

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS POST OBAMA'S ELECTION: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Seventy-three students, who attend a predominantly white, Northeastern college, participated in this 2009-2010 pilot study that drew from Bonilla-Silva's previous research. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, we examined students' exposure to diversity and their views on affirmative action, interracial marriage, intergroup contact, minorities' cultural values and life chances, racial discrimination, and their perceptions of race issues in the U.S. since Obama's election. Although some students employed Bonilla-Silva's four frames of color-blind racism, students also acknowledged structural factors of racism and exhibited a deeper understanding of race and ethnic relations than was previously suggested in Bonilla-Silva's work. We explore varying reasons for this as well as analyze students' identification with the value of post-racialism as symbolized by Obama's presidency.

Keywords: color-blind racism; college students; racial attitudes; race and ethnic relations; post-racial society; Obama presidency

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The literature on college students' perceptions of race and ethnic relations spans a variety of perspectives (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Bracket et al., 2006; Chavous, 2005; Cole & Yip, 2008; Harper 2008; McCabe, 2009; McClelland & Linnader, 2006; Price, Hyle, & Jordan, 2009; Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2006; Smith, Bowman, & Hsu, 2007; Torres, 2009). A substantial portion of this research emphasizes white students' perceptions of race and ethnic relations (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Chavous, 2005; McClelland & Linnader, 2006; Smith et al., 2007). Some studies examine the color-blind racism of whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), the familial and environmental upbringing which has either fostered or challenged racism (Smith et al., 2007), the role of the media in perpetuating white students' beliefs in racial stereotypes (McCabe, 2009); the continued problem of white isolationism and the importance of encouraging intergroup contact (Chavous, 2005; McLelland & Linnader, 2006; Smith et al., 2007), and the need to foster an anti-racism stance in college classrooms to counteract white privilege (Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2006).

However, much of the recent scholarly literature also focuses on minority students' perceptions of and experiences with the on-going racial tensions that plague college campuses (Ancis et al., 2000; Bracket et al., 2006; Cole & Yip, 2008; McCabe, 2009). Some of these studies have emphasized the experiences of black students (Chavous, 2005; Harper, 2008; McCabe, 2009; Torres, 2009), in particular, highlighting the successful strategies that they have employed to combat racism at the college level such as forming support groups (McCabe, 2009); encouraging intergroup contact (Chavous, 2005); or building social capital through increasing social networks (Harper, 2008). Other studies have explored how social class status intersects with race on America's campuses to further marginalize poor black students (Torres, 2009).

Bonilla-Silva's research, in particular, has garnered much attention and has renewed a national debate regarding race and ethnic relations in U.S., by focusing on the on-going problem of color-blind racism amongst whites, as evidenced by his study of American white college students from various regions in the U.S. and a sample of white adults in the Detroit area. Due to the

importance of Bonilla-Silva's work and the fact that the college we were studying was predominantly white, we decided to draw on his research as a model for our pilot study. In addition, given the recent scholarly literature focusing on black students, we also over-sampled black students for our study.

In Bonilla-Silva's college study, 627 college students (of whom 451 were white), participated in a survey at medium-large universities in three regions of the country: the Midwest, the South, and the West Coast. Students first completed the survey and then a 10% random sample of those students who provided contact information, later participated in an in-depth interview.

Bonilla-Silva highlights the insipid nature of color-blind racism in his analysis by demonstrating how whites' discussions of race and ethnic relations often represent four frames of an underlying color-blind, racist ideology. Bonilla-Silva defines frames as the set cognitive pathways that people develop to interpret and present information. Bonilla-Silva notes that people use those same pathways to then communicate those views to the world. Building on the earlier work of Erving Goffman (1974) and also the work of social movement theorists like David Snow and his colleagues (1986), frames are conceived as deeply internalized, cognitive schema that filter people's perceptions and understandings of everyday life; frames highlight information with which it resonates and overlooks information with which it conflicts.

In this way, Bonilla-Silva argues that students' use of different frames is largely subconscious. They have been socialized in this post-Civil rights era to not think of racism as a real issue. This socialization is in part due to their families, the media, schooling and other socializing agents and thus the students unwittingly employ these four different frames of color-blind racism.

