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June 1, 1998

**WHEN WHITES AND BLACKS AGREE: FAIRNESS IN EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES¹**

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WHEN WHITES AND BLACKS AGREE: FAIRNESS IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

We explore what Americans think should happen in college admissions when two applicants compete for the same freshman slot. Whites and blacks are not separated by unbridgeable gaps on the affirmative action issue, at least so far as college admissions decisions are concerned. Whites and blacks show surprising agreement on the allocation of educational opportunities in zero-sum situations where only one person can win. Most Americans do not think that colleges and universities should select their student bodies solely on the basis of objective indicators such as grades and test scores.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the public debate about affirmative action in higher education concerns situations in which an African American or Hispanic student is admitted to a college or professional school with less impressive academic credentials than the white students that these institutions reject. Colleges and universities have vigorously defended their decisions by arguing that their quest for a more diverse and well-rounded student body requires that they examine a host of factors other than grades.

Responding to two lawsuits against his institution, President Lee Bollinger of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor stated that the critical factors influencing admission decisions go beyond grades and academic achievement. "Throughout our history," he proclaimed, "we have included students from diverse geographical, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. For almost 200 years, public universities have unlocked the doors to social and economic opportunity to students from many different backgrounds, and we believe that it is absolutely essential that they continue to do so. . . ."²

Although most institutions declare that grades and test scores have never been overriding factors in their admission decisions, some white students disagree. They have sued universities with increasing frequency since the mid-1970s, charging reverse discrimination disagree [see *Defunis v. Odegaard*, 94 S. Ct. 1704 (1974); *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*, 438 S. Ct. 265 (1978); *Hopwood v. Texas* (1995), 78 F. 3d 932 (1996), *Gratz & Hamacher v. University of Michigan*, (1997); and *Grutter v. University of Michigan Law School*, (1997). Starting with *Defunis vs. Odegaard* and later *Bakke vs. University of California at Davis*, the former involving

² News Release, President Lee Bollinger's reaction to lawsuit regarding admissions, The University of Michigan, October 14, 1997.

admission to a law school and the other to a medical school, the public has been privy to reports that many professional schools and universities have established dual admissions processes with grade point cutoffs for minorities different from cutoffs for whites and Asians. Colleges and universities, it is charged, have engaged in race norming, in which the test scores of minorities are grouped and compared with only the scores of other members of their groups, resulting in stiffer competition and a narrower range of choices for non-minorities. Widely publicized stories of racial disparities in grades, test scores, and the admissions rates of minorities have led affirmative action's opponents to argue that institutions are violating the Constitution and the Supreme Court's decision in the Bakke case. Under the Bakke Rule, articulated by Justice Powell in 1978, colleges and universities are allowed to use race as one of many factors in admission decisions, although it cannot be the dominant factor in a decision to either admit or reject a given applicant.

Although the Bakke Rule may have caused some institutions to become more circumspect about using race in the selection of their student bodies, by the 1990s race at most elite institutions had become more than a simple plus factor tipping the scales in favor of minority candidates who were equally qualified (or near equally qualified) with non-minority candidates (D'Souza, 1992; Nieli, 1991; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1997). At the University of Michigan, for instance, if a non-minority student did B-minus work in high school (2.8 to 2.99 grade point average) and her test scores fell in the upper middle range (1100-1190 on the SAT and 27-28 on the ACT), her chances of being admitted to the university were minuscule—only about 11 percent during the 1994-95 academic year. But if a student with the same average and score was a member of an “underrepresented minority,” defined as black, Latino, or Native American, the chances of admission were excellent. In fact, in 1994-95 they were reported to be 100 percent.

The idea that it is unfair to give some individuals additional points because of their racial group membership has caused affirmative action's opponents to argue that college admissions decisions should be made primarily on the basis of academic achievement as measured by indicators such as grades, test scores, and class rank. Dual admissions standards seem to violate the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Increasingly, federal courts have leaned toward this view both Bakke and Hopwood won their cases, and in 1998 a majority of five Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court are intent on applying the demanding "strict scrutiny" standard of Constitutional review to all cases involving racial preferences. Indeed, racial preferences seem to be viewed by the conservative majority on the Court (Justices Kennedy, O'Connor, Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas) as inherently suspect and presumptively invalid.

It is our purpose in this article to probe some of the issues raised by the controversies, and more specifically, to probe public opinion on the use of race-and class-based criteria in college admissions decisions. Although we will use the term "affirmative action" at times, we generally try to avoid the use of the concept affirmative action because of our belief that it is at once both too vague and too emotionally charged to yield clearly interpretable results about what Americans really believe about fairness in opportunities.

Surveying the public opinion data on this issue has taught us to be wary of many past efforts to ascertain what the public thinks. How a person responds to direct questions about affirmative action depends on a host of factors, including race, social class, education, and life experiences. How a person responds also depends on how the affirmative action question is worded and the answer choices given respondents (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987; Kinder and Sanders, 1990; Stoker, 1997). Some social scientists have added to the public's confusion by inquiring about forms of the policy that the Congress or the Supreme Court has already deemed

illegal, for example, race norming and racial quotas for diversity enhancement (see Sniderman and Piazza, 1993).³ Not only are many of the questions dated contextually, but also they are framed in ways that prevent them from tapping sources of agreement between Americans, especially between whites and blacks. Data presented by social scientists such as Andrew Hacker (Hacker, 1992), for instance, make it appear as if whites and blacks are separated by unbridgeable gaps.

We show that whites and blacks are not separated by unbridgeable gaps on the affirmative action issue; at least not, insofar as college admissions decisions are concerned. Whites and blacks show surprising agreement on the allocation of educational opportunities in zero-sum situations where only one person can win. One of the unsettling facts about affirmative action, of course, is its tendency to distribute scarce goods in a fashion that creates winners and losers. In order for one person to gain an opportunity, another, perhaps equally deserving person must have his hopes dashed. Despite the inevitability of loss, however, we show that black and white Americans have similar ideas about fairness and justice in college admissions, and we believe that this shared sense of what is right might form the basis for public policies that can transcend racial considerations.

³ In the *Scar of Race* Sniderman presents us with one of his cleverly designed questions that he calls the Mere Mention Experiment. He divides a random sample of whites into two halves. One half of the white respondents are asked an affirmative action question before they are asked to evaluate stereotypes about blacks. The other half of his sample is asked to evaluate the stereotypes before they confront his affirmative action question. Sniderman found that those whites first asked his question about affirmative action are significantly more likely to endorse negative stereotypes of blacks as being lazy, and irresponsible than the group of whites who encountered the stereotypes before the affirmative action question. Sniderman concludes from the mere mention experiment that white opposition to affirmative action is causing some whites to resent blacks. He also argues that white opposition to affirmative action, itself, is based on beliefs about equity and fairness and not just racial prejudice against African Americans.

Sniderman's conclusions about why whites oppose affirmative action may well be accurate. Other researchers have found that part of white opposition to affirmative action is based on their notions of fair play. Sniderman's question reads:

In a nearby state, an effort is being made to increase dramatically the number of blacks working in state government. This means that a large number of jobs will be reserved for blacks, even if their scores on merit exams are lower than those of whites who are turned down for the jobs. Do you favor or oppose this policy?

Not surprisingly, large numbers of whites are angered by the unfairness of the policy described in the experiment. When we examine the context and wording of the question, we discover that white respondents were asked about two illegal forms of affirmative action: race norming, in which the test scores of blacks are compared to the scores of other blacks, and quotas for purposes of diversity enhancement. The white respondents in the Mere Mention Experiment who go on to negatively stereotype blacks are angered by an unfair policy that the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional several years ago. Race norming is banned by the Civil Rights Act of

In this paper, we explore what Americans think should happen in a college admissions situation when two unequal applicants compete for the same freshman slot. Our results will appear surprising to some. For instance, we found that most Americans do not think that colleges and universities should select their student bodies solely on the basis of objective indicators such as grades and test scores. Many Americans believe that the disadvantages a student has had to overcome should be taken into account in making college admissions decisions. If Americans believe that criteria other than grades and test scores can sometimes justify the admission of a less-prepared student, we conclude, then perhaps they are giving admissions committees permission to engage in what these committees already claim to be doing, namely weighing several factors other than past academic performance in the selection of their student bodies.

DATA

The data for this experiment come from a national survey of English-speaking adults administered during the summer and fall of 1996 by Response Analysis of Princeton, New Jersey. A total of 1875 respondents were interviewed as part of a random-digit telephone survey, consisting of 1,070 adults, plus a targeted second sample of 805 African Americans. We designed the survey instrument so that respondents were asked general questions before coming across any of the experiments or before mention of the term "affirmative action." The interviewer started the 30-minute conversation by stating that "we are conducting an interview s. for a researcher at Princeton University, about things that are happening in this country today." Four different experiments came immediately after a question about term limits for members of Congress.⁴

A year before our national survey, in the spring of 1995, we commissioned six focus groups: two groups of 10 to 12 whites and blacks from New York City and Edison, NJ, one Asian

1991.

⁴ The first two experiments were about congressional elections, the third was a promotion situation, and the last was

group from New York City, and a Latino group from Edison. The two-hour discussions led by same-race interviewers revealed what many of us had already suspected, namely, that affirmative action means different things to different people depending on their race, education, and other experiences. These data were supplemented with a New York Times/CBS poll conducted during December 1997 which asked a range of questions about racial issues.

