Lindsey Roath

Columbus State University

Cultural Experience Paper

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In the United States we spend so much time attempting to be like those around us, that often we forget that there are people who aren’t like us, or embody things we can never be. Sadly, one of our biggest faults is looking for the differences between ourselves versus our peers and create an us versus them dichotomy. Specifically during high school, students spend a vast amount of their time comparing themselves with others. This can be physically, psychologically or academically. Despite high school continuing to change, one of the things that remains the same is the constant necessity to fit in and the student quest for how to do that.

However, this becomes more difficult when you are a minority in the school. How does one who already doesn’t fit in based on outward appearances overcome the barrier of fitting in, in a place so ready to judge? Increasingly the federal government has differentiated students by their race, gender and socioeconomic status and made very clear that “non-white” students have score differentiations that show an inability to compete with their “white” counterparts academically. However, there has been little evidence at present to show how schools that are primarily “non-white” account for test scores and this type of social hierarchy.

Thus, the reason for this type of research stems from how a minority group within a majority hopes to fit into a high school setting. The school that I teach at is 99% African American. The remainder of students are a mix between hispanic and white students totaling less than 10 students total in the school. This lead to research about the impact of minorities within “non-white” schools. However, the research is almost nonexistent. There is a great deal about minorities within all white schools but there seems to be a vast underdevelopment of research for “whites” as a minority as well as other groups. This was surprising for a variety of reasons, but specifically that as immigration continues to be a big issue, one would think with the constant melting pot occurring in the United States would lead to a more diverse school culture. However, this doesn’t seem to be the case.

Presently, research is inconclusive in reference to minority education. The greatest amount of research is on test scores and college entrance rates. Additionally, there is a great deal of research on the educational outcomes of these students and the race of their teacher. However, this information is additionally inconclusive in reference to the majority population being something other than “White.”

Felix and You (2011) conclude “ much remains to be known about the potentially complex relations between ethnicity and peer victimization and this can be informed by nationally representative and/or population-based studies.” There is evidence that explains that “African Americans had lower rates of bullying victimization (a more severe subtype of peer victimization based on chronicity and the existence of a power imbalance) than White and Latino/a youth (Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel & Haynie, 2007). Interestingly, school context shows that White and African American students are likely to be victims of bullying however, did not effect the victimization of Latino children. “For White children, attending ethnically integrated schools increased their victimization rates, whereas for African American students it slightly lowered their victimization risk (Hanish and Guerra, 2000).” It was additionally found that students who were the ethnic minority in classrooms were also more likely to be determined as victims versus those in the majority who were viewed as aggressors (Graham and Juvonen, 2002).

As previously referenced there is very little information on majorities beyond white students in high schools. There is evidence that when confronted with their stereotype as a stigmatized group, performance results in school decrease (Steele, 1997). This information stems from a victimized/stigmatized individual within a majority white school and not specifically the type of school being researched. As this literature search was conducted the goal was to understand the impact of being a minority within a majority. Sadly, the research on this particular topic is limited when Whites are the minority. There may be a variety of reasons for this rangings from location, school type, age group, or the school being used for frame of reference being unique for this type of evaluation.

Specifically, as a teacher the minority students at the school seem to be more socially awkward or disengaged than those who are in the majority. That may be for a variety of reasons but in the interview I did with a senior student at the school it seems that a person can integrate themselves into the majority if they want to and if they have a thick skin. Additionally, one of the things I have personally noticed as a teacher is that the minority students tend to spend more individual time with teachers, and sometimes not the teachers they have class with. Specifically this comes across as interesting, but again research was lacking in this area other than my personal perceptions and those of my teaching peers.

The implications for this research show that there is a vast amount of research that can and should be done in this realm. There has been previous discussion on the importance of knowing clients, but in this particular realm of education it is particularly important for students and teachers to understand what they are dealing with. This is two-fold, first, students need someone to relate to whether it be peer or educator. Thus in order to conduct any type of counseling session it is best to have a firm grasp of what the school dynamic and how social groups function.

Students who fulfill the minority within the school can offer a great deal of awareness about functioning within the school. Additionally they can offer a different perspective about the ways in which to handle certain situations. It seems unfair that the only time a minority is addressed is in reference to test scores. Further, that in the research conducted and observed, being White doesn’t allow you to be a minority within education or many other settings.

Educational research and counselors should take this into account when pursuing new endeavors in education. There will always be a majority and minority and it may be beneficial to do team building and goal setting as an entire group instead of simply focusing on parts of a whole. As administrators in the school, it is important to look at the ways that your teachers and administrative staff can affect students both postiviely and negatively. Appearances are essentially the first things we go off of, and whether or not those cause lasting relastionships, it may be beneficial to create a diverse community in both instances in order to cater to all types fo clients.

Appendix A

The premise of this discussion is to determine the effects of being a minority within the majority.

Tell me about yourself.

How long have you been going to Kendrick or it’s feeder schools?

-I’ve been at Kendrick for 4 years.

What race do you see yourself as?

- I Am Hispanic. My Mother is Panamanian while my Father is Puerto Rican.

Does race effect your social status at Kendrick?

-When I was younger it did because people would consider me a Mexican due to my last name. However, It has gotten better. They are willing to know more about my heritage.

Does race effect your social status outside Kendrick?

-Like before, when i was younger it did, But now it has gotten better.

Describe how going to a school where you are a minority has effected you? Has it effected you? Why or why not?

Going to a school where I am a minority has affected me. I used to get called names

Do you think it is easier for you because you have a brother attending the same school?

-Its Actually easier for him. Due to my experiences dealing with it, i have been able to explain to him about to handle situations if they happen to him.

How would things be different if you were not a minority at Kendrick?

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Do people act differently because you are not black?

- Yes

Are you expected to meet the same expectations as your peers? Why or why not?

How is race a factor at Kendrick? Describe a normal day in the hall, this may involve you or others.

Do you mostly spend time with people of a similar background as yours or different? Why or why not?

As far as I know, there are no teachers who reference themselves as Hispanic/Mexican, how does that effect you? Why or why not?

What are you stereotyped as?

Describe how involved your parents are in the school and your education?

How has parental involvement effected your education?

Do you think your educational experience would be different if the school had greater diversity of students and teachers? Why or why not?

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