

Understanding What Students Bring to the Classroom: Moderators of the Effects of Diversity Courses on Student Attitudes

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We investigated the impact of required diversity courses on students' understanding of racial inequality and their social development with regard to racial outgroups, with a specific focus on the effects of student race and empathy as moderators of diversity course effectiveness. First-semester students ($N = 173$), enrolled in either diversity courses or introduction to psychology, completed surveys at the beginning and end of the semester. Diversity courses increased understanding of White privilege, acknowledgment of blatant racism, and intersectional consciousness overall, but had a greater impact on intersectional consciousness for White students compared with students of color. White students taking diversity courses experienced a reduction in Protestant work ethic ideology that was absent for White students in psychology courses and for all students of color. Notably, empathy moderated the effect of diversity courses on both outgroup comfort and willingness to act to promote diversity.

Keywords: race, students, diversity, intersectionality, privilege

Required diversity courses in college curricula emerged in response to educational disparities highlighted during the civil rights movement, including the absence of course content about women and racial/ethnic minorities, as well as the need for pedagogical practices reflecting the needs of diverse students (Soldatenko, 2001). In the early 1970s, racial and ethnic minority group members, White women, and their allies launched reforms across the American educational landscape, with substantial changes made in postsecondary education including the establishment of Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies programs.

The institutionalization of diversity courses in higher education proved to be important to a diversifying student body, and by 2000, 58% of bachelor's degree granting institutions required some type of diversity requirement for graduation (AACU, 2000). Research finds that students who take diversity courses are changed in meaningful ways, and that these changes can be lasting (although the evidence is not unequivocal, see Engberg, 2004). However, less is known about the processes or mechanisms

through which these changes occur (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004), and whether change is related to characteristics of individual students, course characteristics, or a combination of the two. This paper presents research examining the effects of ethnic minority status and perspective taking on attitude change associated with taking required diversity courses.

Outcomes Associated With Diversity Courses

Many of the studies evaluating the effectiveness of diversity courses use a longitudinal design, comparing students' attitudes at the start and completion of the course (e.g., Case, 2007; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). Many use a comparison group, either a random sample or students enrolled in a course without a focus on race or ethnicity (e.g., Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000). In a recent meta-analysis of 27 studies, Denson (2009) found that overall, diversity-themed courses have a moderate effect on the reduction of racial bias. After taking diversity courses, students report decreased prejudice based on race (Chang, 2002; Hogan & Mallott, 2005; Hurtado, 2005), support for race-based initiatives (Case, 2007; Hurtado, 2005), increased social action engagement (Gurin et al., 2004; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004; Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005), and greater empathy and perspective taking (Carrell, 1997; Gurin et al., 2004). One study found that over the semester racial attitudes of students enrolled in the diversity course held constant, while attitudes of White students in the control group became less tolerant (Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000), suggesting these courses might provide a buffer against the development of racial prejudice even when they do not improve racial attitudes.

These outcomes can be understood as including two types of effects: those resulting from the ideas conveyed explicitly in the

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content of the course and those corresponding to social development that, although not part of the syllabus, might be promoted in classrooms where questions of inequality, exclusion, and social justice are explored.

Outcomes Associated With Course Content

Course content related outcomes tap students' understanding of racism as an ongoing form of bias and systemic inequality that intersects with other forms of identity, difference, and disadvantage (Cole, 2009), to shape life chances and opportunities.

Awareness of Racism

Neville et al. (2000) argued contemporary expressions of racism take the form of "color blind" attitudes, involving denial that racism is a current social problem in need of remedy through social policies. Courses addressing the history and manifestation of racial and ethnic intolerance might be expected to raise students' awareness of racism. Using a version of Neville et al.'s Color Blind Racism (COBRA) scale, both Case (2007) and Kernahan and Davis (2007) found that students taking a psychology course about race and racism scored higher on awareness of racism at posttest compared with pretest.