Race, Gender and the College Admissions Experiment

The college admissions experiment is a highly complex vignette that tries to give respondents enough background information for them to individualize two students. It is designed to present respondents with bits of information similar to what admissions committees come across when they evaluate freshman applicants. To tap important issues of social class and performance disparities, we have described two students that offer sharp contrasts, and have allowed respondents to make inferences about the values and character of the applicants. As designed, this experiment allows us to determine what a representative sample of Americans might do if they were making college admissions decisions in the situation described. Respondents can decide how much weight they would like to give traditional academic criteria such as grades and test scores, and they have a rare opportunity to discriminate for or against their own race, gender, or social class. After they make their decision about which student to favor, respondents are given an opportunity to guess at which student they think the institution will actually admit.

We set up the experiment so that one student is always described as a hardworking "B" student from a low-income family, whereas the other is an "A" student from an affluent family who has had many advantages. The race and gender of each of the students are varied orthogonally, so that the 16 possible combinations of student race and gender are assigned to equal numbers of

the college admissions experiment detailed below.

respondents. The indicators of social class and academic merit, however, are combined so that the low-income student is always the “B” student. This experiment, of course, could have been done a number of different ways. We could have varied the type of institution, whether it was private or public, and social class of the “A” and “B” students. We made a conscious decision not to do this for a number of reasons. First, it was not necessary to answer our primary questions, and to have varied more aspects would have reduced the number of respondents in each category to unacceptable levels, and possibly obscured the principal issue. This vignette, therefore, varies only the race and gender of the two dissimilar freshman applicants to a state university. It is designed to mirror the complexity of the real world. It is a later question that allows us to assess what happens when factors are held constant.

The introduction to the question reads: Please suppose that a state university is deciding between two high school seniors who have applied for admission. I will read you a brief description of these two students. Then I will ask you to decide, if the college has space for only one more student, which of these do you think they should admit. The interviewer reads that the “first student attends a local public high school where [he or she] has maintained a ‘B’ average. [He or she] is either a [black or a white] student from a low-income family and has held a job throughout high school to help support [his or her] family. [He or she] scored slightly below average on [his or her] college admission tests. The second student attends a well-respected private school, where [he or she] has been an ‘A’ student. [He or she] comes from a prominent [white or a black] family and has spent two summers studying abroad. [He or she] scored well on [his or her] college admission tests. The interviewer next asks, “based on what I have told you about these two students, which one do you think the college should admit?” After respondents have given their answer, they are asked “regardless of who you think should be admitted, which student do you think the college would probably admit?”

RESULTS

We used linear logistic modeling to assess the effects of the various factors; fuller details are given in the Appendix. Overall, the respondents are almost equally divided over which student the college should admit, with a small majority (450 of the 850, expressing a view) favoring the admission of the "B" student. This proportion is not significantly different from 50 percent. There is no demonstrated correlation between this overall proportion and respondents' race, gender, income or education; none of these characteristics is individually significant even at the 10 percent level. It is remarkable that none of these characteristics of the respondents has any significant effect on the proportion favoring the "B" student. The effect that is most clearly significant ($p=0.0003$) is the combination of races assigned to the two hypothetical students, the way in which race is superimposed on the social class and academic profile that is held constant. The age of respondents is also a significant factor ($p=0.012$), but one that does not interact with the races assigned to the students.

Figure 1 presents the results of the experiment broken down by this race condition, showing for each combination of races whether respondents believe that the college should admit the disadvantaged "B" student or the more affluent "A" student. In our figures, we have listed the "A" student first and the "B" student second, so that, for example BW refers to a black "A" student and a white "B" student. The figure shows that when the students are the same race, whether black or white, a majority of respondents support the "B" student. In the mixed race conditions, support for the "B" student drops, and even reverses in the "BW" condition where a majority of respondents now select a black "A" student over a disadvantaged white "B" student.⁵

[Figure 1, About Here]

⁵ When condition "BW" was excluded from the above analysis, there was no significant difference for the other three conditions. Because of the very strong effect of condition, and its pivotal role in the experiment, we considered the four conditions separately in our subsequent analysis. For each of the separate conditions (WW, BB, BW, WB), we fitted a linear logistic model to assess the significance of the respondents' characteristics.

The preference pattern holds constant for each of the gender conditions (see Figure 1a). Respondents' attitudes are not affected whether it is two females, two males, or either mixed gender condition. There is no mixed gender effect comparable to what we observed in the mixed race condition, and since this gender condition was always insignificant we drop it from subsequent analysis of this question.

[Figure 1a, About Here]

To examine the pattern of preference for the "B" student more closely we have broken down the choice of student by the respondent's race. The same general pattern remains for each of the conditions, and indeed the pattern of support is not significantly different; not only is the effect of race insignificant as a main effect, but there is no significant interaction in the results between the respondent's race and the races assigned to the students. A larger proportion of whites than of blacks think that the college should admit a black "A" student over an economically disadvantaged white "B" student, but this is not statistically significant. Black and white respondents again show the same overall preference patterns.

Thus far, we have explored respondents' choices by examining the effects of demographic characteristics of the respondents in each of the race conditions separately. In the same race conditions, whenever there were two white students or two black students, none of the characteristics of the respondents had a significant impact on choice, so the mild preference for the "B" student was unaffected by individual factors such as respondent's race, income, education, or gender.

[Figure 2, About Here]

In this meritocratic society, why would respondents prefer a "B" student to an "A" student, when race is not a factor? Strictly speaking, we cannot say whether they are reacting to the student's grades or indicators of social class. No doubt a few people may favor the "B" student over the "A" student simply because they believe the "B" student will get more value from the opportunity. Many respondents are reacting to the individualizing factors, which have encouraged them to champion the underdog. Some of these respondents have a broader definition of merit than key actors in the affirmative action debate. Their definition of merit allows them to see the "B" student as being the more meritorious of the two. The "B" student has done relatively well academically while holding down a part-time job. Likewise, respondents could be reacting to beliefs that the "B" student has a more limited set of options than the "A" student, and that public institutions have a special obligation to create opportunities for disadvantaged state residents. The "A" student can go elsewhere; perhaps, to another private institution. The notion that a state institution might have a moral obligation to open doors is reflected in the University of Michigan mission statement of how it has seen its role for more than 200 years. Accordingly, Jencks and Riesman (1968, 26) write that universities and colleges try to "help their students transcend whatever subculture they are born and raised in, and move them out into a slightly more cosmopolitan world . . . giving young people with a yen for mobility the diplomatic passport they need to cross the borders of their racial, religious, economic, sexual or generational parish."

Black "A" Student Versus the White "B" Student

The condition that is most anomalous from the same race conditions is the "BW" condition, where the "A" student is black and the "B" student is white. In this condition, noticeable differences between respondents appear once we control for education. Figure 3 presents the results broken down by race and educational level of the respondents. Low and highly educated blacks now prefer a black "A" student to a white "B" student, but not by much. Their preferences

for the black "A" student is mild and educational level has little effect among black respondents; the variations are not statistically significant. Among white respondents, however, educational level has a strong and highly significant effect. Whites with a high school education or less prefer the "B" student by a margin of 21 to 16 (57 percent), which is similar to the general population's preferences in the same race conditions. On the other hand, 81 percent of white college graduates (29 out of 36) select a black "A" student over a white "B" student. The behavior for moderately educated whites is intermediate. The chi-square cross-tabulation of preference against respondent's race and a three-level education variable is 21.6 on 2df ($p=0.00002$). It is particularly interesting that white college graduates are much more supportive of the black "A" student in this case than their black counterparts.

Black college graduates also show a higher preference for the "B" student in the same race conditions.⁶ Their increased preference of the "B" student may go a distance in explaining the observed differences in the "BW" condition. Indeed, if we pool across all four conditions, among black respondents the proportion preferring the low-income "B" student increases from 0.53 to 0.55 to 0.61 as their educational levels increases. The preferences of black college graduates could be influenced by the fact that many of them worked while in college. They are, therefore, sympathetic to the hardworking student irrespective of that student's race.

[Figure 3, About Here]

Why should white college graduates show such a strong preference for the black "A" student in this case? We may simply be witnessing class solidarity for one of their own in a situation where both students are perceived as being disadvantaged. Regardless of a student's

⁶ This effect is not significant in the logistic model, but it does lead to a significant chi-squared statistic (16.6 on 2 df in a cross-tabulation against race and educational level for the two same-raced conditions combined).

social class, some whites may similarly view all blacks as disadvantaged. Other factors may be relevant here. The black "A" student has defied the stereotype of the academically challenged black student. The black "A" student has earned admission to the institution on the basis of high achievement and broad experience. Thus, the disadvantaged white student loses out to the affluent high-achieving black student. For the disadvantaged white student to get a break from highly educated whites, he or she must be in competition with a more affluent white student.

White "A" Student Versus Black "B" Student

We now turn to the other mixed race condition, where the "B" student is black. In this case, the only significant factor is the respondent's income; see the breakdown in Figure 4. By far the greatest support for the disadvantaged "B" student comes from people earning less than \$15,000 a year. Our low-income category includes more minorities than whites, and relatively more women than men, but race and gender have no significant effect or interaction with income in this case. Higher-income people favor the affluent "A" student, and their choice of the "A" is irrespective of the respondent's race. Likewise, low-income respondents favor the black "B" student, regardless of their own race.

