

Examining high school students' perceptions of racism within their school environment (Mercer County, New Jersey)

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Background

- Inspiration: After the 2016 elections, teachers noted heightened tensions between students, even by race, within their schools (Rogers, 2017)
 - Note: this study focuses on teacher perceptions of students
- The High School in this study:
 - Mercer County, New Jersey
 - A generally Democratic county (NJ Department of Elections)
 - In a 3,763.5 student school district located near Princeton University
 - 53% White, 20% Asian, 15% Hispanic/Latinx, 6% Black, 6% mixed race, .1% Native American/Hawaiian Native students (NJ Department of Education).

Purpose and Significance

- Research has been done on students and racial divide from teachers' perspectives(SOURCE), and not much has been done from the students perspective
- Most of the research on racial discrimination from the students' perspectives are solely qualitative (SOURCE)
- Identifying where gaps in racial tolerance exist and where a lack of awareness of racial discrimination exists will help adminiatrators and teachers better address anti-racism teaching/curricula

Methods

Online Survey (parental consent required for students under 18)

- Demographic questions such as age, race, gender
- 17 Likert statements (on a 1-5 scale) on the following topics:
 - Feeling of belonging at school
 - Presence of racial discrimination between students
 - Opinions on racial justice topics like Black Lives Matter
 - Opinions on racial literacy and talking about racism at school
- Optional open ended section to elaborate on opinions or experiences with racial discrimination

Analysis

Likert scale data

- One way ANOVA used to identify statistical significance
- Tukey Post Hoc HSD used to identify where the significance lied
- Pearson correlation test to identify any correlations between Likert statements

Open ended

- Statements were separated by race and gender to look for trends.

Likert scale means of student opinions of racial discrimination/racial justice by race with ANOVA and Tukey Post Hoc Test significance

Results Figure 1

(*: $p < 0.05$)

3 significant statements:

I have been discriminated against by another student because of my race

- Black, Asian, and mixed race students had higher agreement with the statement than white students

I am accepting and understanding to all races

- Asian students had a slightly lower agreement than White students, despite both groups still agreeing with the statement

People have told me that I act like a certain race

- Black students had significantly higher agreement with this statement than White, Asian, and Mixed race students, the only group aligning heavily with "agree"

	White (137)		Asian (93)		Hispanic/Latinx (19)		Black (12)		Mixed (28)		Native American/Native Hawaiian (3)		ANOVA P value
	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	
Racism exists at my school.	3.69	none	3.40	none	3.47	none	4.08	none	3.61	none	4.00	none	0.1372
There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school.	3.50	none	3.24	none	3.21	none	3.92	none	3.21	none	3.33	none	0.1015
I have been discriminated against by another student because of my race.	1.53	Asian* Black* Mixed	2.42	White*	2.16	none	2.58	White*	2.17	White	2.33	none	<0.05
I have seen another student discriminated against at school because of their race.	2.96	none	2.96	none	3.11	none	3.50	none	3.29	none	2.67	none	0.5422
I acknowledge and inform others of social justice issues.	3.96	none	3.92	none	4.00	none	4.33	none	3.96	none	3.33	none	0.5645
I feel respected by students at my school.	3.77	none	3.83	none	3.26	none	3.83	none	3.61	none	3.33	none	0.0788
There is tension between my racial group and other racial groups in my school.	2.34	none	2.33	none	2.42	none	3.00	none	2.39	none	4.00	none	0.0617
I have a racially diverse friend group.	4.00	none	3.82	none	4.05	none	4.67	none	4.04	none	3.00	none	0.0584
Racism needs to be talked about more at school.	4.18	none	3.93	none	4.11	none	4.75	none	4.04	none	3.67	none	0.0578
I feel like I belong at this school.	3.72	none	3.70	none	3.21	none	3.50	none	3.50	none	3.00	none	0.0534
I feel uncomfortable talking about race/racial justice issues at school.	2.04	none	2.34	none	2.05	none	2.17	none	2.32	none	3.33	none	0.0610
I catch myself making assumptions about different races at my school.	2.42	none	2.65	none	2.05	none	2.25	none	2.71	none	2.67	none	0.0626
I am accepting and understanding to all races.	4.64	Asian*	4.28	White*	4.58	none	4.92	none	4.36	none	3.67	none	<0.05
Having a mandatory racial literacy class as part of my curriculum would help my community.	3.78	none	3.41	none	3.47	none	4.25	none	3.25	none	3.33	none	0.1144
I believe in the Black Lives Matter movement.	4.51	none	4.27	none	4.11	none	4.92	none	4.43	none	3.67	none	0.0554
People have told me that I act like a certain race.	2.83	Black*	3.30	Black*	3.42	none	4.58	White* Asian* Mixed*	3.21	Black*	3.33	none	<0.001
Jokes about different races are often funny, and shouldn't be considered racism.	2.14	none	2.38	none	2.00	none	2.58	none	2.25	none	2.00	none	0.4775

