

The Contact Hypothesis and Interracial Sports Team Involvement

Charity Reid

Missouri Southern State University

Introduction

Race is one of the most ambiguous and problematic human constructions to date. Racial issues have been troubling society for ages, from more overt instances such as segregation, interracial marriage taboos, slavery, and genocide to the more subtle—disbelief in the existence of discrimination and misconceptions about racial groups. The severity of these racial issues has varied over time and continues to vary by location as well as the different races involved. Feelings and attitudes regarding race also differ from individual to individual. When people develop feelings or attitudes (positive or negative) towards others without any basis in reality, such as having attitudes about an entire race that they apply to all individuals of that race, it is referred to as prejudice (Allport, 1979 ed.; Marger, 2003). Prejudice can be difficult enough to define, much less measure. One method used by researchers to measure levels of prejudice regarding various groups of people is social distance. According to Park (1924; cited in Marger, 2003), social distance is the level of intimacy that people are willing to establish in their relations with others. In other words, it is how close a person is willing to get with various types of people. A technique for measuring social distance was developed in 1924 by Emory Bogardus called the Bogardus social distance scale (Marger, 2003). The scale asks respondents to indicate if they would be willing to interact with people of different groups (such as different races) in social contexts that range from incredibly impersonal to an intimate relationship such as marriage. From the responses, researchers can draw conclusions about a respondent's attitudes

towards the various out-groups, whether impartial or prejudiced. While this scale is a helpful aid in determining how willing people are to interact with persons of another race and much can be inferred about their racial attitudes based on their responses, it does not indicate why the people respond differently or why their racial attitudes differ. To answer these questions it is necessary to look to another type of research.

Several theorists have formed explanations for how some individuals form more tolerant racial attitudes while others do not. One such theory is the contact hypothesis. According to the contact hypothesis, racial attitudes are positively affected by interracial contact but that in order for the contact to be affective, it must fulfill certain criteria (Allport, 1979 ed.). Interracial contact that influences racial attitudes must be intimate, reaching below the surface. There are four necessary conditions for influential contact: equal status of participants, common group goals, cooperative interaction, and environmental support. It is important to note that the equal status of the participants refers to statuses within that situation, not as some studies have incorrectly postulated as the participants' statuses in general (Pettigrew, 1998). Interracial cooperation towards a common goal is required rather than conflict or competition. Many studies have shown that competition or conflict hinders the production of positive racial attitudes (Yancey, 1999). The condition of environmental support entails approval or encouragement from relevant institutions or authorities such as school principles, athletic coaches, government leaders, and so on. Some studies have found other factors that help facilitate the reduction of prejudice but these should not be confused with the four conditions that the contact hypothesis holds will reduce prejudice in most cases. Doing so would create so many factors that most intergroup situations would not be applicable; it is important to remember that while there are

many features of contact that can ease prejudice reduction there are only four essential conditions for the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew, 1998).

The contact hypothesis is not without critique. One issue is that of causal sequence which asks: does the contact bring about more favorable attitudes or do the people participating in contact with the out-group members have a more favorable attitude towards the out-group in the first place? Do prejudice people avoid contact with those of other races? This is very difficult to test and requires longitudinal study rather than cross-sectional research. According to Pettigrew (1998) studies have shown that the positive effects of friendship (in fitting with conditional contact) outweigh the effects of any such selection bias. Powers and Ellison (1995) determined that among African-Americans there was no evidence that preexisting prejudice or non-prejudice nullified the result of increased positive racial attitudes following conditional contact. Evidence supporting contact as influential towards racial attitudes rather than the racial attitudes influencing contact is also given by Sigelman and Welch (1993).

Another critique of the contact hypothesis is that much of the research centers on the racial attitudes of Whites. Multiple studies have found that conditional contact affects African-Americans differently than it does Whites. Powers and Ellison (1995) state that when African-Americans are demographically a minority group an even more intimate contact may be necessary to build positive racial attitudes since minority group members are much more likely to be interacting with majority groups based on basic probability. The fact that there are few African Americans and more Whites indicates that Whites are statistically less likely to be in a contact situation with African Americans than the reverse. A study by Yancey (2007) revealed that the contact found to be influential for Whites was hardly influential at all for most other

racial groups. The effect of contact on the racial attitudes of racial minorities is an aspect of the contact hypothesis that needs further investigation.

