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

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the presence of racism within the student body at a school in Mercer County, New Jersey. Specifically, the questions involve asking students about how they perceive racism in context of relationships with other students. Racism has always existed in the history of the United States, but now it often takes the more nuanced form of less noticeable microaggressions. This makes it appear like racism is less present within a community, which can make it easier to ignore important conversations about race. Students were surveyed about their experiences within school, mostly focusing on student-student interactions. Likert scale data was analyzed using ANOVA Tukey Post Hoc HSD. Prominent results indicate that Black students agreed they are told they act like a certain race, while other groups were neutral or disagreed. Across gender and race lines, there were statistically signicificant differences that indicate a more neutral opinion of racial justice activism and race discussions at school for men, while women and nonbinary people showed positive opinions of these topics. Other results included identifying places where racial discrimination was most common, with unsupervised areas such as social media, lunch, and hallways being common places for it to occur. The research aims to give a background on racial attitudes of students in order to better address the gaps that exist in anti-racism learning, and to serve as information to allow students to be more aware of the environment they have existed in at school.

INTRODUCTION

Racism in education has always been a topic of great importance, from Brown v. Board of Education to the school to prison pipeline. Several studies have investigated racism and intolerance in today's school systems. A common term that can be used to ignore racism in schools is the term "colorblind," as it ignores the unique struggles of each race in order to be completely equal, instead of equitable (Joseph, 2016). In such schools, and other schools around the country, racism in schools can lead to greater surveillance of students of color (Nance, 2017).

When talking about and researching racism, it is important to define all relevant terms. Attitudes and stereotypes are essential in understanding how discrimination against people of color happens, especially in the "bubble" of many liberal towns. A stereotype is an association between a concept and a trait, while an attitude is an association between a concept and a way of thinking (Nance, 2017). To further elaborate, a stereotype could be associating a race with a certain trait. Common ones include associating Asian students with good grades, or Black women with loudness, all of which have a negative impact on individual expression of these groups (Joseph, 2016). An attitude, though, doesn't always coincide with stereotypes. Just because a person stereotypes a certain race, it doesn't mean that they automatically have negative feelings about that race. Even so, stereotypes, with good or bad attitudes associated with them, are harmful because they can lead to internalized racism (E.J.R et al., 2019).

Internalized racism is a result of being victimized by racism. It is the development of "ideas, beliefs, actions, and behaviors that support or collude with racism" (Bivens, 2005). The development of these things can lead to self doubt and/or a loss of connection with one's race, even to the extent where individuals want to emulate the oppressor (E.J.R et al., 2019). In one study, internalized racism was correlated with lower career aspirations (E.J.R et al., 2019), and in another similar study lower perceived economic limitations of education (Cooper et al., 2016).

The public high school used in this study is located in Mercer county, New Jersey, which is home to Princeton University, along with numerous high schools. It can be described as more democratic, based on presidential election voter trends from the past 20 years (NJ Department of Elections). As underlined by the Democrat party platform, this party focuses on goals such as fixing the racial wealth gap, giving everyone access to a good education, ending the school-to-prison pipeline, and fighting for women's rights (democrats.org). On the other hand, the Republican presidential candidate has received the minority number of votes for Mercer county, a party which focuses on limiting government power, criminal justice, deregulation of the economy, and restoring the "american dream" (GOP.org) While these voter trends may be indicative of a county or town's attitude as a whole, describing this country as a whole as liberal is consistent with the political climate in the area.

The unnamed school district used in this study is a 3,763.5 student district located near Princeton University, with a demographic of 53% White, 20% Asian, 15% Hispanic/Latinx, 6% Black, 6% mixed race, .1% Native American/Hawaiian Native students (NJ Department of Education). The aim of this study is to examine and

analyze how students of different demographics perceive racism in a generally liberal town.