White Privilege Awareness

The ability to understand racism entails not only acknowledgment of harm associated with prejudice, but also recognition that some are privileged and others disadvantaged by systematic racial inequality and institutional racism. The advantages and benefits afforded to White people by virtue of their racial group membership are described as White privilege (McIntosh, 1988). When White privilege is made salient, White people report greater guilt and lower racial identification (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005). White privilege awareness presents greater ego threat to White people than conceptualizing race in terms of minority group disadvantage; under conditions of threat, White individuals are less likely to acknowledge racial privilege (Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007) and institutional practices favoring White people (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Case (2007) reported that students enrolled in a course about race and gender reported higher White Privilege Awareness at posttest compared with their pretest scores; however, this study did not include a control group.

Intersectional Consciousness

A sophisticated understanding of race also entails sensitivity to the fact that race and racism are experienced differently depending on other social group memberships one holds, including gender and sexual orientation. The ways that gender and race (and other social identities) intersect in complex ways that are impossible to understand in isolation is termed intersectionality (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectional consciousness is the degree to which an individual understands the influence of multiple oppressions on intragroup differences and experiences (Greenwood, 2008). Intersectional consciousness predicts group solidarity among women activists (Greenwood, 2008) and priming intersectional consciousness in White women students induced more positive attitudes toward Muslim women (Greenwood & Christian,

2008). Because diversity courses change students' awareness of structural oppression and privilege (Case, 2007; Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998), such courses may also increase students' recognition of the ways different forms of inequality may overlap.

System Justifying Beliefs

Often diversity courses aim to explain that racism not only entails attitudes but also affects the opportunity structure in U.S. society; thus, the content of such courses should decrease the extent to which students view inequality as the result of individual short-comings. Jost and colleagues (e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2005) have posited a motivation for system justification that leads people to rationalize situations as they are, serving to legitimize inequality. One example of system justification is the Protestant work ethic, a foundational theme of Western civilization (Crandall, 2000), which holds that because hard work and self control will invariably be rewarded with success, those who are not successful are to blame for their position. This ethos is commonly invoked in American culture to justify victim blaming and dispositional attributions about inequality between groups (Levy, West, Ramirez, & Karafantis, 2006). The endorsement of values associated with the Protestant work ethic is also associated with negative attitudes toward racial (Glover, 1994; Katz & Hass, 1988) and sexual minorities (Biernat, Vescio, Theno, & Crandall, 1996), and fat people (Quinn & Crocker, 1999). Because diversity courses include attention to the ways that racial and ethnic group membership are linked to structural inequality both historically and in the present, students who take these courses should show decreased endorsement of this attitude.

Outcomes Related to Social Development

In contrast to content-related outcomes, which assess students' understanding of race and racism after taking a diversity course, social development outcomes concern students' ability to navigate life in a diverse society, including their social comfort with people from other backgrounds, and their ability to respond to bias when they encounter it.

Comfort With Racial Outgroup Members

Students' experiences with diversity in college play an important role in preparing them to participate in a diverse society (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Gurin et al., 2004), including fostering comfort in social interactions with members of other racial and ethnic groups. Cole and Arriola (2007) argued that willingness to engage in intergroup interaction and the emotions experienced in intergroup settings, termed outgroup comfort, are associated with students' adaptation to a diverse campus setting. This construct is related to intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), which has been shown to affect behavior, affect, and cognition (Britt et al., 1996; Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1989; Stephan, Stephan, Wenzel, & Cornelius, 1991). Indeed, Cole and Yip (2008) found that Black students low in outgroup comfort reported higher anxiety in academic settings on predominantly White campuses, compared with those high in outgroup comfort.