[Figure 4, About Here]

To further identify this pattern we fitted a logistic regression model that predicts the probability of preferring the "B" student ($\text{Prob "B"} = 0.95 - 0.027 \times (\text{income in } 000)$). Our estimate shows that high-income respondents (income=\$50K) would have log odds of -0.4 of preferring the "B" student, while low-income respondents would have 0.66. When considered in isolation this effect is extremely significant ($p=0.002$).⁷

⁷ Given that the effect of five factors in each of the four conditions was assessed, a conservative approach to multiple

To sum up, it is only in the mixed race conditions that differences in opinions begin to emerge. The mixed race condition gives people reason to pause. The wheels begin to turn and decision rules come into play, which were not otherwise present. Richer respondents tend to be more inclined towards a white "A" student over a black "B" student, and white college graduates strongly favor a black "A" student if the alternative is giving a break to a disadvantaged white. The preferences of respondents are not affected by their gender, region, political party, or professed political ideology. Income and education, standard indicators of social class, explain much, and the only additional variable to prove significant in a logistic regression is the age of the respondent. Older respondents are in general more likely to prefer the "B" student, but this preference is not affected by the races of the two students.

WHICH STUDENT WILL THE INSTITUTION ADMIT?

In Figure 5, we turn to the respondents' expectations of which student the college will actually admit. The vast majority of respondents (around 90 percent in the same-race conditions and 80 percent in the mixed-race conditions) believe that the college will admit the "A" student. Although they think that the institution should admit the low-income "B," respondents nonetheless expect the opposite to occur. They expect the institution to use traditional indicators of academic merit and exclude the lower-achieving student from admission

The overall pattern is very similar among whites and blacks, but there is an interesting effect in the mixed race conditions. In the "WB" case, where the "A" student is white, the majority of whites that believe that the "A" student will be admitted goes down from around 90 percent to around 70 percent. Exactly the converse happens in the "BW" case among black respondents! This suggests that there is a fairly small proportion (around 20 percent of each race) who think that

comparisons would multiply this value by 20. It remains significant, but not overwhelmingly so.

the college will normally select on academic merit, but will choose a "B" student of the other race against an "A" student of their own race.⁸ When phrased in this way, even this finding can be seen as an example of an area where whites and blacks still agree. In any case, both groups expect the institution to place far more emphasis on grades than they themselves would.

[Figure 5, About Here]

Figure 5a presents the results by gender. Again, there is no gender difference comparable to what appears for race. A female "B" student in the mixed gender condition of "MF" is given the same likelihood of admission as a male in the "MM" condition. Insofar as the pattern observed in Figure 5 is a perception of the college's preference for the other race, there is no corresponding effect for gender. Women are not favored any more than men are. Clearly, gender is not regarded as a valid claim to a college admissions slot in a zero-sum situation.

[Figure 5a, About Here]

Figure 6 highlights the drastic difference between the respondents' perception of which student the institution will choose and their preferences for what it ought to do. It shows that the belief that the "A" student will be admitted over the "B" student is even more overwhelming among the supporters of the "B" student. A negative interaction that is statistically significant exists between the respondent's perceptions of institutional behavior and their own ideals about what should happen. The majority of respondents have few expectations that the institution will operate as they consider just. Again, whites and blacks both agree on these matters. Although a majority of Americans would admit the "B" student, they do not believe that the institution will. Two

⁸ The fact that whites give a black "B" student a much greater likelihood of admission than blacks do, could be influenced by their perceptions of how affirmative action preferences might operate in higher education. Likewise, the beliefs that blacks hold about the pervasiveness of discrimination may lower their expectation of the black "A" student's chances of gaining admission.

different conceptualizations of merit may be influencing how people view the claims of the two students. Jeremy Waldron (1995) has written about the implications of backwards versus forward looking merit. The former takes into consideration a person's past acts and achievements, whereas the later focuses more on what one might become in the future. Taking into consideration the future prospects of the two students, some people might see more potential in the low-income "B" student who has performed admirably despite disadvantages. If not for the job and the family burden, perhaps the "B" student would be an "A" student.

[Figure 6, About Here]

HOLDING EVERYTHING CONSTANT BUT RACE

The college admissions experiment stacked the deck so that the students were unequal in grades and social class. This perhaps elicited greater sympathy for the underdog. In many situations, however, colleges and universities are confronted with two middle class students with similar backgrounds. Should race then be a decisive factor? Who should get admitted to a predominantly white institution when decision-makers are confronted with two well-prepared students from different races, but similar backgrounds? Do most respondents believe that an institution should favor a black "A" student over a white "A" student if only one can be admitted to an institution that has few minorities? The NYT/CBS data allow us to approach this question. In December 1997, they asked a random sample of the U.S. population the following question:

Suppose a white student and a black student are equally qualified, but a college can only admit one of them. Do you think the college should admit the black student in order to achieve more racial balance in the college, or do you think racial balance should not be a factor?

By similar margins, blacks and whites decisively rejected the use of race as a tiebreaker between two equally qualified students competing for a single slot. Of those expressing a view, 77 percent

of white respondents and 72 percent of black respondents said that the race of the student should not be a factor. Clearly, these people felt that the institution should find some other way to choose. For them, perhaps, flipping a coin would be better.

These results are surprising for blacks, but not for white Americans. Laura Stoker has shown that white Americans consider diversity enhancement a poor justification for giving preference to one racial group over another (Stoker, 1997). Using a series of affirmative action experiments in which respondents were given three conditions to justify the implementation of racial quotas: no context, under-representation of minorities as a context, and proven discrimination by a given company as a context, Stoker found that affirmative-action quotas for purposes of diversity enhancement garnered the least amount of support among white Americans. Agreement between whites and blacks that race should not be a factor in a college admissions shows that whites are not the only Americans uncomfortable with affirmative action that uses race as a tie-breaker.⁹

[Figure 7, About Here]

A second NYT/CBS question asking about unequal college applicants in a mixed race condition met with a similar response. Using a decision rule that seems to favor objectivity, a majority of both races preferred the admission of the most academically talented student even when it meant less racial diversity for the college.

⁹ We got a similar result with the following random assignment question asked on the 1996 Princeton Survey: Suppose that a company has few (female/ minority/ black) employees who were choosing between two people who applied for a job. If both people were equally qualified for the job and one was (a woman/ a minority person/ a black person), and the other (a man/ was not a minority person/ white) do you think the company should hire the (woman/ minority person/ black person), hire the (man/ other person/ white person), or should they find some other way to choose? Eighty-two percent of whites and 71 percent of blacks said the company should find some other way to choose. Only 20 percent of blacks and 12 percent of whites said that an underrepresented minority person should be selected.

Suppose there is a white student who has an average and a black student who has a B average, but a college can only admit one of them. Do you think the college should admit the black student in order to achieve more racial balance, or do you think that racial balance should not be a factor?

A very decisive majority of both races (among those expressing an opinion, over 75 percent of blacks and over 90 percent of whites) say that the "A" student should be admitted over the B student. These additional results suggest that respondents in the College Admissions Experiment are indeed reacting to individualizing characteristics of the two students that extended beyond their gender and race. When respondents in the College Admissions Experiment encountered a black "B" student and a white "A" student from different social classes, they chose the underdog; but when a representative sample of Americans were presented with two students, equal in every respect except race, both whites and blacks agreed that the higher-achieving student was the one who deserved the last slot.

[Figure 8, About Here]

Conclusion

Our data show fundamental agreement among blacks and whites concerning what is fair in the affirmative action arena, at least in so far as admissions to colleges and universities is concerned. A substantial majority of Americans are committed to meritocratic principles which allow for a substantially broader definition of merit than many leading protagonists whose views seem to dominate the affirmative action debate. Their broader definition of merit includes consideration of the obstacles and hurdles that a given individual has had to overcome to achieve whatever scores are presented to the admissions committee. These Americans do not view gender as a valid claim for special consideration. While the majority of Americans seem to agree that a hardworking underdog deserves a break, they clearly oppose the use of race as a tiebreaker

between two similarly advantaged students. This widespread agreement between Americans might have been overlooked had we simply asked respondents their views of affirmative action. Most likely, we would have found the same pattern of racial polarization that dominates much of the survey data on race relations. Our counterintuitive findings help illustrate the value that can come from using social experiments in national surveys.

Appendix

The data on which student the respondents thought should be admitted were treated as binary responses. Only the 850 respondents who expressed a definite response (over 90% of those who were interviewed in detail) were considered in this analysis. The analyses reported in this appendix are all based on linear logistic models for the probability of preferring the B student.

An analysis of deviance was carried out to test for the significance of main effects, and of interactions between attributes of the respondents and the races attributed to the two hypothetical students. The model was fitted in the Splus statistical language, with terms added sequentially. The linear dependence of predictor on education was on a 3 point scale with 1=high school or less, 2=some post high school or trade school education, 3= four-year college degree or higher. Income was coded in thousands of dollars to the accuracy available from the questionnaires.

The total degrees of freedom in this table is 781, because the small proportion of cases where some relevant feature of the respondents was unknown was omitted. The factor "condition" refers to the races attributed to the hypothetical students in the study. It can be seen that the condition has a highly significant effect, and the age of the respondent has a significant effect. The only factor that has a significant interaction with condition is the income of the respondent, but education has an effect approaching significance at the 5% level. The interaction of age with condition is remarkable for its low deviance value.

Table 1: Analysis of Deviance for all cases.

