

Student Acceptance of a Multicultural Education: Exploring the Role of a Social Work Curriculum, Demographics, and Symbolic Racism

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ABSTRACT. While the virtues of a multicultural education are debated in the general US populace, most social work educators and organizations have embraced such an approach. Subsequently, social work journals have offered numerous essays on multicultural teaching techniques. Yet, these same journals have rarely explored the multicultural attitudes of social work students. To fill this gap, this paper empirically explores the ways in which BSW students accept or reject some multicultural goals. To do so, close-ended surveys were distributed to 437 undergraduates. After describing their responses to the authors' multicultural index, the project explores the survey results via demographic, social-psychological, and educational variables. With the assistance of a multiple regression, this project suggests that student acceptance of multiculturalism is swayed by the matters of gender and their stances on White privilege and institutional racism. However, student perceptions do not seem static since stu-

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dents become more positive toward a multicultural education after they have initiated interracial exchanges and completed a social diversity class. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Skillful social workers must recognize and respond to the different cultural backgrounds of their clients. To do so, Dungee-Anderson and Beckett (1995) suggest that practitioners must disengage from their own stereotypical beliefs, learn to empathize with people from stigmatized groupings, develop some nuanced understandings of different sub-cultures, and acquire culturally appropriate intervention techniques. Otherwise, social workers may engage in the detrimental practices of misdiagnosing client problems, offering culturally insensitive advice, and ethnocentrically imposing their personal values on others.

To cultivate a culturally aware student base, many advocacy groups have encouraged a wider multicultural curriculum (for a history see Torres and Jones, 1997). By the 1980s, the Council on Social Work Education officially endorsed a multicultural curriculum and the National Association of Social Workers wrote, "the social work curriculum should provide relevant and meaningful content related to ethnic and racial groups of color."

With such a multicultural imperative, accredited schools have officially agreed to develop classes that focus on groups disenfranchised on the basis of, for example, race/ethnicity, poverty, sexual orientation, immigrant status, and age. Although some suggest that many recalcitrant schools and professors have never properly implemented such a curriculum (Chau, 1990; McMahon and Allen-Meares, 1992; Singleton, 1994; Van Soest, 1995), there has been a diligent band of professionals and educators who have embraced the multicultural calling. In fact, there is a substantial literature on pedagogical insights and helpful bibliographies (i.e., Seifert and Butler, 1992; Manoleas, 1994; Ronnau, 1994; Aponte, 1995; Hurd, 1996).

As teachers paid more attention to multicultural matters, the reactions by students remained understudied. Despite some quantitative studies that have tangentially addressed social worker attitudes toward social diversity (Jayartne et al., 1992; Van Soest 1996; Bronstein and Gibson, 1998), there still

are no systematic studies on social work student reactions to a multicultural curriculum. In place of this thorough research, social work journals have occasionally dispensed some anecdotal impressions of student beliefs. Interestingly, as a whole, these first-hand accounts of teachers have offered disjointed portrayals of the same phenomena. Some professors declare that BSW students welcome the multicultural curriculum. For example, Manoleas (1994) asserts that UC Berkeley students want to take as many courses “dealing with ethnic minority content as they can” (p. 46). Conversely, some teachers dwell on a divided student body. Matsushima (1989) writes that “one might anticipate that most White social work students would be receptive to content on minorities . . . [but] others might think this is a threat to their own self-interests” (p. 314). Lastly, some teachers insist that social work students adamantly reject multicultural messages. Martin (1995) writes that most White social work students “acted as if race was a matter that should not be discussed” (p. 167), and Plinius (1995) warns that “multicultural courses often increase the interpersonal and intragroup intolerance that they designed to moderate” (p. 176). Likewise, Singleton (1994) found that many instructors were worried that many students found “oppression as boring” or “impertinent,” and that students had the audacity to announce “I want to go into private practice—why do I need to study all this stuff on poverty and Black folks?” (p. 12).