Willingness to Act Against Racism

Educators who teach about diversity often aim to promote students' confidence that they can take action against discrimina-

tion. Curricular content and pedagogical practices (e.g., intergroup dialogue and learning) can encourage students to engage in behaviors reflecting antiracist attitudes including communicating across differences (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Nagda & Zuniga, 2003), promoting racial equality/diversity (Dovidio et al., 2004; Lopez, 2004), and reducing prejudice by monitoring their own behavior (Nagda et al., 2004). Comparing pre- and posttest scores for students enrolled in a diversity course, Nagda et al. (2004) found that students' ratings of the importance of promoting diversity, as well as their confidence in their ability to do so, increased.

Moderators

Racial/Ethnic minority group membership. Gurin et al. (2002) theorized that because many students come to college from segregated home environments, diversity encountered on campus through academic and social interaction might foster disequilibrium with their familiar assumptions and experiences, and challenge them to collect new information and reconsider old beliefs. Bowman (2009) argued this may be particularly true for White students, because their race privilege often results in few opportunities to learn about how race and ethnicity structure life experiences for members of minority groups. His large-scale study supported this assertion, finding that taking diversity courses resulted in increased need for cognition among White students, but not students of color. We expect that race may moderate the effect of taking diversity courses such that White students experience greater benefit, particularly with respect to outcomes related to diversity content.

Perspective taking. The ability to take on a perspective other than one's own is a component of cognitive empathy (Davis, 1983; Duan & Hill, 1996). Increased perspective taking can be an outcome of diversity courses (Carrell, 1997; Gurin et al., 2004). However, perspective taking reduces outgroup stereotyping and bias (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) and also predicts positive attitudes toward the use of nonsexist language (Parks & Robertson, 2005, 2008). These findings suggest that perspective taking might be an individual-difference variable moderating the effect of exposure to diversity courses on students' attitudes. Because empathy involves taking the perspective of another person, we expected that for students high in perspective taking, enrollment in a diversity course would result in enhanced scores on social outcomes, including comfort with individuals from other racial/ethnic groups and willingness to act as an ally on behalf of others.

This Study

At the University of Michigan, where much of the research on effects of diversity courses has been conducted, the College of Literature Science and the Arts has included a "Race and Ethnicity" course as a degree requirement for undergraduates since 1991. Courses are designated as meeting the requirement by a curriculum committee, which uses the following criteria: the inclusion of "substantial, but not necessarily exclusive" discussion of "(a) the meaning of race, ethnicity, and racism; (b) racial and ethnic intolerance and resulting inequality as it occurs in the United States or elsewhere; and (c) comparisons of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, social class, or gender." Courses meeting the requirement are offered in many disciplines.

We expect that students taking diversity courses should score higher than those enrolled in a comparison course on outcomes associated with content related to diversity, including awareness of blatant racism and White privilege, and intersectional consciousness. These effects should be enhanced for White students, who may have more to learn about such content because it is likely to be discrepant with previous life experience (Bowman, 2009; Gurin et al., 2002). However, for outcomes that are related to social development, that is, comfort with racial outgroup members and willingness to act as an ally, we expect that empathy will moderate the effect of diversity courses. Specifically, we expect that students high in perspective taking will score higher on outgroup comfort and be more willing to act as an ally, regardless of course taken. In contrast, because diversity course requirements aim to prepare all students to function in a diverse society and to challenge discrimination, regardless of their background or traits, we expect that among students who take a diversity course we will observe high scores on these two outcomes regardless of perspective taking.

Method

Participants and Procedures

First-year students enrolled in introduction to psychology and all courses meeting the Race and Ethnicity requirement were invited by email to participate in this study near the start of the fall 2008 semester; students enrolled in both types of courses were omitted. Participation entailed completing surveys in September and December, near the end of the term. Both waves were completed by 173 students; the attrition rate was 24.8% with 57 Time 1 participants missing at Time 2. The sample included 106 students enrolled in diversity-themed courses and 67 enrolled in psychology. Of these 138 (79.8%) were females and 34 (19.7%) males (1 missing); approximately 18.5% identified as Asian/Asian American, 3.4% as Black, 2.9% as Latino/Hispanic, 1.7% as American Indian/Native American, 4% as other, and 73.4% as White (totaling more than 100% because participants were permitted to choose all that applied). Four students identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, 1 as "other," and 168 as heterosexual. The average participant age was 18 years ($SD = .50$). Participants reported the highest education level achieved by their mothers in the following categories: 10.4% high school or less; 19.7% some college or vocational training; 39.9% earned college degree; 6.4% some graduate/professional work; 22.5% earned graduate/professional degree; and .6% did not report.

