Getting to the What, How, and Why of Diversity on Campus

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What kinds of diversity initiatives and cross-racial interactions foster learning among diverse students? In response to that question, the authors trace various social psychological theories that inform campus diversity programs. Making a case for moving beyond traditional *intergroup harmony* or *intragroup solidarity* approaches, the authors elaborate on a model that uses group identities as resources for intergroup understanding and collaboration. This model, which we call *intergroup dialogue,* engages students in exploring commonalities and differences in group identities and experiences, working constructively with intergroup conflicts, and building collective identities as socially just people. The article concludes with an agenda for future research addressing both substantive and methodological issues.

Social science evidence submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of affirmative action, as well as research conducted later and summarized in several books published since the original expert reports were given to the courts (Chang, Hakuta, & Jones, 2002; Gurin, Lehman, & Lewis, 2004; Hurtado, 2003; Orfield, 2001), generally support the view that racial/ethnic diversity has positive effects on student learning outcomes. Moreover, it is clear that *interaction with diverse peers* in and outside the classroom is the crucial way in which diversity produces educational benefits for students (see especially Antonio, 2001, 2004). The expert reports and the many briefs of the amici curiae that were presented to the U.S. Supreme Court stressed that institutions of higher education must offer guided opportunities for students to interact across race and ethnicity. However, they did not address *what kinds* of cross-racial interactions and educational diversity initiatives foster mutual learning among diverse students.

We begin this article by probing the diversity argument more deeply, using social psychological theories to understand the underlying programmatic assumptions of various curricular and cocurricular diversity initiatives on college campuses. We identify the tensions of intergroup harmony and intragroup solidarity among the different theories and programs, and consider a particular diversity program, intergroup dialogue, that creatively addresses seemingly irreconcilable tensions. We end by proposing a future research agenda that calls for attention to both substantive and methodological issues.

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Social Psychological Rationales for Campus Diversity Efforts

College campuses in the United States abound with various diversity initiatives inside and outside the classroom, most of which derive from classic work in social psychology on intergroup contact (Allport, 1954). Allport argued that cross-racial contact will produce more tolerant attitudes when members of different groups interact with each other under specified conditions, namely when they have equal status in the situation, get to know each other well, and cooperate with each other toward common goals, and when their contact is supported by relevant authorities. Most research on the impact of intergroup contact supports its efficacy in reducing prejudice and intergroup bias (Pettigrew, 1998).

Despite their common heritage in the work on intergroup contact, the various educational initiatives found on U.S. college campuses reflect different theoretical approaches to intergroup relationships, although they rarely define their foundational assumptions. The differences center primarily on three issues: (a) salience of racial/ethnic group identity; (b) power, privilege, and inequality as a context for intergroup relationships; and (c) the outcomes of intergroup harmony, understanding, and collaboration.

The Standard Models in Social Psychology: Intergroup Harmony

Following Allport's articulation of conditions for beneficial intergroup contact in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), much of social psychology's work on intergroup relations has been directed to understanding ways to achieve intergroup harmony. One such approach, called *decategorization,* helps members of groups to personalize and get to know "outgroup" members as separate individuals rather than as group members (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Wilder, 1981). The goal is to promote differentiated conceptions of outgroup members so that they "slide even further toward the individual side of the self on the individual–group member continuum" (Brewer & Miller, 1984, p. 288). In this approach, anything that makes groups salient and encourages thinking about groups rather than about individuals—group competitiveness, seating arrangements whereby members of different groups sit together separately from others, resource allocation based on groups rather than individuals, discussion of cultures and histories of different groups, and *attention to group identities*—is believed to foster intergroup prejudice, bias, and discrimination. On campus, then, diverse students are brought together merely as individual students. Examples include orientation for new students in which advising is done individually rather than in groups, random assignment of individuals to be roommates, alphabetical assignment of seating in classes, and course requirements and grading based only on individual products rather than on group projects.

A second approach to achieving intergroup harmony is termed *recategorization,* or the *common in-group identity model.* Developed and richly tested by Gaertner and Dovidio (2000), the common in-group identity model draws on the well-documented evidence that members of groups show bias in evaluation and preferences for others in their in-groups. Because of the in-group positivity bias, Gaertner and Dovidio argue that "once outgroup members are perceived as ingroup members, it is proposed that they would be accorded the benefits of ingroup status" (p. 48). The way to make former out-group members into in-group members, so that everyone holds a single group identity (as opposed to separate group identities), is through giving them common activities and tasks, rewarding them based on cooperative behavior, integrating them in seating/living patterns, and creating symbols for the new, single group, such as a team T-shirt or a group name. Research shows that, when the common in-group identity model guides intergroup interactions, prejudice and intergroup bias are reduced and helping and disclosures about oneself to former out-group members are greater (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Campus initiatives that implicitly or explicitly recategorize groups include living–learning programs that may consist of diverse students but de-emphasize the students' cultural backgrounds, group identities, and experiences. Instead, a new, common identity is defined by the theme of the program (such as Environmental Scholars, Life Sciences and Health Scholars, or Arts and Citizenship Scholars). University and intramural sports teams are also examples of the common in-group model.