The four frames of color-blind racism are: *abstract liberalism*, *naturalization*, *cultural racism*, and *minimization of racism* and are described at length in Bonilla-Silva's book, *Racism without Racists* (2010:28-29). The first frame, *abstract liberalism*, involves white students utilizing ideas associated with American political liberalism (e.g., "America represents equal opportunity for all" and the idea that no governmental intervention such as affirmative action should be used to achieve equality) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters. Examples of this frame include: "I don't think they should be provided with unique opportunities. I think that they should have the same opportunities as everyone else. You know, it's up to them to meet the standards..." (Sue, a Southern student, 2010:31).

Diane, a Southern student, provides an example of the frame of *abstract liberalism* as Diane is firmly against affirmative action and believes in meritocracy.

"If you do have two people with the same qualifications, one's minority

and one's not, you know, I'd want to interview them and just maybe a personality stands out that works for the job, I don't know. Just something other than race to base it on, you know?" (2010:32)

The second frame, *naturalization*, allows whites to justify racialized phenomena such as the high rates of residential segregation or the low intermarriage rates between blacks and whites by suggesting that they are natural occurrences. In this manner, whites can assert that "birds of a feather flock together." An illustration of this frame would be Liz, a student in the Midwest who explains away her resistance to engage in interracial, romantic relationships with minorities: "...just because I wasn't really attracted to them, you know, I'm more attracted to someone that's like kinda more like me" (2010:38).

The third frame, *cultural racism*, draws on the culture of poverty argument and allows whites the opportunity to attack racial-ethnic groups' culture instead of biology in an attempt to not appear racist. Bonilla-Silva explains that the culture of poverty argument, which essentially "blames the victim," originated in the sixties (Lewis, 1968; Moynihan, 1965) and then was popularized by conservative scholars like Charles Murray (1984). This theory proposes that the loose family organization or inappropriate values of certain marginalized groups lock them in a feedback loop of poverty. Arguments such as "Hispanics do not put much emphasis on education" or "blacks have too many babies" are used to explain the poor standing of minorities in today's society.

And the fourth frame, *minimization of racism*, emphasizes that discrimination is no longer a key, causal factor in affecting minorities' life chances. A statement like "discrimination is no longer really a problem" or "Maybe like when I was younger I would notice it, but right now I don't really feel that there's too much segregation anymore" are examples of the minimization frame (2010:46).

According to Bonilla-Silva, the use of these frames is in large part a result of whites' physical isolation through years of residential segregation (what he defines as the "white habitus") which makes it difficult for them to truly understand the structural problems that contribute to blacks' and other minorities' disadvantaged status in American society (2010:104). Bonilla-Silva argues that this physical isolation brought on by years of residential segregation (Massey & Denton, 1993) also make it difficult for whites to develop meaningful friendships or to truly consider interracial romantic relationships with other groups, especially blacks.

However, Bonilla-Silva does not claim that all whites are automatically racist and unwittingly employ the four frames of color-blind racism when discussing racial/ethnic issues. He noted from his survey of whites, that some working class, white women (i.e., 15% of his entire sample) fell into the

category of what he deemed "racial progressives." He defines racial progressives as: "...respondents who support affirmative action and interracial marriage and who recognize the significance of discrimination in the United States" (2010:132).

In this paper, although we will assert that white students' responses could reflect Bonilla-Silva's four frames of color-blind racism; overall, we found that their open-ended comments were indicative of a pluralistic openness that Bonilla-Silva would not have predicted. In fact, like Bonilla-Silva, we found that 15% of the white students in our sample (i.e., seven out of 47) could be termed as racial progressives as they did support affirmative action, acknowledged the on-going problem of discrimination, and were open to marrying someone of a different race. However, not all of these racial progressives were working class, three classified themselves as upper middle class, three self-classified as lower middle class, and one did not answer the social class question. And of the racial progressives, not all were women. Two out of the seven were men.

