Original Paper

Effectively Integrating a Diversity Focused Pedagogy into a Social Psychology Course

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Abstract

A number of faculty who teach psychology courses opt out of addressing diversity-centered content out of discomfort or glaze over this material, ultimately creating content which does not relate to increasingly diverse student bodies (Boysen, 2011; Ocampo et al., 2003). The present study examines the effectiveness and impact of utilizing a pedagogy grounded in a theory of diversity/social justice with respect to learning outcomes. The study also explores whether faculty's teaching experience impacts student's understanding and application of diversity focused content. Three raters categorized and coded assignment data from two course sections, containing a total of 786 undergraduate respondents. Students applied more content from diversity-centered chapters to their papers and final project. Additionally, the rate at which students applied diversity-focused concepts to assignments did not differ by instructor's teaching experience. Findings indicate that students overwhelming resonate with diversity centered content and choose to relay constructs which align with a diversity-centered, socially just pedagogy over general social psychology content. Our findings also suggest that a diversity-driven curriculum can be effectively implemented in the classroom and received by students, regardless of prior teaching experience or exposure.

Keywords

diversity, curriculum, critical pedagogy, pedagogy, teaching effectiveness

1. Introduction

1.1 Social Psychology and Diversity

As psychology instructors at a minority-serving institution where over half of the student body are People of Color (POC), we understand the need for courses that enhance multicultural competence and inclusion. Additionally, the perpetuation of insensitive and racialized incidents on our campus, ranging

from the use of racial slurs during presentations by staff and faculty during departmental, and campus-wide seminars and classrooms, to direct micro assaults on student patrons in dining halls, led to demands from students and student organizations for greater diversity training and multicultural competence from faculty members (Highberger, 2018; Reece, 2019). These on-campus events served to further highlight the urgency of using classroom pedagogy that addresses diversity related issues, experiences, and perspectives. Our venue for promoting meaningful and effective understanding of race/ethnicity, sex, gender identity, religion, ability, and other identities is in the social psychology classroom.

Social psychology is the study of how people are both affected by others and affect others (Allport, 1954; Baumeister & Bushman, 2014). The field of social psychology stresses the significance of evaluating the relationship between the individual and environment, and considers how this interaction impacts subsequent affect, thought, behavior, and perspective taking (Baumeister & Bushman, 2014). Typical social psychology textbooks broadly discuss the relationship between the person and the environment in relation to topics such as attitudes and emotion, the self-concept, social influence, antisocial versus prosocial behavior, and include a separate chapter that directly focuses on topics related to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Baumeister & Bushman, 2014; Kassin et al., 2016; Stangor et al., 2014). However, some instructors feel discomfort when discussing issues related to diversity, bias, and race, and might choose to opt out of addressing these sections in their classrooms (Boysen, 2011). When psychology faculty address diversity in the classroom, an average of only 3-5 hours is spent discussing issues related to diversity, which does not allow for the development of multiculturally competent and non-raciststudents or faculty members (Boysen, 2011). Furthermore, even when diverse topics are discussed in the classroom, more than half of faculty members do not formally address diversity in terms of religion, disability, language, intersectionality, or sexual orientation in their syllabi (Gorski & Goodman, 2011).

As a result, the field of social psychology might seem relatively tangential to diversity-centered discourse. However, the field's foundations were influenced by major social movements and historical events that inspired research beyond the individual level to incorporate macro level contexts and social issues (Baumeister & Bushman, 2014; Cherry, 2009). Examples of such influences can be seen through various points of history.These include the Civil Rights movement, which inspired research on prejudicial attitudes and in-group versus outgroup dynamics by seminal psychologists like Gordon Allport (1954), or protests against racial segregation laws which inspired Kenneth and Mamie Clark's seminal doll study on racial perceptions (Cherry, 2009; Hargrove & Williams, 2014). The actions of Nazi Germany during WWII inspired a proliferation of research on obedience, authority, and social influence by scholars like Stanley Milgram in the 1960s (Cherry, 2009; Hammack, 2017). Kurt Lewin, deemed a founder of social psychology, emphasized the significance of action research which served to simultaneously increase knowledge on social psychological phenomenon and address social injustices directly (Hammack, 2017; Lewin, 1951). A mainstream approach that glazes over historical and current

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issues of injustice, diversity, and political action does not provide a robust understanding of the field or adequately address the complexities of an individual-environment relationship (Hammack, 2017).