Researchers have studied numerous different settings for interracial contact. Yancey (1999) focused on integrated churches as a scenario that met the four necessary conditions for positive influential contact and found that whites who attended interracial churches had more positive racial attitudes than those who did not attend interracial churches. The same study found that the contact produced by integrated residential areas did not influence racial attitudes; close proximity to minority group members does not in itself ensure that intimate relationships that go beyond the surface will develop. Other studies have looked at the relationship between contact and racial attitudes within the military, schools, neighborhoods, and sports teams. According to Allport (1979 ed.), interracial athletic teams are one of the clearest examples of the type of contact that will reach below the surface and allow people of different races to work together in an equal-status situation for a common goal that is supported by applicable authorities. Pettigrew (1998) also stresses that interracial athletic teams are a prime illustration of contact wherein people of different races work towards a common goal. The condition for having a common goal is not the only one met by interracial athletic teams; this interaction seems to fulfill all four of the conditions required for positive influential interracial contact.

Interracial sports team involvement seems to provide an intimate setting for individuals of different races to engage in contact that goes beyond the superficial, casual acquaintanceship. First of all, athletes who participate in sports are racially at an equal status. It is illegal for schools to discriminate based on race or ethnicity and therefore players are allowed to participate based on their athletic ability. It is possible that in practice this is not the case and if this is so the

influence of interracial contact may not have a positive effect since the condition for equal status interaction will not have been met. But if the team members are ranked in the usual way, by athletic ability rather than race, interracial sports demonstrate an equal status situation.

Concurrently, by ranking players by athletic ability rather than race the team coach and the institution that the interracial team plays for provide the authoritative sanctions that are needed. Coaches encourage team unity and cooperation as part of their job. They also wish for the team to achieve their goal to win, as does the institution at large.

Interracial sports team involvement is one of the most obvious illustrations of interracial contact that meets the condition for pursuit of a common goal. With every practice, game and season, interracial athletic teams must work together in order to reach their goal of victory. Reaching this goal requires interracial cooperation. Whether competing as individuals (as in track or golf) or as a unit (as in football or softball), most athletes must work together in order for the team to reach its goal—victory. Attainment of victory hinges on cooperation among all members regardless of race. All in all, interracial sports teams seem to provide an intimate atmosphere that facilitates contact that will promote positive racial attitudes in conjunction with the contact hypothesis.

It is necessary to note however, that not all sports provide the same type of contact. Some sports such as track are more individualized such that members of the same team may compete against each other in specific events even though each individual also competes for the victory of the team as a whole. This may create a more competitive atmosphere rather than the cooperative interaction necessitated by the contact theory. Sports that are more team oriented such as football are less likely to have a competitive atmosphere since teammates are not directly

competing with one another. Consequently it is not surprising that differences in racial attitudes are reported based on type of sport (Brown et al., 2003). The findings in general in regards to interracial sports teams and the contact hypothesis are varied as well.

Chu and Griffey (1985) found that among high school students, those who participated in interracial athletic teams did not have substantially different racial attitudes from those students who were not athletes. Rees and Miracle (1984) (cited in Chu and Griffey, 1985) also indicated that the sports setting does not fulfill the conditions for contact as well as previously believed. Other studies have found that sports do allow for effective contact. Research by Miracle (1981) (cited in Brown et al, 2003) supports this notion and in studying student athletes, Brown et al. (2003) found that white athletes who played team sports with black teammates had more tolerant racial attitudes. Much of the research regarding the contact hypothesis and interracial sports team involvement has dealt with high school students or students who have just graduated. Brown et al. (2003) supposes that the social environment that high school students are in may reinforce negative racial attitudes in a way that most college atmospheres would not. To date, there is minimal research regarding interracial collegiate athletic team involvement and the contact hypothesis.

The contact hypothesis states that individuals who have contact with minorities under the right conditions will develop more tolerant racial attitudes. It is commonly accepted that interracial sports team involvement meets the necessary conditions (Allport, 1979 ed.; Brown et al, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998) although the research does not always support that assertion (Chu and Griffey, 1985; Rees and Miracle, 1984-cited in Chu and Griffey, 1985). This study hypothesizes that interracial sports team involvement at the collegiate level will lead to more tolerant racial

attitudes in accordance with the contact hypothesis.

