

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 588

HE 031 779

AUTHOR Crim, Elton J., Jr.
TITLE Aversive Racism on Campus: Explaining Mechanisms of Isolation for Students and Staff of Color on Campus. ASHE Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE 1998-11-00
NOTE 34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (23rd, Miami, FL, November 5-8, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; *Diversity (Faculty); *Diversity (Student); Focus Groups; Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; Racial Bias; *Racial Discrimination; Racial Integration; *Racial Relations; *Social Integration; Specialization; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting

ABSTRACT

The campus experiences of 24 students of color at a large, predominantly white midwestern university were investigated using four focus groups and grounded theory methods of analysis. Participants were asked about their experiences in four area environments: classrooms, residence halls, student services and programs, and the city where the university was located. Interview data were analyzed using theory on aversive racism and cultural context. Findings suggest that white faculty, staff, and students avoid interacting with students of color in classrooms, residence halls, and in advising and helping situations, supporting the theory of aversive racism and suggesting that negative racial attitudes, combined with equalitarian values produce discomfort and/or fear, rather than the overt racial hatred of the past; in turn, the aversive behavior functions as an isolating mechanism for students of color. In response to the hostile campus environment, students of color reported four survival strategies maintaining cultural coherence, dream internalization and maintenance, developing circumscribed knowledge, and program migration. Findings also suggest that the cultural context of research institutions supports a dual mechanism of isolation in which high levels of compartmentalization and specialization support avoidance of interaction by faculty and staff. Appendices include the conceptual frame model, the interview protocol, and a table of participant demographics. (Contains 17 references.) (DB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Aversive Racism on Campus: Explaining Mechanisms of Isolation for Students and Staff of Color on Campus

Elton J. Crim Jr.
Student Services Coordinator

Department of Health Promotion and Prevention
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1552 University Ave. Room 127
Madison, WI 53705
Phone: (608) 263-4536
Email: ecrim@facstaff.wisc.edu

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association
for the Study of Higher Education, Miami.

November 1998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

ASHE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

AE 031 779



*Association
for the Study
of Higher
Education*

Headquartered at the University of Missouri-Columbia • College of Education • Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis • 211 Hill Hall, Columbia, MO 65211 • 573-882-9645 • fax 573-884-5714

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Miami, Florida, November 5-8, 1998. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Abstract

The campus experiences of students of color at a predominately white institution in the Midwest were investigated using focus groups and grounded theory methods of analysis. Participants were asked about their experiences in four area environments including classrooms, residence halls, student services and programs and in the city that the university was located. Interview data were analyzed drawing on theory on aversive racism and cultural context. Findings suggest that white faculty, staff and students avoid interacting with students of color in the classroom, residence halls, and in advising and helping situations. These findings are consistent with the theory of aversive racism which suggests negative racial attitudes combine with values in egalitarianism to produce feelings of uncomfortability or fear rather than the overt racial hatred of the past. The data suggest that aversive behavior functions as the mechanism by which students of color become isolated. In response to the hostile campus environment, students of color implemented four survival strategies including maintaining cultural coherence, dream internalization and maintenance, developing circumscribed knowledge, and program migration. Findings also suggest that the cultural context of research institutions support a dual mechanism of isolation in which high levels of compartmentalization and specialization support the avoidance of interaction by faculty and staff at the institution.

Universities offer a wide range of programs and services to help African American and other students of color with social integration, civic involvement as well as provide academic support. Despite the presence of these programs, students of color continue to struggle with the cultural environment that is predominately white as evidenced by their lower retention rates (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora & Hengsler, 1992; Tinto, 1987). The research, which has examined this problem, has focused too much attention on the students themselves and has greatly under emphasized the environment that these students enter when they arrive on campus. While knowledge about the nature of the students that arrive on campus is clearly important, the results from this research have generated programs that are limited in scope. The policies and programs developed as a result of this research focus primarily on supporting students through an extremely adverse environment. What is needed is a more complete understanding of the mechanisms of poor campus climate. With regard to students of color, scholars must consider the role of racism, and the culture of the institution in the creation and maintenance of an isolating and alienating campus environment. The purpose of this study was to: (a) examine the experiences of students of color on a predominately white campus to explain how aversive behavior and institutional culture are experienced in their lives, (b) to explain how aversive behavior negatively affects diversity efforts and overall campus climate for people of color, and (c) discover successful coping mechanisms that students of color have developed to survive on campus. I conclude by discussing implications for policy, programs and services and by suggesting how the culture of academic institutions themselves might be adjusted to improve the overall experience of students of color on campus.

The Literature Review

Racial incidents in American Colleges and Universities have been wide spread since the 1960s. During the Reagan era the country became enthralled in racial conflict. Disrespect towards racial and ethnic minority group members became was frequently exhibited through overt displays of racism (Altbach & Lomotey, 1991). More recently racial conflict has begun to spread on many campuses, motivated by primarily by ideological and political differences regarding racial policy regarding admissions decisions and free speech. These types of racial conflict has centered on two policy questions, (a) Should students of color be given an advantage in college admissions decisions because of their race or ethnic background, and (b) should constraints on speech be implemented to protect the rights of minority groups to matriculate free of racial harassment?