Factor	DF	Deviance	P value
condition (race of students)	3	18.77	0.0003
gender of students	3	0.48	0.92
race of respondent	1	2.10	0.15
income of respondent	1	1.41	0.23
education of respondent	1	0.01	0.92
gender of respondent	1	1.43	0.23
age of respondent	1	6.27	0.012
condition:race	3	2.71	0.44
condition:income	3	11.86	0.008
condition:education	3	7.31	0.06
condition:gender	3	1.15	0.77
condition:age	3	0.96	0.82

In order to investigate further the effect of condition, separate analyses of deviance were carried out for the four possible allocations of race to the hypothetical students. In each case reported here, income and education were considered as main effects because of their significant or near-significant interaction with condition in Table 1. Respondent's race was also included because of its pivotal role in this study. The interaction of age and gender with condition was also investigated in separate tests not reported here; no significant effects were found. It can be seen from Table 2 that the only significant effects are those of income in the "WB" condition and of education and the education/race interaction in the "BW" condition. Both of these were discussed in more detail (and tested by analysis of contingency tables, which are sensitive to non-linear

effects) in the main text. In the "BW" condition, education and race together account for a deviance of 13.13 on 3 degrees of freedom, a value significant beyond the $p=0.005$ level.

Table 2: Analyses of deviance carried out on subsets of the original data, according to the races of the hypothetical students.

Condition	Factor	DF	Deviance	P value
Both students white	income	1	0.39	0.53
	education	1	2.03	0.15
	race	1	1.75	0.19
	income:education	1	0.55	0.46
	income:race	1	2.33	0.13
	education:race	1	0.01	0.93
Both students black	income	1	1.21	0.22
	education	1	0.24	0.62
	race	1	0.13	0.72
	income:education	1	0.39	0.53
	income:race	1	0.15	0.70
	education:race	1	0.48	0.49
White A student, black B student	income	1	9.78	0.002
	education	1	0.06	0.81
	race	1	0.64	0.43
	income:education	1	0.31	0.58
	income:race	1	0.34	0.56
	education:race	1	1.33	0.25
Black A student, white B student	income	1	0.72	0.40
	education	1	5.20	0.02
	race	1	2.96	0.09
	income:education	1	1.43	0.23
	income:race	1	0.06	0.81
	education:race	1	4.97	0.03

We now turn to logistic regression models based on the effects found to be significant in the above analysis. In each case, let $p(B)$ be the probability of preferring the B student. The logistic regression model fits a linear model to the logit of $p(B)$, i.e. $\log(p(B)/(1-p(B)))$, the log odds of preferring the B student.

The logistic regression models fit to the data were as follows. For the "WB" condition, based on a sample of size 189 the model is

$$\text{logit } P(B) = 0.95 - 0.027 I$$

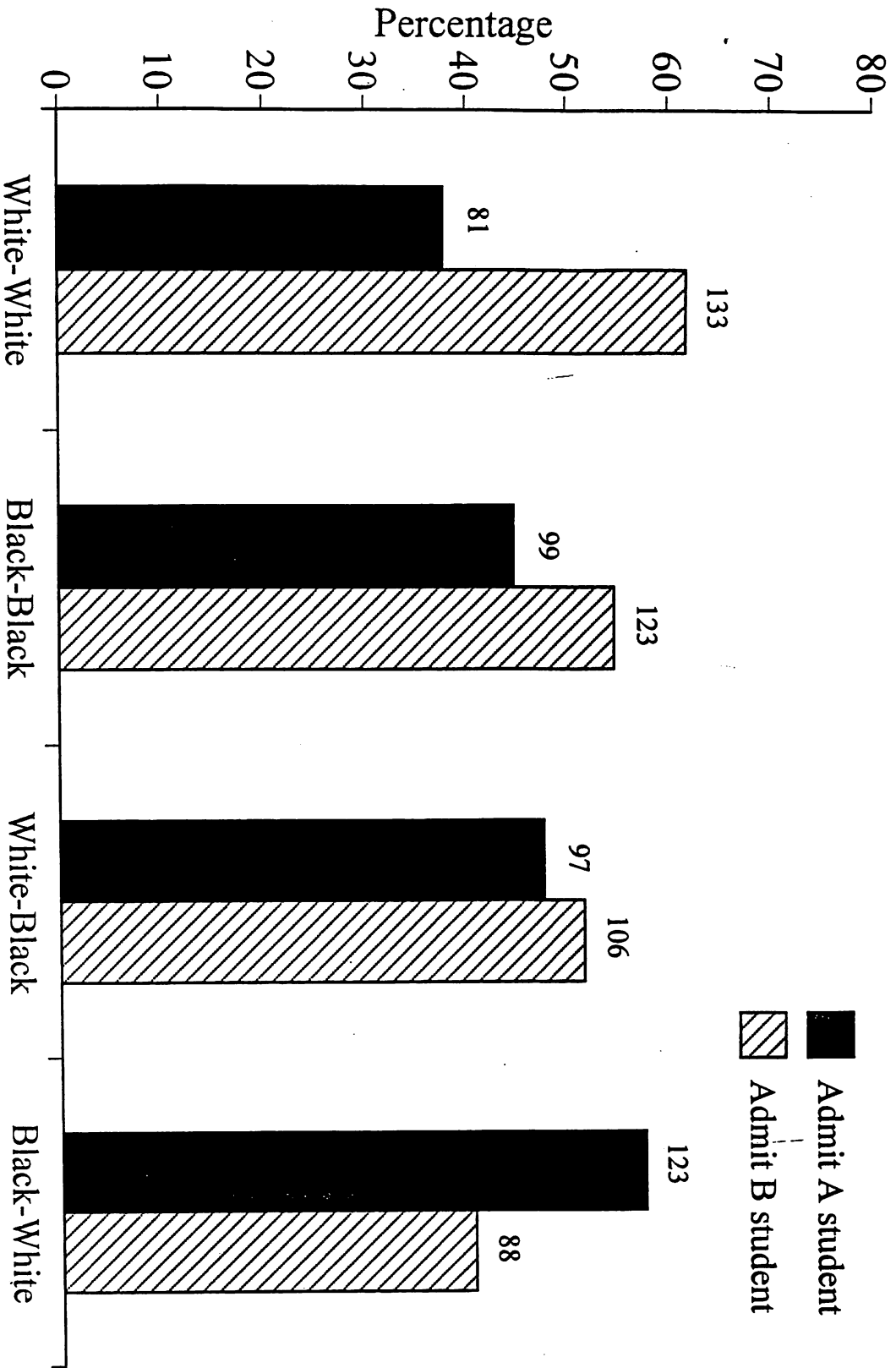
where I is the income in thousands of dollars, over the range from \$5000 to \$60,000. The standard error in the slope coefficient is 0.009.

In the "BW" condition, let E be the education level measured on a three-point scale, and let Wh and Bl be dummy variables for the race of the respondent (so that $Wh = 1 - Bl$). A logisitic regression allowing for interactions between education and race gives $\text{logit } P(B) = 0.22 Wh + 0.11 (Bl \times E) - 0.86 (Wh \times E)$

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**Figure 1: Which Student Should the College Admit?
Dependence on Race of Students
(All Respondents)**



**Figure 1a: Which Student Should the College Admit?
 Dependence on Gender of Students
 (All Respondents)**

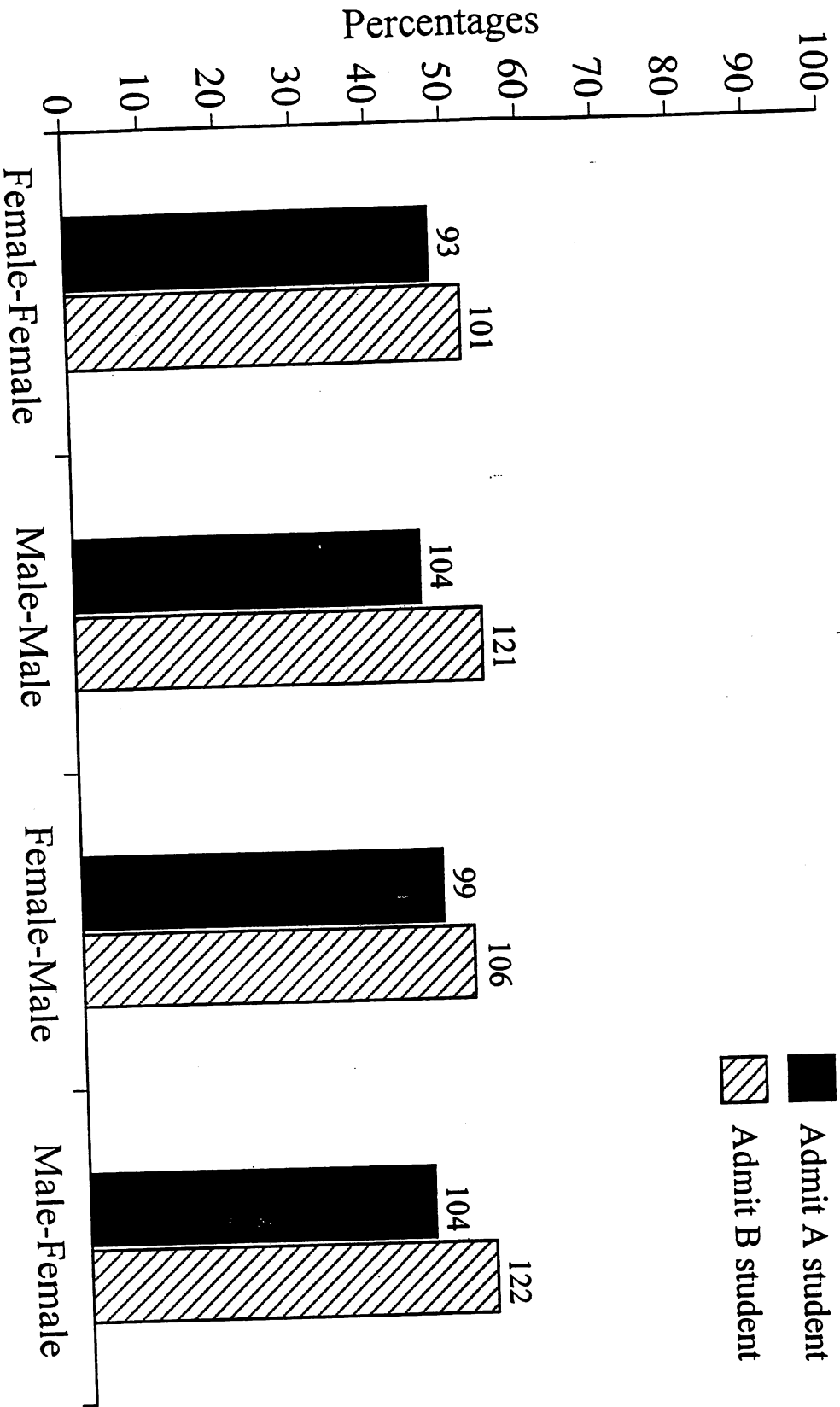


Figure 2: Admission Preference Broken Down by Race of Respondent and Race of Students

