Since the late 1960's, the expression of overt racism towards African Americans has decreased and support for racial equality in public opinion polls has increased (Greeley & Sheatsley, 1971; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Henry & Sears, 2002). Despite these reported changes in social attitudes, racism is arguably still a widespread problem in America (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; McNeilly et al., 1996; Utsey, 1998). Sigelman and Welch (1993) found that nearly fifty percent of African Americans reported a belief that negative attitudes towards African Americans were increasing nationally. Thus, this finding is paradoxical to the report that racism is declining across the nation. To account for this discrepancy, researchers have focused on the idea that racism in America has changed to become more covert/subtle and less overt in nature (Krysan, 2000; Pettigrew, 2000; Sears & Henry, 2005).

One contemporary view that distinguishes between overt and covert racial attitudes is symbolic racism theory (Sears & Henry, 2005). Overt racism is similar to “old-fashioned racism” and is characterized by an open support for racial discrimination, the use of pre-Civil War stereotypes, a preference for maintaining distance from other groups through segregation/social distance, and opposition to racial equality (Henry & Sears, 2002). In contrast, symbolic racism is more covert in its expression and is believed to stem from continued problems from the civil rights movement. Symbolic racism is based on the ideas that African Americans do not currently suffer from prejudice or discrimination, and African Americans have achieved equality, but still are not satisfied. Furthermore, African Americans obtained rights/privileges they do not

Overt and Covert Racial Attitudes Towards African Americans and Native Americans

Contemporary theories of racial attitudes have stated that two distinct forms of racism exist in America today—overt and covert. Recent studies have suggested that racial attitudes towards African Americans have become increasingly covert in their expression while overt racism has declined. However, racial attitudes towards other minority groups, such as Native Americans, have not been consistently studied in this regard. This study examined self-reported overt and covert racial attitudes of 35 White college students towards Native Americans and African Americans. The results showed higher levels of overt and covert racism towards Native Americans as compared to African Americans. Social desirability and socioeconomic status were not related to racial attitudes. Possible reasons for differences in the expression of racial attitudes between the two groups are discussed.

Author Note. Melissa K. Tibbits was at the University of Tulsa when this study was conducted. She is currently at Pennsylvania State University. Dennis R. Combs is at the Department of Psychology, University of Tulsa (OK).

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deserve and disregarded traditional values such as work and individualism (Sears & Henry, 2003; 2005).

A second contemporary view of racial attitudes is blatant and subtle racism theory (Pettigrew, 2000; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Blatant prejudice is very similar to the previously stated definition of overt or “old-fashioned” racism. “Subtle prejudice,” like symbolic racism, is rooted in traditional values and involves an overemphasis on presumed cultural differences between ethnic groups and a denial of positive emotions toward minority groups (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). For example, one may interpret the high unemployment rate of another ethnic group as an indication that the ethnic group as a whole does not culturally value a strong work ethic and then use this evaluation as a justification for negative feelings towards the ethnic group. Both symbolic racism and subtle racism are consistent with the idea that a new, more covert form of racism exists among Whites (Krysan, 2000).

Although many of the conclusions about contemporary racial attitudes have been drawn from studies of overt and covert racism towards African Americans, very little research has examined racial attitudes towards other minority groups, such as Native Americans (Ancis, Choney, & Sedlacek, 1996). Like African Americans, Native Americans have experienced historical and current struggles with racism (Belcourt-Dittloff & Stewart, 2000). One major concern for Native Americans is the impact that stereotypes have on racial attitudes. Native American stereotypes continue to persist in textbooks, on product labels, as mascots for sports teams, and in the media, and have been characterized as negative and damaging (Ashley & Jarrett-Ziemske, 1999; Merskin, 2001; Trimble 1988).

What is currently known about the racial attitudes of Whites towards Native Americans? The research evidence on this issue has been equivocal. Consistent with the research on African Americans, there is evidence that the overt expression of negative stereotypes and attitudes towards Native Americans has gradually decreased over time (Ancis et al., 1996; Trimble, 1988). In contrast, a recent study found that Whites reported more prejudiced attitudes towards Native Americans than other ethnic groups, suggesting that overt racism towards Native Americans is still quite pervasive (Paniagua, O’Boyle, Tan, & Lew, 2000). Higher levels of overt racism may stem from a lack of familiarity with Native Americans, cultural and religious differences, and socioeconomic factors, but arguably the most important influence on racial attitudes is the presence of Native American stereotypes (Ancis et al.; Farley, 1997; Merskin, 2001). Another unanswered question concerns the level of covert racism towards Native Americans and if present, how it compares to other minority groups such as African Americans. The authors found no published studies that measured covert racial attitudes towards Native Americans. Clearly, more information is needed to understand better the nature of Whites’ attitudes towards Native Americans, and the consequences of these attitudes for Native Americans.