Responses to racial conflict and the challenges of developing and maintaining a diverse environment have included changes in the college curriculum, attempts to diversify faculty and staff, new programming initiatives including multicultural and diversity education programs, and the establishment of speech and harassment codes (Lomotey, 1991). However, despite these initiatives, university policies, and programs and services with respect to racial climate have been under developed (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1990). Attempts to provide diversity education and training for faculty, staff, and students are often resisted and avoided by those who need them the most. I argue that understanding issues related to inter-group interaction are more important than questions about affirmative action or speech since, despite our best efforts,

in the near future universities will still be predominately white. Developing a better understanding of how the dynamics of inter-group interaction affect campus climate is critical to improving the quality of the campus experience for students of color.

Little is known about the dynamics of poor racial climate on college campuses. However, a few studies have been conducted exploring racial climate issues. In sum, studies indicate that prejudice and discrimination (a) negatively affect the adjustment of minority students, (b) damage both cognitive and affective development, (c) are perceived more acutely by students of color, and (d) are a larger and more difficult issue for larger campuses compared to smaller colleges (Hurtado, 1994; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

In this article I present campus climate from the perspective of students of color on the campus of a predominately white research institution in the Midwest. I begin by describing a theoretical perspective to frame this analysis. I then turn to an examination of the data from this study. The data derive from the transcripts of four focus groups conducted, in the fall semester, with a total of 24 students of color. The students were of African-American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American ethnic backgrounds. Each focus group consisted of a mix of students by gender and ethnic background such that representation from each ethnic group was present during each discussion. The students were asked open-ended questions about their campus experiences in four university related environments (a) residence halls, (b) classrooms, (c) extracurricular programs including student services and (d) off campus in the community at large. The major assumptions were that (a) students of color would interact with the culture of the institution or town and with the dominate Anglo ethnic

group in each of these areas and (b) that the nature of those interactions has had a powerful effect on the lives of the students interviewed. Freshman were excluded from the study because they would not have had the requisite experiences that more mature students had encountered and also because they might not be able to distinguish between the experiences we were interested in and normal college adjustment issues that all new students go through. Accordingly this research suggests that isolation may not be merely a perception, but may instead be a physical reality that students of color experience on the campus of predominately white institutions. It appears that this isolation is not just the result of being the "other" in a dominant culture, but may instead be related to actual nonverbal human behavior experienced by students of color in a many campus environments. I conclude by discussing the implications of this analysis for policy, practice, and future research.

Relevant theoretical perspectives

Appendix (a) presents an illustration of the theoretical perspective used to frame this study. This perspective theorizes that the American cultural value of egalitarianism converges with a variety of other cultural influences including racism. The convergence causes internal conflict in the minds of white students, faculty and staff, which is largely suppressed by a belief that they are able to treat everyone the same. As a result of this conflict, white racial group members develop non-racist self-concepts that they defend strongly but which result in feelings of uncomfortability and uneasiness and /or disgust around or fear of minority group members. These unconscious feelings however, motivate avoidance rather than hatred (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986).

Cultural context, the second aspect of the theoretical perspective is the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event. Cultural context is defined both by the physical or structural elements of the institution and by cultural rules which govern human behavior. The elements of cultural context combine to produce meaning and are in different proportions depending on the culture. Cultures of the world can be compared on a scale from high to low context with elements of cultural context varying in form and substance depending on the culture (Hall & Hall, 1990). Characteristics of low-context cultural behavior include the increase ability to compartmentalize relationships, work, and much of their day-to-day life, utilize detailed factual information, and prefer verbal or written communication. High context cultural behavior includes aspects such as spiral or correlational logic, increased ability to observe and interpret nonverbal cues, and value group orientation and extensive networks of family, friends, colleagues and clients (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988b; Hall, 1976).

There are also important differences in the use and meaning of spatial cues between high and low context culture (Hall, 1976). The distance held between individuals of low context cultural background might be interpreted to mean something other than intended by people of high context cultural backgrounds. Contextual spatial communication shifts depending on feelings and attitudes about the nature of a relationship. Shifting toward higher context communication indicates a warming of the relationship and is denoted by nonverbals such as the communicating parties moving closer to one another perhaps even touching in some fashion, facial expressions indicating happiness, joy or pleasure and seeing, being with, or interacting with a familiar

person. Lower context communication in contrast, is indicated by facial expressions, which denote coolness, displeasure, or uncomfortableness with the relationship, and an increase in distance between communicating persons.

The focus group data used in this study illustrate the nature of aversive behavior and highlight what is actually being communicated from the university community to students of color despite overt efforts to appear inclusive.

Methods

The intent of this study was to understand how students of color experience campus climate from the student's perspective. How the students experienced classrooms, residence halls, campus life in general and life in the town in which the university is situated. I focus almost exclusively on the views that the students presented during the study.