Furthermore, since we over-sampled black students and had an adequate representation of other minority groups as well, we also examined some of the unique experiences and perceptions of these other racial-ethnic groups. In general, minority students have a better understanding of the structural problems that have contributed to racism. Often it seemed that they were evoking a desire for a truly post-racial society, one in which race does matter less.

Indeed, the majority of individuals from all racial-ethnic groups sampled wanted to put racism behind them and desired to achieve the post-racial society ideal that the presidency of Barack Obama has come to signify.

Given the significance of Obama's election, we also include some of our samples' responses regarding the state of race relations since Obama started his presidency. In general, students seemed proud to have a black president and were in general agreement that Obama should not focus exclusively on race issues in policy making.

METHOD

Data and Sample

Drawing on Bonilla-Silva's study of color-blind racism, we utilized the 1998 Detroit Adult Survey—Form B that was made available to the public in the appendix of the 2nd edition of *Racism without Racists*.¹ The survey was adapted to include questions that related to the environment of the particular college we studied and also to incorporate relevant questions that pertained to the Obama

presidency.

To recruit participants into the study an announcement was made in December 2009 in two undergraduate sociology courses and students in these classes were invited to take the survey themselves and were asked to help recruit their peers. Through snowball sampling based on students' networks, seventy-three students agreed to participate in the pilot study and responded to the survey in late 2009 or early 2010, either through being interviewed by trained student volunteers or completing the same survey that was available online at surveymonkey.com. Out of the 73 students who completed the survey, most students were white 65% (47); 19% (14) were African American or Black Caribbean; 12% were Hispanic (9); 3% (2) were Asian; and 1% (1) self-classified as "other". As mentioned previously, we intentionally over-sampled black students to try and adequately reflect their views on race and ethnic relations.

Most whites (68% or 30 out of 47) self-identified as upper-middle class and most minorities (88% or 23 out of 26) self-identified as either lower middle class or upper-middle class. The sample was generally more liberal than might be expected. The majority of respondents self-identified as Democrat or Independent. However, the most Republicans were found amongst white students (i.e., 32% or 15 out of 47). In addition, the sample was mostly made up of women 70% or 51 respondents were female and 30% or 22 respondents were male.

Procedure

We performed univariate descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis (cross tabulations) on students' closed-ended responses in different areas that were originally covered by Bonilla-Silva's survey. In addition, we coded open-ended responses to develop categories for inclusion in the overall statistical analysis. We focused on questions that touched on students' exposure to diversity and their varying views on race and ethnic relations that could later be analyzed under the four frames of color-blind racism. These questions touched on the following areas: affirmative action; interracial marriage; segregation and intergroup contact; minorities' cultural values and life chances; and racial discrimination. As stated above, we also incorporated questions on race and ethnic relations in the U.S. since Obama's election and views on Obama's policies as a reflection of the collective value of post-racialism.

Limitations

There are two limitations that we encountered in conducting this pilot study. One limitation was that the line of questioning offended some students. One Latina student refused to participate, because she believed that some of the survey questions reified negative stereotypes of minorities. We will share her

legitimate concerns in our conclusion.

Another limitation is that the sample was not large enough to conduct statistical tests of significance. However, since this study was intended to be a pilot study, the results are preliminary and are presented as a means to inform future research.

RESULTS

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics and bivariate relationships for the different areas studied.

Diversity in Schools Growing Up

The results show that racial segregation was evident in the formative school years of our student respondents. The majority of white students (73%) attended schools that were primarily white. In contrast, not a single black student answered that they had attended a school that was primarily white and only 17% of Hispanic and other students stated that they had attended a primarily white school. Minority students overwhelmingly attended schools that they characterized as either mostly minority or diverse and many lived either close to or in an urban area where there were high levels of racial diversity.

Support or Opposition to Affirmative Action

As we can see in Table 1, the support or opposition for affirmative action does tend to follow racial lines. Half of all black students and 63% of other minorities supported affirmative action, whereas almost half of all white students opposed affirmative action. Yet, it is interesting to note that for all minority groups, more than a third (i.e., 40% of black students and 37% of Hispanic and other students) also opposed affirmative action.