These two models, advanced by many social psychologists as the most effective ones for achieving intergroup harmony, are color-blind (see Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Ward, & Banker, 1999, and Stephan & Stephan, 2001, for overviews of these standard models). In both models, group identities are submerged so that group members think about themselves only as individuals or as part of a newly formed deracialized in-group. Furthermore, neither model attends explicitly to power, privilege, or inequality. Therefore, while racial and ethnic diversity is represented among students, its salience is actively diminished.

Tajfel's Identity Model: Intragroup Solidarity

A third model, one in which separate groups continue to exist, is treated by advocates of decategorization and recategorization as much inferior for reducing intergroup bias and prejudice. Nonetheless, Tajfel's (1974) identity theory provides a strong social psychological rationale for the value of separate groups *for a different but crucially important outcome—the development of group solidarity as a basis for social change.* Tajfel argues that everyone is motivated by the drive for positive psychological distinctiveness. Members of groups compare their groups with others. When that social comparison affirms positive psychological distinctiveness, individuals are motivated to stay in the group, although they usually are unaware of the importance of groups and group identity, which they take for granted as simply "normal" aspects of their lives. In contrast, when a membership group is devalued or has less power than other groups in society, individuals are motivated either to leave the group ("passing") or to employ what Tajfel calls "cognitive alternatives," which others call "group consciousness" or "solidarity"—essentially a strengthening of group ties based on an understanding of how groups are affected by systems of power and inequality (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999; Nagda, Kim, Moise-Swanson, & Kim, 2005). Through cognitive and emotional work, members alter their conceptions of their membership group and its relationship to other groups by reinterpreting negative stereotypes as positive (such as, "Black is beautiful," "Emotionality of women is their strength," "Queer power"). They learn to recognize and treat as illegitimate the political and social inequalities that disadvantage their groups. The outcomes of intragroup consciousness and solidarity—which provide collective social psychological resources for collective action by groups that often lack political, economic, and social resources—contrast markedly with the outcome of intergroup harmony in the standard models of intergroup relations.

Examples of the group consciousness or intragroup solidarity model also abound in colleges. Ethnic-themed houses, cultural clubs, separate (though often supplementary) orientation programs, graduation celebrations for different ethnic/racial groups, and ethnic studies and women's studies courses derive from this model of identity and intergroup relationships. Their advocates argue that separate spaces for in-group interaction and solidarity help minority students to cope with the social and psychological stress that many of them experience on predominantly White campuses; they are an antidote to what Smith, Allen, and Land (2005) call "racial battle fatigue." These solidarity enclaves for students of color, which rarely if ever encompass all of their daily interactions, help the students support each other and explore their cultural heritages. They help to increase retention and the campus influence of minority students, who on many campuses are otherwise subsumed under the hegemony of the dominant campus culture (Bocian, 1997; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Tensions Among the Models

To take the message of *active engagement* with diversity for student learning forward, we need to grapple with the tensions posed by these different social psychological models. Are the models mutually exclusive? And, more fundamentally, can the first two be integrated with the third? Or do they represent irreconcilable approaches that produce different valued outcomes? At issue here is that the very conditions that make decategorization and recategorization difficult—essentially everything that heightens the salience of group boundaries, including group identity—are the conditions that foster group consciousness and solidarity. Conversely, Gaertner and Dovidio (2000) acknowledge that recategorization may be interpreted by minorities as expecting them to assimilate to the majority group and that efforts to create a single superordinate identity, "although well-intentioned, may threaten one's social identity, which in turn can intensify rather than reduce intergroup bias and conflict" (p. 166).