Data Collection

Data collection during four focus group interviews conducted during the fall semester. Students were also allowed to describe their ethnic backgrounds. An interview guide was used to ensure some level consistency between groups, however considerable flexibility was built into the process which allowed the facilitator freedom to probe important areas as they surfaced. The interviews lasted two hours in length and were conducted on campus. Participants were instructed and encouraged to share differing perspectives and opinions if their experiences produced different viewpoints.

Analysis

Data analysis was conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the project. Inductively derived themes were checked against the data which facilitates the “grounding” of the data in the life experiences of the students (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data were analyzed by reading and rereading interview transcripts and field notes, assigning codes to the raw transcripts, and identifying and coding emerging themes. Themes were then categorized and rechecked against the data for saliency. A qualitative research package assisted with coding and data management.

Findings

The findings suggest that the students of color in this study may be experiencing consistent patterns of avoidance in their interactions with white racial group members of faculty, staff, and students. The notions of aversive behavior and cultural context may help us to understand how avoidance occurs and its’ possible causes. The findings suggest that negative attitudes and feelings about students of color may be communicated to them nonverbally through aversive behavior in circumstances where inter-group interactions occur. It seems likely however that both aversive behavior and cross-cultural miscommunications occur often and interchangeably such that students are at times unable to clearly determine the cause of avoidance. I do not suggest that all white students, faculty, and staff behave aversively, Indeed the findings presented here are derived from a small sample of students of color and as such defy generalization. However, the mechanisms presented here illuminate important aspects of the institutional climate which must be considered in the development of diversity policies and programs.

In what follows, I present five key themes that emerged from the data. The first four themes represent various aspects of the mechanism of isolation that students of color experience. The final theme describes how students of color respond to an inhospitable climate and survive.

Interactions with white students

Aversive behavior is communicated to students of color by white students in many contexts within the institution. Two areas where aversive behavior was reported often were in the classroom and in the residence halls on campus. Students of color indicated that in classroom situations negative attitudes were conveyed by a consistent pattern of avoidance, which they interpreted as attitudes of dislike. They indicated that they sensed a coolness toward them that was evident even in small group situations. They felt that what they had to say did not matter and that they often were not listened to by other students in the class. A male student of Puerto Rican background from the second focus group interview describes his classroom experience:

It's not like you got here because of quotas and stuff like that, because they won't even talk to you, they won't look at you and the thing about the college environment that's really different for a lot of us is that they are very cold and reserved, they don't try and make the effort for outreach.

An African American and a Latina female, respectively, from the second focus group interview session underscore the classroom experiences of students of color in this important exchange. The African American female:

Where there is nobody and nobody speaks to you, they will not speak to you, they will speak to each other and they will not speak to you, they will not sit next to

you and if you ask for their notes they are like 'nawe, I wasn't in class'. Its just very very... 300 people and nobody speaks to you.

The Latina female responds:

Even when you try to say like hi or whatever, that first day of class, right away you see people start to make connections and they might be studying together and if you don't make that first move and you're hoping this person is going to be responsive to you, but they aren't. After that disappointing experience you're like 'I'll just sit here by myself taking my notes and then study alone and hope it goes well'.

These quotes highlight important aspects of the mechanism of isolation and the nature of student interaction. These observations by students of color suggest that negative feelings and attitudes about students of color are communicated at an unconscious level through aversive behavior. The student interviewed perceived that white students were uncomfortable interacting with them and as a result avoided it. Aversive behavior is likely to occur in situations in which the rules of normative behavior are unclear or ambiguous (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). In contexts like classrooms in a large university the rules of interaction are unstated and therefore ambiguous. Subtle behaviors such as these are difficult to identify as evidence of racism, however, viewed en masse as a cultural communication, these behaviors illustrate elegantly the paradox of aversive behavior and power of aversive behavior as well as its impact on the experience of students of color. The mechanism by which students of color become isolated is the result of a communication from white students that they are experiencing uncomfortable feelings about students of color. The shift to lower context behavior communicating

coolness and avoiding interaction and connection. Students of color receive that message and after making initial attempts to connect seek connections elsewhere.

Aversive interactions were evident off campus as well as in the classroom. The powerful effect that aversive behavior may have on students of color is illustrated by this example as an African-American male describes his experience attempting to socialize with white students at an off campus party:

I went to a party they (white students) were having and the music they were listening to was RAP music, I could hear it outside the door, but when I went in the party they looked at me as if I were an alien. It makes me angry. They can listen to our music and still look at me as if something were wrong with me. They have no idea how angry that makes me. Sometimes I walk around campus and I look at them and I think I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.

Aversive behavior on the part of white students reinforces the outsider status of students of color. Given the amount of frustration, disappointment and anger expressed by students of color as a result of these day to day interactions, it is surprising that more students of color do not leave the university.

A participant in the study indicated that even in contexts where the student of color had status, authority, and was charged with providing services to white students aversive behavior was the dominant mode of interaction by white students. A Latina student explains:

Students go to the RA for everything, they have to, they have no choice and this certain house fellow, she's black and students did not go when she was in her room. It was very different in the way they treated her compared to the way they treated white

resident advisors, because they would go to her door and leave her messages, but they would never go while she was there. She was really sad about it because she would have her door open and be like 'Hi I'm here,' but they still did not go.