Outcomes (Assessed at Time 1 and Time 2)

All survey items used a response range of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) unless otherwise stated. A 6-item scale measured *denial of blatant racial issues* (Neville et al., 2000) with higher scores indicating more denial. A sample item is "Racism may have been a problem in the past; it is not an important problem today." Cronbach's alphas indicated good reliability (Time 1 = .82; Time 2 = .80).

A 6-item scale assessed *White privilege awareness*, students' awareness of privileges and advantages extended to White people (Case, 2007), with higher scores indicating more awareness. A sample item is "Whites must be willing to confront their privileged

status before racism can end.” Cronbach’s alphas indicated good reliability (Time 1 = .84; Time 2 = .86).

A measure of *intersectional consciousness* (ISC) was developed based on Greenwood’s (2008) 9-item measure. The 21-item adapted measure (Curtin, Stewart, & Cole, in preparation) included some of Greenwood’s items about race and gender along with new items addressing socioeconomic class and sexuality. A sample item is “All oppressions are tied together.” Participants rated items on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating more understanding of the connections among various social identities and forms of discrimination. However, five items were inadvertently administered on a 6-point scale; thus, responses were z scored and the standardized items were averaged. Cronbach’s alpha indicated good reliability (Time 1 = .75; Time 2 = .81).

The 4-item *Protestant work ethic scale* (Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, & Federico, 1998) assessed the extent to which people believe that individuals get what they deserve. A sample item is “If people work hard they almost always get what they want.” Reliability for the scale was good (alpha Time 1 = .71; alpha Time 2 = .71).

The *outgroup comfort* scale’s 15 items assessed comfort levels in settings with people of other races. It is a modification of a measure developed to assess Black peoples’ comfort with White people (Cole & Arriola, 2007). A sample item is “I feel uncomfortable around people of other races because they’re so different from me (reversed).” The Time 1 mean score of 4.27 ($SD = .59$), suggested a ceiling effect and constrained variance. Therefore, we omitted the five items with the highest mean scores from the scale score. Reliability for the scale was good (alpha Time 1 = .89; alpha Time 2 = .90).

Attitudes toward actions that promote diversity were assessed using the 22-item *ability to act as an ally* scale (Nagda et al., 2004), on a 4-point scale. Participants were given a list of ally behaviors (e.g., “Refuse to participate in jokes that are derogatory to any group”) and asked to rate how important it was for them to engage in this behavior, and how confident they felt in their ability to do so. Reliability for the ally scale was good, with a Time 1 alpha level of .93 and a Time 2 alpha of .94.

Student Characteristics (Assessed at Time 1)

The 7-item perspective taking subscale of the *interpersonal reactivity index* (IRI; Davis, 1983) measured the tendency to adopt the perspective of others (a cognitive component of empathy). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *does not describe me well*; 5 = *does describe me very well*). A sample item is “I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision.” Reliability for the scale was good ($\alpha = .78$).

Because this data was collected during the 2008 presidential election campaign, in which race was particularly salient because of the candidacy of Barack Obama, participants were asked to rate *interest in the election*, by rating their agreement with the statement “I have been very interested in following the news of the 2008 presidential election” ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 1.19$). This variable was included as a control, given the possibility that the salience of Obama as a positive exemplar of Black Americans could have resulted in positive racial attitudes among those exposed to election news (Plant et al., 2009). In our final analyses, outcome variables assessed at Time 1, sex and mother’s education were included as control variables.