Results Figure 2

The highest correlation was between the statements "There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school" and "racism exists at my school" with a correlation of 0.75.

"Racism exists at my school" was also positively correlated to two statements, one stating that the student has seen another student discriminated against because of their race, and one about believing in the Black Lives Matter movement.

"There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school" was positively correlated with two statements, one stating that racism needs to be talked about more at school, and another about seeing another student being discriminated against because of their race.

"Racism needs to be talked about at school" had positive correlations to a statement encouraging a mandatory racial literacy class, and the other about believing in the BLM movement.

	Racism exists at my school	There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school.	Racism needs to be talked about more at school.
There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school.	0.75		
I have seen another student discriminated against at school because of their race.	0.52	0.54	
Racism needs to be talked about more at school.	0.53	0.57	
Having a mandatory racial literacy class as part of my curriculum would help my community.			0.68
I believe in the Black Lives Matter movement.	0.52		0.64

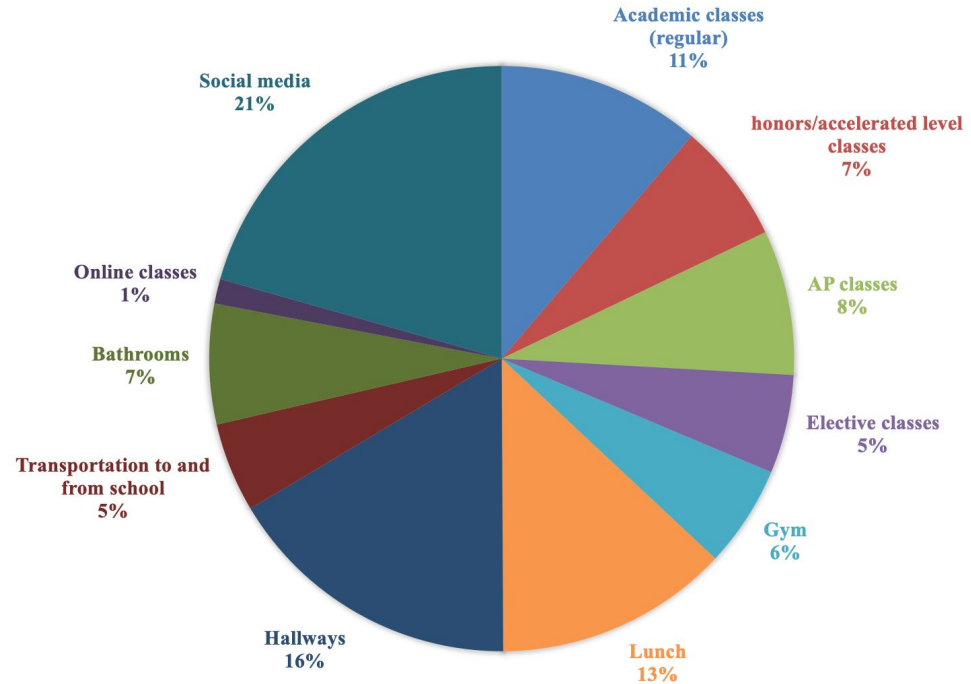
Results Figure 3

Each student who took the survey was allowed to select multiple options.