For contrast, the participant presented an example of an RA of color who worked during the summer on a residence hall floor, which had primarily other students of color:

It was very different for her over the summer, the opposite was true, everybody was either international or of color and the minority students were white students.

It was very different the way they treated her as a Resident Advisor; a lot of students would come to her.

One participant, a Latina woman, described general patterns of interaction with majority culture students in residence halls:

I think it's the worst because people will not look at you. They will go to everyone else's door and they won't look for you. They'll all congregate not really inviting you unless they see you and feel sorry for you or something.

In these two examples, subtle aversive sentiments are again communicated by white students, through lack of interaction. Even in situations in which students presumably needed services provided by Resident Advisors of color, white students avoided the interaction.

Systemic aversive behavior

Systemic aversive behavior is aversive behavior that is supported institutionally by the culture, structure and function of organizations. I argue that high levels of

compartmentalization, and specialization combined with an emphasis on bureaucratic efficiency support, the development and implementation of aversive strategies by faculty and staff. Data from the study suggests that systemic aversive behavior occurred in administrative systems such as residence life and student affairs central offices. The residence life system at Midwestern Research University exhibited highly compartmentalized living quarters and workspaces. Living space in the student rooms is divided between two residents and each floor is staffed by a student leader called a Resident Advisor (RA) and each building or area (cluster of two or three buildings) has a student of color student leader called a Multicultural Residence Consultant (MRC). There are 14 residence hall buildings on campus and a large residence life staff to implement programs and services as well as a separate housing staff to maintain the facilities. One consequence of having a large residential system is the development of an equally large administrative staff and a complex organizational structure. The MRC of a building or area is responsible for providing support services and outreach to students of color (domestic) and international students. A few of the participants in the study also worked in residence life. Those students reported that felt that a separation of duties between resident advisors and multicultural resident consultants existed and that resident advisors by in large did not support and often were not even cognizant of programs that MRCs were doing. Aversive behavior occurs on two levels in the residence hall environment: at the individual level, by RAs most of whom are white students avoiding interaction with MRCs who are students of color. The MRCs and Ras on staff here attended separate meetings, had a separate supervisor, and did not work together. Thus there was little personal interaction between the individuals in these two groups. At the

systemic level. As most of whom were white also avoided providing programs for students of color, as well as involvement with issues of diversity. Compartmentalized organizational structure and culture supports aversive behavior and impacts the delivery of services to students of color. By allowing the disengagement of RAs from the issues and people that students of color are concerned with, the system reinforces the marginalization of students and staff of color. What may be even more problematic is that left unchecked residence life staff that should be comfortable and well versed in serving all students may develop a multicultural incompetence which effectively may cause them to believe that they can serve students of color adequately. "They don't even know what the programs are about so they won't put it up," explains an African-American resident advisor. Her statement illustrates how the compartmentalization of Resident Advisors from multicultural resident consultants resulted in the disengagement of resident advisors from involvement in programming initiatives for students of color.

Another example that elucidates the enabling aspects of a compartmentalized organizational structure and culture is in the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of students, the associate and four assistant deans all are potentially available for outreach and support to students of color. At the organizational level, work assignments, outreach activities, and support programs for students of color are often organized and developed by the Assistant Dean of students who happens to be Latino. The net effect of this division of labor is, (a) the isolation of staff of color, a reinforcement of outsider status, (b) a failure or breakdown by white student service staff in making efforts to reach out to or visibly provide support for students of color, (c) the marginalization of important issues and concerns of students of color; and (d) the failure of white staff to develop

professionally by improving their cross cultural communication skills and improving their level of comfort with cross cultural issues. In a highly efficient manner, the office simply directs students of color to the office of the Latina Dean. Other staff rarely see or provide services to students of color. Students of color interpret this as a familiar pattern and describe the phenomenon and a pragmatic consequence of the phenomenon. A Latina student explains, "I can just remember like one example when a friend of mine was applying somewhere and she needed all of these recommendations and she said, well, I have such and such Madera and such and such Perez, but I need a white person. That sounds terrible, but it affects you." One might dismiss such statements as the student's inability to network effectively, except for the fact that many students of color at this institution go their entire undergraduate career without really getting to know very many white staff. As illustrated by the previous statement, students of color are almost always referred to the person of color in charge of supporting them many white administrators are able to avoid dealing with many of their issues. The problem however is that there will never be enough staff of color to create a positive campus climate. For campus climate to improve from the perspective of students of color their interactions with the dominant culture on campus will have to (a) occur more frequently and (b) be positive and connecting. Students of color must feel more connected and supported not just by staff of color but by the people who dominate the institution.