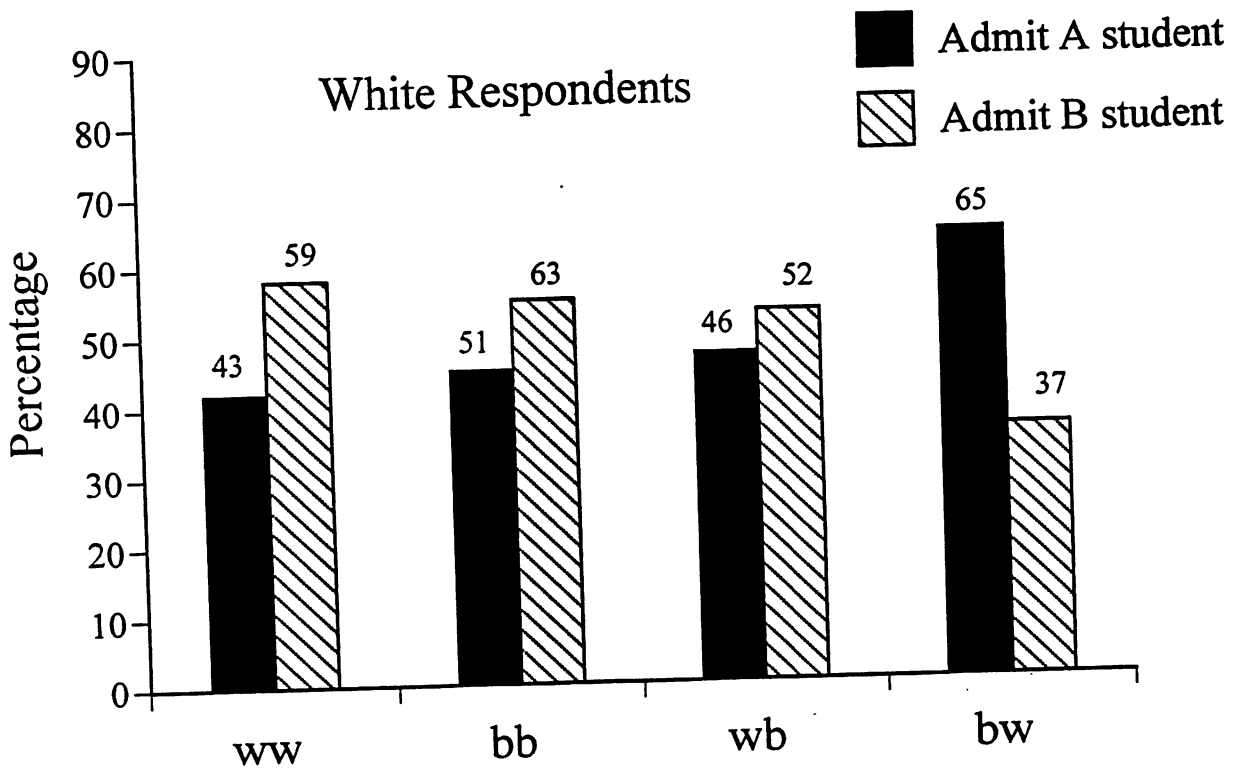
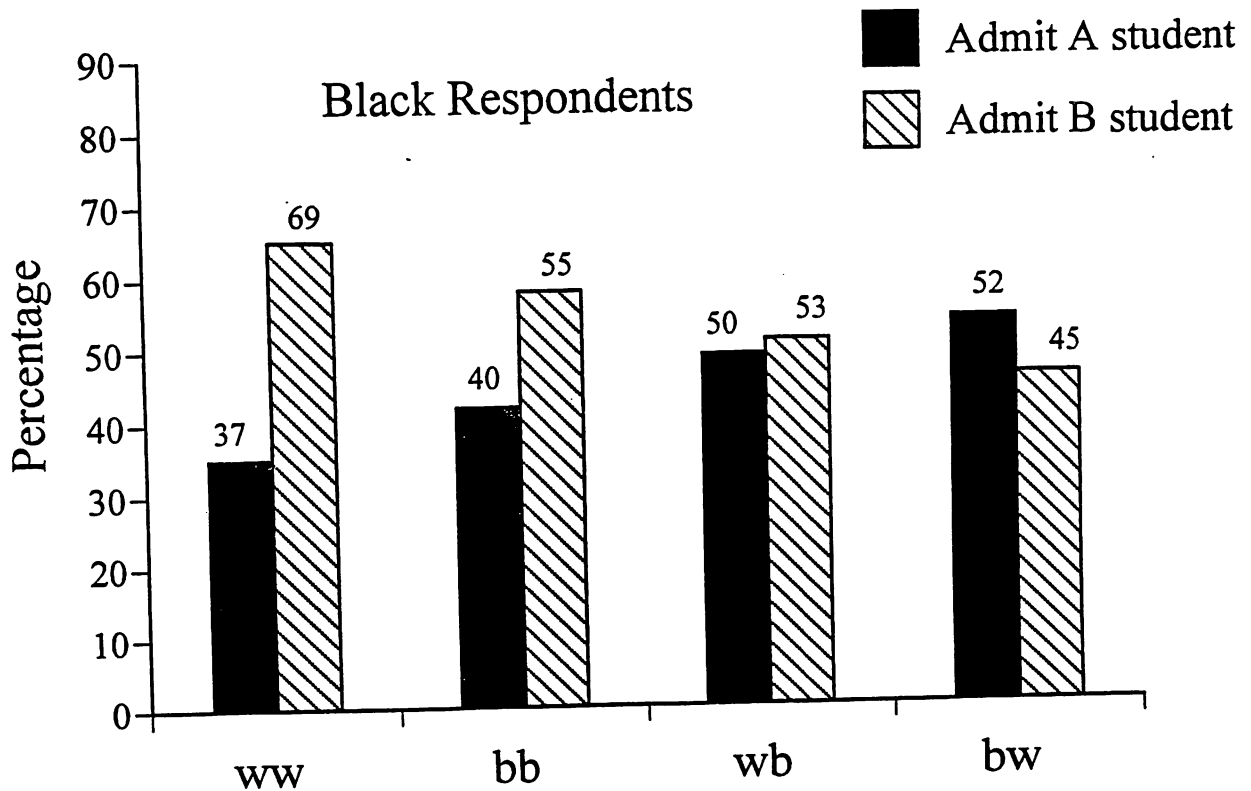
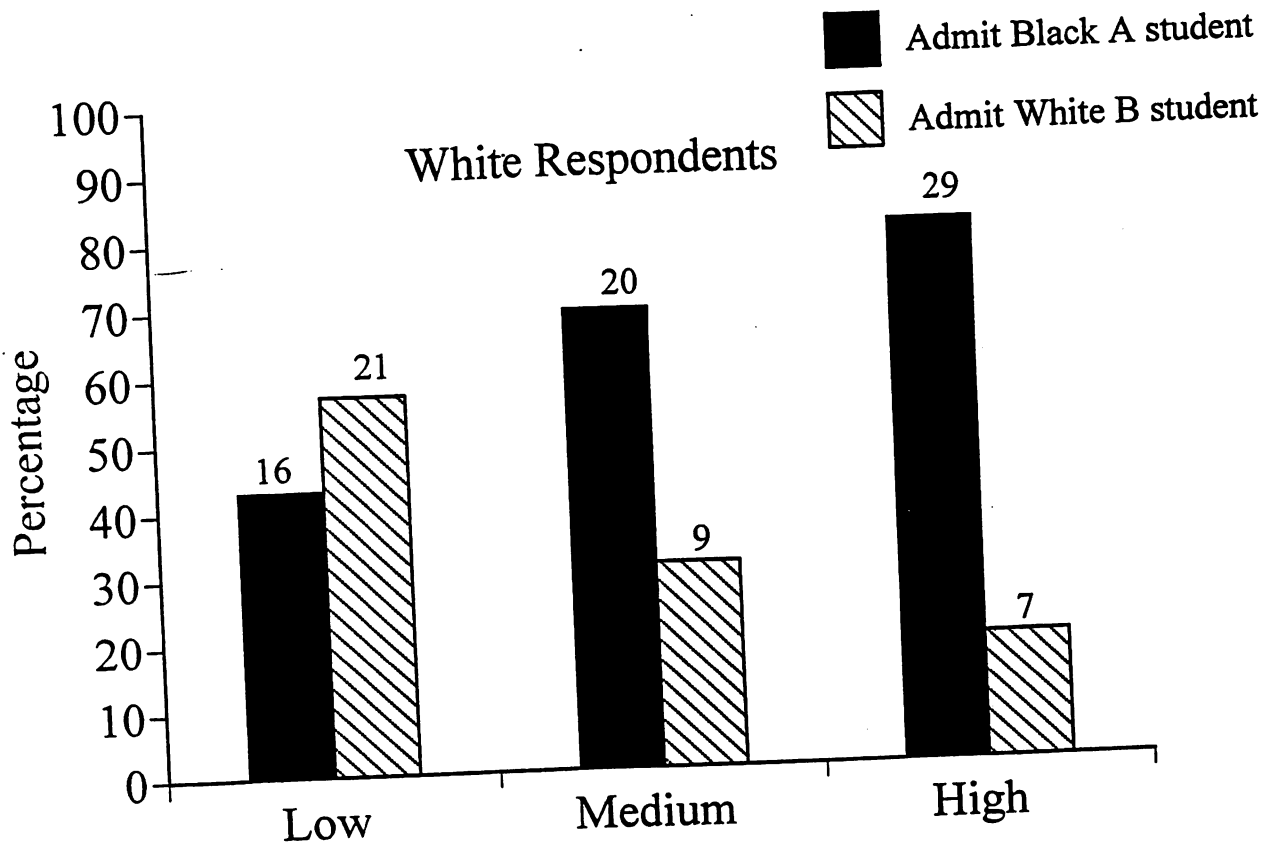