Methodology

A survey was given to 122 students at Missouri Southern State University. A purposive sample was used for the athlete sample while a convenience sample was used for the non-athlete sample. Sixty-five student athletes were administered surveys at various team meetings or practices in order to obtain enough data to compare student athletes and non-athlete students. Teams were chosen based on gender and team diversity as to provide a balance of diverse men's teams with homogenous men's teams and diverse women's teams with homogenous women's teams. There was an issue in arrangements to administer the instrument to a diverse women's team creating a sample that may not be fully representative of female athletes from a diverse sports team. It must be noted that the athlete sample was meant to be purposive in regards to the amount of racial diversity of the teams and not necessarily representative of MSSU athletes in general. The remaining fifty-seven surveys were administered to students who were convenient to the researcher on the Missouri Southern campus. The researcher is aware that by using a convenience sample there are limitations on the data and that the results may not be an entirely accurate representation of the population. Using a convenience sample introduces a possible bias in the data but despite these drawbacks and limitations, the data still provides useful information.

The respondents varied in age from 17 to 54 with the majority of respondents (90%) being between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Fifty-six percent of the respondents were male. Respondents identified themselves as White/Caucasian about 75% of the time while a little over 10% identified themselves as Multi-Racial and another 10% of respondents identified themselves as Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan

Native, or African-American. Less than 1% indicated being an unspecified “Other” race. A little over half of the respondents (53%) were currently athletes at Missouri Southern State University. Of those who identified themselves as athletes, many of them (67.7%) described the specific team they were a part of as consisting of players of more than one race. Four different teams were included in the athlete sample: football, women's soccer, baseball, and the women's track and field/cross country team. Among the athletes that were surveyed, 53% had been an athlete at MSSU for 1 season or less.

Results and Discussion

Participants were asked to indicate from a given list how many of their closest friends were the same race and an overwhelming majority (82%) indicated that either all or most of their closest friends were the same race as them while 54% indicated that their acquaintances were all or mostly all the same race. Among those surveyed, most people (72%) responded that they communicated with someone of another race on a regular basis (weekly, every other day, or every day). Overall this indicates that a majority of people have a fairly racially homogenous social circle but are likely to step outside of that homogeneity in their daily electronic interactions.

Racial attitudes towards six different races (White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Native American/Alaskan Native) were measured using questions formed from the Bogardus social distance scale. Respondents indicated how close they were willing to get to members of each race by agreeing or disagreeing that they would associate with members of that race in contexts that varied in intimacy. The answers they gave for each race were then compiled and given a social distance value ranging

from 6 (indicating a completely favorable racial attitude and a low amount of prejudice) to 12 (indicating a completely non-favorable racial attitude and a high amount of prejudice).

Almost 90% of the respondents had an entirely favorable racial attitude towards the Caucasian race which is not surprising considering that only one-third of those surveyed were non-White. Sixty-two percent of those surveyed had no prejudices towards African-Americans and about the same percentage had no prejudices towards Latinos (63%), Hawaiians (65%), or Native Americans (63%). About 4% had completely negative racial attitudes towards African-Americans, meaning that five individuals responded that they would not associate with African-Americans in any way. The same percentage had completely negative racial attitudes towards Asians, Latinos, and Hawaiians. This does not necessarily mean that the same people had negative views towards all four races as respondents could have answered that they would interact with some races and would not associate with others; in fact, only one person had entirely unfavorable views towards all races except Whites. The number of people who had a completely positive racial view towards Asians was the lowest amount of all the scores at 57%. So although there was some variation, most of those surveyed reported positive racial attitudes towards each race.

Most of the variation in racial attitudes is related to willingness to date or marry someone of another race. When looking at the individual questions used to measure social distance, a significant number of people indicated an unwillingness to date or marry someone of another race: 42% would not date or marry an Asian, 36% would not date or marry a Latino, 37% would not date or marry a Native American, 33% would not date or marry a Hawaiian, 38% would not date or marry an African-American, and 8% would not date or marry a Caucasian. Since most

respondents answered the social distance questions by ceasing contact when it became too intimate rather than skipping around, a higher social distance score than average would tend to mean that a respondent indicated that they would not be willing to marry or date someone of a said race. This indicates that even though most people reported having positive racial attitudes, a significant number were not entirely without prejudice; it also shows that there is still at least some amount of reluctance present regarding interracial relationships.