Interactions with faculty

Interactions between faculty and students of color at Midwestern Research University are often characterized by aversive behavior. There also appeared to be a relationship between students of color encountering aversive behavior in their

interactions with faculty and student's subsequent decision to leave certain academic areas. Particularly evident was a pattern of marginalization of women of color. In one focus group, three women of color, each with a different ethnic background, described their experience in the areas of math, psychology, and premedicine. An African American woman describes her experience:

When I came to the university I was a psychology major, and I changed from psychology to sociology. I have a passion for numbers, I should say I had a passion, I used to do a lot more mathematical work and now it gets very challenging. Unfortunately professors have a tendency to make things hard for me. When I initially got in the program, I wanted to do research that would get resources to my community, to let society know in general why a lot of our kids are dropping out of school, and getting into gangs. You find this more now in Midwestern City. I am a mentor to some kids in the area... Some of my experiences with professors are a little bit different. I mean the tendency in the math department and sociology is to hire predominantly white professors. There were some professors that were really receptive, but for the most part they had an attitude. They said "basically, if you want to have me outside of staffing hours, you can not, if you want to see about extending staffing hours, then, then you should not be taking this course, you should just drop out." I find that way of thinking very hard and difficult to hold to up. Now, I find myself in women's studies.

The subtle nature of the professors' decision not to help this student makes it difficult to assert racist or sexist behavior on the part of the professor. One could rationalize that the professor was simply unkind and insensitive or busy and overburdened. However, this example also reflects the culture of the institution with its focus on research rather than teaching. It does not matter to the student whether the cause of the faculty members refusal to help is personal attitudes about African-American students or simply the narrow minded focus on research, the experience eventually resulted in the student seeking support in women's studies. In effect aversive behavior becomes a mechanism for marginalization. The institution once again failed to connect positively to the student thus reinforcing outsider status and contributing to the persistence problem for women and students of color. Fortunately, she was able to find refuge in women's studies. Camille, an African American returning adult female student elucidates her experience, "I have felt that I have been discounted, that my perspective is not understood and so dismissed by professors who are white. I have not found that with professors of color."

Interactions with staff

Students of color also told stories of blatant mistreatment at time bordering on professional misconduct. Jose, a Puerto Rican student from the first focus group interview session, described his early interactions with academic advisors in the engineering program

I had two bad experiences my first year with two old people. One in the math department and one in the English department. I went to talk to them because I was having problems in my math class and they have a roster and at the end the

guy told me that I was very dumb for being in this school and he didn't know how I could get here. I went to talk to this woman and she told me almost the same. They were like in contact with each other and that frustrated me so much. These were not professors. It was an advisor in the math department or someone who had only worked there for a few years.

Without voicing a blatantly racist word, these staff members engaged in what McDermott and Varenne (1995) have termed cultural disablement. They assert that people often act on powerful cultural stereotypes in ways to disable or undermine the confidence of students of color. Their method of choice was to question Jose's academic skills, labeling him dumb. At the individual level, the rules of normative behavior and the power and privilege of being white empower people in the academy to challenge or question the intellectual ability of people of color. In academic settings intellectual challenges and discussions about merit are often used as a cover for the expression of negative attitudes about people of color.

Survival Strategies

The students of color in this study used four strategies for survival on campus including, (a) maintaining cultural coherence, (b) dream internalization and maintenance, (c) the development of circumscribed knowledge, and (d) and program migration.

Cultural coherence Cultural coherence refers to the student's ability to maintain strong networks with family and friends. For example, Camille, an African American female, explains, "My own personal thing is that I go home, and I talk to my friends on the phone. You need to try and get the support somewhere else." A second way that cultural

coherence was maintained by these students was to find each other in classes and make a concerted effort to group together. A Latina female asserts:

If there is a sprinkling of minority students or other students of color in the classroom, we'll immediately find each other and sit in a row together. We'll be the group to study together, and I don't have a problem with that. That's been the most beautiful experience for me here.

Thus part of surviving on campus for students of color depends on their ability to stay connected to outside networks of friends and discovering solidarity with other students of color. In those ways they are able to maintain cultural coherence and develop a stronger support network.

Dream internalization and maintenance Dream internalization and maintenance refers to the ability of students of color to keep their dreams to themselves, yet keeping the dream alive. For example, one student shared her dreams for the future, "I want to go to medical school, so I feel like I have to protect my dreams. I have to protect them so it does not get messed up." The decision to keep her dreams to herself is one way this student defends herself against intellectual criticism.

The development of circumscribed knowledge The third strategy that students of color use to survive on campus is the acquisition of circumscribed knowledge. Circumscribed knowledge refers to local knowledge that the student must learn in order to survive. For example, students of color in this study talked about learning when to confront or not to confront other students about racial or disparaging remarks about their culture or communities. This resulted in an almost perpetual state of psychological defensiveness

where students seemed to always ready to defend their culture or confront white faculty and students. A student explains:

At first I tried to deal with it. I would try to teach them. You know, like explain to them certain things, you know try to the best of my ability, try to talk to them, and um, but after a while it just got to the point where I was like, you know, just, Yeah. whatever... It was kind of like you know it's impossible and they are never going to learn anything.