The purpose of this study was to examine levels of overt and covert racism of Whites towards Native Americans and African Americans. We predicted that due to the widespread presence of Native American stereotypes, higher levels of overt/blatant racism would be reported towards Native Americans than African Americans. In addition, White participants were asked to complete a measure of social distance for Native Americans and African Americans in various social roles. Social distance has been considered a form of overt racism in recent research, and we predicted that Whites would report greater levels of social distance towards Native Americans than for African Americans (Ducote-Sabney, 2000; Henry & Sears, 2002). Due to the lack of data on levels of covert racism, we expected both groups would be relatively equivalent on these measures. We assessed covert racism using measures of subtle prejudice and symbolic racism. We also examined the relationship between racial attitudes, social desirability, and socioeconomic status. Since the expression of racism has social and personal implications, we expected a positive relationship between the measures of racism and social desirability (Biernat & Granda, 1999; Rattazzi & Volpato, 2003; Sears, 1988). There has been inconsistent evidence on the relationship between racism and SES level, so we make no prediction concerning this relationship (Clark et al., 1999).

Method

Participants

The participants were 55 White college students (11 male and 44 female) recruited from a private university in Oklahoma. The mean age and educational level of the sample were 20.8 (SD = 1.6) and 14.5 years (SD = 1.0), respectively. There were more female participants in the sample than male, χ² (1, N = 55) = 19.0, p = .01. Socioeconomic status (SES) was measured with the Hollingshead four-factor index which computes an overall SES score based on level of education, occupation, gender, and martial status (Hollingshead, 1975; Cirino et al., 2002). Because all the participants were college students, SES values were based on parent data. The mean SES score of the sample was 51.2 (SD = 10.0; range 21-66), which fell in the middle class level (Hollingshead, 1975). There were
no differences on the racial attitude measures based on gender, so the participants were combined into a single group for the purpose of analysis.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. All participants completed a demographic questionnaire composed of questions concerning educational level, marital status, age, ethnicity, and information on parental education and occupation to allow computation of the Hollingshead SES index score.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale - short version. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (M-C SDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) assesses social desirability in a variety of populations. The scale measures the tendency to not endorse items about common everyday flaws and behaviors that may potentially lead to an unfavorable assessment by the researchers. Social desirability may be an important component for studies on racism, and it has been argued that college students tend to avoid a direct expression of negative racial statements in research studies (Biernat & Crandall, 1993). For this study, we used a 20-item version developed from the original 54-item scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). The short version demonstrated comparable psychometric properties to the original scale. Scores on the M-C SDS short version ranged from 0-20, and all items were answered in a true/false format. Higher scores reflected greater levels of social desirability. For this study, the internal consistency of the M-C SDS was good (α = .70).

Blatant and Subtle Prejudice Scales. The Blatant and Subtle Prejudice Scales assess a person’s racial attitudes according to the blatant-subtle theory of racism (as reviewed in Biernat & Crandall, 1993). The Blatant Prejudice Scale is a 10-item scale that measures overt beliefs of threat by minorities, rejection of minorities, and opposition to intimacy with minorities (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). The Subtle Prejudice Scale is a 10-item scale that measures a person’s self-reported comfort level with minority groups in a variety of social roles and can be considered a measure of covert racism (Biernat & Crandall, 1993; Henry & Sears, 2002). The short version contains eight items rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very uncomfortable) to 7 (very comfortable). Participants in the present study rated how comfortable they would feel with a minority individual as governor, president, personal physician, renter, spiritual counselor, roommate, date, and dance partner. The scale was constructed so that the roles differed in amount of social contract and intimacy. For this study, we used Native American and African American versions. Because each item represents a different social role, we analyzed the individual items. In previous research, the internal consistency was excellent (α = .90), and the test-retest reliability for a 3-week period was good (r = .94; Byrnes & Kiger, 1988). For the present study, the scales showed excellent levels of inter-

Blatant Prejudice Scale. The Blatant Prejudice Scale (Byrnes & Kiger, 1988) is a variation of the original Borgardus Social Distance Scale, which has a long history of use in racism research (Bogardus, 1928). The Social Distance Scale measures a person’s self-reported comfort level with minority groups in a variety of social roles and can be considered a measure of overt/blatant racism (Biernat & Crandall, 1993; Henry & Sears, 2002). The scale contains eight items rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very uncomfortable) to 7 (very comfortable). Higher scores reflect greater levels of overt-blatant prejudice, respectively. Previous data on the scale showed good levels of internal consistency, and the blatant-subtle distinction has been supported by factor analysis (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). In addition, blatant prejudice was associated with negative views on immigration policy, more conservative beliefs, and greater outgroup prejudice in a large sample of European participants (Biernat & Crandall, 1993; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). In contrast, subtle prejudice was linked to higher rates of acceptance of outgroup members and less reported discrimination (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997). In the present study, the internal consistency of the Blatant Prejudice Scale was in the moderate range for both the Native American (α = .52) and African American (α = .53) versions. The internal consistency of the Subtle Prejudice Scale was good for both the Native American (α = .77) and African American (α = .81) versions.