To fill this void, the present research deals with three interrelated questions: (1) to what extent do students desire a multicultural education? (2) do social work students have a distinctive multicultural stance? That is, are social work students more amenable to a multicultural education than students from other majors? (3) what are the factors that influence a student’s multicultural predisposition?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, a few educational studies have systematically traced student attitudes toward multiculturalism (i.e., Nel, 1993; Lopez et al., 1995; Levine and Cureton 1998). In as much as most of these studies are descriptive, only a few studies have attempted to explain why students maintain certain multicultural predispositions (i.e., Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1996). Since educational researchers conducted these studies, most of these studies focused on the interactions between the college environment and student perceptions.

In examining national samples, the works of educational researchers Austin (1993), Milem (1994), and Pascarella et al. (1996) suggests that class content can have a direct impact on multicultural attitudes. Through correlational analyses, they found that the completion of a multicultural course generally en-

hanced the appreciation of racial/ethnic diversity. A few social work studies replicated such findings (Ben-Arri, 1998; Black, 1994; Royse and Riffe, 1999). For example, an introductory social work class liberalized the gender notions of Texas students (Black, 1994); a sexual diversity class lowered the levels of homophobia among Israeli BSW students (Ben-Arri, 1998), and Mid-western undergraduates were more willing to work with poor, gay, and minority peoples after a class on multiculturalism (Royse and Riffe, 1999). Finally, Bogo et al. (1995) noted interest in working with multicultural clientele did change during a year of MSW classes.

However, other social work studies refute the notion of considerable schooling effects. In some earlier studies, several researchers concluded that student values did not significantly change during the MSW experience (Varley, 1968; Wodarski et al., 1988). More recently, research by Moran (1989) found that the number of social work classes had no bearing on the student commitment to social justice, and Van Soest (1996) found that students perceived society to be more rather than less just after they completed a class on social oppressions.

Since departmental units lay claim to certain topics and perspectives, students may select a major that affirms their values. With such a case, several studies have shown that students in the humanities and social sciences were more likely to favor multiculturalism than those who were matriculating in engineering, business, physical science, nursing, mathematics, and statistics (Astin 1993; Milem 1994; Springer et al., 1996). While there are no studies on the unique multicultural attitudes of social work students, many studies have found that social work students are more liberal than students from other majors. For example, one study found that social work majors were more generous in their attitudes towards public assistance than non-social work majors, while others showed that social work students had values more akin to the tenets of socialism and were more comfortable with flexible gender roles than students in other disciplines (Merdinger, 1982; Enoch, 1988; Black, 1994).

Finally, interactions in the university's extracurricular and informal domains might sway a student's racial outlook. More precisely, student appreciation of cultural diversity may be enhanced by conversations with college students from other racial and ethnic groups. In testing the general elements of the "contact thesis," Wright and his colleagues (1997) found that extended contact with racial/ethnic out-group members can lead to more positive inter-group attitudes. Similarly, Sigelman and Welch (1993) suggest that having close interracial friendships will decrease the amount of personal interracial hostilities, and Cramer et al. (1997) noted that social work students had lower homophobia levels when their class content was combined with out-of-class interactions with homosexual students. However, the contact thesis has not always been con-

firmed. Ellison, Powers, and Smith (1995) found that casual contacts with neighbors, workers and schoolmates made no difference in attitudes towards other racial/ethnic groups. Moreover, others argue that increased interactions can actually increase racial/ethnic antagonisms. For instance, some studies suggest that anti-Black prejudice increases when Black residents move into White-dominated enclaves (Taylor 1998) or when school desegregation plans are enacted (Quillian 1996).

Thus, the educational literature has offered three predictors of multicultural inclinations: class effects, major selection, and extent of interracial contacts. While these factors seemed worthy of analysis, the authors believed university based variables were too limiting. Recognizing that college students do not live exclusively in college settings, this study incorporates a wider array of independent variables that have been influential in non-collegiate samples. Specifically, the theoretical model borrows those independent variables that have had explanatory power in social science research regarding how Americans view the “race-targeted” policies of affirmative action and school desegregation.