A diversity centered approach to teaching social psychology is especially important today as the changing demographics of the U.S population are reflected in increasingly racially diverse classrooms across college campuses (Espinosa et al., 2019; National Center for Education, 2019). Diversity-centered pedagogies allow students to confront preconceived notions and broaden understanding of core concepts (Good& Moss-Racusin, 2010). This pedagogical focus also aids in challenging systemic injustice and raising student awareness to encourage lasting change on the student, grass-roots level (Beckett, 2015).

Furthermore, the utilization of diversity-based curriculum does not detract from other, more mainstream knowledge attained. Rather, it has been linked to outcomes associated with less stereotyping by students, greater interest in civic and political activities, and being active in local communities.In addition, this curricular approach leads to reductions in racism and classism, increased ethnocultural empathy, reductions in color-blind attitudes, and interests in promoting racial and ethnic understanding beyond the classroom (Gurin et al., 2004; Hussy et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2018).

Student diversity on campus extends beyond race and ethnic identity. It also reflects variety in religious affiliation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, and ability (Boysen, 2011; Ocampo et al., 2003). Additionally, institutions of higher learning across the country are increasingly promoting diversity and prioritizing the need for inclusion on campus, which further indicates a need for a culturally competent and responsive pedagogy that is considerate and reflective of this shift (Boysen, 2011; Ocampo et al., 2003). As such, instructor's omission of or refusal to meaningfully address diversity issues sends a message to students that implies that their representation does not matter and that these issues are not truly valued at the institutional level (Kluck, 2005).

1.2 Social Justice Approach to Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the framework that informs teaching style, leads to the enhanced learning of others, and fosters a community of learners who are actively engaged in the acquisition for knowledge (Beckett, 2015; Mortimore, 1999). A social justice pedagogy addresses diversity-driven needs by focusing on the voices of marginalized individuals whose experiences are either completely erased or typically not considered in a traditionally Eurocentric, heterosexist, and ableist pedagogical framework (Applebaum, 2008; Gorski, 2008; Kishimoto, 2016). A social justice approach to teaching acknowledges the importance of inclusivity and diversity, while also recognizing that the additive approach of dedicating a mere hour or day to discuss these issues is tokenization at best, and, at worst, gives students a message that experiential differences based on identity are irrelevant (Kishimoto, 2016). Social justice pedagogy entails going further than inclusion alone to inspire students who might otherwise unknowingly reinforce existing stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices (Beckett, 2015). It draws from tenants of critical race theory, critical feminist theory, and intersectionality. Social justice pedagogy integrates critical race theory by addressing racism as a structural and systemic issue that

utilizes the social construct of race to oppress members outside of the dominant group (Ash & Wiggan, 2018; Kishimoto, 2016). Social justice pedagogy integrates critical feminist theory by addressing the pervasiveness of systemic and individual sexism in our patriarchal society (Ash & Wiggan, 2018). Lastly, a socially just pedagogy integrates an intersectional approach to identity, which has typically been ignored within psychology and approached in a flat and unidimensional manner (Bowleg, 2008; Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Niemann, 2020; Nije-Carr et al., 2020). Intersectionality functions by acknowledging that the simultaneous, multiple identities of students lends them to unique experiences of their surrounding world in ways that vary in depth of diversity (Case & Lewis, 2012; Kishimoto, 2016; Niemann et al., 2020).