Among those surveyed, men tended to have less positive racial attitudes than women towards all races except Caucasians (see Table 1). Women tend to be more social so it could be that this influences the level of interracial interaction and thus impacts their racial attitudes. Not only this but in their relationships women are more likely to discuss feelings, emotions, and other details about their lives leading to a well of information that acts to combat prejudice. Men also tend to be more competitive than women so they may be more likely to see people of other races as a threat to their lifestyle, job, or dating life possibly making them more likely to hold on to prejudiced ideas.

Table 1

Independent T-Test: Male/Female

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	1.501	119	.136
Black Social Distance	3.232	119	.002
Asian Social Distance	2.654	119	.009
Latino Social Distance	3.141	119	.002
Hawaiian Social Distance	1.965	119	.052
Native American Social Distance	3.020	120	.003

Although the racial diversity of respondents was not huge (70% of respondents were White), there were significant findings regarding the levels of prejudice of different races. Those

who indicated being members of the Caucasian race had less prejudice towards Caucasians and African-Americans than did those who indicated being Multi-Racial (See Table 2).

Table 2

Independent T-Test: White/Multi-Racial

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	-3.924	103	.000
Black Social Distance	-2.067	103	.041
Asian Social Distance	-.518	103	.606
Latino Social Distance	-.600	103	.550
Hawaiian Social Distance	-1.611	103	.110
Native American Social Distance	-1.460	104	.147

It is not surprising that the racial attitudes towards Caucasians are more positive for those who are exclusively Caucasian than for those who have more than one racial ancestry. People are almost always completely comfortable with all levels of contact with their own race. It would seem that Multi-Racial individuals would have lower levels of prejudice since they have people of different races within their family of origin, very close level of contact. This seeming discrepancy could have to do with the racial background of those who indicated that they were Multi-Racial. Among those Multi-Racial individuals, the majority were White and Native American. Whether these individuals actually have Native American parents or grandparents or if they simply know that their genealogy includes one or two distant Native American ancestors could be an issue of influence concerning the greater amounts of prejudice found towards African-Americans from Multi-Racial individuals. If the later is true then those individuals would probably better be classified as White and perhaps the social distance scores would reflect a different trend. If the former is the case then it could be that Multi-Racial individuals (regardless of racial background) tend to have more prejudice towards Blacks than Caucasians

do because they feel that by holding to a more negative attitude towards another racial group they can identify more with the dominant race in their make-up. It is suggested by many that Multi-Racial individuals have a hard time finding a sense of belonging and perhaps this is one way of coping with that. If it is beneficial to identify more so with one specific racial group then a Multi-Racial person may do so to the extent of developing negative attitudes towards all other races in order to confirm their “belonging” to the race of their choice.

In regards to the relationship between the number of interracial friendships and racial attitudes, the lack of variety in responses causes a difficulty in even making accurate comparisons. Since over half of the respondents indicated that most of their friends are the same race as them, further study would be necessary to obtain a group of individuals with more diverse numbers of interracial friendships. When looking at interracial acquaintances the same issue is visible, again, about half of respondents answered that most of their acquaintances are the same races as them.

Regarding interracial communication and social distance scores the frequency of interracial communication reported by those surveyed is more diverse than the number of interracial friendships or acquaintances; two significant relationships were found. Those who responded that they communicate weekly (through phone or instant messaging) with someone of another race have more favorable racial attitudes towards African-Americans, Asians, and Native Americans than those who responded that they never communicate with someone of another race (See Table 3, Page 13). The level of prejudice towards Native Americans, Latinos, and African-Americans was significantly lower for those who engage in interracial communication daily than for those who never engage in interracial communication (See Table 4, Page 13). These

relationships involve small sample sizes but it is still worthwhile to explore these relationships while still keeping in mind that the low response rate may have an impact.

Table 3

Independent T-Test: Weekly/Never Comm.

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	.145	36	.886
Black Social Distance	-3.094	36	.004
Asian Social Distance	-1.838	36	.074
Latino Social Distance	-2.172	36	.037
Hawaiian Social Distance	-1.654	36	.107
Native American Social Distance	-2.475	36	.018

Table 4

Independent T-Test: Daily/Never Comm.

