Racist prejudices in different contexts. Differences between rural and urban environments

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyse the presence of racist prejudices in response to certain statements in two different contexts, namely, a rural environment and an urban environment. A questionnaire was prepared using nine statements in respect to real situations of preconceived ideas regarding certain minority groups of society. Specifically, these situations refer to gypsies, Blacks, immigrants, Moroccans, beggars, refugees from Latin America or handicapped persons. The questionnaire was given to university students, who were asked to assess the racist characteristics of each statement on a scale of 1–4. The results obtained show certain differences that are detected between the two contexts in respect to participants' perception of prejudice. The conclusion is that the presence of racist prejudices is very similar in the two contexts in which the research was carried out, with a high correlation between students' answers.

Keywords: Prejudices, university students, urban, rural.

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1. Introduction

At present, the diversity of opinions and freedom of expression, together with the desire and hope for a better society, have provoked the return of ideas and concepts that seemed to have been overcome; ideas and concepts until very recently were considered obsolete as elements that corresponded to the darker periods of the history of humanity. Some authors, such as Pascale (2010), have even raised the question of 'Why are we racists'?, highlighting that racism is present everywhere in our way of thinking and in our way of life.

We must remember that racism is 'el conjunto de creencias, ideologias, procesos sociales que discriminan a unos grupos por su pertenencia a un grupo racial. Supone acciones, actitudes políticas basadas en creencias acerca de las características raciales' (the set of beliefs, ideologies and social processes that discriminate certain groups for belonging to a racial group. It entails actions, attitudes and policies based on beliefs about racial characteristics) (Jimenez & Aguado, 2002, p. 173). It is in itself a specific form of prejudice, based on the construction of the concept or term of race. Brown (1995) argues that prejudice is generated in group processes, and that it is caused by the perceptions of individuals and their behaviour towards members of other groups. In other words, it is a group phenomenon, considered by Allport (1955) as an individual expression associated to certain personality traits that are expressed jointly with other persons that have a social link or relationship.

Prejudices are essentially based on stereotypes. They entail prior negative judgments, opinions or attitudes that are not supported or justified by facts (Jimenez & Aguado, 2002). In addition, they involve assessments that are not based on real experience comprising cognitive, affective and attitudinal components. For authors like Minotta and Meneses (2018), a stereotype is a set of beliefs resistant to change that shape the type and closeness of contact with the persons who belong to a group, and that assigns to the members of a stigmatised group a series of fixed characteristics and attributes that foment disdain. It is considered to be a generalised belief which, according to Jimenez and Aguado (2002), is associated to customs and attributes of a social group. It can become a prejudice and produce discrimination; the process starts with knowledge (stereotype), becomes attitude (prejudice) and causes a specific type of behaviour (discrimination).

At present these conducts are expressed in a concealed and private manner, or in individual actions, although several persons share them. In consequence, racism has not disappeared; it has simply changed and become subtler and underlying, more difficult to identify and measure (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Pascale, 2010; Pettigrew, 1998). For this reason, this research is aimed at detecting the expression of racist prejudices amongst university students, using as a reference a rural environment and an urban one. The objective is to highlight the differences, if any, related to the student's location, in other words their university. At the same time, the idea is to analyse whether there exist gender differences amongst the participating students.

This study has adapted the questionnaire called 'Midiendo el Racismo' ['Measuring Racism'] developed by Tuvilla (1998). The objective is to learn about the opinions regarding certain groups that could be at a risk of social exclusion due to issues of race, nationality, economic position, etc. Assuming that society shares the appearance of a democracy and exercises an equalitarian and anti-discriminatory force through the media, the aim is to analyse the difference of opinions of undergraduate university students in different contexts in respect to the perception of racist content in several texts. The main hypotheses are based on the assessment of the racist nature of the statements, their correlations and their manifestations in connection with the variables established.

The study follows the trend marked by McConahay (1986) when he presented the modern racism scale (MRS), an instrument to quantify new and subtle forms of racism. It comprises ten statements that constitute two highly correlated theoretical dimensions: 'threat or fear' and 'support or cooperation'. Cardenas (2007) assessed the performance of the MRS with an ordinal response model of four options in connection with attitudes towards immigrants in northern Chile. This region has a

large number of immigrants from Bolivia. In a sample of 120 first year psychology students, the scale showed a high degree of internal consistency, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 and two factors that explain 50.5% of the total variance.