Some studies have registered weak associations between policy preferences and ascribed social roles. In examining gender differences, a number of studies have found that women display greater affinities towards race-targeted policies (Link and Oldendick, 1996; Milem 1994; Pascarella et al., 1996; Qualls, Cox and Schehr, 1992; Seltzer, Frazier and Ricks, 1995; Springer et al., 1996; Stack, 1997; Wood and Chesser, 1994). On the other hand, other studies have found no gender differences on this topic (Astin, 1993; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Bobo and Kluegel, 1993). Likewise the role of person’s age has shown incompatible results. Some studies show that older respondents favor multiculturalism (Link and Oldendick, 1996), yet others find that older populations hold more negative attitudes toward minority groups (Glover, 1991; Seltzer, Frazier and Ricks, 1995), and others find that age simply has no bearing on racial attitudes (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Bobo and Kluegel, 1993; Sears et al., 1997).

Another line of research insists that attitudes towards racial policies are influenced by perceptions of societal fairness. With an emphasis on the perceived legitimacy of social institutions, some studies suggest that people are reluctant to support race-targeted programs when they think the economy functions as a meritocracy (Sidanius, Devereux and Pratto, 1991; Bobo and Kluegel, 1993; Gilens, 1995; Alvarez and Brehm, 1997). Hence, people who believe that the economy rewards the talented might not want to learn about the racial/ethnic groups who have not broadly experienced upward mobility. Similarly, those who accept the creeds of egalitarianism and liberalism will supposedly embrace progressive race-targeted policies.

Finally a set of social psychologists has argued that racial policy preferences are grounded in two important "racial schematas" (Sears, 1988; Bobo and Klegelul, 1993, Kinder and Sears, 1996). The first schemata deals with the issue of which racial/ethnic groups seem to be benefitting from the present arrangements. That is, people's interpretations of programs focused on race/ethnicity seem contingent upon their understandings of which groups do and do not control the riches and the fame of their society. The second strand deals with issues of attribution. Supposedly, opponents of affirmative action think that poor minorities are personally responsible for their negative fate while proponents see a social order that unjustly disenfranchises people along racial/ethnic lines.

Analyses of public opinion polls clearly indicate that many within the White population still believe that racial/ethnic minorities are inherently lazy, lacking intelligence, and violent (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Gilens, 1995). Predictably, studies have found that White individuals who cling onto such derogatory characterizations are very likely to oppose the programs that address social inequalities (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Bobo and Kluegel, 1993; Bobo and Zubrinsky, 1996; Gilens, 1995; Link and Oldendick, 1996; Sears et al., 1997; Taylor, 1998).

As obvious as this link between the "old style racism" and anti-multiculturalism seems, some researchers have noticed some weaknesses in this argument. While longitudinal studies indicate that fewer individuals within the White population will publicly embrace these archaic stereotypes, the general opposition to busing and affirmative action has nevertheless remained intact (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Sears et al., 1997). Thus, this lack of a perfect linear relationship suggests that other factors might drive this phenomenon.

To comprehend this enigma, Sears (1988) has argued that a large number of White Americans are practicing a new sort of "symbolic" or "contemporary racism." In modifying their racist repertoires, Sears argues that symbolic racists do not support disparaging or derogatory portrayals of minorities (they may even scold those who use racial epithets). Instead, these racists tacitly condone racial hierarchies by denying the existence of discrimination and racism. That is, they claim that contemporary America has abolished institutional racism and thus find it bizarre that minorities keep complaining about an already resolved problem. Hence, programs like Affirmative Action or bilingual education are seen as unnecessary expenditures on non-existent travesties.