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	.000	48	1.00
Black Social Distance	-3.230	47	.002
Asian Social Distance	-1.885	47	.066
Latino Social Distance	-3.905	47	.000
Hawaiian Social Distance	-2.996	47	.004
Native American Social Distance	-3.213	48	.002

It could be that through instant messaging on social networking websites such as Facebook, people are being exposed to the kind of information that can dispel prejudice without having to actually step out of their comfort zone; even if they do not want to become close friends with someone of another race, through instant message conversations or text messaging one can obtain pieces of information about someone that can work to combat preconceived notions. Perhaps with the technological advances of recent years and the increasing reliance on electronic communication, especially among those in their twenties and younger, it has become a way to become closer to people and learn about them without having to be physically near them. This type of communication may have a stronger effect on racial attitudes than was previously thought. More research into this expanding area of communication is needed.

No significant relationship was found regarding racial attitudes and the amount of time spent as an athlete but 53% of athletes surveyed had been members of the team for 1 season or less which could very well be a contributing factor in the lack of a significant finding here.

There is a possibility that a variation in sampling method and setting could have contributed to a difference in the responses of athletes and non-athletes, but several significant findings indicate that interracial athletic team involvement does play a role in racial attitudes. At Missouri Southern State University, athletic teams are generally either almost entirely White players or a combination of White and Black players. There are some players of other races, especially on the football team which was one of the teams included in this study but on average the teams followed this trend.

The data show that athletes from teams that had very little or no diversity tended to have greater prejudice towards African-Americans and Native Americans than members of diverse athletic teams (See Table 6, Page 15). This relationship fits with the postulation of the contact hypothesis since athletes on diverse teams are exposed to conditional contact within the context of the interracial team while athletes on non-diverse teams are not. It seems that only the attitudes towards the races that the athletes are in contact with on the team are affected. Athletes also tend to socialize mostly with other athletes, especially those from their team. So for athletes from diverse teams the interracial contact is very likely not limited to the field or court but carries over into their social lives as well and for athletes from non-diverse teams the homogeneity is likely to remain in their social lives.

Overall, the data indicated that on average athletes have less favorable racial attitudes than non-athletes towards Asians and Latinos (See Table 5, Page 15). When comparing non-athletes and athletes based on diversity of team, typically athletes from non-diverse teams have less positive racial attitudes than non-athletes have towards Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans (See Table 8, Page 16). Upon looking at non-athletes and athletes who are members

of diverse teams, athletes from diverse teams tend to have less favorable racial attitudes towards Asians and Latinos (See Table 7, Page 16). These relationships indicate that the team mentality may function as a catalyst for prejudice towards races not represented on the team. If there are few or no Asian or Latino athletes on the team then the team mentality could actually serve as an enforcer for negative racial attitudes and prejudice thinking. Racial “out-groups” or minorities may become even more of an out-group because not only are they racially different but they are doubly an out-group because they are not part of the team. This seems to be the case even for athletes who are a part of racially diverse teams as they tend to have greater prejudice than non-athletes towards races not represented on their team. Even though contact within an interracial athletic team can lead to more positive racial attitudes towards the racial groups present, it seems that team mentality can contribute to less positive racial attitudes towards racial groups that are not present on the team.

Table 5
Independent T-Test: Athlete/Non-Athlete

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	.864	119	.389
Black Social Distance	1.349	119	.180
Asian Social Distance	2.088	119	.039
Latino Social Distance	2.423	119	.017
Hawaiian Social Distance	.587	119	.558
Native American Social Distance	1.844	120	.068

Table 6
Independent T-Test: Diverse Team/Non-Diverse Team

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	.764	63	.448
Black Social Distance	1.974	63	.053
Asian Social Distance	.469	63	.641
Latino Social Distance	1.379	63	.173
Hawaiian Social Distance	1.443	63	.154
Native American Social Distance	2.128	63	.037

Table 7
Independent T-Test: Non-Athlete/
Diverse Team

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	-1.837	97	.069
Black Social Distance	-.950	97	.345
Asian Social Distance	-2.111	97	.037
Latino Social Distance	-2.069	97	.041
Hawaiian Social Distance	-.394	97	.695
Native American Social Distance	-1.287	98	.201

