discrimination.

Modern racism may be harder to identify than historical racism. Racism today is often clouded by political correctness, but it does still exist. Sydell and Nelson designed a survey to measure "multicultural attitudes and perceptions of [participants]," (Sydell and Nelson, 2000). One hundred and twenty-four undergraduate students were selected to take this survey. They were then divided into two groups: white students and black students. One hypothesis that was tested in Sydell and Nelson's study had to do with the reason for modern racism. White participants agreed with a survey question stating that blacks segregated themselves. The researchers had this to say about the item.

"By agreeing with the statement that blacks are the cause of the problem, whites were not necessarily indicating prejudice toward them. However, this feeling may in turn fuel white prejudice because it is hard to like someone who you think does not like you," (Sydell and Nelson, 2000).

The researchers warn that if the above statement is true, then "whites may feel that black people are overreacting to a problem of the past" (Sydell and Nelson, 2000) and may not take racism seriously. If modern racism is not taken seriously by everyone, change will be much harder to achieve.

Methodology

This study was conducted on the campus of Milligan College. The study was sent to 157 traditional undergraduate students via email through Qualtrics Survey Software. The sample of 157 students was composed of 100 traditional undergraduate students who were randomly selected and 57 traditional undergraduate students who were members of the GOAH Diversity Scholars. GOAH is a diversity program on Milligan's campus designed to provide a way for ethnic minority students who cannot afford tuition on their own, to be able to attend school at Milligan. It is the most distinct non-white group of students on Milligan's campus and was thus selected for this study. All of the 57 GOAH Diversity Scholars received this study.

The present study included 38 questions pertaining to racism on Milligan College's Campus. This includes an informed consent question and a question that kept students under the age of 18 out of this study. The first set of questions determined a person's gender, class (freshman-senior), race, and membership in GOAH. The second set of questions comes from an index designed by David R. Williams. This index explores how other people treat the person answering the 9 questions. The 10th question then asks what reason the participant thinks these different treatments are allotted to (ie: race? gender? ect). The third set of questions specifically asks participants about their experiences of racism on Milligan's campus through True or False questions. If participants marked questions as True, they would be taken to follow-up questions about their experiences. The last set of questions were designed for participants to rank their overall feelings about Milligan College in terms of racism.

In the first part of the analysis I looked at cross-tabulation of specific questions. My main area of interest was to see how GOAH students differed from the main population of Milligan

undergraduates. I used cross-tabulations to see where these differences were statistically different or similar across the two groups. I also ran other variables through cross-tabulations to see if something other than race was statistically significant. I then looked at the open-ended questions to look for similarities in answers.

Results

I. Cross-Tabulations

The Index by Williams was used in this study to create a baseline for what participants experience in their personal lives in terms of being treated “less than equal”. [Table One](#) (refer to Index 1) indicates that most of the GOAH participants selected their “race” as the main reason that they are treated differently ($p=0.02$) whereas Non-GOAHs indicated that their “gender” was the main reason for these different treatments (not statistically significant). Out of curiosity, I ran a cross-tabulations test on gender vs. the last index question. Even without the GOAH filter, there was a higher frequency for “race” being the main cause of being treated differently over any of the other 12 possible causes.

Due to the small sample size of this survey, the second set of questions’ data is less clear. In [Table Two](#) (found in Index 2), the first question, about receiving negative racist comments ($p = 0.00$), and the third question, discussing non-verbal discrimination ($p = 0.00$), were found to be significant. However, because of the small sample size the second and fourth question about written racial aggression ($p = 0.14$) and physical aggression tied to race ($p = 0.26$) did not fall into significance, even though the frequency of results suggests otherwise. Overall, one can conclude from these results that racial discrimination is not a big problem on Milligan’s campus

when it is related to acts of aggression or in the form of written word. However, non-verbal racism (such as glaring or hand gestures) and negative comments do contribute to the problem of racial discrimination at Milligan.

From the open-ended questions, negative comments that people receive due to race are often in the form of insensitive comments or jokes by other students. Across the board, most of the racial discriminating acts that happen on Milligan's campus, according to the participants, are from other students, with a handful of cases from staff and faculty (see [Table Two B](#) for frequencies in Index 3). There were four cases of "physical acts of aggression" that were documented in this study. All of these cases were from other students. I cross-tabulated these cases against a further question about how severe one would rate their experiences of racism on Milligan's campus. Two of the participants rated the racism that they had received as "Not Severe", the other two participants rated their experiences as "Somewhat Severe". This includes any other form of racism that they have received while at Milligan. At the same time, these results are important because physical acts of aggression in any form should be made known to the college so that they can make strides to ensure that this does not continue.

In the last section of the survey, participants were asked to rank Milligan's staff, students, faculty, and the general atmosphere of Milligan College in terms of racial acceptance. Participants were asked at the beginning of this section to rate the severity of any racism they had experienced. The majority of those who have experienced racism while at Milligan rate their experience as "Not severe at all" (46.48%). Participants also noted that generally Milligan does not have a racist atmosphere (49.30%). Most of the participants said that Milligan's staff (60.56%) and faculty (59.15%) treat people equally regardless of race. However, the results became more muddled in terms of frequency for the student category. The uniform frequencies

that were found in the staff and faculty questions disappeared when students were the main focus (see [Table Three](#) in Index 4).

One other area of imbalance can be found in the last question. This question asked participants if Milligan College was “too racially diverse”, “fine just the way it is”, or “not racial diverse enough. None of the participants thought that Milligan was “too racially diverse”. However, the last two categories were split between the non-GOAHs and the GOAH participants. The non-GOAHs generally selected that Milligan is “fine just the way it is” (62.16%), whereas the GOAH participants selected that Milligan is “not racial diverse enough” (80.24%). All of these results can be found in [Table Four](#) (Index 5).