METHODS

An online survey was created and distributed to high school students after gaining approval from their principal and other administrators. The survey consisted of demographic questions, such as age, race (based on the categories the department of education in New Jersey uses: White, Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, Mixed, Native American/Native Hawaiian, and grade (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019). For survey takers under 18, a parental consent question on the survey was mandatory. The bulk of the survey was a 17 statement likert scale, asking questions about whether students believed there was racial discrimination between students, their opinions on social justice topics, and their own feelings about their sense of belonging at school. An optional open ended section was included for students to elaborate on their experiences. The survey was distributed online, through teachers' class websites, and the survey was open for 3 weeks from mid-November to early December.

The Likert scale data was analyzed by race using one way ANOVA and post-hoc Tukey HSD test. A correlation test was also conducted using all responses to compare the relation each statement had to another.

RESULTS

(fig 1.) Likert scale means of student opinions of racial discrimination/racial justice by race with ANOVA and Tukey Post Hoc Test significance
(*: p <0.05)

	White (137)		Asian (93)		Hispanic/Latinx (19)		Black (12)		Mixed (28)		Native American/Native HI (3)		
	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	mean	sig.	P value
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.	2.344	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	3.78	none	3.41	none	3.47	none	4.25	none	3.25	none	3.33	none	0.1144

community.

Statement													p-value
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

Figure 1. ANOVA and Tukey Post Hoc significance for Likert scale answers by race. There are four statements with significant responses, "People have told me I act like a certain race" with Black students being significantly higher (4.58) than White (2.83), Asian (3.30), and Mixed (3.21) students, "I am accepting and understanding to all races" (Asian students (4.28) being significantly lower than White students (4.28), and "I have been discriminated against by another student because of my race," White students (1.53) being significantly lower than Asian, Black, and Mixed Students.

(fig. 2) Significant positive Pearson correlations between likert statements (all races, all genders)

	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

Figure 2. Shows the significantly positive Pearson correlations between likert statements, comparing data from all races and genders, not separately. "Racism exists at my school" had positive correlations with the following statements: "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), "Racism needs to be talked about more at school" (0.53), and "I believe in the Black Lives Matter movement" (0.52). "There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school" had positive correlations with agreeing that racism needs to be talked about more at school, and seeing another student being discriminated against because of their race (0.57 and 0.54, respectively). "Racism needs to be talked about more at school" had two positive correlations: agreement with implementing a mandatory racial literacy class (0.68), and believing in the Black Lives Matter movement (0.64).

IF YOU SEE/EXPERIENCE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION BY STUDENTS AT YOUR SCHOOL, WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)
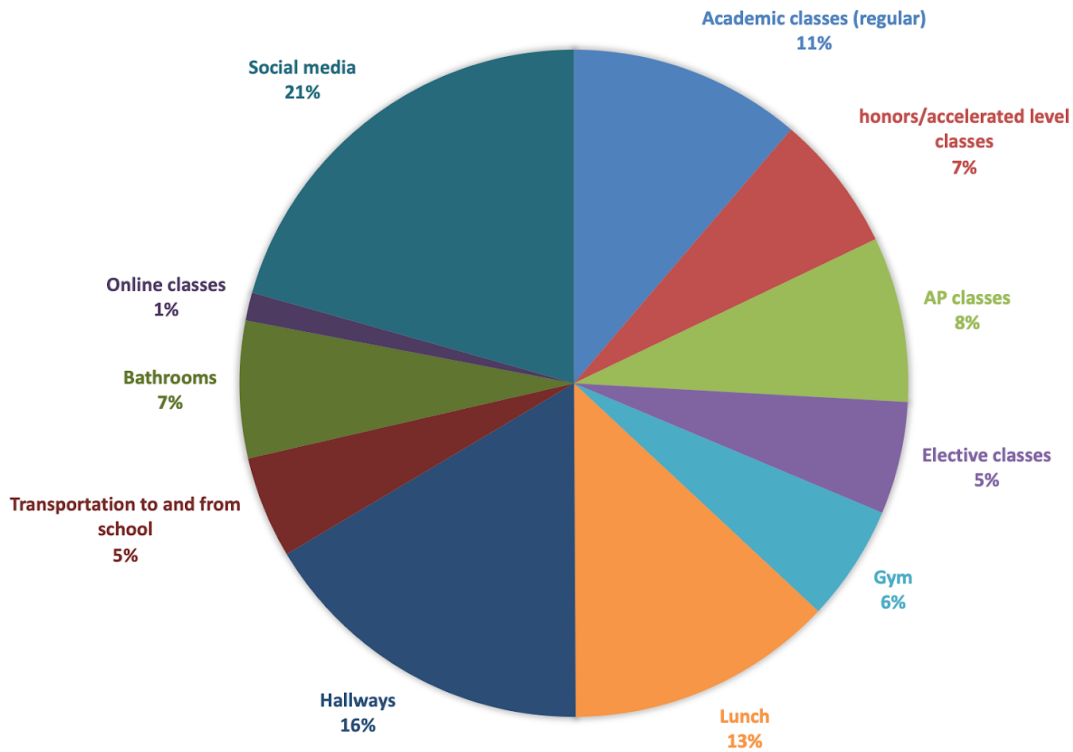
Figure 3. The pie chart displays the results of the question asking where students see or experience discrimination. The question was not limited to one answer, so most students chose multiple answers. The highest percentage where students saw or experienced racial discrimination the most was on social media, with 22% of responses. The second and third highest were hallways (16%) and lunch (13%). The lowest number of responses were for online classes (1%) transportation to and from school (5%) and elective classes (5%).