The three most selected options were social media (21%), hallways (16%), and lunch (13%), all of which have little/no teacher/administrator/parent supervision.

The three least selected options were online classes (1%), elective classes (5%), and transportation to and from school (5%).

(Note: at the time of the survey, students had been learning remotely for 6 months in total, with limited hours on Zoom compared to typical in-person class time).



Results Figure 4

(fig. 4) ANOVA and Tukey Post Hoc significance for Likert scale data by gender (Tukey Post Hoc test: ♀ = significant from women, ♂ = significant from men, * = significant from non-binary people)

	Race	Men	Women	Non-Binary	P value
Racism exists in my school.	White	3.425*	3.839	4.750♂	0.0083
	Asian	3.0909	3.5714	3.3333	0.0820
	Black	4.0000	4.1250	NA	0.8105
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	3.3571	NA	0.5010
	Mixed	3.5714	3.5714	4.0000	0.7956
There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school	White	3.225*♀	3.716♂	4.500♂	0.0091
	Asian	2.8788	3.4464	3.3333	0.0749
	Black	4.0000	3.8750	NA	0.8105
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.5000	3.1429	NA	0.6464
	Mixed	2.8571	3.2778	3.6667	0.4062
I have been discriminated against by another student because of my race.	White	1.625	1.432	1.000	0.2166
	Asian	2.1212	2.5536	2.3333	0.2473
	Black	3.2500	2.2500	NA	0.3190
	Hispanic/Latinx	2.0000	2.0714	NA	0.9231
	Mixed	1.8571	2.3333	2.0000	0.5663
I have seen another student discriminated against at school because of their race.	White	2.425♀	3.216♂	3.250	0.0019
	Asian	2.5152	3.1429	3.3333	0.0837
	Black	4.2500	3.1250	NA	0.2596
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.5000	3.0000	NA	0.6248
	Mixed	3.1429	3.3333	3.3333	0.9469
I acknowledge and inform others of social justice issues.	White	3.625♀	4.108♂	4.500	0.0065
	Asian	3.6061♀	4.1071♂	4.3333	0.0096
	Black	4.0000	4.5000	NA	0.3828
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	3.9286	NA	0.9284
	Mixed	3.4286	4.0556	4.6667	0.0489
I feel respected by students at my school.	White	3.900	3.757	3.500	0.3893
	Asian	3.9697	3.7679	3.3333	0.2438
	Black	4.2500	3.6250	NA	0.2384
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	3.0714	NA	0.1861
	Mixed	3.5714	3.6111	3.6667	0.9852
There is tension between my racial group and other racial groups in my school.	White	1.900♀	2.541♂	3.000	0.0028
	Asian	1.9697	2.4821	3.3333	0.0307
	Black	2.5000	3.2500	NA	0.2990
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.0000	2.2857	NA	0.3014
	Mixed	1.4286*	2.5556	3.6667♂	0.0171
I have a racially diverse friend group.	White	4.0250	3.8378	4.2500	0.4763
	Asian	4.0000	3.7679	3.0000	0.2218
	Black	4.5000	4.7500	NA	0.4332
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	4.1429	NA	0.8816
	Mixed	3.8571	4.3333*	2.6667♀	0.0244
Racism needs to be talked about more at school.	White	3.6750♀*	4.5135♂	5.0000♂	1.2439e-6
	Asian	3.5455♀	4.1250♂	4.6667	0.0135
	Black	4.5000	4.8750	NA	0.1877
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	4.1429	NA	0.8757
	Mixed	3.7143	4.0000	5.0000	0.1237