Table 8
Independent T-Test: Non-Athlete/
Non-Diverse Team

	t	df	Sig.
White Social Distance	-.1721	74	.089
Black Social Distance	-2.839	74	.006
Asian Social Distance	-2.534	74	.013
Latino Social Distance	-4.048	74	.000
Hawaiian Social Distance	-1.687	74	.096
Native American Social Distance	-3.045	75	.003

Overall these findings seem to support the supposition of the contact hypothesis that contact as a result of interracial sports team membership can lead to more positive racial attitudes, but this data also indicates that this relationship is only affective for prejudices towards the races the athletes are interacting with. Otherwise, it is possible that the team mentality can create an extra barrier to acceptance or act as catalyst for prejudice.

No significant correlations were found regarding racial attitudes and age or amount of time spent as an athlete. But some significant correlations were found among the social interaction questions about interracial friendships, acquaintances, and electronic communication. As the number of close friends of the same race a person has increases, so does the number of acquaintances that person has of the same race, or in other words, if a person indicates that most or all of their close friends were the same race as them then they are also likely to indicate that a high number of their acquaintances are the same race as them as well ($r = .481, p < 0.01$).

A similar correlation was found regarding frequency of communication with someone of another race. As the number of acquaintances of the same race that a person has increases the amount he or she communicates via phone or internet with persons of other races typically

decreases ($r = -.541, p < 0.01$). Also, the more close friends of the same race a person has, the less often he or she generally communicates via phone or internet with persons of other races as well ($r = -.470, p < 0.01$). In sum, the fewer friends or acquaintances of the same race that a person has the more likely they are to text, call, or chat online with someone of another race.

These three correlations are not surprising since the different levels of a person's social circle that were measured in this study (close friendships, acquaintances, and those whom they communicate with) normally build upon on another. That is to say, the people that one communicates with via phone or internet most normally are either close friends or acquaintances. For example, if a person indicates that about half of their friends are the same race as they are then the other half of their friends must be of a different race providing an opportunity to more frequently electronically communicate with someone of another race. Similarly, if a person has a smaller number of close friends of the same race (and thus a larger number of close friends of other races) then he or she is more likely to make acquaintances of other races through those friends. If a person has a more homogenous circle of friends then a more homogenous circle of acquaintances is likely to develop.

Only one significant relationship was found regarding close friends and racial attitudes. As the number of close friends of the same race a person had increased, their prejudice towards Latinos also tended to increase ($r = .174, p < 0.05$). In other words, people who indicated that they had a greater number of close friends that were not the same race as them tended to have more favorable racial attitudes towards Latinos. One would assume that the relationship between close friends would fit within the conditions outlined within the contact hypothesis (equal status of participants, common group goals, cooperative interaction, and environmental support) so this

correlation is not surprising. Having even one close friend of another race could provide an opportunity for one to interact with that person in such a way as to see beyond the color of their skin. However, there were no significant correlations between racial makeup of close friends and the social distance for any other race; the social distance scores for all of the other races except for White showed the same trend but it was not significant.

There are several possible explanations as to why negative racial attitudes towards Latinos were directly correlated with the racial make-up of a person's close friends. It is possible that negative racial attitudes towards African Americans are no longer socially acceptable but negative racial attitudes towards Latinos continue to be viewed by many as tolerable or even based in truth. If this is the case then having a close friend of another race may combat the presence of negative racial attitudes towards Latinos because those are the racial attitudes most likely to be present and thus the ones most likely to be affected. It is also possible that among those surveyed those who answered that they had greater numbers of close friends of other races were close friends with Latinos, meaning that they had the greatest exposure to Latinos and thus may have lower social distance scores for Latinos but not necessarily for other races since their exposure could be limited to Latinos.

A similar correlation involving racial attitudes was found concerning acquaintances. The fewer acquaintances a person had that were of the same race, the more positive his or her attitude towards Hawaiians ($r = -.185, p < 0.05$). This correlation again showed the same trend for other races but was only significant for racial attitudes towards Hawaiians. In reality there are probably very few Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders in Joplin so the likelihood that any of the individuals have close friends or acquaintances that are Hawaiians is very small. It could be that

the racial attitudes concerning Hawaiians are not as strong in the first place since Hawaii is still a part of the U.S. and thus acquaintanceship would have had more of an affect on those weaker attitudes than on the attitudes towards any other racial group.