Other authors such as Pires and Alonso (2008) in Brazil, Campo-Arias and Oviedo (2008) in Chile and Campo-Arias, Herazo and Oviedo (2016) in Colombia studied the performance of the MRS with an ordinal response model of seven options as a measure of attitudes towards black and mixed-race persons in a sample of 105 students of Caucasian origin. The complete scale showed an internal consistency of 0.63. Likewise, the factor analysis identified two dimensions that accounted for 57.8% of the variance. The first factor encompassed aspects related to fear and mistrust (32.9% of the variance, Cronbach's alpha of 0.89) and the second latent factor encompassed aspects associated to cordiality and sympathy (14.9%; Cronbach's alpha of 0.65).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample for the study consisted of 174 students from the Faculty of Education at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM) in Ciudad Real and at the Rey Juan Carlos University (URJC) in Madrid. One hundred and forty-eight students were women and 26 were men. Ninety-one students of the sample lived in Ciudad Real and 83 lived in Madrid.

2.2. Instruments and procedure

The data were collected by means of a questionnaire prepared for this study and given to all participants in a classroom at each university. The questionnaire is based on an older one entitled 'Midiendo el racismo' ['Measuring Racism'] (Tuvilla, 1998). The objective was to learn about students' opinions regarding certain groups that could be at risk of social exclusion due to matters of race, nationality, economic position, etc. These opinions, in turn, enabled detecting the presence of prejudices in the assessment of the statement considered to be the most discriminatory. Participants were given nine statements that had to be evaluated on a scale from 1 to 4, depending on the racist content, and at the end they had to indicate in order the three most racist cases and the three least racist ones.

To ensure that students responded properly to the questionnaire, and that all teachers administering the test would do so in a uniform manner, a few clear instructions were given. The objective was to establish clear guidelines for the use of the questionnaire to avoid the interference of other variables that could alter the proper collection of data. Students were supervised to ensure that they answered all statements, and that their data in respect to gender and date of birth were correct. The latter was used as the identifier for each student; when a date corresponded to more than one student, the initial of the latter's name was added to the date.

The students were asked to read nine statements and indicate whether for them it was 'Not at all racist', 'Hardly racist', 'Very racist' or 'Extremely racist'. In addition, they had to establish a ranking with the three most racist cases and the three least racist ones. Once the data were collected, they were analysed using the Chi-square test and Pearson's correlation in order to determine which statements were perceived as being more or less racist. In both cases, confidence intervals of more than 95% ($p < 0.05$) were taken into account. When values greater than 0.05 were obtained, the differences are not considered to be significant; hence, the results of both samples are assumed to be similar. Confidence intervals of more than 99% ($p < 0.01$) were also taken into account. The internal consistency test of the questionnaire was also performed by means of Cronbach's alpha.

2.3. Aims and hypotheses

Individuals do not always correctly perceive racist contents. Very often different participants may interpret the same situation differently. In this research study, the focus was to analyse the differences of opinion of undergraduate students enrolled in the Education Degree programme in different contexts concerning the perception of racist contents in several statements. Several statements regarding which participants evaluated the degree of racism they detected in each one were compared. The hypotheses formulated in this research study are the following:

H_1: There is a difference in the assessment of the racist character of the statements by the participants of the two universities.

H_2: There is a correlation between the different statements that have a racist character.

H_3: There is a difference in the perception of the most racist case depending on the university where the questionnaire is administered.

H_4: There is a difference in the perception of the least racist case depending on the university where the questionnaire is administered.