(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
	White	3.425*	3.839	4.750♂	0.0083
	Asian	3.0909	3.5714	3.3333	0.0820
Racism exists in my school.	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
	White	3.225*♀	3.716♂	4.500♂	0.0091
	Asian	2.8788	3.4464	3.3333	0.0749
There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school	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
	White	1.625	1.432	1.000	0.2166
	Asian	2.1212	2.5536	2.3333	0.2473
I have been discriminated against by another student because of my race.	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
	White	2.425♀	3.216♂	3.250	0.0019
I have seen another student discriminated against at school because of their race.	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

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	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
	White	2.9000	2.7973	1.7500	0.2824
	Asian	2.8788♀	3.5536♂	2.3333	0.0208
People have told me that I act like a certain race.	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
	White	2.7250♀	1.8378♂	1.5000	5.6682e-5
	Asian	2.7273	2.1786	2.3333	0.0805
Jokes about different races are often funny, and shouldn't be considered racism.	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

Figure 4. The data shows likert data from each race separated by gender. The significant values only apply to the gender within that race. White and Asian students showed the most likert statement differences. For the statements about mandatory racial literacy, the Black Lives Matter movement, racism needing to be talked about at school, and informing others of social justice issues, White and Asian women agreed significantly more with these statements than White and Asian men ($p < 0.05$). Hispanic students showed no statistical differences between genders. Only one significant difference was found for Black students on the statement "Jokes about different races are often funny, and shouldn't be considered racism," with Black women disagreeing, and Black men agreeing with the statement ($p < 0.05$).

Of 299 responses, 292 were used for analysis. The other 7 responses were either incomplete, or invalid because parental consent was not stated. There were 137 White respondents, 93 Asian respondents, 19 Hispanic/Latinx respondents, 12 Black respondents, 28 mixed respondents, and 3 native american/native hawaiian respondents. When separated by race, only three statements showed statistical significance (fig. 1).

In figure 1, the data shows the average results for each race, for each likert scale statement, along with the P values calculated using ANOVA, and the significance of each race's relationship to another race. Most of the data was insignificant, meaning that most responses did not significantly differ by race. The three statements that were significant were:

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

"I am accepting and understanding to all races."

"People have told me that I act like a certain race."

For experiencing discrimination based on race by students, Asian, Black, and mixed race students had a significant difference compared to White students: values in the 2 digit compared to White response average being 1.53. Although these values are significantly higher than the White responses, the "2" value indicates "disagree" on the likert scale. This is not indicative of the absence of racial discrimination, though, as many individual responses were in the 3s, 4s, and 5s.

White and Asian students had a significant difference when comparing their responses for the statement "I am accepting and understanding to all races."