I feel like I belong at this school.	White	4.0000	3.5946	3.5000	0.0819
	Asian	4.0606♀	3.5536♂	3.0000	0.0088
	Black	4.2500	3.1250	NA	0.0906
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.0000	3.0000	NA	1.0000
	Mixed	3.8571	3.3333	3.6667	0.2739
I feel uncomfortable talking about race/racial justice issues at school.	White	2.2000	1.9730	1.5000	0.2826
	Asian	2.5152	2.2321	2.3333	0.4899
	Black	2.0000	2.2500	NA	0.7326
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.0000	2.0714	NA	0.1861
	Mixed	2.1429	2.4444	2.0000	0.6759
I catch myself making assumptions about different races at my school.	White	2.5750	2.3108	2.5000	0.4512
	Asian	2.3030	2.8214	2.6667	0.0684
	Black	1.5000	2.6250	NA	0.1086
	Hispanic/Latinx	2.5000	1.9286	NA	0.4530
	Mixed	2.8571	2.7778	2.0000	0.5529
I am accepting and understanding to all races.	White	4.5750	4.6351	4.7500	0.7546
	Asian	4.0000	4.4643	4.3333	0.0848
	Black	4.0000	4.5714	NA	0.4833
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	4.5714	NA	0.4833
	Mixed	4.2857	4.3333	4.6667	0.8293
Having a mandatory racial literacy class as part of my curriculum would help my community.	White	3.1750♀	4.2027♂	4.2500	6.7812e-5
	Asian	2.5152♀	3.9821♂	4.0000	6.7459e-7
	Black	4.0000	4.3750	NA	0.5059
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.0000	3.3571	NA	0.7397
	Mixed	2.2857	3.4444	4.3333	0.0984
I believe in the Black Lives Matter movement.	White	4.2250♀	4.7162♂	5.0000	0.0024
	Asian	3.7576♀	4.5179♂	4.6667	0.0031
	Black	4.7500	5.0000	NA	0.1669
	Hispanic/Latinx	3.5000	4.1429	NA	0.4683
	Mixed	4.1429	4.4444	5.0000	0.4744
People have told me that I act like a certain race.	White	2.9000	2.7973	1.7500	0.2824
	Asian	2.8788♀	3.5536♂	2.3333	0.0208
	Black	4.2500	4.7500	NA	0.2389
	Hispanic/Latinx	4.0000	3.4286	NA	0.5976
	Mixed	3.2857*	3.5000*	1.3333♀♂	0.0092
Jokes about different races are often funny, and shouldn't be considered racism.	White	2.7250♀	1.8378♂	1.5000	5.6682e-5
	Asian	2.7273	2.1786	2.3333	0.0805
	Black	4.0000♀	1.8750♂	NA	0.0301
	Hispanic/Latinx	2.0000	2.0714	NA	0.9395
	Mixed	2.8571	2.1111	1.6667	0.1848

Results

Figure 4

White students had 5 statements that were significant by gender, Asian students had 4, Hispanic/Latinx students had 0, Black students had 1, and mixed race students had 2.

All significant statements regarding activism, noticing the presence of racism, and talking about race/racism at school had significantly lower agreements for men compared to women and/or nonbinary students.

For the statement “I have a racially diverse friend group,” nonbinary mixed race students disagreement (2.667) with the statement was significantly different from mixed women’s agreement (4.333).

Both Black and White male students had a higher agreement with the statement: “Jokes about different races are often funny, and shouldn’t be considered racism” than the women of their race.

Qualitative Data

White men who responded generally viewed racism at school as “not a big deal” or nonexistent.

“Anyone that says there is racism within [redacted] is just way too sensitive and doesn't even know what they're talking about.”

“Stereotypes exist.... deal with it...If you think there's nothing funny about being racist then ig [shorthand for “I guess”] we wouldn't be friends.”

“I don't feel like my school has a lot of racism in general.”