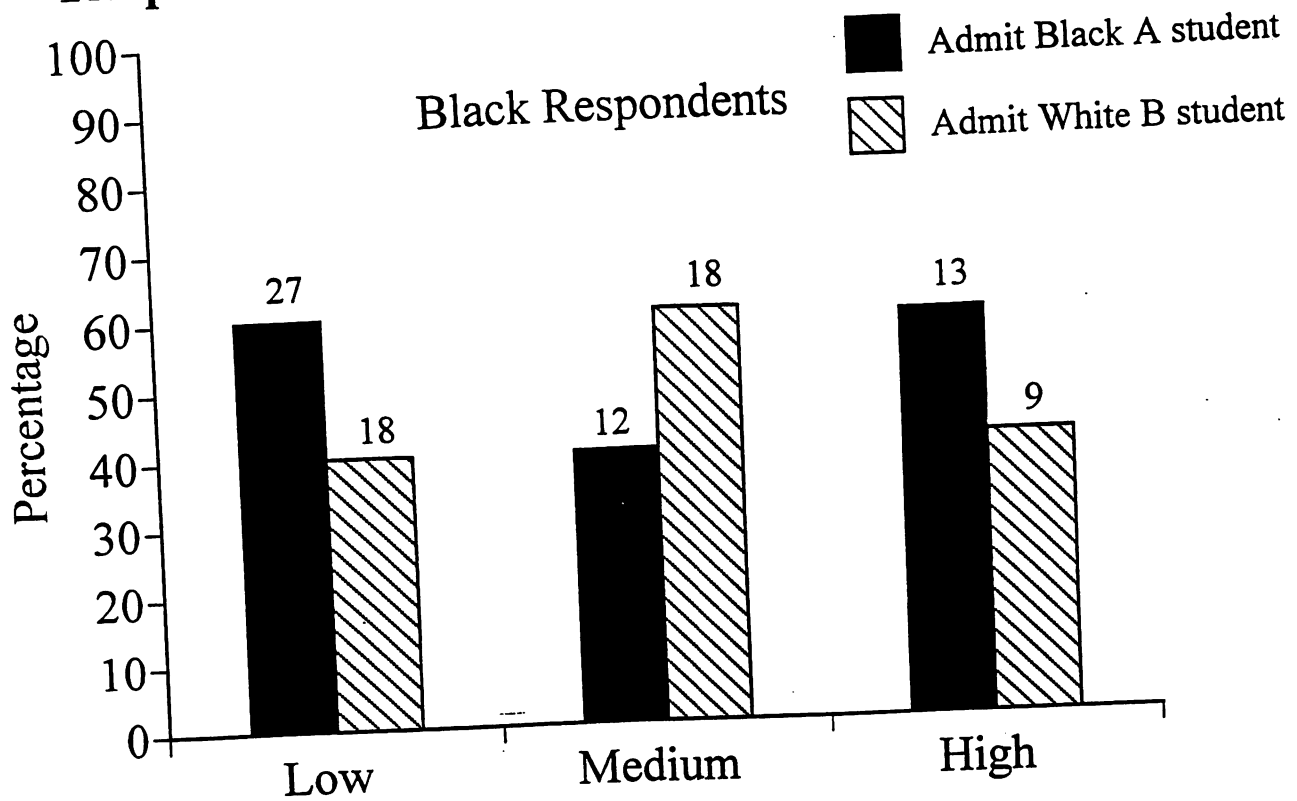
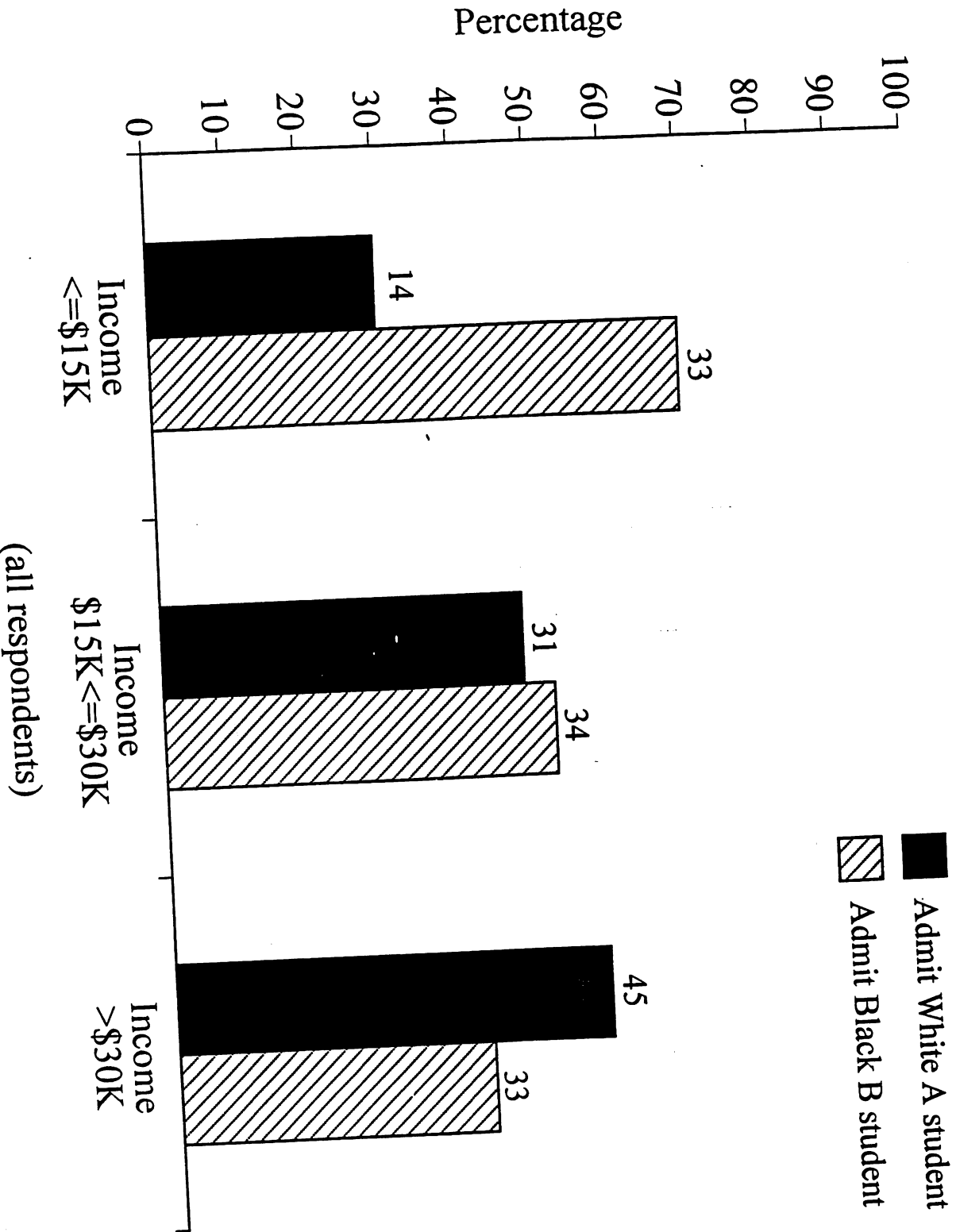