Recent theorizing and research on intergroup harmony approaches in social psychology recognize that it is not always possible to submerge one's cultural and group identities. In those circumstances, allowing members to maintain distinct group identities while they function in a superordinate, total group may be more effective than either decategorization or recategorization. Gaertner and Dovidio (2000), in accord with Hewstone and Brown's (1986) *mutual differentiation* model, acknowledge this possibility in conceptualizing a *dual identity* model. In both of these models, members of groups can be simultaneously attached

to their separate group identities and capable of engaging in common tasks with members of other groups. In fact, efforts to press members of groups for whom history, culture, and group identity are central to their sense of self to forsake their group identities may actually arouse strong resistance and worsen intergroup relations rather than foster intergroup harmony (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Schofield, 1986). Some experiments demonstrate that the mutual differentiation and dual identity models are often just as effective as the common in-group model in reducing intergroup bias and sometimes even more effective, because they can help group members to generalize the positive feelings they developed in the original intergroup situation to other outgroup members who *were not present* in that situation (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000a, 2000b).

A model that has some similarities to the mutual differentiation and dual identity models but also has distinct elements is *intergroup dialogue*. Now in place at numerous campuses, intergroup dialogue programs bring students together in small-group, co-learning environments. Over a sustained period of 10 to 12 weeks and with the guidance of trained facilitators, students from pairs of identity groups (e.g., African American and White, Anglo and Latino, Arab and Jew, male and female, Christian and Muslim, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer) and heterosexual, affluent and working-class) explore their own and the other group's identities, analyze how power and inequality affect their groups, and examine ways to bridge the intergroup differences (see Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002, for a fuller description).

Intergroup Dialogue: An Innovative, Integrative Approach

Intergroup dialogue integrates various aspects of the social psychological models discussed above, while dealing somewhat differently with the key features of saliency of group identity, role of social inequality, and goals of intergroup relations. We elaborate below on intergroup dialogue, discussing the new model in relation to the previously established social psychological models.

Decategorization

Personalizing is a critical ingredient of the success of intergroup dialogues (Yeakley, 1998). However, in contrast to simple decategorization, personalization comes from testimonials and stories that students tell about themselves as members of groups, not simply as autonomous individuals. Intergroup dialogues incorporate readings and interactive activities that help members of each identity group to personalize others as individuals. Personalizing individuals in an explicit group context increases the likelihood that what is learned about these specific group members in this specific situation will generalize to others in other situations.

Recategorization

Recategorization in intergroup dialogue involves developing a superordinate identity as people broadly committed to social justice. Students from the two identity groups in dialogue carry out joint learning—involving reflections, dialogues, and actions—and over time achieve a total superordinate identity that does not relinquish the particular social group identities; instead, the superordinate identity is framed as an expression of the separate identities. For example, in the final sessions of extended interracial/ethnic dialogues, students converse explicitly about their roles in challenging racial, ethnic, and other inequalities. They explore questions such as these: What are our roles as White people/people of color to undo racism and ethnocentrism within our communities? What are our roles as White people/people of color to work in alliance with other people of color/White people to undo racism?"

Separate Groups

Intergroup dialogue is also similar in some ways to the separate groups model because both maintain the salience of separate groups and the importance of intragroup solidarity. However, intergroup dialogue differs from the separate groups model in emphasizing affective ties between individuals in the two groups and helping the groups to forge collaborations and intergroup alliances. Such alliances may not be harmonious, but they can enable positive and mutual in-group and out-group respect. Intergroup alliances are strengthened in conjunction with intragroup solidarity, not at its expense. In fact, intergroup dialogues are structured purposefully to use separate groups to deepen the intergroup exchange.

Processes and Outcomes

The crucial distinctions between the standard models of intergroup relations and the intergroup dialogue model lie in both their processes and their outcomes. The standard models emphasize similarities and a common-task orientation as a way of reducing prejudice and fostering intergroup harmony. Intergroup dialogues also use common tasks, but they focus especially on a common dialogic communication process that is intended to develop intergroup understanding, intergroup collaboration, and the development of a shared identity as socially just people. When intergroup dialogues are successful,[1] students gain an understanding of *both* commonalities and differences between groups. They learn that collaborations are possible without a false sense of harmony that often masks conflicts and different interests. Harmony may not be genuine without the working out of difficult conflicts and disagreements in a democratic fashion.

Research evidence on the impact of intergroup dialogues has been garnered from field experiments in which the same students were studied before and after participating in intergroup dialogues; in some instances, this longitudinal comparison was combined with a participant–control group comparison. These studies have demonstrated that participation in intergroup dialogues fosters active thinking about causes of social behavior and knowledge of institutional and other structural features of society that produce and maintain group-based inequalities (Alimo, Kelly, & Clark, 2002; Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998; Nagda et al., 2005). Participation increases perception of both commonalities and differences between and within groups and helps students to normalize conflict and build skills to work with conflicts (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003; Nagda et al., 2005). Participation also enhances interest in political issues and develops a sense of citizenship through college and community activities (Gurin, Gurin, Dey, & Hurtado, 2004; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004).