Socially just pedagogy includes utilizing an integrative, collaborative approach, encouraging the sharing of diverse experiences, addressing the realities of racism, bias, and prejudice, acknowledging that the many "-isms" (e.g., racism, sexism) are not always overt in nature, recognizing that these "-isms" function on both an interpersonal and systemic level and encouraging students to consider their role and potential complicity within the larger system via critical reflection (Applebaum, 2008; Beckett, 2015; Gorski & Goodman, 2011).

1.3 Integrating Social Justice Pedagogy into a Social Psychology Course

Intentional pedagogical strategies are essential to creating a curriculum centered around diversity and social justice. These strategies confront bias in the classroom by addressing issues of prejudice, bias, identity, and oppression, thereby raising awareness of injustice that functions on both systemic and interpersonal levels (Applebaum, 2008; Ash & Wiggan, 2018; Beckett, 2015). The courses analyzed in the present study integrated this strategy during lecture, discussions, presentations, and written assignments by prompting students to consider how their intersecting identities lead to diverse experiences and perceptions that may be prone to bias or the formation of stereotypical schemas. Additionally, one of the textbook chapters specifically covered in both courses specifically focused on the psychology of prejudice and discrimination, which facilitated students' understanding of scholarship in the areas of prejudice and stereotyping, etc.

Within the two selected social psychology courses, students were prompted to engage with course material by participating in daily attendance activities where they related class material to their personal experiences and real-world knowledge via group discussion. Students across both courses were also given a group project where they were assigned to collaborate in creating a "Psych Talk" on a topic of their choosing and incorporate constructs from the text and lecture.

Finally, a social justice approach emphasizes the importance of self-reflection to connect students to the realities of the -isms on a personal level and to aid marginalized group members in developing a critical consciousness to empower themselves and better understand relevant issues (Case & Lewis, 2012; Hackman, 2005; Styslinger et al., 2019). Critical reflection is especially important when working with students from diverse marginalized and privileged backgrounds for two reasons. First, it allows students to relate class materials to relevant sociocultural, political and historical events and secondly, it

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pushes students to engage in perspective taking relevant to others (Applebaum, 2008). This particular technique was a focal point in both social psychology courses, via the implementation of a reflective paper assignment based off of the seminal book *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012), which will be discussed later in further detail.

1.4 The Current Study

The present study examines the effectiveness and impact of pedagogy grounded in a theory of diversity/social justice with respect to learning outcomes. Specifically, the study aims to analyze students' learning in response to the course and better understand what social psychological theories were taken away from actively engaging in a diversity-based curriculum. This approach utilized a reflective, "*Presumed Incompetent*" paper to expose students to diverse narratives that recant the reality of working in the face of various "-isms," and a 'PSYCHTalk' video to assess what constructs students grasped and applied to a topic of their choosing. Lastly, this study aims to assess whether a pedagogical approach centered on social justice can be effectively implemented by instructors with varying teaching experience. Our first hypothesis posits that students will apply more constructs from chapters and lecture materials that were diversity focused and/or addressed socially just-based content and fewer constructs from chapters and materials that relayed general social psychology content and terminology. Secondly, we hypothesize that instructors of varying teaching level will have different levels of success getting students to apply and make use of materials focused on diversity and social justice.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants included 786 students of undergraduate social psychology courses spanning 3.5 academic years and seven semesters -four in Spring, three in Fall—at a large, public, southwestern university. Due to university regulations and student concern for privacy, no demographic information was collected from students as assignments were graded. However, according to data available from the University based on the 2017-2019 school years, approximately 5.7% of psychology department undergraduate students identified as Asian American, 19.5% as Black/African American, 30.7% as Hispanic/Latinx, and 41.3% as White. Additionally, 1.4% of students identified as Native American, and an additional 1.4% as any other racial background. Additionally, using the same data, 73% of psychology undergraduates were identified by the University as female, and 27% as male.