3. Results

After collecting the data, the pertinent analysis was performed with SPSS software. The results of the study are shown below, distinguishing between the students enrolled at the UCLM and the URJC. Note should be made that gender was taken into account as a variable. However, no significant differences were detected in any case, and the samples of men and women were considered to be statistically equal.
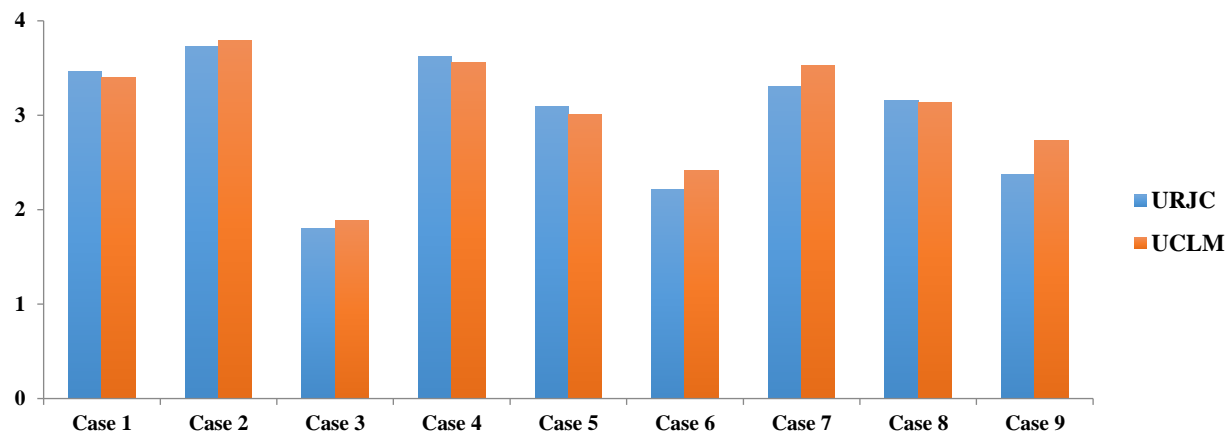
Figure 1. Comparison of the average score depending on participants' university

Figure 1 shows that very similar results were obtained in both contexts. Most cases are very similar, with only statements 6, 7 and 9 showing some differences. However, on doing the statistical calculation for Case 6, there are no significant differences despite the discrepancy of the average value obtained. In consequence, the results are considered to be similar.

In respect to the other statements, almost one half is above or very close to an average of 3.5 (Cases 1, 2, 4 and 7). Moreover, there are two noteworthy cases with very low values: number 6 and especially number 3, with an average value of less than 2. Below a breakdown is provided of Cases 7 and 9, in which there are statistically significant differences.

Figure 2. Values obtained in Case 7 depending on participants' university

UCLM   **URJC**

Figure 2. Values obtained in Case 7 depending on participants' university

The wording of Case 7, the first statement that will be discussed, was the following:

'A refugee couple from Latin America is looking for an apartment to rent. The owner of the apartment does not want to rent it to them because he says he does not want to have complications with foreigners'.

Figure 2 shows the differences between the answers given in Case 7. The statistical calculation gives a Chi-square value of 8.304 and an asymptotic (bilateral) significance of 0.04. Hence, the students of the UCLM consider that this statement has a strong racist character, whereas those of the URJC indicate considerably lower values.

Table 1. Results of Case 7 depending on participants' university

	UCLM (%)	URJC (%)	Difference (%)
Not at all racist	2.2	1.2	1
Hardly racist	3.3	14.8	11.5
Very racist	34.1	37.0	2.9
Extremely racist	60.4	46.9	13.5

Table 1 shows the exact values that reflect the opinion of students at a university in a rural environment (UCLM) and of others at a university in an urban environment (URJC). Two of the answers given are very similar: the ones stating that this case is 'Not at all racist' and 'Very racist', with all differences between the two universities being less than 3%. The biggest differences are in the answers 'Hardly racist', with a difference of 11.5% in favour of the students of URJC, and 'Extremely racist', with a difference of 13.5% in the values obtained.

UCLM   **URJC**

Figure 3. Values obtained in Case 9 depending on participants' university

The other statement (Case 9), which showed differences of analysis, was worded as follows:

'A mother complains to the school principal that one of her son's classmates does not dress well and does not wash his hair'.

Figure 3 above shows the differences in the answers provided in Case 9. The statistical calculations give a Chi-square value of 8.304 and asymptotic (bilateral) significance of 0.002. As in the previous case, the students of the UCLM consider that this statement has a racist character, whereas the students of the URJC show distinctly lower values. In this case, the results were obtained with confidence intervals of 99%.

Table 2. Results of Case 9 depending on participants' university

	UCLM (%)	URJC (%)	Difference (%)
Not at all racist	16.5	14.8	1.7
Hardly racist	20.9	48.1	27.2
Very racist	36.3	22.2	14.1
Extremely racist	26.4	14.8	11.6

Table 2 shows the exact values regarding the opinion of the students from the two universities in different contexts. In this case, there is only one response with similar values, 'Not at all racist'. In the other, the discrepancy of the results is much greater, particularly in the response 'Hardly racist'. Nearly one half of the participants who live in an urban environment marked the answer 'Hardly racist', whereas less than half of those who live in a rural environment marked that answer. There were also considerable differences in the other two possible answers, 'Very racist' and 'Extremely racist', greater than 10% of the total number of participants.