Table 1: Blatant and Subtle Prejudice Scale - Short Version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blatant Prejudice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtle Prejudice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Symbolic Racism 2000. The Symbolic Racism 2000 scale (SR2K, Henry & Sears, 2002) is a contemporary measure of symbolic racism. Symbolic racism consists of beliefs that minorities make excessive demands, are no longer discriminated against, do not have a strong work ethic, do not take responsibility for their life outcomes, and have advantages based on their ethnicity. The SR2K contains eight items rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (agreement) to 4 (disagreement). Lower scores indicate greater levels of symbolic racism. The SR2K has demonstrated good internal consistency levels in a large sample of college students and underwent extensive psychometric development using factor analytic procedures (α = .79; Henry & Sears, 2002). Furthermore, the scale showed minimal correlations with measures of overt racism, thus supporting the discriminant validity of the scale (Henry & Sears, 2002). For the present study, the scale showed good levels of internal consistency for both the Native American (α = .75) and African American (α = .78) versions.

Social Scale. The Social Scale (Byrnes & Kiger, 1988) is a variation of the original Borgardus Social Distance Scale, which has a long history of use in racism research (Bogardus, 1928). The Social Distance Scale measures a person’s self-reported comfort level with minority groups in a variety of social roles and can be considered a measure of overt/blatant racism (Biernat & Crandall, 1993; Henry & Sears, 2002). The scale contains eight items rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very uncomfortable) to 7 (very comfortable). Participants in the present study rated how comfortable they would feel with a minority individual as governor, president, personal physician, renter, spiritual counselor, roommate, date, and dance partner. The scale was constructed so that the roles differed in amount of social contract and intimacy. For this study, we used Native American and African American versions. Because each item represents a different social role, we analyzed the individual items. In previous research, the internal consistency was excellent (α = .90), and the test-retest reliability for a 3-week period was good (r = .94; Byrnes & Kiger, 1988). For the present study, the scales showed excellent levels of inter-

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nal consistency for both the Native American ($\alpha = .94$) and African American versions ($\alpha = .91$).

**Procedure**

We recruited participants for a study entitled “Attitudes Towards Others,” a title chosen to minimize the possibility of a response bias that may affect research on racial attitudes (see Thompson, Neville, Weathers, Poston & Atkinson, 1990). Participants signed-up on a centralized board placed in the department of psychology. The measures were randomized before administration and several filler scales were included to distract participants from the purpose of the study. Participants received extra credit for their time and effort. Participants were debriefed after completion of the study.

**Results**

Data analyses proceeded as follows. First, correlations between the measures of racism, social desirability, and socioeconomic status (SES) were computed. Due to the number of correlations, a corrected probability level was set at .005, and correlations falling above that level were considered to be nonsignificant. Second, comparison $t$ tests were conducted to determine if differences were present in racial attitudes towards Native Americans and African Americans on the Blatant Prejudice Scale, the Subtle Prejudice Scale, the Symbolic Racism 2000 scale, and the Social Scale.

A summary of correlations for the measures of racism, social desirability, and SES are presented in Table 1. Social desirability and SES level were not significantly correlated with any of the racism measures. There were significant intercorrelations between the African American and Native American versions of the Blatant Prejudice Scale, the Subtle Prejudice Scale, and the Symbolic Racism 2000 scale. The Symbolic Racism 2000 scale was significantly correlated with the Subtle Prejudice Scale across both the Native American and African American versions. There was a trend for a positive relationship between scores on the African American version of the Blatant and Subtle Prejudice Scales, but this relationship was not found on the Native American version.

Mean scores for the racism measures can be found in Table 2. We used a series of paired $t$ tests to compare the means on the racism measures. On the Symbolic Racism 2000 scale, there was a trend for greater levels of symbolic racism (i.e., lower scores reflect greater symbolic racism) reported towards African Americans than Native Americans, $t(54) = 1.7, p = .08$. As predicted, there were significantly higher levels of blatant prejudice reported towards Native Americans than African Americans, $t(54) = 2.0, p < .05$. Similarly, there were significantly levels of subtle prejudice reported towards Native Americans as compared to African Americans, $t(54) = 2.8, p < .05$. Thus, participants reported higher levels of blatant and subtle prejudice towards Native Americans than African Americans.

