

Rochester Diversity Council Brief
2006 Olmsted County Racial Attitude and Actions Survey
Prepared by Char Kunkel
May 13, 2007

Charlotte A. Kunkel, PhD, Principal Investigator
Carissa Jean Sojka, Research Assistant

Funded by
Luther College, Decorah IA
Mayo Clinic, Rochester MN
Diversity Council, Rochester MN

Introduction:

Racism and racial attitudes in the US have long been the foci of sociological study. In this brief report we present and analyze the results of the 2006 Olmsted County Racial Attitudes and Actions Survey which was distributed in late summer 2006 to a random sample of this county's households. We asked about attitudes towards various "racial and ethnic" groups as well as new immigrant groups, and complement these questions with inquiries about actions or behaviors. This allows us to get beyond social science criticisms of attitudinal research as superficial and not reflective of lived reality. Open-ended questions are also included to flesh out the data. We analyze the data for change in attitudes over time, and place. The data are compared to a 1990 countywide survey of similar content.

We also compare this data to a 2004 Minnesota survey on urban immigration (Greenberg et al). The county in question is historically rural and of predominantly "white" racial composition but has experienced significant diversification from international immigration. In addition to these comparisons, our work makes visible the application of racial attitudes to new immigrants in Southern Minnesota. Interesting preliminary results suggest some diverse opinions about Bosnian versus Somali immigrants. We present this data to explore the racialization of immigration and to point us in directions of social justice and equality.

History:

In 1990 a small taskforce conducted a survey of the racial attitudes of residents of Olmsted County (1990 Rochester Area Racial Attitudes Survey). The reported data are still used today to drive programming and education. The county has been active in community education and collaboration around "diversity" issues. No comprehensive evaluation of current attitudes had taken place since 1990.

The Survey:

In late summer 2006, we distributed 2270 surveys to a stratified random sample of households in Olmsted County. We over-sampled households in the rural areas as well as households with less tenure. Our intention was both to increase the percentages of rural respondents, new residents, and respondents of color. The survey was eight pages in length and included 120 questions, including several open-ended questions.

In addition to replicating questions asked on the 1990 survey, we asked questions from a 2004 Minnesota study on immigration (Greenberg et al 2004), and from a national survey on racial attitudes (Bonilla-Silva 2006). What follow are the results of the 2006 Olmsted County Attitudes and Actions Survey. We discuss changes since the 1990 survey, the responses to some of the immigration questions, and draw some preliminary conclusions about racism and immigration.

Results:

We received a 15% response rate. We acknowledge this is disappointing, but perhaps not unexpected with a survey of such length and regarding a highly charged topic. Our sample was fairly representative of the county population with the following

exceptions. Our sample consists of slightly more women, slightly more people over the age of 65, and persons of above average education. Conversely, our sample slightly under-represents people of color at 6 percent, while the county population is 11%.

Demographics:

94 % of respondents were white

63 % were women

74% were parents

74% were employed

98% held high school diplomas or higher, 24% were educated beyond college/university

81% claimed to live in the city, 19 % were rural identified

65 % had lived in the county 10 years or more

The median income was over \$60,000

We value Diversity:

Respondents reported that they value diversity. They claimed: "I think it's a very positive thing," "It is a wonderful development to have the increased opportunities to interact with people from other places," "I would like to see more of an increase in the minority population. I feel that it is important to expose children to people of many nationalities and cultures," "I think an increase in the minority population will make Olmsted County a better place to live. People will be familiar with others who are different from them and hopefully more open embracing other cultures." "I think it is a positive." "The community I live in needs more diversity!" "I welcome it! ... " "I think diversity adds a great sense of culture to Rochester Olmsted County." "Diversity is good. It is important for us to learn about other cultures and back grounds in today's world. We need understanding." "I think it is overall very positive...." "I think it's good for a community to have different races in their community. If their parents have "episodes" of racism, then maybe the kids playing together will get their parents talking and learning about each other." "I think diversity is a good thing." And "I enjoy living in Olmsted County; the possibility of meeting people from other places is high. It is exhilarating meeting/ learning new things."

Actions:

In response to questions about interracial interactions, respondents reported little interaction. Of respondents' three closest friends, eighty (80) percent claimed none of them were of another race. Seventy-eight (78) percent of respondents claimed none of their three closest co-workers were of another race. Seventy-five (75) percent of respondents said none of their three closest neighbors were of another race. Fifty (50) percent of those questioned reported they had daily interactions with no one of another race.

The 2006 Survey suggests little change in the last 15 years in regards to integration and interracial interactions. Most whites do not interact with people of other races; they live, work, and befriend mostly other whites. Bonilla-Silva (2006) suggests this reflects white habitus and reproduces white racism. Many agree that interaction, particularly when interdependent, with other races decreases racist attitudes.

Attitudes:

When comparing the 1990 Racial Attitudes Survey with the 2006 Racial Attitudes and Actions Survey, we have chosen only white respondents to analyze. The numbers of people of color was too small and too diverse to make any conclusions. Among white respondents we find that attitudes towards Blacks have become more negative. This is statistically significant in 7 out of 10 questions asked. For example, more Whites believed in 2006 than in 1990 that Blacks “are naturally more violent than whites.” In fact, twenty percent more Whites believed in Blacks’ natural violence in 2006 than in 1990 (See attachment A). Similarly, more folks in 2006 believed that “whites generally perform better in school because of natural abilities” than Blacks. Fewer people in 2006 believed that Blacks “tend to maintain their property as well as whites do.” Finally, we find general support for “goals or quotas for hiring and promoting people” in all groups, including for Whites, to have decreased by about 13%.