Personal and Familial Openness to Interracial Marriage

The majority of all students said that they would consider marrying someone of a different race: 76% of white students; 100% of black students, and 90% of Hispanic and other students. However, 50% of Hispanic and other students and almost a third (30%) of white students suspected that their families would oppose such unions. Students from all racial-ethnic groups also answered that they were unsure how their families would react to a potential interracial marriage.

Segregation and Intergroup Contact at College

Most respondents (59%), regardless of racial background, noted that

there was some spatial self segregation between Whites and Minorities at the college we studied.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Relationships:
Nominal Level Measures**

Questions	Race		
	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics and Other
Diversity in Schools Growing Up (N=60)	N=37	N=13	N=10
Mostly White	73% (27)	0% (0)	17% (2)
Mostly Minority	3% (1)	38% (5)	50% (5)
Diverse	24% (9)	62% (8)	33% (3)
Affirmative Action (N=45)	N=27	N=10	N=8
Support	37% (10)	50% (5)	63% (5)
Oppose	48% (13)	40% (4)	37% (3)
Undecided	14% (4)	10% (1)	0% (0)
R Intermarry Someone of Other Race (N=53)	N=33	N=10	N=10
Yes	76% (25)	100% (10)	90% (9)
No	21% (7)	0% (0)	10% (1)
Unsure	3% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Family Support R Intermarrying (N=44)	N=27	N=9	N=8
Support	55% (15)	67% (6)	38% (3)
Oppose	30% (8)	11% (1)	50% (4)
Unsure	15% (4)	22% (2)	12% (1)
Spacial-Racial Segregation at College (N=50)	N=30	N=12	N=8
Yes	63% (19)	58% (7)	76% (6)
No	33% (10)	26% (3)	26% (2)
Unsure	3% (1)	16% (2)	0% (0)
Blame for Lack of Intergroup Contact (N=53)	N=33	N=10	N=10
Whites more to blame	15% (5)	40% (4)	20% (2)
Blacks more to blame	12% (4)	10% (1)	10% (1)
Both whites and blacks are to blame	21% (7)	0% (0)	40% (4)
Neither group is to blame	52% (17)	50% (5)	30% (3)
Minorities Lack Proper Cultural Values that Affect Life Chances (N=58)	N=36	N=12	N=10
Agree	14% (5)	17% (2)	30% (3)
Disagree	75% (27)	75% (9)	70% (7)
Depends	11% (4)	8% (1)	0% (0)
Discrimination Now (N=51)	N=30	N=12	N=9
Yes	70% (21)	67% (8)	67% (6)
No	7% (2)	8% (1)	0% (0)
Unsure	23% (7)	25% (3)	33% (3)
Race Relations Post Obama's Election (N=45)	N=26	N=11	N=8
Improved	46% (12)	36% (4)	38% (3)
Remained the Same	31% (8)	55% (6)	62% (5)
Unsure	23% (6)	9% (1)	0% (0)
Obama Wants to Work on Other Issues and/or Race Issues (N=41)	N=23	N=10	N=8
Other Issues	70% (16)	80% (8)	63% (5)
Race Issues	0% (0)	0% (0)	13% (1)
Both	17% (4)	20% (2)	25% (2)
Unsure	13% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Yet, when asked if blame for this lack of intergroup contact could be attributed to one racial-ethnic group over the other, roughly half of both whites (52%) and blacks (50%) did not want to assign blame to either whites or blacks. Still 40% of black students were more likely to assign blame to white students and 40% of Hispanic and other students believed that both whites and blacks were to blame for the lack of intergroup contact.

Minorities' Cultural Values and Life Chances

Overwhelmingly, students from all racial-ethnic groups (i.e., 75% of both white and black students and 70% of Hispanic and other students) did not agree that minorities' cultural values affected their life chances.

Racial Discrimination Now

Likewise, most students from every racial-ethnic group agreed that there was still some discrimination that minorities had to face in the United States (i.e., 70% of white students; and 67% of all minority students).