Figure 3: Choice of Student by Education and Race of Respondent for the Black-White Combination Only

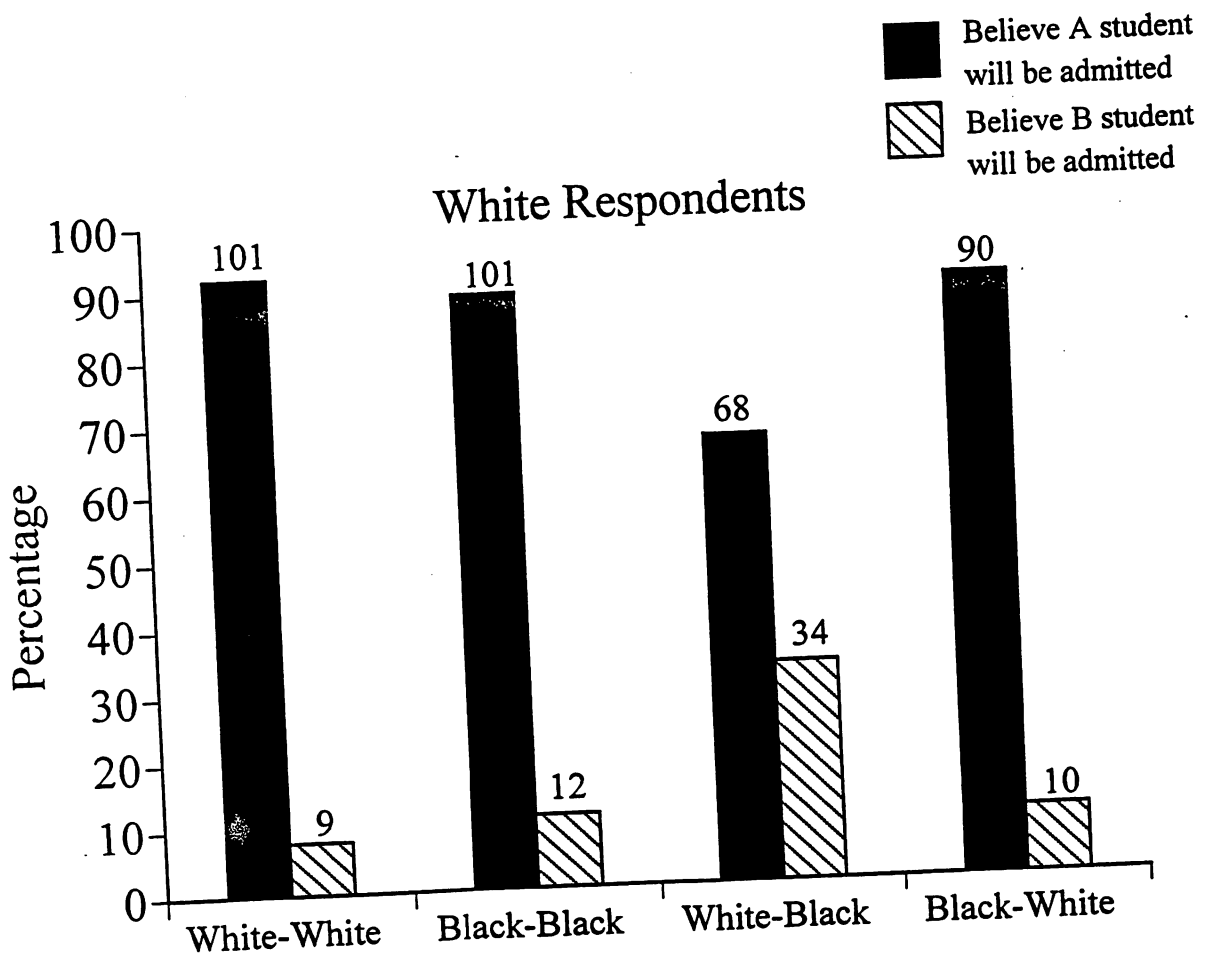
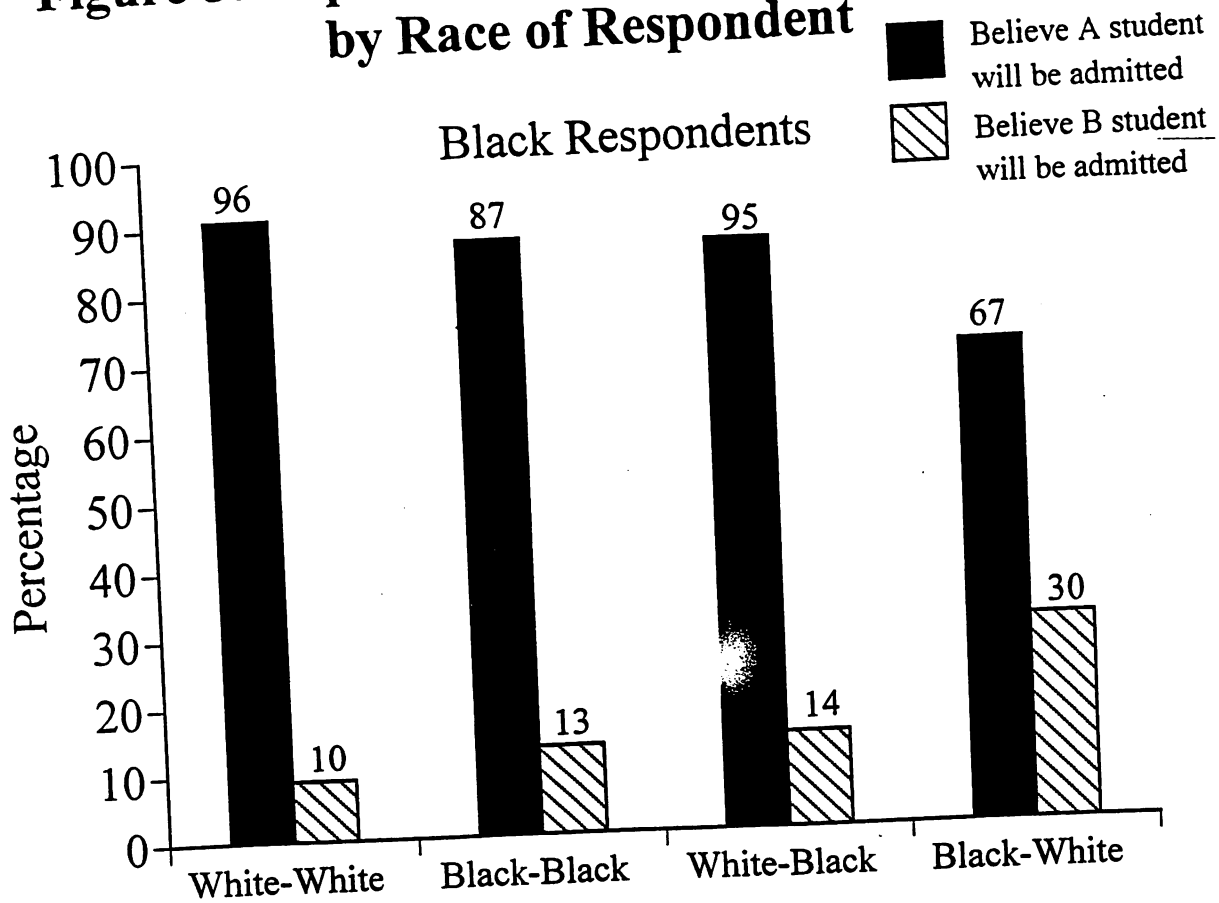


Low \leq high school; Medium $>$ high school; High \geq college

**Figure 4: Choice of Student by Income of Respondent
for White-Black Combination Only**



**Figure 5: Expectations of Institutional Behavior
by Race of Respondent**



**Figure 5a: Expectations of Institutional Behavior:
Effect of Gender of Students**

(All Respondents)