Lastly, many individuals may not be simply annoyed by "misguided" or "pointless" racially focused policies. Instead, some may perceive these policies in an adversarial light. That is, they see politics as a battle over scarce resources as they conclude that racial policies leave the White populace in an unfair power disadvantage. Simply put, the gains of minority groups are seen

as encroachments on White entitlements. In emphasizing this zero-sum orientation, Kinder and Sanders (1997) write that “racial resentment features indignation as a central emotional theme, one provoked by the sense that Black Americans are getting and taking more than their fair share” (p. 293).

In extending this backlash argument, Bobo notes that fear of White loss is most acute among those who have expected White privilege. That is, it is especially hard to give up ones privileges when the challengers are expected to continuously acquiesce to some proscribed states of subordination. Bobo and Hutchings (1996) write, “feelings of competition and hostility emerge from the historically developed judgments about the positions in the social order that in-group members should rightly occupy” (p. 955). Thus, symbolic racists might reject a multicultural education since it might be seen as part of an insidious trend that strips the White population of earlier advantages.

METHODS

Sampling Procedures

To gather the data, surveys were distributed at public university in Eastern Kentucky. Situated in Central Appalachia, 96% of the six thousand students are White. Three-fourths of these students commute from counties that are virtually all White (more than 99.5%), and less than 10% of the students have lived in the somewhat racially mixed cities of Lexington and Louisville. Additionally, many of the students are first generation college students who grew up in economically distressed communities. The university’s most serviced counties have per capita incomes around \$11,000, poverty rates above the 35% line, and only 7% of the adults hold bachelor’s degrees (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1994; Rural Development Working Group, 1995).

Adding to this homogeneous student body is an administration that places a minimal emphasis on creating a racially diverse setting. The university has few minority professors, rarely invites minority speakers, and has an under-financed minority recruitment program. Furthermore, the college has never established any Black, Asian, Chicano, or Women’s studies departments, and only a small smattering of race, Appalachian, and women studies classes are offered in the English, history, social work, and sociology departments.

In establishing the 1998 sample frame, the researchers decided to use official classes. In implementing a stratified sample, surveys were distributed to a variety of academic disciplines. While slightly over-sampling social work classes, also selected were math, chemistry, biology, marketing, nursing, Spanish, sociology, government, English, physical education, and education

classes. Such classes were chosen since previous research suggests that racial attitudes vary by student major (Astin, 1993; Milem, 1994).

Since the surveys were completed during class sessions, the response rate was very high (99.3%). This impressive response rate netted a sample of 437 students. The ages of the respondents ranged from 17 to 51 years old, with 76.8% of students falling in the traditional bracket of 17 to 22 (Mode = 21, Mean = 22.2, SD = 5.9). Similar to the contours of the official student body, the sample had a high percentage of women (59.2%) and White students (92%). When exploring the class backgrounds of students, a large percentage came from impoverished backgrounds. About 15 percent of students earned or came from families with an income of less than \$15,000 a year, and about 6 percent of them placed themselves the income between \$15,000 and \$20,000. However, the student populace showed a large number of middle and upper-middle-class incomes, as more than 30 percent put themselves in the category of \$50,000 or more. Since Morehead State is a rural commuter school, it was not surprising that almost 51 percent of the students grew up in rural areas, and 27 percent lived in small towns. Conversely, only 4 percent said they lived in the center cities and 11 percent resided in the suburbs.

Measurement and Operationalizations

In using closed-ended questions, the six-itemed multicultural index focused on the student acceptance or rejection of multicultural goals. When using a five-point Lickert scale, the first three items measured individual and general mandates. These questions asked if the college should offer multicultural majors, provide multicultural workshops, and hire more minority faculty. Items four and five asked the students about making the whole curriculum more multicultural and requiring students to take a multicultural class. Finally, the most direct measure asked if respondents personally wanted more multicultural information. The index as a whole demonstrated an acceptable level of consistency since it displayed a high Cronbach's alpha of .89.