Another correlation that was found was that the frequency of communication (via phone or internet) with someone of another race increased, his or her prejudice towards Latinos increased as did prejudice towards Native Americans ($r = .229, p < 0.05$; $r = .193, p < 0.05$). Once again the trend was there for all of the other races (except for White) but was not significant. Through social networks such as Facebook or even just through an ongoing texting conversation prejudice may come to diminish as people are exposed to individuals who combat those preconceived notions towards racial groups; perhaps this explains the correlation between frequency of interracial communication and racial attitudes towards Latinos and Native Americans. It could be that those who indicated frequent interracial communication were communicating with someone of those races thus impacting those racial attitudes more than other races which they would not have been as exposed to. The affects of interracial communication through phone, texting, or online chatting are most likely influenced by several factors such as how many different people are involved, subject matter and depth, and frequency. Further research is needed to determine exactly how such communication affects racial attitudes.

The data also showed that as a person's social distance score for one race increased, their score for any other race increased as well. The correlation was significant across the board for every race with every other race at the .01 level (see Table 9, Page 20). In other words, respondents were likely to have similar racial attitudes towards each race; if they had a negative

racial attitude towards African Americans they were likely to have a negative racial attitude towards other races as well.

Table 9
Correlations: Social Distance Scores

	White Social Distance	Black Social Distance	Asian Social Distance	Latino Social Distance	Hawaiian Social Distance	Native American Social Distance
White Social Distance	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Black Social Distance	r = .602 p < 0.01	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Asian Social Distance	r = .369 p < 0.01	r = .558 p < 0.01	-----	-----	-----	-----
Latino Social Distance	r = .351 p < 0.01	r = .565 p < 0.01	r = .762 p < 0.01	-----	-----	-----
Hawaiian Social Distance	r = .551 p < 0.01	r = .642 p < 0.01	r = .674 p < 0.01	r = .716 p < 0.01	-----	-----
Native American Social Distance	r = .533 p < 0.01	r = .695 p < 0.01	r = .633 p < 0.01	r = .674 p < 0.01	r = .717 p < 0.01	-----

This could be because whatever affects prejudice towards one race may also affect prejudice towards another race; if a contact situation develops between a White person and a Latino person, they both may have to reconsider previous ideas they held about people of the other race (such as a character traits). In doing this, they might also conclude that prejudices about other races could also be incorrect. It could also be plausible that respondents with more favorable racial attitudes tend to be more accepting of others or outgoing while those with less favorable racial attitudes tend to be more narrow-minded or introverted. Another explanation is that many of those surveyed might see race as a generic, “white and non-white,” and therefore report similar racial attitudes towards all races.

Conclusions

There are not a lot of studies at the collegiate level that examine interracial attitudes in regards to athletics. This study hypothesized that at the collegiate level, interracial sports team involvement would lead to more positive racial attitudes. In some ways this hypothesis was supported and in others it was not. Racial attitudes were impacted by athletics in quite a few different ways. Athletes from diverse teams had more positive racial attitudes towards Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans than athletes from non-diverse teams but they also had less positive racial attitudes towards Asians and Latinos than non-athletes did. Further study is needed to determine if interracial athletics impact only the racial attitudes pertaining to the specific races that athletes are interacting with as well as to determine if team mentality can actually lead to less positive racial attitudes towards racial groups not represented within the team.

References

- Allport, Gordon W. *The Nature of Prejudice*. 25th Addition Anniversary Edition ed. 1954. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc, 1979.
- Brown, Kendrick T., Tony N. Brown, James S. Jackson, Robert M. Sellers, and Warde J. Manuel. "Teammates On and Off the Field? Contact With Black Teammates and the Racial Attitudes of White Student Athletes." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 33.7 (2003): 1379-1403.
- Chu, Donald, and David Griffey. "The Contact Theory of Racial Integration: The Case of Sport." *Sociology of Sport* 2.4 (1985): 323-333
- Marger, Martin N. *Race and Ethnic Relations: American and Global Perspectives*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003.
- Pettigrew, Thomas F. "Intergroup Contact Theory." *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998): 65-85.
- Powers, Daniel A, and Ellison G Christopher. "Interracial Contact and Black Racial Attitudes: The Contact Hypothesis and Selectivity Bias." *Social Forces* 74.1 (1995): 205-226.
- Sigelman, Lee, and Susan Welch. "The Contact Hypothesis Revisted: Black-White Interaction and Positve Racial Attitudes." *Social Forces* 71.3 (1993): 781-795.
- Yancey, George. "An Examination of the Effects of Residential and Church Integration on Racial Attitudes of Whites." *Sociological Perspectives* 42.2 (1999): 279-304
- Yancey, George. *Interracial Contact and Social Change*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007.

