Facts do not support the Black Alumni Survey's claims of racism

To the Editor:

I feel that certain points were overlooked in the article "Alumni study shows racism" (Oct. 28), placing the validity of the report in question.

The 1985 Black Alumni Survey, which the opinions of the 671 black alumni who entered MIT from 1969 to 1981, failed to survey white and non-minority students to get a parallel view on other students' perceptions of their years, treatment, and education at MIT. By doing so, it is impossible to know whether the problems are us-ing, or blacks or are indicative of the undergraduate experience. The report was quite vague, the professors never named as not the years in which the accused racial incidents occurred.

The survey found that most respondents "developed a negative orientation to the MIT environment." Is this to say that all whites were enamored with the institute for their entire stay? Also 55 percent had "negative perceptions to the personal and academic support provided by MIT faculty members." MIT is a research institution. Many students find it slightly impersonal in this respect, because the faculty often seem more interested in their research than in the students, black or white.

The claim of the Visiting Committee's 1984 Quality of Student Life report shows racism" on the front page of the article was subtitled "Excerpts from responses to 1985 Black Alumni Survey." Those unedited anecdotes, if their purpose was to support the claim that MIT is racially discriminant, often fail. Under Relations with Faculty is this quote. "My reluctance to approach teaching assistants or professors to help fill the gaps in my knowledge had a negative effect on my academic performance." Two quotes, is this fault of the faculty member or the student? Does it matter that the student was black?

Under "Preparation for MIT," this is slightly off the wall quote, "There were two types of blacks at MIT: those who were completely prepared for MIT and the rest of us. We had attitude, but we couldn't keep up. White students -- their parents were engineers. They had taken apart the family car or is it that all white students have parents who are engineers?" I also fail to see how race comes into play in the anecdote from the "Living Group Experiences" section. "The living experience was all right, but I didn't fit into the scene. A typical party was 'lets drink beer and get drunk and pass out.' I wasn't that into that so I went to black parties and just hung out with friends." I am white. I don't like to get drunk or pass out. Neither do lots of my friends. I don't see this as being a habit of all whites or exclusive of all blacks. What is being implied is including this in the article? Getting drunk or hanging out with friends or working dances on Friday night is a choice each person has to make. Just because one is Jewish or Chinese or black doesn't rule out any options.

MIT undoubtedly has racial problems. The claims of this article though were unsupported and seemed to be implying certain fallacies. The themes of the anecdotes were not exclusive to a certain race, but could have been related by a student of any race or religion. The author of the article and the editors of the newspaper should learn how to back up generalities and not make unsupported claims such as "Alumni report shows racism" on the front page of The Tech.

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