Some of the independent variables were measured in a dichotomous manner. For the variable multicultural class, a dummy code was applied to the question "At college(s), did you take any minority or gender related courses such as American Minority Relations, Appalachian Studies, Women's Studies?" (1 = yes, 0 = no). Likewise, social work status and gender were coded in a similar fashion (1 = female, 0 = male and 1 = Social Work, 0 = non-Social Work). This coding of major as "Social Work and other" addresses the possible uniqueness of Social Work students since "other majors" serves as a comparison group.

The amount of liberalism was recorded by a student's self-placement on a seven-point scale that ranged from far-left to far-right. When asking about the amount of racial contact, the study focused on the voluntary act of spending "freetime with members of other racial groups." The responses ranged on a six-point continuum of daily to never. The rest of the variables were measured with a standard five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). The egalitarianism item dealt with the acceptance of unequal life chances as it claimed "It is not a big problem if some people have more life chances than others" (Sidanius, Devereux and Pratto, 1991). The meritocracy item professed "Anyone who works hard can succeed" (Gilens, 1995).

The stereotype index employed four statements measuring racial attitudes (Cronbach alpha of .62). Respondents were if asked minorities were "generally lazy," "more intelligent," "like to be supported by welfare" and "are easy to get along with" (Bobo and Hutching, 1996; Gilens, 1995; Link and Oldendick, 1996; Sigelman and Tuch, 1997). For the variable of denying racism, the following item was employed: "Minorities frequently see racism were is does not exist."

The racial resentment index consisted of four questions: (1) "Blacks unfairly use affirmative action for their own benefit"; (2) "government gives Blacks more attention than they deserve" (Sears, 1988; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Glover, 1991; Seltzer, Frazier and Ricks, 1995); (3) "minorities are too demanding when they push for equal rights"; and (4) "teachers spend too much time looking at different cultures" (Cronbach alpha of .64).

FINDINGS

Descriptive Results: Attitudes Towards Multicultural Goals

Although educators and pundits might have some strong opinions on this topic, it is clear that most of these students were much less certain (see Table 1). In fact, when looking for enthusiastic affirmations, only one item achieved double digit Strongly Agree (the presence of a workshop). Conversely, adamant objections were equally scarce, since only the issue of multicultural majors descended to the 10% Strongly Disagree plateau.

Rather than being strong proponents or opponents of multiculturalism, most students gave neutral or lukewarm responses (the modal scores were either Agree or Not Sure). More precisely, the ambivalent mark of Not Sure consistently netted between 30 and 47% of the students, while moderate approvals fluctuated between 23 and 40% for every statement. Clearly, this meant that most students either minimally accepted or were indifferent to a multicultural experience.

TABLE 1. Student Perceptions of Multicultural Goals

Item name	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	S.D.
ADDING MC MAJORS	9.5%	31.6%	37.7%	11.2%	10.0%	3.195	1.084
MC REQUIREMENT	7.4	23.0	36.4	24.4	8.8	2.958	1.060
GENERAL CURRICULUM	7.0	42.5	32.5	12.3	5.8	3.325	0.977
PERSONAL MC INTEREST	4.4	23.0	47.2	17.9	7.4	2.991	0.941
MORE MC STAFF	9.0	40.6	32.3	12.8	5.3	3.353	0.994
MORE MC WORKSHOPS	12.3	37.2	30.0	12.3	8.1	3.333	1.098

As modest support and uncertainty generally prevailed, a noticeable segment switched alliances on different sorts of items. The largest instances of mild support were found in the optional affairs (the workshops, hiring of minority staff, and the general inclusion of multiculturalism into the curriculum). This means, that almost half of the students accepted a multicultural education when it was seen as voluntary and easy to avoid.