Appendix

Read and then answer each question honestly. Indicate your answer with an “X” on the appropriate line for multiple choice questions. Please note that for this survey time spent as a “redshirt” athlete is included as team membership.

Section 1

Age: _____

Sex: _____ Male _____ Female

Race: (You may choose more than one if applicable)

- _____ White/Caucasian
- _____ Black/African American
- _____ Asian
- _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- _____ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- _____ Hispanic/Latino
- _____ Other _____

Thinking about your closest friends (that is, those people you spend the most time with and/or have the most conversations with) approximately how many of them are the same race as you?

- _____ All of them
- _____ Most of them
- _____ About Half of them
- _____ A Few of them
- _____ None of them

Thinking about your acquaintances (that is, those people whom you know but do not frequently choose to spend much time with) approximately how many of them are the same race as you?

- _____ All of them
- _____ Most of them
- _____ About Half of them
- _____ A Few of them
- _____ None of them

How often would you say you communicate with someone of another race through phone (calling or texting) or instant messaging (such as Facebook chat or MSN messenger)?

- Daily
- Ever Other Day
- Weekly
- Once or Twice a Month
- A Few Times a Year
- Never

Which of the following best describes you?

- I am currently a member of an athletic team at MSSU
- I am not currently a member of an athletic team at MSSU but have been
- I have never been a member of an athletic team at MSSU (please skip to **Section 2** on the next page if you select this answer)

Approximately how long have you been (or were you) a member of an athletic team at MSSU?

- 1 season or less
- 2 seasons
- 3 seasons
- 4 seasons or more

Which MSSU athletic team are you (or were you) a member of? (if applicable you can select more than one)

- Football
- Basketball
- Soccer
- Volleyball
- Baseball
- Softball
- Tennis

- Track and Field
- Cross Country
- Golf
- Cheerleading
- Dance Team

Which of the following best describes the athletic team you are (or were) a part of?

- the team consists of players who are all the same race
- the team consists of players who are not all the same race

Section 2

For the following questions, please continue to indicate all of your selections with an “X” on the appropriate line.

I would find it acceptable to associate with members of the White/Caucasian race in the following ways: (select all that apply)

- I would not associate with
- I would live in the same city
- I would live in the same neighborhood
- I would have classes with
- I would have as a teammate or work on a class project with
- I would be close friends
- I would date/marry

I would find it acceptable to associate with members of the Black/African American race in the following ways: (select all that apply)

- I would not associate with
- I would live in the same city
- I would live in the same neighborhood
- I would have classes with
- I would have as a teammate or work on a class project with
- I would be close friends
- I would date/marry

I would find it acceptable to associate with members of the Asian race in the following ways:

(select all that apply)

- I would not associate with
- I would live in the same city
- I would live in the same neighborhood
- I would have classes with
- I would have as a teammate or work on a class project with
- I would be close friends
- I would date/marry

I would find it acceptable to associate with members of the Hispanic/Latino race in the following ways: (select all that apply)

- I would not associate with
- I would live in the same city
- I would live in the same neighborhood
- I would have classes with
- I would have as a teammate or work on a class project with
- I would be close friends
- I would date/marry

I would find it acceptable to associate with members of the Hawaiian/Pacific Islander race in the following ways: (select all that apply)

- I would not associate with
- I would live in the same city
- I would live in the same neighborhood
- I would have classes with
- I would have as a teammate or work on a class project with
- I would be close friends
- I would date/marry

I would find it acceptable to associate with members of the Native American/Alaskan Native race in the following ways: (select all that apply)

- I would not associate with

_____ I would live in the same city

_____ I would live in the same neighborhood

_____ I would have classes with

_____ I would have as a teammate or work on a class project with

_____ I would be close friends

_____ I would date/marry