Future Research

Moving beyond *Gratz* (2003) and *Grutter* (2003), we need campus diversity programs to be theoretically guided and empirically evaluated. Too many current efforts simply reflect the hunches

of faculty and administrators, rather than lessons learned from research, about how to use diversity educationally (McCauley, Wright, & Harris, 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Future research on intergroup relations and the role of diversity education must take on the substantive issues raised in the affirmative action cases and the methodological issues associated with isolating the impact and efficacy of various efforts.

Substantive Issues

The review of theoretical models and programs shows many, and sometimes seemingly irreconcilable, assumptions underlying campus diversity programs. Future research can contribute to a greater understanding of various programs and their likely effects on groups of students by considering the following issues:

Pre-college experience. Little research exists that examines how pre-college diversity affects diversity experiences in college. How integrated or separated were the social structures of students' high schools, neighborhoods, and other settings? How do the extent and the nature of pre-college diversity experiences affect student learning in programs guided by various models?

Classroom dynamics. Although there is some previous research on how diversity education actually operates in classrooms, much more research that uses videotaping and other observational methods is needed to understand classroom dynamics and what accounts for more and less effective teaching and learning in multicultural classrooms.

Race and ethnicity. Future research needs to examine more closely the impact of various diversity approaches for different groups of students. For example, many students of color enter universities with greater awareness than exists among many White students of group-based inequalities in the United States, and thus with greater questioning of the dominant ideology of individualism. These differences may significantly affect their learning in programs reflecting various models.

Stages of development. Future research needs to examine how stages of cognitive and emotional development interact with pre-college diversity experiences and with racial/ethnic group identities in accounting for the effects of the various approaches to diversity programming.

Impact of multiple approaches and pathways. Given multiple diversity efforts, future research needs to assess the impact of the various approaches for students whose college experiences have been defined primarily by only one of them, and for students whose experiences have combined them, either sequentially over time or in combination throughout their college years.

Methodological Issues

A review of the theoretical models and research on intergroup relations makes evident some methodological issues that future research should address:

Selectivity. Critics of research on diversity programs often cite as problematic the issue of selectivity, that is, the likelihood that students who are attracted to diversity initiatives differ from other students. Thus what may appear to be effects of diversity programs may only reflect the predispositions of students who enter them.

Establishing impact and effect. Research on group consciousness, solidarity, and intergroup dialogues has been carried out primarily in natural settings, sometimes using field experiments but often depending on cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. Although this research is helpful in understanding the potential impact of programs, it does not provide definitive evidence of effect as a function of the particular program.

Generalization. Most of the research testing the traditional models (decategorization, recategorization, and dual identity) has involved carefully controlled laboratory studies that can enable attribution of effect to certain treatments. However, laboratory conditions often do not generalize to real situations; thus we know little about external validity.

Endurance and latency of impact. The question remains whether effects attributed to a program have long-lasting impact. Conversely, qualitative information from students sometimes reflects latency of impact; that is, students do not fully understand the impact of a certain program until much later. When post-test surveys or exit interviews are conducted close to the end of the program, the latent effects may not yet be discernible.

Mixed methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods have unique strengths that can be harnessed in future research. Qualitative methods, in particular, by conveying the complexity of experiences based on social identity and countering any tendency to overgeneralize findings to all racial/ethnic groups, can provide a richer understanding of the diversity of experiences. Carefully conducted qualitative research can be a source for generating theory, while quantitative research can help to test theories through statistical models.

Conclusion

Like *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, in which the U.S. Supreme Court called on scientific evidence supporting desegregation, the *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger* cases (2003) affirmed the importance and relevance of social science research in national policy formulation. It is now time that the best of theorizing, program design, and research methods are brought together to bear on diversity education initiatives. To do so is necessary if we are to achieve the benefits of diversity, as described by the 74 organizations that submitted amici curiae in *Gratz* and *Grutter* supporting the University of Michigan's affirmative action policies: Students can learn from each other, appreciate their different life experiences and perspectives, gain skills to work with and across differences, and actively promote inclusion and social justice.

NOTE

[1]Yeakley (1998) analyzes the processes that distinguish positive from negative outcomes for dialogue participants. She shows that positive effects far outnumber negative ones and that most participants benefited from the dialogues. The few who benefited little had not established emotionally meaningful relationships with members of the other identity group.

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