However, when a multicultural education was framed as a universal requirement, many of the students were less sympathetic. When multiculturalism was seen as a part of required classes, the number of students responding "disagree" nearly doubled while the number of "agrees" decreased by almost half. Similarly, student negatives rose on the topic of personally desiring a multicultural educational experience. Thus, one can conclude that while almost half of the students supported the availability of a multicultural education, many of these same students believed that a multicultural education was not germane to their studies, and they wanted the prerogative of personally ignoring multicultural classes. In other words, a large number of students approve of multicultural experiences as long as they are elective; however, when a multicultural education is suggested as widespread and binding, much of their support turns into ambivalence or opposition.

Explanatory Statistics: The Factors That Influence Multicultural Attitudes

To assess the relationship between a student's major and their multicultural attitudes, the authors initially ran a simple bivariate analysis (see Table 2). With Chi-squares that ranged between 37.09 and 19.57, the data overwhelmingly showed that social work students were more favorable to a multicultural education ($p \leq .000$). However, this comparative score may not mean that their endorsements were unqualified. Although the majority of social work students

TABLE 2. Interpretations of a Multicultural Education by Social Work and Other Majors

Item	Major	SA f %	A f %	NS f %	D f %	SD f %	Chi- Square
I wish my college had more information on minority issues	Social Work	3 (4)	36 (47)	32 (43)	2 (3)	2 (3)	37.09***
	Other	16 (15.4)	59 (77.2)	159 (155.3)	63 (52.8)	29 (25.2)	
The perspectives of a wide range of ethnic groups should be included in the curriculum	Social Work	5 (7)	48 (64)	21 (28)	0 (0)	1 (1)	23.02***
	Other	25 (24.4)	127 (142.4)	107 (104.1)	45 (36.6)	23 (19.5)	
This college should have women studies or Black studies majors	Social Work	14 (18)	34 (45)	19 (25)	4 (6)	4 (6)	19.57***
	Other	26 (32.5)	96 (105.7)	129 (120.3)	39 (35.0)	36 (32.5)	
There should be special events or workshops to celebrate different cultures	Social Work	16 (21)	37 (49)	19 (25)	3 (4)	0 (0)	22.59***
	Other	36 (42.3)	109 (118.7)	102 (98.4)	47 (40.6)	32 (26.0)	
The school staff should reflect ethnic and cultural diversity	Social Work	10 (13)	47 (63)	14 (18)	3 (4)	1 (1)	25.94***
	Other	28 (30.9)	116 (132.6)	115 (104.9)	46 (39.9)	22 (18.7)	
More content on women and minorities should be taught in required courses.	Social Work	11 (14)	32 (43)	23 (30)	8 (11)	1 (1)	33.36***
	Other	21 (26.0)	62 (76.5)	120 (116.3)	90 (79.7)	34 (28.5)	

Note: * p ≤ .05 ** p ≤ .01 *** p ≤ .001. The first score in each cell indicates the actual observed frequencies while the numbers in parenthesis offer the percentage of Social Work and other majors who marked such answers.

were open to multiculturalism (51 to 79% marked “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”), most of the BSW’s were not strong multicultural proponents (strong approvals fell between 4 and 21%). Thus, the table reveals at least two crucial points. First, social work students were less apathetic toward a multicultural education since the bulk of the other majors were in the ambivalent or oppositional camps. Second, most social work students did not see a pressing need to enhance their personal multicultural knowledge base. In turn, this might cause some concern since many of the students were juniors who had not taken their practice or policy classes.

After establishing that social work students were more open, or at least less indifferent to multiculturalism, the other independent variables were integrated into a multiple regression. In doing so, the study could identify the independent impact of each variable as the statistical calculations controlled for the impact of the other independent variables. As a whole, the theories were discerning since Table 3 reports that the entire model presented a robust F-score of 36.252 ($p < .001$). With a R-squared of .501, about half of the differences in student multicultural perceptions can be explained by the accumulated impact of the independent variables.

When controlling for each variable, many of the specific variables become statistically inconsequential. A person’s age, perceptions of the general economy, and their self-identification with liberalism seem to have little effect. Moreover, the social work major variable changed its direction and lost its earlier explanatory power.