Table 3. Correlation between the nine statements given to participants * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8	Case 9
Case 1	1	−0.009	0.190*	0.205**	0.121	0.191*	0.194*	0.220**	0.097
	.	0.910	0.013	0.007	0.114	0.012	0.011	0.004	0.204
Case 2		1	−0.083	0.277**	0.151*	0.058	0.311**	0.158*	0.124
		.	0.279	0.000	0.048	0.451	0.000	0.039	0.106
Case 3			1	0.014	0.164*	0.294**	0.142	0.126	0.248**
			.	0.855	0.031	0.000	0.064	0.099	0.001
Case 4				1	0.227**	0.216**	0.481**	0.252**	0.219**
				.	0.003	0.004	0.000	0.001	0.004
Case 5					1	0.137	0.280**	0.150*	0.167*
					.	0.073	0.000	0.049	0.028
Case 6						1	0.310**	0.216**	0.210**
						.	0.000	0.004	0.006
Case 7							1	0.258**	0.212**
							.	0.001	0.005
Case 8								1	0.393**
								.	0.000
Case 9									1
									.

Table 3 shows the correlations seen in the participants' answers to the nine statements. A correlation is considered to exist in most of them. Moreover, this correlation is positive. In consequence, the participants perceive the racist character of these statements in a similar manner.

Note should be made of statements 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, which correlate with six or seven of the other statements. In addition, in most cases, confidence intervals of less than 0.01 are obtained.

However, the first three statements (1, 2 and 3) only correlate with four or five of the other statements. A weaker relation is perceived between these statements and the rest, even though they still correlate approximately with half of them. These three cases are precisely the ones that the participants perceive differently, as 1 and 2 are the ones they consider to be the most racist, whereas three is less racist. This circumstance is analysed below.
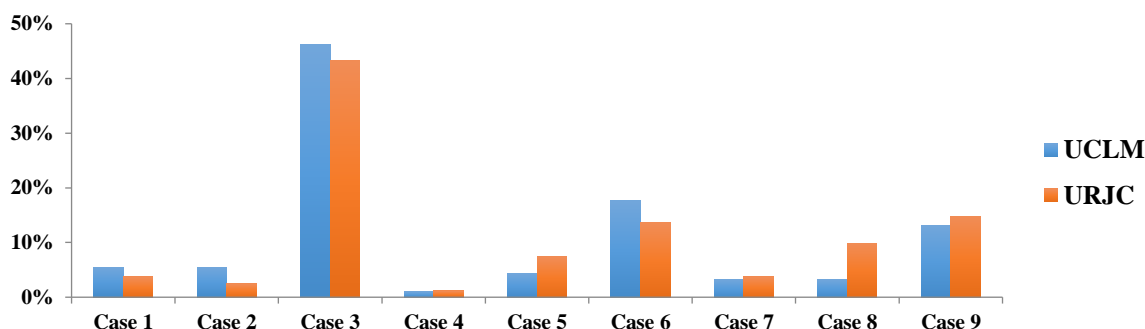

Figure 4. Values obtained regarding the least racist case depending on participants' university

Figure 4 shows the differences in respect to the case considered to be the least racist, with all cases indicating very similar results. Furthermore, there is general consensus regarding the situation that the students of both universities consider to be the least racist, comprising nearly one half of the participants. The scores of the other two cases with the highest results (cases 6 and 9) are much lower, entailing a little more than 10%. This similarity is confirmed by the statistical calculation, which gives results above the level of significance.
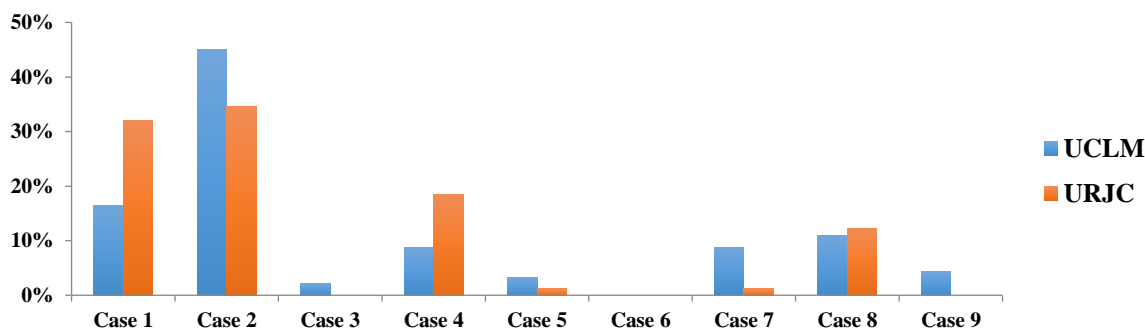