2.2 Materials & Measures

2.2.1 The Presumed Incompetent (PI) Paper

As a part of the foundations of a class anchored in diversity, social justice, and identity, each student was tasked to select and read a chapter on the supplementary text *Presumed Incompetent*, a compilation of personal accounts of women with intersecting identities, detailing their experiences in academia (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012). Students were asked to read one full narrative, then produce a two to

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three-page paper analyzing and applying social psychological constructs learned in class to the narrative. Within the paper, students were asked to summarize the narrative, explicitly apply six constructs to the narrative from the textbook and/or discussed during the semester, and, finally, reflect on what the narrative means to them personally.

To determine what constructs and concepts students successfully applied from the classroom, a team of undergraduate and graduate research assistants compiled digital copies of all student papers and collected every construct identified in each student paper. Over 600 constructs and concepts were eventually identified, with three undergraduates reviewing each paper separately to establish inter-rater agreement, overall agreement of over 90+%, and disagreements resolved on a case-by-case basis by a graduate student. To make these concepts and constructs easier to work with, the research team sought an accessible and intuitive method of categorizing these constructs into more workable form. After round-table discussion, the research team settled on using the assigned textbook for the course (see below, Baumeister, & Bushman, 2014) and the chapters within it to place the constructs within more discrete categories. Over 80% of constructs identified in the papers appeared within the textbook, with the rest appearing in the context of lectures or supplemental material provided by the course instructor throughout the semester. Given that such a high concentration of concepts appeared within a pre-organized and reviewed text, constructs were classified according to the first chapter in which they emerged. This method allowed for foundational social psychology concepts like "perception" to not be categorized under multiple chapters or grouped with conceptually unrelated, more advanced concepts (see below for chapters and example constructs). Seven semesters worth of data from 2016-2019 were analyzed.

2.2.2 The Social Psychology "PSYCHTalk"

As an additional part of the course, students formed five to seven person groups and created an original, five to six minute "TEDTalk" style video (called a "PSYCHTalk") to be presented in class at the end of the semester. The video's topic could be anything the group was interested in collectively. Resulting topics of interest varied, ranging from immigration rights to veganism to procrastination avoidance tips. Like the *PI* papers, students were expected to explicitly identify six constructs from the course and break down how they applied to their topic of interest. Also like the *PI* papers, an undergraduate research team of three members reviewed each video privately and indicated what they believed the constructs and concepts the students were employing in the video were. Again, agreement between the three undergraduate coders was over 90%, with graduate students analyzing the videos to decide on coding for disagreements. Furthermore, the PSYCHTalk constructs were viewed using the same lens as the *PI* papers, with each talk analyzed for what chapter of the book the construct appeared from. Given that the PSYCHTalks were freeform in nature and not necessarily inclusive of social justice and diversity, analysis of the PSYCHTalks was a useful analog for comparison to the *PI* papers in how students applied course concepts based on the nature of the material. A total of three sections worth of PSYCHTalks were collected from the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 semesters. Two sections, one from

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Fall 2018 and one from Spring 2019, were taught by a veteran instructor (full professor), with the remaining section taught by a more novice instructor (a graduate student). The work of 44 student groups was analyzed, encompassing 257 students.

2.2.3 The Social Psychology Textbook

Published in 2016, the 4th edition of *Social Psychology and Human Nature* (Baumeister & Bushman, 2016) was used in every semester as the primary text for the present study. Through the lens of 'the social world' that each person finds themselves in individually and contrasting with the social worlds of everyone around them, the text seeks to break down the theoretical foundations for why people, as social creatures, behave the way they do towards themselves and others. The book contains 14 main chapters (see Table 1). The main chapters are well-focused on an aspect of knowledge of social psychology, e.g., attitudes, persuasion, methods, etc. (see Table 1). The number of times students applied a concept from the textbook to one of their assignments was used as a proxy for how much material from that segment of social psychology students appeared to understand and resonate with successfully. Constructs were assessed to be "from" a primary chapter by which chapter the construct is first referred to and defined. Chapter 13, on Prejudice and Intergroup Relations, was the main chapter of interest for analysis due to its focus on diversity, oppression, and the social psychological foundations of modern "isms" (racism, sexism, etc.).