Results

Means and SD s on the dependent variables for students in nondiversity and diversity courses at Time 1 and Time 2 are presented in Table 1. To test the effects of race and ethnicity courses across the semester, a repeated measures 2×2 (Time \times Course) analysis of variance (ANOVA) compared pre- and post-test survey data for each dependent variable. There was no significant time \times course interaction for denial of blatant racial issues. However, there was a significant time \times course interaction on White privilege awareness such that students in diversity courses assessed at the end of the semester had greater awareness than they did at the start of the term, $t(105) = 42.45$, $p < .001$ and also greater awareness than students completing the comparison course, $F(1, 168) = 10.22$, $p = .002$. We found a similar significant

Table 1
Variable Means, SD s, Course Main Effects, and Time \times Course Interactions With Effect Sizes

Variable	Nondiversity courses		Diversity courses		<i>F</i> for course	<i>F</i> for time \times course
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2		
Denial of blatant racial issues	2.28 (.52)	2.33 (.62)	2.09 (.67)	2.05 (.62)	4.27** $\eta^2 = .04$	1.15
White privilege awareness	3.14 (.65)	3.11 (.74)	3.32 (.81)	3.49 (.79)	5.10* $\eta^2 = .03$	4.42* $\eta^2 = .03$
Intersectional consciousness	.07 (.30)	-.13 (.33)	.20 (.43)	.09 (.44)	8.99** $\eta^2 = .05$	3.41* $\eta^2 = .02$
Protestant work ethic ideology	2.81 (.64)	2.82 (.66)	2.75 (.72)	2.53 (.68)	3.88* $\eta^2 = .02$	7.97** $\eta^2 = .05$
Outgroup comfort	4.08 (.66)	4.04 (.77)	4.23 (.63)	4.14 (.68)	<1	<1
Acting to promote diversity	3.06 (.50)	3.09 (.58)	3.14 (.49)	3.12 (.51)	<1	<1
Perspective taking	3.62 (.63)	3.68 (.61)	3.64 (.60)	3.71 (.59)	—	—

Note. $N = 173$. Analyses revealed there were no significant time main effects. The repeated measures analysis was not conducted for perspective taking because it was a moderator variable rather than a dependent variable in this study.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

time \times course interaction for intersectional consciousness, with students in diversity courses reporting greater consciousness compared with both their own baseline scores from the fall, $t(105) = 82.60, p < .001$ and to students completing the comparison course, $F(1, 165) = 12.76, p < .001$. The same significant time \times course interaction emerged for endorsement of Protestant work ethic ideology, with students completing the diversity course reporting less endorsement than they had at the start of the course, $t(104) = 39.22, p < .001$ and less than their counterparts completing the comparison course, $F(1, 169) = 7.75, p = .006$. Analyses revealed no significant main effects for time.

To examine predictors and moderators of the outcome variables, ordinary least squares (OLS) procedures were used to conduct multiple regression analyses. Data collection in September from students in diversity courses and the control course provided baseline measures that allowed us to control for self selection into the courses. Each dependent variable was regressed on its own baseline score, course (0 = control course, 1 = diversity course),

perspective taking, race (0 = White, 1 = person of color), and sex (1 = female, 2 = male), mother's level of education (as a proxy for socioeconomic status), the interaction of course by perspective taking, and the interaction of course by race. To create interaction terms we multiplied the variables; perspective taking was first centered (by subtracting the grand mean from each participant's score). To control for the effects of interest in the 2008 presidential election and socioeconomic status (defined as mother's highest level of education) on the outcomes measured at the semester's end, regression analyses were conducted including these independent variables. Interest in the election was not a significant predictor in any of the models, nor did it alter the regression results. It was therefore excluded from the analyses presented here.