Mean scores for the measure of social distance (Social Scale) are also presented in Table 2. We used
a series of paired $t$ tests to compare the means on the Social Scale. Participants reported being significantly more comfortable renting a home to a Native American than an African American, $t(54) = 2.4, p < .02$, and more comfortable with the idea of a going on a date with a Native American, $t(54) = 2.1, p < .05$, but felt more comfortable with an African American rather than Native American as their spiritual advisor, $t(54) = -2.6, p < .01$. No other significant differences were found on the Social Scale.

**Discussion**

It has been argued that overtly stereotypical portrayals of African Americans are still present in American culture today, but these stereotypes are also balanced with varied and arguably realistic portrayals of African Americans in a variety of occupations and social roles. On the other hand, stereotypical images of Native Americans in limited roles are nearly exclusively seen in the media and rarely questioned by those outside Native American culture (Ashley & Jarratt-Ziemski, 1999; Merskin, 2001; Trimble, 1988). Whether these portrayals of African Americans and Native Americans merely reflect popular societal attitudes or directly impact attitudes about the members of these groups are unclear. Still, there is emerging evidence that Whites do tend to express higher levels of prejudice towards Native Americans than African Americans (Paniagua et al., 2000).

In the present study, we predicted that higher levels of overt racism would be expressed towards Native Americans than African Americans. Results from the Blatant Prejudice Scale support this hypothesis; Whites did express greater “blatant” prejudice towards Native Americans. It is possible that these attitudes are based on stereotypical images of Native Americans, which are mainly negative in description (Trimble, 1988). Results from the social distance measure were not as clear. Although participants reported feeling more comfortable with an African American than Native American spiritual advisor, they also reported feeling more comfortable renting a house to and dating a Native American person than an African American. In summary, we found evidence of higher levels of blatant racism towards Native Americans, but this result was not fully supported on the social distance scale.

When interpreting these conflicting results, it may be beneficial to closely examine the kinds of stereotypes associated with Native Americans. One commonly recognized stereotype is that Native Americans have a heightened level of spirituality and connection to nature (Trimble, 1988). Although this stereotype is arguably positive, it does serve to distinguish Native Americans from worshippers of other mainstream American religions, potentially explaining the discomfort with Native Americans as spiritual advisors found in the current study. Similarly, a study on perceptions of Native Americans in different situations found a negative perception for Native Americans who received free health care; all other perceptions were positive (Ancis et al., 1996). Furthermore, other researchers note that although stereotypes of Native Americans have become more positive over time, they are still stereotypes that do not fully encompass the diversity of tribes and individuals present in Native American cultures (Ashley & Jarratt-Ziemski, 1999; Merskin, 2001; Trimble, 1988). Thus, negative perceptions of Native Americans may be present only in specific social situations and roles—a suggestion supported in the present study.

In terms of covert racism, participants reported a higher level of prejudice towards Native Americans than African Americans on the Subtle Prejudice Scale with a trend for differences on the Symbolic Racism 2000. Participants tended to perceive Native Americans as being culturally different, having nontraditional work values, and viewed them less positively than...
African Americans. This result supports the idea subtle forms of racism are present in today's society; however, longitudinal studies are needed to determine if this form of racism is actually increasing over time as predicted. We expected that differences would also be found on the measure of symbolic racism due to conceptual similarities with subtle prejudice, but this was not the case. This result could be explained by the fact that the subtle prejudice and symbolic racism scales, though similar, are not identical concepts, a possibility supported by the modest correlation between the two measures. Thus, it is possible that the differences more than the similarities between the concepts are especially important in the perception of Native Americans. Finally, we found no evidence that social desirability or socioeconomic status impacted the results of the study (Biernat & Crandall, 1993; Ratazzi & Volpato, 2003). A more complete examination of the differences between these two theories of racism awaits further research.

The present study has several limitations that should be mentioned. First, familiarity with the Native American population may have been an important factor in the study. In Oklahoma, the Native American population has an increased presence and visibility, and many participants reported significant contact with persons from this group. Consistent with research on stigma, we would predict that direct contact would reduce stereotypes and negative attitudes towards this group (see Couture & Penn, 2003 for a review). The study would have been enhanced if we included a measure of familiarity with Native Americans and African Americans in the study. Second, our sample consisted of college students who may be more liberal and racially tolerant in terms of values (Biernat & Crandall, 1993). Because political values have been linked to racial attitudes, the inclusion of a measure of liberalism/conservatism would have been benefited the study (Henry & Sears, 2002; Sears & Henry, 2003; 2005). Finally, as evident in Tables 1 and 2, the data are attenuated in range, which may have lowered the magnitude of the correlations found in the study.

Despite the limitations of the current study, the findings support the idea that although overtly racist ideas towards African Americans appear to be less prevalent in contemporary America, overt racism towards Native Americans is present. It is hoped that these results lead to a more accurate understanding of racial attitudes in America.

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