Table 1. Chapter Topics and Constructs

Chapter # and Title	Example Constructs	Total # of Constructs
1 The Mission & The Method	Correlation, Validity, Social Psychology	18
2 Culture and Nature	Collectivism, Culture, Morality	27
3 The Self	Public Self, Private Self, Self-Concept	65
4 Choice and Actions	Goals, Risk Aversion, Self-Regulation	34
5 Social Cognition	Attribution, Schema, Scripts, Priming	50
6 Emotion and Affect	Shame, Guilt, Disgust, Satisfaction	26
7 Attitudes, Beliefs, & Consistency	Coping, Dual Attitudes, Polarization,	38
8 Social Influence and Persuasion	Yielding, Persuasion, Normative Influence	38
9 Prosocial Behavior	Just World, Forgiveness, Similarity Bias	38
10 Antisocial Behavior	Frustration, Self-Control, Humiliation	21
11 Interpersonal Relationships	Rejection, Ostracism, Need to Belong	26
12 Close Relationships	Gender, Friends, Social Exchange Theory	14
13 Prejudice & Intergroup Relations	Stigma, Us Vs Them, Stereotypes, Sexism	100
14 Groups	Group Roles, Leadership, Role Playing	28

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3. Result

To investigate whether students applied chapters and lecture materials that focused on diverse and socially just-based constructs/materials, a one-way ANOVA was employed using the data from the PI papers. With the chapters used as the grouping variable and the frequency with which terms appeared as the dependent variable, over 700 papers were compared (see Table 2 and Figure 2 for chapter descriptives). There was an overall significant effect for book chapter and how frequently constructs from that chapter appeared ($p <. 001$, $F(13,11003) = 321.293$), suggesting that students did recall and apply constructs from the book differently based on the chapter in which they appeared. Specifically, with regards to Chapter 13: Prejudice and Intergroup Relations, which contained the highest density of content directly related to the study of diversity, students overwhelmingly and successfully integrated concepts from the chapter. Post-hoc tests with Tukey corrections for chapter 13 revealed that, on average, students included more concepts from chapter 13 than from every other chapter present (all at the $p< .001$ level). Within the *PI* papers however, two other chapters emerged as highly salient chapters to undergraduates in their application of social psychology material- those on the self (chapter 3), from which students also included more concepts on average than every other chapter (except 13, $p< .001$), and on attitudes and beliefs (chapter 7).

Table 2. Average Construct Frequency per Paper

| Chapter	M (per paper)	SD
1	.06	.27
2	.19	.48
3	.64	.93
4	.30	.65
5	.34	.67
6	.11	.34
7	.47	.79
8	.20	.47
9	.24	.49
10	.12	.34
11	.15	.46
12	.05	.23
13	1.73	1.60
14	.17	.48

Figure 1. Visual Means Plot for how often Each Chapter Appeared per Paper

However, as the nature of the *PI* papers lent itself well to applying concepts on prejudice and intergroup relations, the same analysis was conducted using the group PSYCHTalks. PSYCHTalks were not bound to being about diversity and social justice, with students allowed to freely choose their topic and apply concepts from the course as they saw fit (see above). As a result, analyses were conducted to see if students continued to retain and apply course concepts relevant to diversity and social justice when not working with material that was by necessity about such topics. A second one-way ANOVA was conducted using the constructs presented in the PSYCHTalks as data, mirroring the analysis used to analyze the *PI* papers. The overall ANOVA was also significant for the PSYCHTalk data ($p = .007$, $F(13,265) = 2.31$), suggesting that there were again systematic differences in how students applied constructs to their PSYCHTalks based on the chapter the constructs were from (see Table 3 and Figure 3 for chapter descriptives). However, when investigating the two standout chapters here (chapters 3 and 13) that the students pulled from most, Tukey post-hoc tests did not suggest as strong a meaningful difference existed between the chapters as with the *PI* papers (likely due to the number of tests performed and the reduced number of PSYCH talks compared to PI papers). However, both chapters 3 and 13 were meaningfully more present that chapter 14 within the PSYCH talks ($p = .045$ for both), and both chapters appeared the most frequently across PSYCH talks as evidenced by chapter descriptives. Synthesizing results for both the PI papers and PSYCH talks, Hypothesis 1 is conditionally supported, with students able to successfully retain and apply identity and diversity salient concepts well, but especially well when they are given a chance to elaborate on real-world experiences with identity and diversity.