White students had an average of 4.64, while Asian students averaged 4.28, whose difference is statistically significant. Both groups, however, still fall into the category of "agree," the White student average reaching more toward "strongly agree."

The last significant statement was "People have told me that I act like a certain race." The average Black student response was statistically significant from White, Asian, and Mixed students. The average for Black students was 4.58, between "agree" and "strongly agree," while Asian and Mixed responses were 3.30 and 3.21, respectively, signifying a "neutral" opinion, leaning toward "agree." White students had the lowest significant value of 2.14, representing "disagree."

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient test was used with all of the likert scale data to find any correlations between responses by comparing each statement. Figure 2 shows significant positive correlations between different likert statements. Most responses were not correlated to any other statements. However, the results for "racism exists at my school" had positive correlations between four other statements about the presence of racial discrimination, talking about racism in school, and activism. The data may suggest that those who see racism at school are more likely to support initiatives and movements against racism, and/or those who support these initiatives are more aware of racism at school. "Racism exists at my school" had positive correlations between four other statements about the presence of racial discrimination, talking about racism in school, and activism. The highest correlation was between "racism exists at my school" and "there are racial discrimination issues between students at my school." There was a positive correlation between "racism needs to be talked about more at school" with both "Having a

mandatory racial literacy class would help my community" and "I believe in the Black Lives Matter movement."

To get a greater sense of the environment at the school, students were asked where they saw or experienced racial discrimination. In the pie chart shown in figure 3, Social media was chosen more often than any other place/platform, with 121 selections. The second highest location/platform was in the hallways, with 97 students selecting it. The lowest, with 8 people selecting it, was online classes.

Data from the likert scale statements were also separated within each race by gender to see if there were statistical significances between genders. For White students, women agreed more than men on statements such as "There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school" (3.716 vs 3.225), "I acknowledge and inform others of social justice issues" (4.108 vs. 3.625), "I believe in the Black Lives Matter movement" (4.716 vs. 4.225), and other statements acklowledgins the presence of racism at school, and support for racial justice initiatives and speaking more about racism. Non-binary students showed no statistical significance from the women respondents, but did show differences between the men respondents on the statements "racism exists at my school (4.750 vs 3.425, respectively), "There are racial discrimination issues between students at my school (4.500 vs 3.225), and "racism needs to be talked about more at school" (5.000 vs 3.675).

For Asian students, women also agreed more than men on the statement "I acknowledge and inform others of social justice issues" (4.107 vs. 3.606), "racism needs to be talked about more at school" (4.125 vs. 3.675), and also agreed more with implementing a mandatory racial literacy class as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. There were no statistically significant values for non-binary students within this group.

Black students only had one likert statement that was statistically significant between genders, that being "Jokes about different races are often funny, and shouldn't be considered racism." While Black men generally agreed (4.000), Black women disagreed (1.875). There were no responses from Black non-binary students.

Hispanic/Latinx students had no statistical differences between gender, and there were no responses from Hispanic/Latinx non-binary students.

Mixed race students had statistically significant values for the likert statements "There is tension between my racial group and other racial groups in my school" (1.429 for men and 3.667 for non-binary students), and "People have told me that I act like a certain race," all gender identities being significantly different from one another (3.286 for men, 3.500 for women, and 1.333 for non-binary students).

The results from this table generally show that men, for the statements that were significantly different across genders, tend to have less of an activist mindset and

are less acknowledging of racism between students at school than women and non-binary people. There were no statistical significances for the statements that focuses on feelings of belonging at school, feeling uncomfortable talking about race, and being accepting and understanding to all races.

Qualitative data was also collected as an optional part at the end of the survey. The results consisted of responses from 12 White students, 9 Asian students, 1 hispanic student, 1 Black student, and 4 mixed students. These responses consisted of details of personal experiences with racism, as well as student opinions on the presence of racism at school.

A common stereotype for Asians is being naturally intelligent. Asian students corroborate this in their responses. This stereotype is noted to be perpetuated by Asian peers as well. Most of the students who stated this stereotype wrote that it didn't bother them much, or that "it's not really discrimination." Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a student even notes his experience with a microaggression stemming from the false narrative that Asian people are the origins and spreaders of the virus.