Race Relations Since Obama and Obama's Post-Racial Policies

There is a general lack of consensus when students were asked whether or not race relations have improved in the U.S. since Obama's election. Almost half of all whites (46%) stated that they had improved since Obama's election. In contrast, over half of all minorities stated that they had remained the same (i.e., 55% of black students and 62% of Hispanic and other students).

Furthermore, when students were asked whether or not Obama is focusing on race or other issues, the majority of all students stated that he was focusing on other issues (i.e., 70% of whites, 80% of blacks, and 63% of Hispanic and other students).

DISCUSSION

The Four Frames of Color-Blind Racism and Students' Perceptions of Race and Ethnic Relations Post Obama's Election and the Value of Post-Racialism

1) Abstract liberalism - Views on Affirmative Action

As predicted by Bonilla-Silva, the majority of white students were against affirmative action and the majority of minority respondents were for affirmative action.

White students often evoked the frame of *abstract liberalism*,

mentioning that acceptance into jobs or education should be based on hard work and not a quota system set up through government intervention.

“Acceptance to anything should be earned; this transcends the racial barrier. If you don’t make the cut, then you don’t get the job/school you want.” (White student)

However, a fair percentage of white students (roughly a third) who answered the affirmative action question, supported the program and acknowledged that structural racism still exists.

“I am for the affirmative action program...statistics show that there is a bias towards the hiring of whites.” (White student)

“Education is unequal, so are job opportunities which develop the foundation for stratification. Therefore, affirmative action allows minorities to get easier access.” (White student)

These findings suggest that despite some of Bonilla-Silva’s assertions that white students generally do not recognize structural racism and thus do not support affirmative action, a substantial number of white students in our sample did support the program, acknowledging structural factors of racism.

It is also surprising to note that more than a third of all minorities opposed affirmative action. This preliminary finding raises the methodological issue of whether questions concerning affirmative action should be used to serve as a proxy in measuring underlying racist attitudes, given that some minorities also oppose affirmative action. However, we suspect that some scholars like Bonilla-Silva would argue that it this is simply indicative of the insipid nature inculcating minorities into accepting the hegemonic color-blind racist ideology that stresses equal opportunity for all and overlooks the ongoing problems of racial inequalities.

2) Naturalization - Views on Interracial Marriage and Intergroup Contact at College

Bonilla-Silva would have predicted lower support amongst white students for interracial relationships and marriage and that students would use the *naturalization frame* to justify their reasoning (i.e., it’s just natural to want to be romantically involved with your own race.) However, our results show that the students in our sample are much more open and liberal in their views, although it could be argued that their families are employing the *naturalization frame* and will ultimately deter them from interracial relationships and marriage.

It was also particularly interesting to note that 50% of Hispanics and other students also believed that their families would oppose interracial

marriages, suggesting that the naturalization frame is also utilized by minorities. Indeed, this seems to be the case, when students were asked about who was to blame for the segregation and the lack of intergroup contact at the college we studied. Students from all racial-ethnic groups used the *naturalization frame* to some extent to suggest that people who are similar in terms of race and ethnic background are more comfortable around each other, yet they noted that there is increasing openness to initiate more contact between different groups.

"Black people do tend to gravitate towards each other, but so do white people. This is an understood norm. However, the vast majority of whites are open to having black friends and vice-versa." (White student)

"My friends and myself are very friendly and are always looking to meet new people and make new friends." (Black student)

"I think Blacks and Latinos stick together until they get comfortable and realize that whites around them do not care what race they are." (Hispanic student)

Overall, however, we did find that some minorities still believed that whites were more unwelcoming, giving credence to the literature that shows lingering "out-group" effects for minority students.

Another interesting dynamic that we found in analyzing the open-ended responses was the self-segregation that seems to occur between residents and commuters that tends to follow racial lines.

"Yes, the minorities are commuters so they hang out together." (White student)

"Yes, the residents are predominantly white while the commuters are predominantly minorities. Both groups tend to stay within their own ethnic group." (Hispanic student)

A few students also noted that there were general patterns to the spatial segregation that seemed to reflect broader social class differences and hinted at white students' sense of entitlement and privilege. In general, it was noted that the white students often sat on the steps in the most prominent area of the college where there is green grass, trees and an area for playing Frisbee or sunbathing, while the minorities, mainly Blacks and Hispanics, often sat in front of the cafeteria area which is also near the commuters' lounge and near the steps going towards the street and public transportation.