II. Open-Ended Questions

There were three open ended questions within this study. The first open ended question was a follow up question. The preceding True or False question asked participants if they had “experienced racism in any way that has not been covered in this survey while attending Milligan College?” If they selected True, then they were taken to the follow up question where they were asked to describe their experiences. Most of these responses can fit into the other categories of questions (ie: racist comments) but one participant specified that they were often treated differently because of people’s stigmas against non-whites. This participant was seen as less intelligent. Another explained that many people do not understand diversity or what it means to be from a racial minority and so they do not know when they are being offensive. One last participant explained a time when they were refused help for a health issue from a non-white

student who saw them as entitled. These stories show that racism can happen in many different forms and directions.

The second open-ended question asked participants who had not been victims of racism to describe any incidents that they had seen or heard about on Milligan's campus. Some of these answers talked about how students talk poorly about non-white students. One case that was highlighted happened from the Chapel stage. In the spring semester of 2016, a guest chapel speaker talked about the Black Lives Matter Movement. At the end of her message, she had students go pray over African American students. A few participants highlighted this event as racist in nature.

The last open-ended question concluded the survey. Participants were asked to share any further comments about racism at Milligan College. Some participants were more delicate than others in this last section. One participant said that racism is blown out of proportion especially when negative comments are really just jokes. Another admitted to being a racist. This participant said that they were a very impulsive person, but they could not help judging people's abilities by their skin color. Another participant asked the question of why Milligan's staff and faculty are not more diverse. They wondered about why an African American professor does not teach the African American literature course. One participant acknowledged the fact that some racism occurs within the same racial group, which this study did not address. Lastly, two different participants talked about the GOAH Diversity Scholarship. One of these participants talked about how the majority student body is biased against GOAH, whereas the other participant suggested that GOAH is biased against the majority student body. These were interesting cases to look at. One was saying that the GOAH scholarship should be open to the entire student body, whereas the other was suggesting that the majority student body looks down

on GOAH students as lesser students. Overall, there were mixed feelings about whether “racism” can be actually be categorized as racism on Milligan’s campus.

Discussion

The results of this study reflect some of the key themes other researchers have found while studying racism on college and university campuses across America. One commonality that many of my participants sited as an example of racism at Milligan College was crude racial jokes from their peers. A participant said that “not all comments referring to race are racist...Sometimes it's a joke, but people today have somehow forgotten how to take a joke”. However, racial jokes, whether intended to be racist or not, can have very negative results on a person toward which the joke is directed. Harwood et al. discussed how their participants felt that racist jokes “reduced them[selves] to their racial-ethnic minority status and sometimes made them feel like second-class citizens,” (2012). This sadly can be found at Milligan too. One participant answered boldly to this problem of unintended comments. They said that these jokes or comments are like a “shot to your core self. Comments that [then] make me question myself.” A different participant in the current study said this of their experience or racism while at Milligan:

“A lot of it can be blown out of proportion. Some comments are from people that you really care about, and those are the ones that hurt more. It's important to have a thick skin to handle what is said about you, and understand that it's hard to please people. It's sad to [be] misunderstood by your peers, but once you're in that situation, it's harder and harder to explain who you really are.”

Racist comments and jokes have serious personal, social, and psychological implications. Just because someone does not intend to offend another person through a racial joke does not mean that it does not cause pain to that individual.

A way to remediate some of the racial tension between students at Milligan could be through ethnic diversity classes. Milligan currently requires students to complete at least one 3-hour credit course of ethnic studies (Milligan Catalog, 2016-2017). Students can choose one ethnic studies from a list of 21 possible courses. Participants in Kordesh, Spanierman, and Neville's study on student racism found that students who had taken more diversity classes held less racist attitudes (2013). Ethnic diversity classes are very important in reducing racial attitudes in college students. These courses introduce topics that have led to modern racism and allow discussion for how to reduce history's impact on modern racism (Kordesh, Spanierman, and Neville, 2013; Smith, Senter, and Strachan, 2013). To reduce racism on Milligan's campus, the administrators may want to assess the list of the 21 ethnic studies classes to determine which ones are the most valuable in acting in the fight against racism. These classes could be prioritized. Another approach that Milligan could take is to encourage students to take multiple ethnic studies courses in an attempt to create a more positive mentality towards racial diversity.

A third avenue that could help reduce racism on Milligan's campus is to encourage people of different races to become friends. This is a good concept in theory, but harder to instill in the actual lives of students. Interacting with people of other races can help reduce racism in an individual (Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, and Lewis, 2012; Kordesh, Spanierman, and Neville, 2013). Although interacting with people of other races is a good way to reduce racism, it is even more effective to become friends with someone of another race (McCelland and Linnander, 2006). A way that Milligan could encourage students to become friends with students of other

racism is through the annual Spiritual Formation Program's small groups and Bible studies. These events allow students to discuss important concepts in safe areas. Events like these allow free conversation to flow that encourages students to form friendships within the group. Another way that people of different races could foster friendships could be through events that GOAH or other diversity groups sponsor.

Conclusion

This study's findings point to a problem between student relations and racism. Though racism is not a severe issue at Milligan, steps should be taken to eradicate its existence from this campus. The results from this study point overwhelmingly to student-student interaction as the main source of racism at Milligan. Encouraging students to form relations with people of different races may help this problem, as well as familiarizing oneself through the study of ethnic diversity. It is this diversity that is being misunderstood and causing problems for student-student relations. In the words of one participant, "most of the racism...has come from students who do not understand diversity. They especially do not understand what it means to come from a multi-ethnic background." For understanding to exist and to flourish, people need to know what is going on in terms of racism at Milligan, and to be committed to ending modern racism on this campus.

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