Another student of color shares the experience of her political science class:

I think you cannot change the way some white students come into these classrooms. I do not want to sit in my class and defend every single point so they can get a well-rounded education. I sit in those classrooms and I notice that when certain statements are made, all of their eyes are on me, daring me. It is really interesting because they are really competitive in this area. They are daring me to find out on all sorts of levels. Is she liberal? Is she conservative? Is she one of those militants? or is she going to let this one slide? Where does she sit?"

Finally, a third student of color adds:

I think I'm a little bit like her in the sense that I've been here so long that you almost learn when to speak and when not to speak to make a point. Like she said, if someone says something off the wall, I mean you just can not let this group say that, even though you might be a quiet person. You've got to say 'guys... this is wrong' or what ever, but like she said if you know the professor asks a question or something and maybe everyone thinks you know the answer, I'll be like I want

to hear what everyone else has to say about what they think about Latinos or African-Americans or whatever. It's almost that you learn when to speak and when not to speak and you learn it to your advantage and you learn it to protect yourself because if you don't then you're never going to get out of here.

Students of color have to learn when to try and educate their classmates and when to confront them on their cultural incompetence. As a result they maintain a state of constant readiness which may have a developmental cost in terms of their ability to focus on the material. It is also with some degree of risk that students of color choose to confront because doing so might risk being labeled as being militant.

Program migration Program migration refers to the general pattern exhibited by many of the students in the study, of migrating into ethnic or women's study classes, in search of support, cultural coherence, and nurturance. An African-American woman explains:

I personally find it very lonely, and I specifically take certain kinds of classes to try and combat that. We are in this black feminist class, and I sat down. She was there and there were all these different women, and it was totally like you know, you are in this class and not the only one, and I specifically took that class because I was thinking that this is going to be my survival class for this semester because I know there will be other women of color in this class. I thought maybe there might also be a few men of color, but there is not.

Tierney (1992) emphasizes the contradiction of official encouragement, and institutional discouragement, arguing that minority students often receive encouragement to come to college at the official or public level, while simultaneously receiving

institutional messages of discouragement. As these experiences illustrate, discouragement happens at the individual and institutional levels. Aversive behavior communicates to students of color both at the institutional level and at the individual level messages of discouragement. Students of color adopt a number of survival strategies in response to these messages. Developing cultural coherence, program migration, dream internalization and maintenance and the development of circumscribed knowledge all help students of color survive in the hostile environment of predominately white institutions. Thus at a time when students of color should be embracing the institution and developing a passion for intellectual pursuits, instead they expend a great deal of psychological energy strategizing to survive. The campus for students of color represents a place of battle where they remain on guard for comments, and then retreat when class is over, needing to refuel for battle the next day.

Conclusion

Students of color at Midwestern Research University experience aversive behavior in the classroom and in the residence halls on campus. In addition the cultural context of the institution supports aversive behavior on the part of administrators and faculty. The result is isolation, alienation, and continued maintenance of outsider status at multiple levels of the institution. Moreover, in their interactions with some administrators students of color suffered through attempts to intellectually disable their confidence.

This study provides rich contextualization of the experiences of students of color and grounds the phenomenon in real life experiences of students of color. Ultimately, it is

only by developing an understanding of the phenomenon that we can begin to develop services that truly address the problems and issues of students of color.

Perhaps the most important lesson that can be learned from this study is that if university officials are truly interested in changing the campus climate at predominantly white institutions for students of color, then they must begin to understand how the dynamics of various cultural influences including context, normative rules of behavior and racial attitudes influence human behavior even when we are not cognizant of our actions. In doing so, we can begin to think, about how classroom interaction can be facilitated in ways that reduce the outsider status of students of color. We must also consider student interpersonal interaction in student services areas. Ultimately, it is imperative that faculty, staff and students begin to redefine the culture of our institutions in ways that support the education and development of all of our students.

The practice of compartmentalizing as a way of thinking and problem solving leads to hiring practices that are problem specific. Administrators of color are hired to do outreach and support to students of color. This pattern allows white staff and faculty not to have to deal with students of color or their issues. Most importantly, it results in students of color being less able to develop relationships with white staff and faculty. Ultimately, the problem of aversive behavior contributes to persistence problems for students of color. Isolated from the majority of people at the institution and unable to find enough of each other to create a welcoming environment, many students of color leave. The students that participated in this study were students who were surviving the institution. However, there was evidence of these students' inability to persist in particular academic programs, including math and sciences, and that attitudes by faculty

and staff at Midwestern Research University contributed to their leaving. Previous scholars, (Pounds, 1987; Fleming, 1984) have written about the isolation and alienation that students of color experience at predominantly white institutions. The findings from this study coincide with their findings. Tierney (1992) found evidence of institutional discouragement despite official encouragement with respect to minority students. Similarly, findings from this study illustrated how discouraging statements questioning the intellectual ability of students of color attempt to disable their confidence in their intellectual abilities. Colleges and universities for the most part have been “well intentioned.” They have sought to diversify staff and faculty and increase numbers of minority students on their campuses. However, they have been largely unsuccessful and retention at all levels is a continuing problem.