While several factors showed little pertinence, six of the variables induced some significant effects. When examining the university variables, the impacts of multicultural classes and spending free time with minorities are distinguishable. That is, students who have completed a multicultural class are much more positive toward the tenets of multiculturalism. Similarly, students who mingle in racially diverse settings are more receptive to a multicultural education. Thus, the strongest multicultural advocates were those who have greater intellectual and emotional encounters with a heterogeneous mix of people and ideas. However, with cross-sectional data, it is impossible to determine if multicultural acceptance inspired interracial friendships or if the friendships inspired multicultural attitudes. Likewise, the data cannot discern as to whether the multicultural classes made the difference or certain types of students take multicultural classes.

In another development, the measures of racial perceptions exhibited tremendous effects. Both the amount of internalized stereotypes and the denial of racism were associated with the dependent variable. Thus, students who recognize institutionalized racism and discard insidious racial characterizations tended to welcome multiculturalism. Furthermore, with the resentment vari-

TABLE 3. Coefficients of a Regression on Multicultural Attitudes

Variable	Standardized Beta
Multicultural Class	.228**
Free Time Minorities	.160**
Social Work Major	-.059
Gender	.098*
Age	.023
Meritocracy	.049
Egalitarianism	.039
Liberalism	.019
Stereotypical Beliefs	.161**
Denial of Racism	.098*
Racial Resentment	.366***
R-Squared	.501
F-Score	36.252***

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

able reaching the moderate level of strength, it displayed the largest coefficient in the model ($B = .366$). Therefore, the White students who felt encroached upon by minorities were those who indignantly resisted a multicultural education.

Finally, gender was a significant factor. That is, regardless of friendship ties, coursework, or how racial interactions were viewed, women still embraced a multicultural education at higher levels. In turn, this might explain why the social work major lost its statistical significance. Social work students did not hold a better impression of multiculturalism because of their major, but rather the major draws a high number of women students who demonstrate less racism and have wider friendship networks. However, the data indicate that the few males in the major are probably as racially biased as the general student populace.

LIMITATIONS

Before addressing the ramifications of this research, the methodological limitations should be considered. First, this paper records the attitudes of students who are planning on becoming social workers. This means that the data cannot anticipate how these attitudes will influence future practice. Second,

the use of cross-sectional data are problematic in as much as they cannot present the temporal order of events. For example, without cohort data, it is impossible to determine if favorable multicultural perceptions preceded or followed the completion of a multicultural class. Furthermore, the use of surveys carries inherent shortcomings. There is always an issue of social desirability and measures are never perfect. For example, to save space, some of the measures used the general concept of "minority." However, the use of such a broad term can be misleading since it might gloss over issues of attitudinal variance toward different minority groups. For example, a person might hate Mexicans, love Filipinos, despise gays, and respect Jews. Likewise the comparison of BSWs to "other" neglects the possible variance among non-Social Work majors. Furthermore, some readers may not be totally pleased with the author's operationalization of multiculturalism. Empowerment scholars such as Banks (1988) might complain that the items simply asked students about knowledge acquisition and did not address the issue of using this new knowledge for social transformation (Banks calls this the additive versus social reconstruction notions of multiculturalism). Finally, the attitudes of these Appalachian students may not reflect the attitudes of all White Americans. In fact, two case studies suggest some variance in the multicultural perspectives between Morehead State, Florida State and University of Michigan students (Lopez et al., 1995; Bronstein and Gibson, 1998). Conversely, these generalizability concerns may be overstatements since studies of other commuter colleges have discovered similar distributions (Pohan, 1996; Tettegah, 1997; Levine and Curton, 1998).