**Figure 5. Values obtained regarding the most racist
case depending on participants' university**

The results regarding the case perceived as the most racist by participants are shown in Figure 5. They show greater disparity than in Figure 3. Statements 1 and 2 obtained a larger number of answers, with nearly the same number of URJC students answering in both cases (between 30% and 35%). On the contrary, UCLM participants chose Case 2 in greater numbers (nearly one half, more than twice as much as Case 1). This disparity is confirmed by the statistical calculation, which gives a Chi-squared value of 19.460 (p = 0.007). In consequence, we can say that there are significant differences in both universities in the perception of the most racist case.

The internal consistency method based on Cronbach's alpha (1951) can be used to verify an instrument's reliability. We can thus verify whether the different items measure the same construct and if they have a high correlation (Welch & Comer, 1988). On the basis of the scores obtained, greater consistency is considered to exist the closer the alpha value is to 1. In general, a coefficient greater than 7 is considered acceptable, when it is lower than that it is questionable

and poor or inacceptable when it is less 5 (George & Mallery, 2003). Other authors, however, consider that in the initial phases of research (as in this case) a value of 0.6 or 0.5 may be sufficient (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 4. Verification of the reliability of the instrument used

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardised elements	Number of elements
0.651	0.653	9

Table 4 shows that the total value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the instrument used with the students is 0.651, slightly less than the value considered acceptable (0.7). However, it is considered sufficient for use in the first phases of research, as in this case.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The results obtained indicate that the ad hoc questionnaire prepared for the study is a reliable instrument to measure racist prejudices of university students. Furthermore, it is also valid, given that in most cases the results were similar. In Cases 1, 2, 4 and 7, the average value obtained, close to 3.5, is very high. Hence, these cases are perceived as being more racist. On the other hand, Cases 6 and 3 have very low values (with an average value of less than 2) and thus are considered as the least racist. In Case 7, there are differences in the results. Nearly two-thirds of all UCLM participants consider that the statement is 'Extremely Racist', whereas less than one half of URJC students have the same opinion. In consequence, the participants from a rural environment believe that this statement has a more racist character in comparison with participants from an urban environment, who do not perceive that same level of racism. Significant differences were also found in Case 9. Nearly one half of the URJC participants considered that the statement was 'Hardly racist', whereas the percentage of UCLM participants who share that opinion is much smaller. In addition, there are discrepancies in the responses that consider the statement to be very or extremely racist, mostly on the part of participants residing in more rural areas.

On the other hand, correlations are seen between nearly all the statements, with a high level of significance in many cases. Participants perceive Case 3 as the least racist. In this case, there is a large degree of consensus between the two universities. However, differences are noted in respect to the most racist case: for URJC participants, this option is divided between Cases 1 and 2, whereas a much larger proportion of UCLM participants chose Case 2.

Lastly, it should be highlighted that our questionnaire coincides to a large degree with scales that measure the very different construct of conservative policies (MRS) or just authoritarianism (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). In this research study, the scores of the scale we analysed coincide with several aspects of both the RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1988) and of the gender role scale (stereotypes). This indicates that traditional forms of prejudice might be indirectly measured. Furthermore, these scales try to detect new forms of prejudice and are not effectively deployed in our context, in which there is ample evidence that prejudice continues to be a less-than-subtle practice (Cardenas, 2007). In other words, traditional prejudices endure in the ideas and thinking of current society, giving rise to humiliating images of the others (immigrants, minorities and women) that are used to reinforce a position of social entitlement. For this reason, the results contribute to a better knowledge of racist prejudices in a university context. However, we must also study how these prejudices emerge and are expressed at other educational levels (primary and secondary) or in other informal contexts (sports, cultural activities, music, dance, etc.).

In future studies, the survey could be adapted to other educational levels or groups. This would enable comparing the results of different groups of participants, including early childhood, a time when students can be manipulated by their surrounding context.

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