Leadership in higher education must continue to provide support for students of color. However, campus climate will not change until the cultural majority begins reaching out, connecting, engaging, and interacting positively with students of color. Facilitating these changes will require several strategies, including, adopting more team-based approaches to the design and implementation of services and programs for students of color. These changes require all administrators and faculty to engage the problems and issues of students of color together, effectively eliminating much of the systemic level isolation. Staff and faculty would have to become multiculturally competent and in doing so, they would begin to understand how their non-verbal behavior affect students of color. This would have the additional benefit of increasing interaction between white staff and faculty and students of color, becoming allies, increasing the number of people that students of color are connected to, and reducing outsider status. Second, refocus

diversity programs to intentionally develop social capital for students of color. Social capital is the sense of interconnectedness empowerment that individuals experience when they are involved in organizations and civic associations on campus. Many diversity programs assist in the development of these kinds of organizations for students of color. Researchers are finding that a sense of hope and feelings of empowerment is related to the presence of strong levels of social capital in communities (Potapchuk, Crocker, & Schechter, 1997; Lappe & Dubois, 1997). Third, institutions must provide opportunities to white students and students of color to interact in meaningful ways. Understanding that aversive behavior occurs in situations in which the rules of behavior are ambiguous suggests that faculty and staff can perhaps facilitate interaction in the class room setting or in the delivery of student programs by clearly establishing rules that support interaction. For example, small groups of two to four students could be given a set of questions which encourages them to talk about their family lives, history and experiences, to seek common ground and to begin to understand each other.

Lastly, successful students of color developed strategies to survive their campus experience. In the interim between the time that universities are able to make the kinds of major changes necessary to improve campus climate, developing a local model of the strategies successful students of color use on campus, might be used to ensure that new underrepresented students learn these strategies as soon as possible.

I began this article by discussing race and diversity policy issues in higher education. For the most part, institutions have sought to recruit more students of color and then struggled to retain them through graduation. Much of the intervention that has

occurred on college campuses was focused on supporting students through a climate that was initially openly hostile and subsequently more tolerant but still inclimate.

I have argued that universities really need to take a long hard look at the reality of campus climate from the eyes of their students. Further, I have provided a theoretical perspective, which should advance that understanding and extend opportunities to make real change on campus. The framework implies that human interaction is guided often in unconscious ways by a variety of cultural influences and that despite our best intentions humans often communicate cultural biases through our behavior. The result is an isolating alienating experience for people of color. The challenge then is to create change in the context of a system, which supports advantages and privilege rather than inclusiveness and access.

References

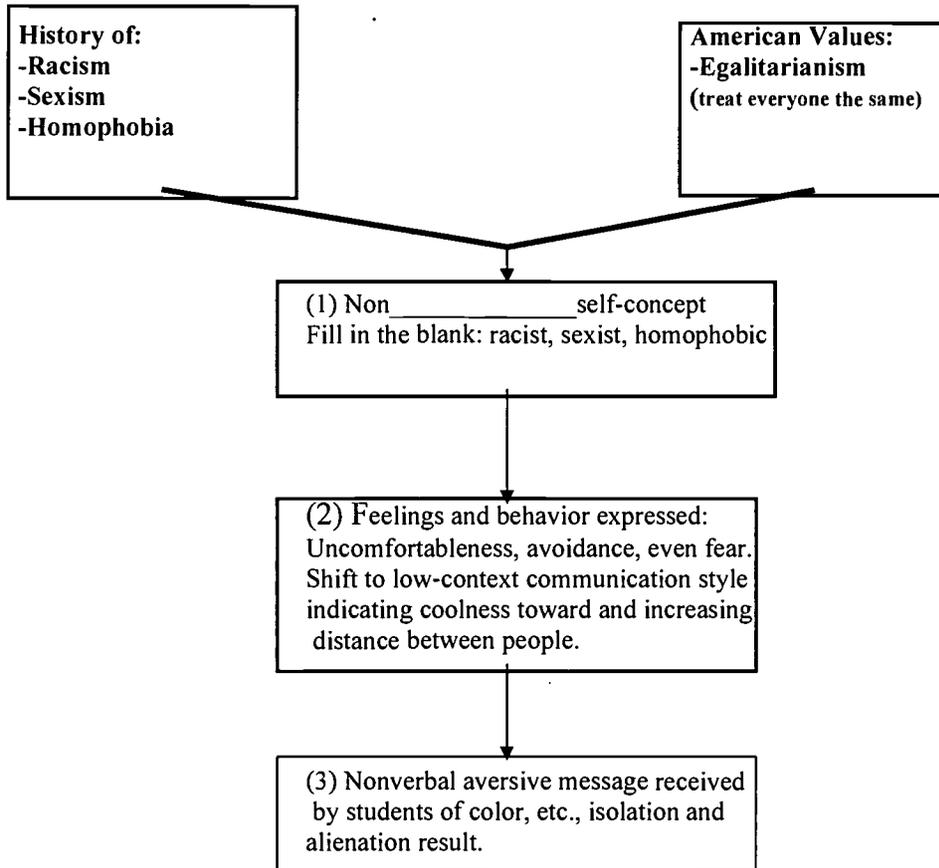
- Altbach, P. (1991). The Racial Dilemma in Higher Education. in The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education. Altbach, P. & Lomotey, K. (ed.). New York: State University Press.
- Cabrera A. F., M.B. Castaneda, A. Nora, D. Hengstler.(1992). The convergence between two theories of college persistence. Journal of Higher Education, Vol.63, No. 2, March/April.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. L. (1990). Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Dovidio, J. F. & S. L. Gaertner (eds.). (1986). Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism. Orlando: Academic Press.
- Fleming, J. (1984). Blacks In College: A comparative Study Of Student Success” In Black and White Institutions. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Gundykunst, W. B., & Ting-Toomey, S., with Chua, E. (1988b) Culture and Interpersonal Communication. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). Beyond Culture. Garden City, NY: Anchor/ Doubleday.
- Hall, E. T. and M. R. Hall,(1990). Understanding Cultural Differences. Intercultural Press Inc.
- Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Pederson, A. R., &Allen, W. R. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial and ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. The Review of Higher Education 21 (3), 279-302.
- Hurtado, S. (1994)The institutional climate for talented latino students. Research in Higher Education. 35 (1), 21-41.