DISCUSSION

Even with these methodological constraints, these results offer useful information to social workers and educational planners. The students of Eastern Kentucky demonstrated some tepid support of multicultural goals. That is, most agreed that multicultural information should be used in the university and the college should hire more minority faculty/staff. However, this support seems to be conditional to many students. Substantial segments favored the availability of multicultural classes but were reluctant to make these classes a requirement to graduate. Furthermore, only about one-fourth of the students said they felt personally compelled to learn more about cultural diversity. Thus, one might conclude that a large number of these students believe a multicultural education is fine, but they are not excited nor feel compelled to take such classes.

This provisional support of policies focusing on racial/ethnic equity is not new to the race-relations literature. In naming this the "implementation gap,"

Bobo (1996) and Sears (1988) have found that many White individuals will facially approve of the abstract principles of racial equality until those principles are converted into actual programs (i.e., affirmative action). Thus, the data mirror the findings that many within the White population are cultural pluralists as long as this commitment does not impinge on their current lifestyle. However, much of these liberal sentiments disappear when specific programs ask for some modest alterations in their daily routines.

The explanatory findings added more insights to this topic. This paper accentuates the importance of certain racial/ethnic attributions. When students perceived racial or ethnic minorities as inherently inadequate or inferior, then they are more likely to reject a multicultural education. Moreover, students who recoil from a multicultural education are the same students who ignore or dismiss any indications of present-day racism. Finally, multicultural discomfort appears when White students think they suffer when minority situations improve. Thus, the White students who maintain there is “no racism” or allege “reverse discrimination” are typically those who refuse the virtues of a multicultural education.

However, the study findings show that these values are not the only factors that shape a multicultural outlook. Instead, it appears that multicultural attitudes may not be static, and that certain university factors can diminish parochial attitudes. In addressing the importance of professors, this paper shows that multicultural classes enhance the interest in multicultural learning. In turn, this indicates that BSW programs should continue their efforts to incorporate more multicultural material into the formal curriculum (be it in specific classes such as “Ethnic Sensitivity in Social Work” or in the core practice, research and HBSE classes).

Moreover, this study underscores the relevance of peer groups. Students seem to appreciate a multicultural education when they have racially heterogeneous friendships. Subsequently, social work educators might try to facilitate such friendships. To do so, programs must initially create an environment that welcomes minority students. In turn, the program then should arrange events and settings that provide some opportunities for interracial exchanges (i.e., music clubs, racially integrated dorms, international student placements). On the other hand, universities must resist any procedures that place minority students in the uncomfortable position of always explaining racism to their White counterparts.

When addressing student majors, this analysis shows that social work students were more accepting of a multicultural education (confirming the research indicating Social Work students to be slightly more liberal). However, this support was not highly passionate, and this lack of enthusiasm may not

motivate students into serious reflections on the America's racial/ethnic dilemma.

IMPLICATIONS

Social work educators must continually nudge students in multicultural directions. If not, these programs might continually graduate those who have superficial pledges to understand their clients. Moreover, social work programs might want to seriously consider the use of diversity surveys. At a bare minimum, these instruments could track the changing attitudes of students. Furthermore, these surveys could play a role in the acceptance of students into social work programs. While this practice might be controversial, the profession might have better practitioners if social work programs screens out racially insensitive students.

In the end, this study indicates that educators should try to construct formal and informal settings that reinforce pro-multiculturalism sentiments. However, there is an important caveat. To enlist White student sympathies, instructors must prudently invent a multicultural experience that does not seem to be imposed or obligatory. Otherwise a multicultural education can trigger a backlash of resentment (see Van Soest, 1996).

As researchers, the authors hope future studies build on this theoretical groundwork, create a national sample, and trace the effects of multicultural education on later social work interventions. As teachers, the authors note that this study confirms the notion that racial/ethnic resentments and stereotypes are issues that must be tackled by progressive teachers. Furthermore, it is clear that a multicultural education is not simply a futile exercise. Most students seem to be somewhat receptive to the multicultural imperative, and multicultural interventions can augment positive racial attitudes.

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