Influence of expectation and campus racial climate on undergraduates’
intraracial interaction

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In this study, the authors examine the influence of intraracial interaction expectation
and campus racial climate perception on attitudes toward intraracial interaction which,
in turn, influences the levels of intraracial interaction among students at a multicultural
university in Malaysia. Interaction across race is fundamental to students’ growth and
development. Responses from 193 Malay and 165 Chinese students were analysed
by means of hierarchical regression. Results support the hypothesized influence of
intraracial interaction expectation and campus racial climate perception on attitudes
toward intraracial interaction for the Chinese students. For the Malay students,
however, only intraracial interaction expectation is significant. Attitudes toward
intraracial interaction, in turn, significantly predict levels of intraracial interaction for
both groups. The results support the hypothesized differential strength of relationships
among the variables for the two racial groups. Implications for higher education are
discussed.

Keywords: intraracial interaction; expectation; perception; attitude; university students

Introduction

In institutions of higher learning, interaction across race, as a form of diversity experience,
is fundamental to students’ growth and development (Bowman, 2010, 2011; Brennan &
Osborne, 2008; Garin, Dey, Hurtado, & Garin, 2002; Millem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005).
Accordingly, studies on factors enhancing intraracial interaction among students are
crucial for higher education policy and practice. Chang, Denson, Saenz, and Misa (2006)
point out that whereas the benefits of interaction across race/ethnicity have been
extensively examined within the study of higher education, the equally important
conditions that promote and sustain high levels of intraracial interaction among students
have been understudied. A handful of researchers, particularly examining intergroup
contact, have examined the influence of selected individual background and psychosocial
variables on intraracial interaction. The relationships between intraracial interaction
expectation (defined as expectation that racially different peers are interested in interacting
with one’s racial group), and campus racial climate perception (defined as perception of
race relations on campus), attitudes toward intraracial communication (defined as interest
in participating in cross race interaction with peers) and levels of intraracial interaction
(defined as frequency of interaction with racially dissimilar peers) have not, however, been
the subject of previous studies on students’ diversity engagement and race relations on
campuses. To fill the gap, this analysis focuses on examining the influence of intraracial