"People have told me I act Asian, but it's usually other Asian students and almost always one of my friends. I think it's probably perpetuating stereotypes but I have never felt threatened or uncomfortable."
-Asian, 15, man

"Everyone would either tell me I'm not Indian at all or I'm too Indian."
-Asian, 15, man

"Early February, Someone took an umbrella and shoved it in my face to 'keep the corona away.'"
-Asian, 14, man

"Smart because I'm Asian."
-Asian, 15, woman

"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."
-Asian, 14, woman

"Some students seem to be indifferent to racism, as they believe it's not an issue. They think that people who talk about racism are playing the victim, and it's hard for me to explain to them that they are wrong (I know they aren't bad people, and I don't

think I have ever heard them be openly racist, but some of their world views are concerning).”
-Asian, 15, man

“Someone made a racist comment about an Asian stereotype to me, and he was not held accountable or called out. I felt uncomfortable saying anything because I was the only Asian girl, surrounded by the group of guys who were all friends. I felt cornered.”
-Asian, 16, woman

“I am Indian, and people have told me, more than once, that I smell like curry, even though I don't. I reported the comments because they made me uncomfortable...and the consequence given to the person who said this was simply to apologize to me, which they didn't do.”
-Asian, 15, woman

“I think that this all extends from microaggressions and that a mandatory racial lit class would make ppl become more aware of how their actions hurt others.”
-Asian, 15, woman

Of the White respondents, there were 4 men, 3 of which noted that racism isn't present at school, or it isn't of large importance. The other man, jewish, noted the use of a jewish slur used against him by another student:

“Anyone that says there is racism within [redacted] is just way too sensitive and doesn't even know what they're talking about.”
-White, 17, man

“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.”
-White, 18, man

“I don't feel like my school has a lot of racism in general.“
-White, 17, man

*“[I] have been called a greedy K**e.”*
-White, 16, man

The White women, however, had a different pattern of opinions. While they personally recognize that they do not experience it, and they may not see it or notice it, they do not deny that it could exist elsewhere.

“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.”

-White, 16, woman

“...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.”
-White, 16, woman

“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.”
-White, 16, woman

One woman noticed a specific incident in which another student of color was taunted by their classmates.

“[A] group of White boys started singing a song they associated as an 'Indian' anthem and sang it in the face of the only Indian/Asian student In the class. The student laughed it off but some of us could tell it affected that person.”
-White, 16, woman

A few highlighted the importance of learning about racism and racial literacy in the classroom:

“We had a unit about racism at PHS in my Spanish class and it was really insightful.”
-White, 18, woman

“...we really need a mandatory class or at least another outlet that won't only expose us to these issues, but also how to handle them....We need to know what to do and how to go about these situations so we can be effective advocates.”
-White, 16, woman

The other students wrote of specific instances of racial discrimination that they, and others, have experienced. These moments include perpetuating stereotypes of hispanic and Asian students, downplaying intelligence and work through the argument of racial inequity of affirmative action, inappropriately commenting on the color of people's skin, and more discrimination in the new era of anti-Asian rhetoric during the Coronavirus pandemic.

“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

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"In my english class last year, one of the students in my class was told he was "so dark"... Also, since I am paler than my dad people are surprised that we are related. People at school tell me "wow you are not fully White?" I don't appreciate this comment of surprise and confusion about my parents."
-Mixed (White, Hispanic/Latinx), 15, woman

"I've been called "mixed breed", been told to stay away from their dogs because Asians eat dogs, supposedly."
-Mixed (Asian, White), 18, woman

"Someone asked me (as a joke) whether I was more susceptible to coronavirus because I'm half Asian. They were just joking though and it didn't really bother me."
    -Mixed (Asian, White), 15, woman

DISCUSSION

At Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), Black students encounter stereotypes that assume that they are less intelligent (Fries-Britt et al. 2001). If a common stereotype of Black students contradicts the academic nature of a high school in a White liberal college town, students may begin to nurture this stereotype by saying that a Black student "acts White," while really meaning that the Black student defies a common stereotype for Black students, which can be used to explain why Black students had a significantly higher agreement with the statement "I have been told that I act like a certain race."