Many Asian students noted instances of discrimination or jokes about their race, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted others' views toward them

“Everyone would either tell me I'm not Indian at all or I'm too Indian.”

“Early February, Someone took an umbrella and shoved it in my face to 'keep the corona away.'”

“Smart because I'm Asian.”

“People assume I'm smart because I'm Asian, or when I do well on an assignment they say, “oh well you're Asian and born smart so obviously you would do well. It's not really discrimination, more of them trying to feel better about themselves by attributing my accomplishments to my natural born intelligence instead of hard work, but it does get annoying sometimes.”

Qualitative Data

Most White female students noted that although they may not see or experience racism at school, it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

"I feel like I don't see racism in school. But I think there is racism in other circles that I just don't see."

"...I don't really think I've seen out right racial discrimination, but then again I have classes with a lot of people who look like me."

"I don't have any personal stories but having the overall concept in my mind of racism, there are a couple of times where I witness small moments of racism."

Other students of color noted moments where racial stereotypes and misconceptions were perpetuated by other students.

"Someone in my health class in 8th grade had pointed to a group of people of color and said that "they all probably do drugs and smoke."" Hispanic/Latinx, 14, woman

"Being told that I was going to get into a good college because I was Black and had good grades. "You have it much easier than I do."" Black, 17, woman

Discussion

Black student stereotypes at predominately white institutions: less intelligent, lazy, etc. (Fries-Britt et al. 2001)

- When these stereotypes are contradicted with academic success, students might be told that they “act white,” while really meaning they do not align with offensive racial stereotypes.

Racial discrimination online, in hallways, and at lunch

- These places are typically less supervised, which indicates that anti-racism practice and teaching must go beyond the classroom

Discussion

Positive correlations between acknowledging racism at school and believing in BLM, mandatory racial literacy courses (correlation doesn't mean causation!)

- Possible relationships
 - Those who see and experience racism are more likely to align with more progressive racial justice attitudes
 - Those who align with more progressive racial justice attitudes may be more perceptive to racial discrimination around them

Discussion

Women vs. Men with racial justice/racial discrimination attitudes

- White men (in this high school setting, in this particular town) generally hold more neutral/less progressive stances on topics of race compared to White women
 - This partially aligns with previous research on women vs men in the workplace
 - women were more likely than men to actively advocate for addressing workplace equity issues than men (Gill, 1992).
 - Corresponds to high school sentiments, where women were more often in higher agreement with statements regarding racial literacy, BLM, and talking about racism at school
 - gender differences in racial attitudes were mostly inconsistent, but significant differences were limited to attitudes on racial policy (Hughes, 2003)
 - Statements like “I am accepting..” had no differences between genders, while statements more “policy-like” like mandatory racial literacy, talking about racism at school, and activism had a higher agreement with women than men.

Discussion

Error

- A higher number of respondents were White and/or Asian, while a smaller number encompassed the Hispanic/Latinx, Black, or Native American/Hawaiian groups, making it harder to find statistical differences
 - In the future, a larger sample size will help get more consistent data.

A lack of data on nonbinary students makes it hard to corroborate any significances found. There were also very few nonbinary respondents.

Future directions include expanding on the significant statements, and looking at comparisons between schools of different student body demographics, socioeconomic statuses, and political climates.

Conclusion

While there are some differences along race and gender lines at this high school, many differences are slight, or do not drastically impact the general consensus with a particular statement (for example when responses are both around “agree,” but with different decimal places).

- It's important to note these differences in order to see how students of different demographics might respond to this new era of individual responsibility and the implementation of racial literacy courses and anti-racism teachings throughout all subjects.

Looking at the past year, a ton of online activism is trickled in with femininity and aesthetics, especially on Instagram. Does this make modern day activism less palatable to more masculine individuals? Now seeing that there are differences in opinion between men, women, and nonbinary high school students across many topics regarding race, it's now imperative to look into the link of toxic masculinity/misogyny to see if this may be one reason why these differences are being brought up with data.

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