Other students attributed the spatial segregation to a common interest in sports and the fact that the college mainly recruits minority students who are

athletes:

"The majority of the minority students are athletes who tend to stick with their teammates; this may give off an appearance of segregation."
(Black student)

3) *Cultural Racism - Views on Minorities Cultural Values and Life Chances*

Students were asked: "Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation, are lazy, or do not have the proper values to succeed in our society. What do you think?" We found that white students' responses did not reflect the *cultural racism frame* in the ways that Bonilla-Silva had found. Most white students disagreed with these "culture of poverty" arguments and vehemently disagreed with this statement, often saying that this was a gross generalization and/or that the statement was completely ignorant and racist.

"I think it's an ignorant comment because every culture has things—someone who is lazy, etc. I've seen many whites who are extremely lazy and don't do anything." (White student)

"This is an unfair generalization. You can't stereotype an entire group of people." (White student)

And some white students made the connection to extreme poverty and the subsequent lack of opportunities as being the main reason for minorities' poor standing in relation to whites.

"That's bulls*\$t! Most poor people want to work but the assimilation to white ways in white collared work is not supported." (White student)

Again, Bonilla-Silva's frame of *cultural racism* does not seem to hold true for our sample. Some white students and many minority students seemed genuinely offended by this line of questioning.

4) *Minimization - Views on Racial Discrimination Now*

The majority of our students (whites, blacks and Hispanics and others) agreed that discrimination of minorities still existed and did not seem to utilize the *minimization of racism* frame to the extent that Bonilla-Silva found in his study. In addition, we were pleasantly surprised by the extent which white students recognized the on-going, pervasive nature of discrimination through racial profiling, racial steering in real estate practices, etc.

"It is the case, it's everyday. Got discrimination everywhere." (White

student)

“I think that sometimes black men are profiled and policemen wrongly assume that they are speeding, stealing, etc.” (White student)

“There is discrimination in stores, renting apartments, etc.” (White student)

“As terrible as it may be, I agree that there is constantly discrimination in everyday life.” (White student)

Although some white students did reflect the minimization of racism frame, their numbers were not large enough to elicit a general pattern in the data. Indeed, the students seemed well-aware of the structural and on-going problems of discrimination which may indicate that they are embracing some of the anti-racist pedagogy to which they have been exposed to in different college classes.

Views on Race and Ethnic relations in the US since Obama’s election and the Collective Value of Post-Racialism

As noted in the Results’ section, white students were more likely to say that race and ethnic relations had improved since Obama’s election compared to minorities. And minorities were more likely to say that race and ethnic relations had stayed the same. However, it seemed that many students, irregardless of racial-ethnic background were proud that America had elected a black president.

“Yes because it shows that the youth of America does not care about race and think more equally then those that came before us.” (Hispanic student)

“Yes because it shows African Americans that it is possible to do anything that white men or any men can do. I think it will lead to greater things in the future.” (White student)

“I do because who could've ever fathomed the idea of a non-white president.” (Black student)

In terms of our sample’s collective value on post-racialism, a vast majority of all respondents (across all racial-ethnic lines) said that they believed Obama was focusing on other issues instead of race in setting his policy initiatives and most students appeared to be in agreement with this post-racial agenda. Some students were of the strong opinion that he needed to prioritize other issues like the economy, health care, education, and national security, before even focusing on race.

“Definitely other issues. There's the economy and foreign policy. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the list could go on. There are far

more things to be concerned about for the President of the United States at this point." (White student)

"Other issues: health insurance, education. (Black student)

And some minority students stressed that race was a provocative area and that maybe Obama would do best to pursue only post-racial policies.