When students noted where they saw or experienced discrimination most often, non-academic locations had the highest number of responses: social media, hallways, and during lunch. This poses a challenge to teachers and administrators working to decrease racial discrimination, as these are places with little to no teacher supervision. Knowing this may help adults be more aware of the areas most common for potential discrimination, and be more alert to catch and call out racism.

Seeing the correlation between likert statements, those who shared more active views (supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, encouraging a racial literacy class, believing that racism should be talked about more in school), had a positive correlation to acknowledging and seeing racism. While these are correlated, it does not mean that one causes another. Those who see or experience racism more may want to be more active in the fight against it, or being more active against racism may make one more observant of situations where racism occurs. This information is important for educators because it may be those that do not notice or see racism that need a more formal education on racial literacy: a class that these types of students may not voluntarily take if they don't believe racism to be an issue in their community.

In a 1992 study, it was found that women were more likely than men to actively advocate for addressing workplace equity issues than men (Gill, 1992). While some of the issues stated in the study pertain mostly to women, like harassment in the workplace, their advocacy was not only directed at their gender. Similarly, we can see how high school students who are women, across most races, generally have higher agreement with statements regarding racial equity implementation and ativism, like racial literacy courses, Black Lives Matter, and informing others of social justice issues, than men. Now that this disparity is identified, it is important to address how this has occurred and why, and how to work towards making racial justice activism and positive racial attitudes less gendered.

Another study examined the differences in racial attitudes between men and women, and found that the gender differences in racial attitudes were mostly inconsistent, but significant differences were limited to attitudes on racial policy (Hughes, 2003). This explains why there weren't statistically significant values by gender for statements like "I am accepting," "I have a diverse friend group", etc. while the statistical significance centered around BLM, talking about race in school, and more "policy" oriented topics about race. This goes to show that those that have lower agreement with the statements related to activism do not necessarily have a higher rate of perceiving their opinions or thoughts as racially intolerant.

There is a lack of literature related to non-binary high school students, especially specifically on racial discrimination and activism. This can be attributed to a smaller number of non-binary students in school, as well as social pressures in high school keeping non-binary students in the closet, or in an environment where they may not question their gender yet.

Letting students know these trends is important and adds perspective that they might not have known if they don't have a diverse friend group where they can discuss race with multiple points of view. This research hopes to make students more cautious of their actions.

Possible errors or elements to change if this study is repeated are question choice and sample size. While there were some significant results, a more thorough analysis could have been done with a larger sample size, especially a greater increase in the number of Hispanic/Latinz, Black, Mixed, and Native American and Native Hawaiian students. For future research, the questions that showed significance could be expanded upon to create a new, more in depth, survey. This research could also be used in the future to examine the impact of student body diversity on views of races.

CONCLUSION

While only three responses were statistically significant by race for the likert scale data, these three statements show the differences that each group faces at a PWI. Black students are more often told that they act like a certain race, and White students are significantly less likely to be discriminated against because of their race than students of color. Across gender lines, more data was significant to show that men tend to have views that lean more toward neutrality and less toward activism, like women and nonbinary students. This poses a great challenge for guiding anti-racist learning to accomodate for all identities, so that people can internalize and take advantage of the resources they are given. It is important to address the perceived "feminization" of activism, especially in upper-middle class communities, like those of this high school. How do we work to remove negative connotations of femininity so that more masculine-aligned people do not stray away from important work to fight against racism? Removing the idea of "femininity" is not an effective solution as it reinforces the ideas rooted in toxic masculinity that femininity is bad and that it must be removed in order for men to partake in something. Instead, examining why men view femininity to be bad, and deconstructing these thoughts is essential for all people to work towards becoming anti-racist.

Future directions for this research include surveying and comparing results from multiple schools of different political, socioeconomic, and/or racial backgrounds, comparing in person versus online students' views, and further expanding on the topics that were shown to be statistically significant in the original survey.

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