These findings are surprising. Most scholars agree overt racism, or old-fashioned racism has been steadily declining on attitudinal tests. This may be one of the only findings of increasing racism on old-fashioned racism items. Nationally, Bonilla-Silva (2006:4) reports anywhere from 20 percent to 50 percent white agreement with stereotypes, meaning agreeing with old-fashioned ideas about biological inferiority of Blacks to Whites. What our study finds is over a twenty percent change in attitudes such that in 2006 over thirty (30) percent of respondents claim violence is naturally more prevalent in Blacks, where as in 1990 it was only eleven percent agreement. This finding needs to be explored.

In addition, these ten questions on old fashioned racist attitudes compared attitudes towards several groups. Few responses to groups other than “Blacks” as a category achieved statistical significance. We include the categories as listed in 1990 (Blacks, Southeast Asians, Hispanic Americans, Native American Indians) except that we replaced “Jewish” with “Bosnian” and added an additional category “Somali.” We theorized that Jewish holds less recognition as an ethnic group today in Olmsted County than Bosnian, and we wanted a recent white ethnic immigrant category to compare with an immigrant group in the area that might be read as Black. For each of the 10 categories, attitudes towards Somalis are the most hostile whereas attitudes toward Bosnians are the least hostile or negative. We conclude that new immigrants are not just read as immigrants but as racialized immigrants, and new “Black” immigrants are most racialized. Racism and anti-immigration have confounding effects.

In other questions, 38 percent of respondents approve or strongly approve of affirmative action (Do you approve or disapprove of affirmative action?), and 62 percent approve or strongly approve of interracial marriage. These two questions along with a question asking “Do you think racism still exists in society today?” were used to form an index of racial progressiveness (See attachment B). Bonilla-Silva argues that folks who strongly support these three propositions are least likely to practice color-blind racism. Color-blind racism is purported to be the new racism, or the post-modern variation of racism among whites today. It is premised on naturalizing racial differences, blaming cultural differences, minimization of racism today, and abstract liberalism. Abstract

liberalism is expressed by individualism and notions of meritocracy—work hard and anyone can make it, it should be equal for us all.

Our study finds only nine white respondents with all characteristics of a racial progressive (all strongly agree). Interestingly even fewer are not-at-all progressive. The vast majority of respondents fall into the moderate category which supports Bonilla-Silva's thesis. Few people claim outright racist attitudes but neither are most racially progressive. The dominant white ideology is moderation, or that of being color-blind.

These findings are not differentiated by city versus rural identification. Gender makes some difference—women are more likely to be racially progressive. Education also is correlated to more progressive attitudes in our study. The more educated the more likely you are to be progressive

Immigration:

We also created an immigrant progressive index using three questions from the survey on immigration (see attachment B). On a question that asked respondents to mark which two of six responses best describe their feelings on immigrants in Minnesota, the respondent received 1.5 points for each for marking that “They contribute to cultural diversity in Minnesota and make it a more interesting place to live” and that “They are hardworking and make a valuable contribution to our society.” The respondent received three points each for strongly disagreeing with the statement “Immigrants are hurting our quality of life in Minnesota because they are putting big demands on our public schools,” and an additional three points for strongly disagreeing with the statement “Immigrants are hurting our quality of life in Minnesota because they are draining resources from the whole community.”

The immigration index paints a different picture of attitudes toward immigration when compared to racial attitudes. The most common category of immigration attitudes is that of not-at-all progressive with fewer numbers in moderate and progressive categories. If you compare the two progressive indices, you can see there are more immigrant progressives than racial progressives; however, it is still most common, perhaps even socially acceptable, to be not-at-all progressive about immigration. It is no longer socially acceptable to appear not-at-all progressive on race, whereas our survey suggests it is normative to do so on immigration.

Conclusions:

- The 2006 Olmsted County Attitudes and Actions Survey shows some people support and value diversity.
- The Survey shows increased anti-black sentiment since 1990 on 7/10 questions measuring old fashioned racism.

- Increased racism is conflated with anti-Somali attitudes—attitudes that are not similar to the comparison immigrant group of Bosnians.
- Anti-immigrant sentiment is mixed at best. Quantitative data show that while there are more immigrant progressives than racial progressives, the overwhelming majority of respondents are NOT-at-all progressive in their attitudes about immigration. Moreover, this comparison may suggest that while racist attitudes are socially unacceptable (even if increasing), anti-immigrant sentiment is socially acceptable and it is racialized.
- Qualitative data suggest significant anti-immigrant sentiment –largely expressed in fears about jobs, taxes, crime, and concern about schooling and English-speaking adaptations.

Works Cited

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2006. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Inequality in the United States*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Greenberg, Stan, Anna Greenberg, and Julie Hootkin. 2004. “The Changing Shape of Minnesota: Reinvigorating Community and Government in the New Minnesota.” Washington D.C.: Greenberg, Quinlan, and Rosner Research, Inc. Retrieved May 2006. (<http://www.dfeducationfoundation.org/vertical/Sites/%7B33A74285-FCE9-452A-B7A6-49C6B6C50A66%7D/uploads/%7B2634A659-2ED7-4812-8563-60860840EBD9%7D.PDF>).

“1990 Rochester Area Racial Attitudes Survey” 1990. Rochester Diversity Council. Retrieved May 2006. (http://www.diversitycouncil.org/PDF_files/Racial_Attitude_Survey_1990.pdf).