"I think he does not because it is a touchy area. He wants to deal with economics and education, which are the backbone of any fruitful life in this country." (Hispanic Student)

"Other issues. Leave race out of politics." (Black student)

CONCLUSION

This pilot study, although preliminary in nature, has yielded some fascinating findings that should inform future research on students' perceptions of race and ethnic relations at primarily white institutions. Indeed, although some of the white students in our sample seemed to employ Bonilla-Silva's four frames of color-blind racism (i.e., *abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism*), we found many students seemed to demonstrate a pluralistic openness and sophistication that was not found in Bonilla-Silva's earlier study. We believe that there are three main reasons to explain these differences.

First, our sample was taken from a region of the country that was not covered in Bonilla-Silva's survey. The college we studied is in the Northeast near a large urban center, where despite entrenched patterns of racial segregation, there is still a heavy value placed on diversity. This may make students more open and tolerant, simply given their region of the country.

Second, although Bonilla-Silva's study also drew on undergraduate sociology courses, we believe that our sample, overall, was more politically liberal and therefore inclined to more pro-minority sentiment. This also coincides with what institutional data has shown. In a survey of the 2009 incoming freshmen, demographic data shows that students generally considered themselves as in the middle or to the left of center. For example, 30% self identified as being liberal, 47% self-identified as middle-of-the-road and 18% as conservative, with the other 5% representing the far right and far left. Interestingly 71.1% thought same-sex couples should have the same right to legal marital status. (Cooperative Institutional Research Program Highlights: Freshman Survey 2009).

Third, it appears that students are absorbing some of the tenets of anti-

racist pedagogy (i.e., acknowledging the structural factors behind racism) which make them more sophisticated and nuanced in their responses regarding race and ethnic relations. This is hopeful news for all educators that are committed to affecting social change in the classroom and beyond.

In terms of how this could inform future research, we believe that others surveys need to be designed that ask more open-ended questions that do not automatically presume white racism. Given that Bonilla-Silva's study was designed to uncover the racist sentiments of some of the most un-enlightened white people, we found some of the questions objectionable as did some of our potential respondents. As noted earlier, one Hispanic student refused to take the survey given that she found it to be offensive. In an email to one of the authors the student complained: "I personally felt offended by the types of questions in the survey that asked about stereotypical behaviors of Blacks and Hispanics. I'm aware that I may not be the intended audience as I am a Hispanic student and not a White student, but the survey did not ask any questions about poor, lazy, uneducated Whites, just minorities. I found this incredibly biased and inappropriate and I would hope that other students of color expressed their concerns about the survey with you." Clearly, the wording of some of these questions needs to be re-evaluated for the purposes of future research.

Lastly, in regards to our survey's analysis of students' beliefs about race and ethnic relations post the Obama election, as Bonilla-Silva has argued, Obama has purposely tried to portray himself as a post-racial president, in order to broaden his political appeal. Bonilla-Silva asserts that this is dangerous because Obama will not institute meaningful policies that address racial inequalities, furthering Americans' problem of color-blind racism. On the other hand, it could be argued and has been argued that if Obama had not been portrayed as a post-racial president, he might not have been accepted by the majority of Americans and may not have been elected.

This collective value for post-racialism, as evidenced by Obama's leadership, has critical implications. We agree with Bonilla-Silva that this value of post-racialism obscures the on-going structural racist practices which inadvertently prolong the problem of color-blind racism. However, this pilot study's findings also indicate that there may be cause for hopefulness as some white students do appear to be learning more about the structural factors that contribute to racism and seem committed to challenging these factors going forward.

NOTE

¹ In November 2009, we contacted Bonilla-Silva by e-mail and explained our wish to conduct a pilot study utilizing the original student survey (i.e., the 1997

Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students) that he and other researchers had administered in 1997. Bonilla-Silva responded that he did not have the 1997 student survey on file and referred us to his original collaborators. Although we contacted these researchers and they indicated their willingness to assist us, they informed us that it could take considerable time to locate the original file of the student survey. To not delay our pilot study, Bonilla-Silva then suggested that we use the In-depth Interview Schedule for the 1998 Detroit Adult Survey that was included in an appendix in the 2nd edition of *Racism without Racists*. This is the survey we used with adjustments, as a model to create this pilot survey.

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