Results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. As predicted, students who took diversity courses scored significantly lower than students in the control course on denial of blatant racial issues at the end of the semester. The standardized regression coefficient indicates the change in the dependent variable (measured in *SD*

Table 2
Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Denial of Blatant Racial Issues, Outgroup Comfort, White Privilege Awareness, Intersectional Consciousness, Protestant Work Ethic Ideology, and Acting to Promote Diversity

Dependent variables and predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Denial of blatant racial issues				.54**
Course (0 = control; 1 = diversity)	-.16	.08	-.13*	
Perspective taking	-.10	.09	-.10	
Race (White = 0; person of color = 1)	-.13	.16	-.08	
Course \times perspective taking	.03	.13	.03	
Course \times race	.17	.19	.09	
White privilege awareness				.59**
Course (0 = control; 1 = diversity)	.24	.09	.15**	
Perspective taking	.18	.10	.14	
Race (White = 0; person of color = 1)	.29	.19	.15	
Course \times perspective taking	-.07	.14	-.04	
Course \times race	-.10	.23	-.04	
Intersectional consciousness				.56***
Course (0 = control; 1 = diversity)	.20	.05	.24***	
Perspective taking	.10	.06	.15	
Race (White = 0; person of color = 1)	.10	.10	.10	
Course \times perspective taking	-.07	.08	-.07	
Course \times race	-.30	.13	-.24*	
Protestant work ethic ideology				.58**
Course (0 = control; 1 = diversity)	-.42	.08	-.30**	
Perspective taking	-.09	.09	-.08	
Race (White = 0; person of color = 1)	.27	.17	-.16	
Course \times perspective taking	.08	.12	.05	
Course \times race	.69	.20	.35**	
Outgroup comfort				.69**
Course (0 = control; 1 = diversity)	-.02	.07	-.01	
Perspective taking	.18	.08	.15	
Race (White = 0; person of color = 1)	-.19	.15	-.11	
Course \times perspective taking	-.26	.11	-.17*	
Course \times race	.04	.18	.02	
Acting to promote diversity				.59**
Course (0 = control; 1 = diversity)	-.00	.06	-.00	
Perspective taking	.17	.07	.19*	
Race (White = 0; person of color = 1)	.05	.14	.04	
Course \times perspective taking	-.23	.09	-.20**	
Course \times race	-.08	.16	-.05	

Note. *N* = 173. In these analyses, sex, mother's education, and pretest scores on the dependent variable were included as control variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

units) associated with a change of 1 *SD* in the independent variable (Hedges, 2008) and thus is a measure of effect size. For partial correlations, an effect size of .14 is considered small, .36 is considered medium, and .51 is considered large (Maxwell, 2000; although he notes these cutoffs may be high). Thus, this effect is small. This effect was independent of participants' scores on this scale early in the term. Additionally, there was no significant interaction between course and students' race.

There was a significant positive main effect of course on White privilege awareness, such that at the end of the semester, students who took diversity courses were on average higher in White privilege awareness than those taking the control course. This effect was small in size, independent of baseline White privilege awareness, and was not affected by students' race.

Compared with the control course, enrollment in a diversity course was associated with higher scores on intersectional consciousness at the end of the term, and this effect was small in size. Perspective taking did not moderate the effect of the course. However, a significant interaction between course taken and race was found, and this effect was small. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) revealed that among White students, but not students of color, enrollment in diversity courses was associated with significantly higher intersectional consciousness ($F = 27.54, p < .001$) at the end of the term compared with students of the same race taking psychology courses (see Figure 1).

Similarly, the effect of taking diversity courses on Protestant Work Ethic ideology was moderated by students' race (see Figure 2), and this effect was nearly medium in size. An ANCOVA revealed that White students enrolled in diversity course, but not students of color, expressed less endorsement of the Protestant Work Ethic, $F = 25.79, p < .001$ at the end of the course compared with White students in the control courses. Indeed, White students enrolled in the diversity course reported lower endorsement of PWE than any of the other three groups.