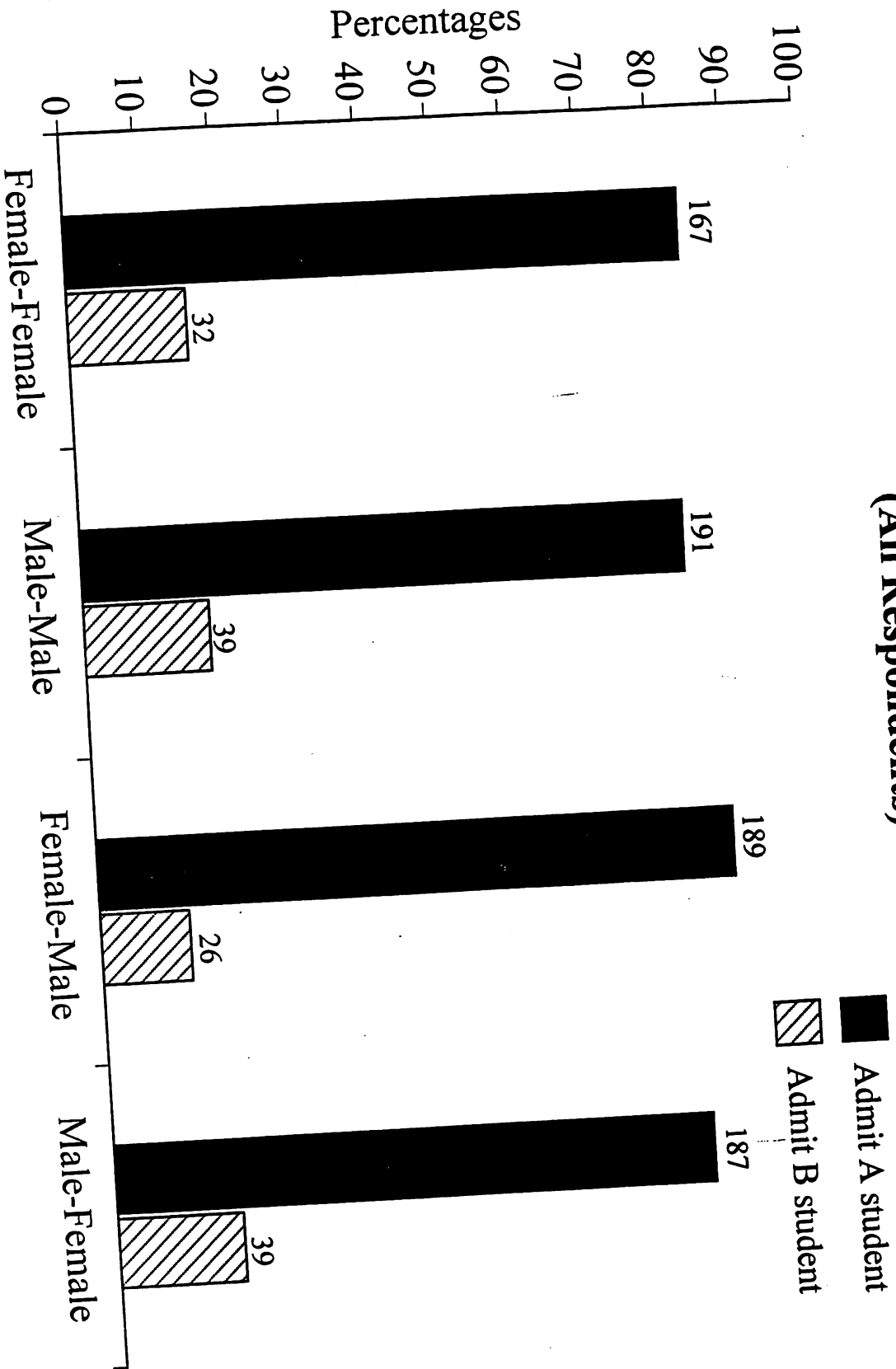
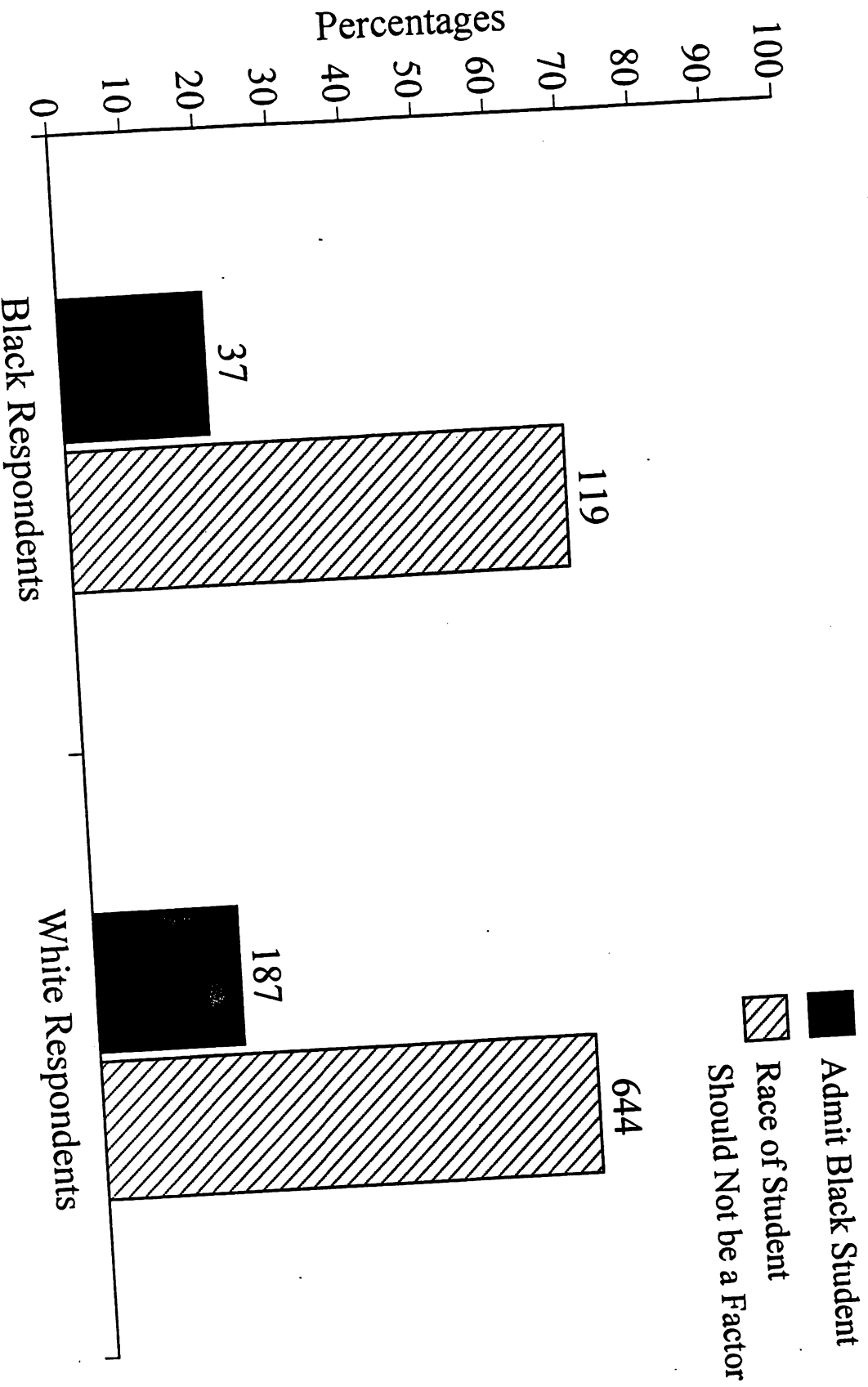


Figure 6: Respondent's *Perception* v. Respondent's *Ideal*

		Believe institution <i>will</i> admit	
		A	B
Feel institution <i>should</i> admit	A	304	75
	B	379	54

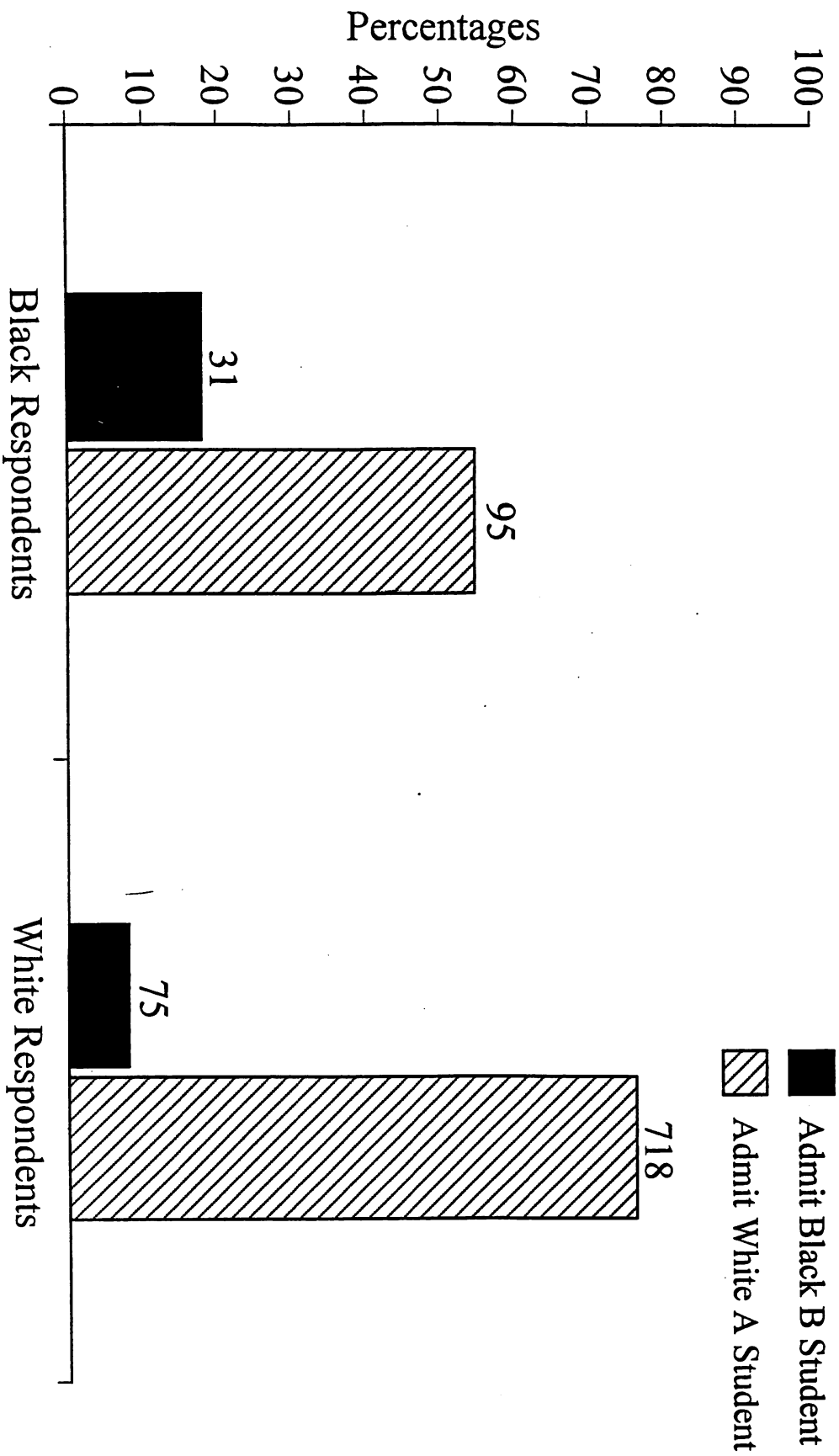
- Vast majority believe that "A" student will be admitted
- Slight negative interaction between perceptions and ideals

Figure 7: Should the College Admit Qualified Black for Racial Balance?



Compiled from Dec 6-9, 1997 *New York Times*/CBS News Poll

Figure 8: All Other Things Being Equal, Should a Black "B" Student be Admitted Over a White "A" Student?



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