- Lappe, F. M., and P. M. Dubois. (1987) Building social capital without looking backward. National Civic Review, 86, 2, 119-127.
- Lomotey, K. (1991). The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education. P. Altbach, K. Lomotey, (eds). New York: State University Press.
- McDermott, R. & Verenne H. (1995) Culture as disability. Anthropology & Education Quarterly 26 (3): 324-348.
- Nora, A., & Cabrera, A. F. (1996). The role of perceptions of prejudice and discrimination on the adjustment of minority students to college. Journal of Higher Education. 67(2), 119-148.
- Pounds, A. W.(1987). Black student needs on predominantly white campuses. In New Directions for Student Services: Responding to the Needs of Today's Minority Students. Doris Wright (Ed) San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Potapchuk, W. R., J. P. Crocker, and W. H. Schechter, Jr. (1997). Building community with social capital: Chits and chums or chats with change. National Civic Review. 86, 2, 129-139.
- Tierney, William G. (1992), Official Encouragement, Institutional Discouragement: Minorities in Academe-The Native American Experience. Norwood: Ablex.
- Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Appendix A.

Conceptual Frame Model

Aversive Behavior Results from:



Appendix B.

Interview Guide

Each of the focus group sessions was tape recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The following protocol was used as an interview guide:

The interview protocol followed a four level approach which examined five areas including:

1. Classroom environment
2. Out-of-class environment
3. Dean of students services and programs
4. Living on/off campus
5. City of Midwest in general

The questions asked:

Classroom Environment

Take a few moments and think about the classroom environment at Midwest University, for yourself and other students of color.

- 1.) Describe the climate of the classroom for students of color by relating some of the experiences which helped create your perceptions of the environment.
- 2.) How did these experiences make you feel? How do they impact your feeling about Midwest University?
- 3.) What did you do about these experiences? What do students of color generally do in response to similar situations?
- 4.) What suggestions do you have for improving the climate of the classroom for students of color?

Out-of-Class Environment

Think for a moment about the climate on campus outside the classroom, in the residence halls, student organizations, student union etc.

- 1) Please describe for me the climate in this area of student life and illustrate your descriptions with real life experiences?
- 2) How did these experiences make you feel?
- 3) What was your response?
- 4) What needs to change/ what else is needed?

Dean of Student's Office Services and Programs

Take a few moments to think about the contact that you have had with the programs and services under the Dean of Student's Office.

- 1) What have your experiences been like when you talked with a dean or participated in a program or service? What was the climate in each area that you used?
- 2) How did you respond to these experiences?
- 3) Are these services helpful to you in mediating the campus climate?
- 4) What services have you needed but were unable to find?

Midwest City in General

- 1) What is the climate for students of color in the Midwest City in general?
- 2) What experiences have shaped your perceptions of this climate? What are the messages you hear from others about the climate of Midwest City?
- 3) How have you and your peers responded to these experiences?
- 4) How can campus administrators help you navigate this climate?

Appendix C.

Participant Demographics

Tables one, two and three display the demographic descriptions of the participants by ethnicity, gender and year in school respectively. Each focus group was carefully assembled to include a mixture by ethnicity, gender and year in school. Freshmen were excluded from the study since it would be difficult to distinguish between campus climate issues and new student adjustment issues that every student faces regardless of minority or majority student status.

Table 1.

Participants by Ethnicity			
Hispanic	African-American	Asian	Native American
13	7	2	2

Table 2.

Participants by Gender	
Male	Female
7	17

Table 3.

Participants by Level in College			
Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	Grad/Prof.
2	6	9	7

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS



This document is covered by a signed “Reproduction Release (Blanket) form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a “Specific Document” Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either “Specific Document” or “Blanket”).