The effect of the diversity course on outgroup comfort was moderated by perspective taking, and this effect was small in size. Post hoc probing of this interaction (see Figure 3) through examination of simple slopes (Holmbeck, 2002) indicated that for students in the control course, high perspective taking was associated with greater outgroup comfort ($b = .18, p = .05$); however,

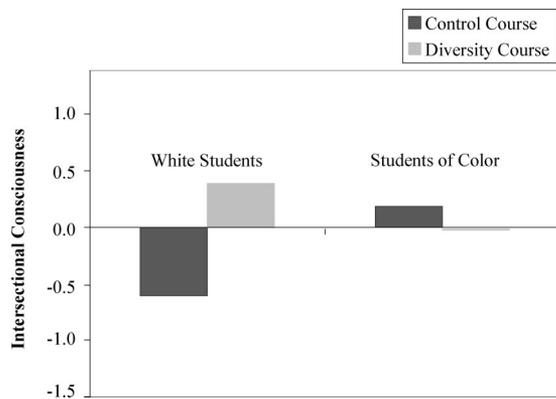


Figure 1. Course effect on intersectional consciousness as moderated by student race.

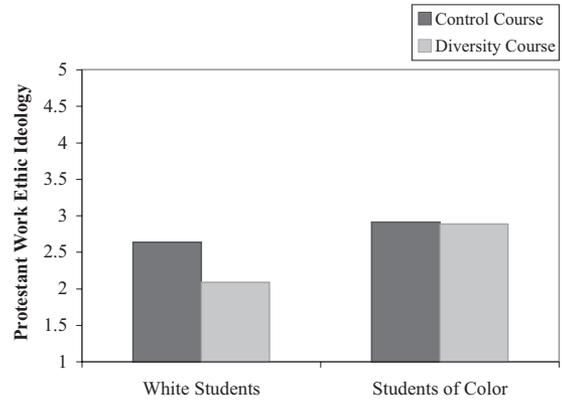


Figure 2. Course effect on protestant work ethic ideology as moderated by student race.

among students who took diversity courses, perspective taking was unrelated to outgroup comfort ($b = -.08, ns$).

Finally, the effect of course on attitudes toward acting to promote diversity was moderated by perspective taking (see Figure 4); this effect was small in size. Post hoc probing of this interaction through examination of simple slopes indicated that in the control course, students who were high in perspective taking were more willing to act to promote diversity ($b = .17; p = .02$); however, among students who took diversity courses, there was no association between perspective taking and attitudes toward antiracist action ($b = -.06, ns$). Although there was a main effect for perspective taking, perspective taking did not moderate the effect of the course.

Discussion

At the end of the semester students taking diversity courses were less likely to deny the existence of blatant racism, and were more aware of White privilege than students in the comparison course. These results supported our hypothesis that outcomes related to content covered in diversity courses would increase for students in such courses; however, contrary to expectations, this effect was

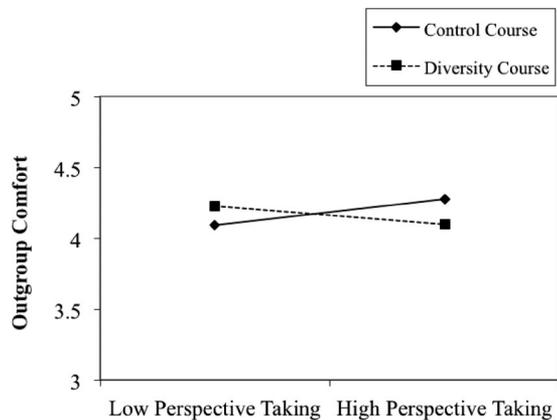


Figure 3. Course effect on outgroup comfort as moderated by perspective taking.

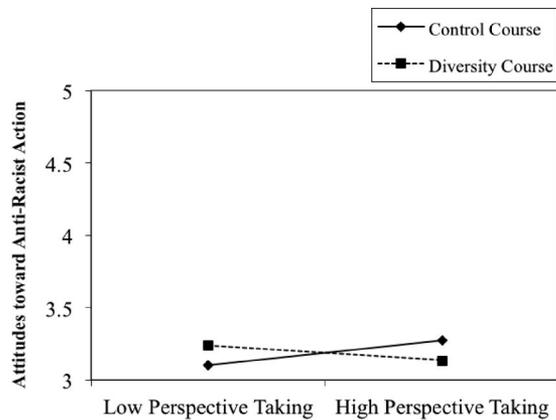


Figure 4. Course effect on acting to promote diversity as moderated by perspective taking.

independent of students' race/ethnicity. Students' race moderated the effect of diversity courses on both intersectional consciousness and Protestant work ethic ideology. Taking diversity courses was associated with increased intersectional consciousness and decreased endorsement of the Protestant work ethic at the end of the term for White students, but no such effect was observed for students of color.

This pattern of findings might be explained by the different relationship that White students and students of color have to the content of diversity related courses. This sample was composed of students surveyed during their first semester at the university. White students who choose to take a diversity course early in their studies might be particularly open to having their assumptions about race challenged and changed, and hence likely to confirm what Bowman (2009) termed "the exploration perspective" (p. 183), that is, the notion that privileged students show more gains in diversity classes because the information is most novel to them. This effect occurred in response to measures tapping awareness of intersectionality and the structural analysis of racial/ethnic inequality. These concepts may be more disequilibrating than the other two content-related outcomes, denial of blatant racism and awareness of White privilege, which assess the more straightforward ideas that racism still exists and that White people are generally privileged in systems of racial inequality.

In contrast, students of color who choose a diversity course early in their studies may expect to learn about their own racial/ethnic groups and that course content will support, rather than test their experiences and worldviews. For this group, the concept of intersectionality, which posits that other forms of inequality, including sexism and classism, are equally important as racism, might be especially challenging. Similarly, if students of color are disproportionately from families in which education is viewed as an important route for upward mobility (as is often true of immigrant families [e.g., Hill & Torres, 2010] and African Americans [Cole & Omari, 2003]), then course content suggesting that systemic barriers based on racism can impede success for minority group members despite individuals' best efforts might be met with resistance (Higginbotham, 1996). Bowman (2009) offered "the resistance perspective" (p. 184) as the competing view to the "exploration perspective"; he argued students from privileged groups

resist serious consideration of the material presented in college diversity courses. Our findings indicate that students of color may also resist learning about certain diversity-related topics and issues, and suggests the importance for both researchers and diversity course instructors to attend to the types and sources of resistance that may occur for students from different backgrounds.

These findings are limited to one university with a well-known history of activist engagement on racial issues by both students and the administration (Gurin et al., 2002). Compared with some studies on this topic, this study has a relatively small sample size. This necessitated combining all students of color into a single group, which did not allow us to test for differences among students of different racial/ethnic background within this group. This is potentially an important line of inquiry and should be addressed in future studies.

However, this study also has notable strengths. Because the students were enrolled in many different diversity courses offered in myriad departments, findings support the efficacy of diversity courses in general, rather than the effects of a single course or instructor. The use of the control course supports the claim that observed changes were because of the diversity course and not first-year students' exposure to a diverse college campus. Finally, intersectional consciousness has not been assessed as an outcome of diversity courses and our findings suggest that despite the fact that the college requirement does not mandate that these courses explore connections between racism and other forms of inequality, some students become more aware of these connections through these courses.

Contrary to recent claims made by Arizona lawmakers that diversity courses promote "ethnic chauvinism" and separatism for racial and ethnic minority groups (FoxNews.com, 2010), our findings contribute to the literature demonstrating positive outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds who take diversity themed courses. Moreover, they complicate this literature by attending to the ways that student characteristics, notably the personality variable of perspective taking, is related to such outcomes. By providing a space for students to explore the many social issues they will face in the greater society, diversity courses play an important role in facilitating students' understanding of how they can participate in a diverse society and work toward social justice.

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