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Table 3. Average Construct Frequency per PSYCHTalk

Chapter	M (per Talk)	SD
1	.21	.41
2	.21	.41
3	.84	.95
4	.21	.41
5	.11	.31
6	.42	.77
7	.47	1.02
8	.42	.77
9	.21	.54
10	.37	.68
11	.21	.42
12	.11	.46
13	.84	1.50
14	.05	.34
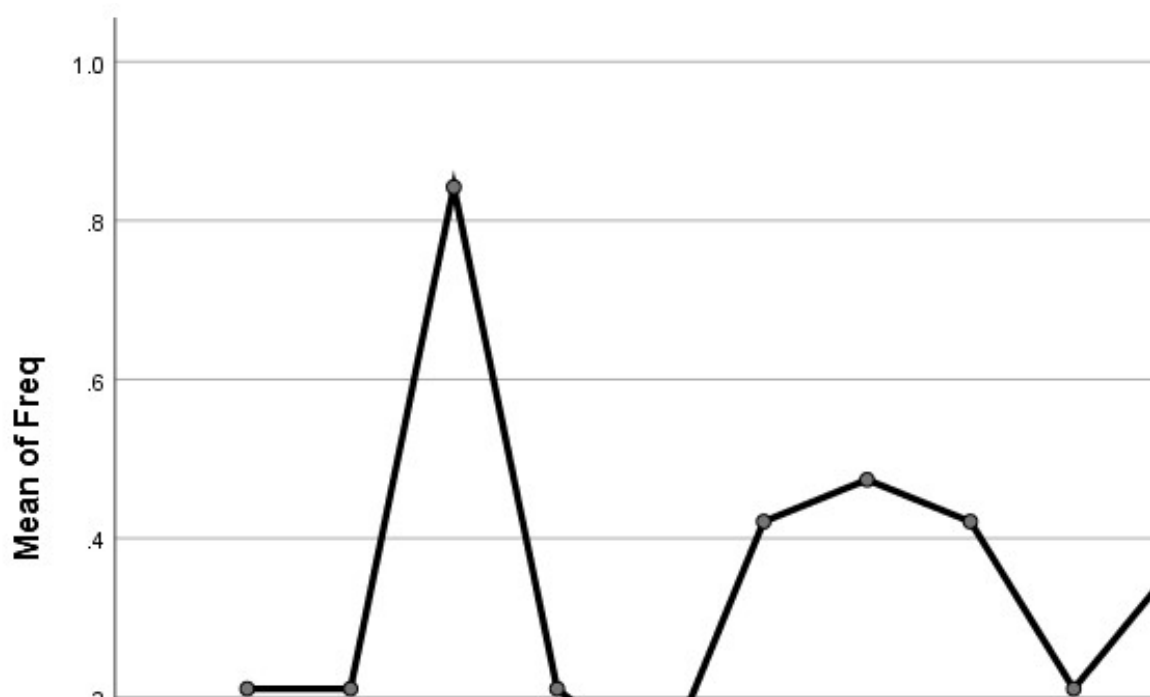
Figure 2. Visual Means Plot for How Often Each Chapter Appeared per TED Talk

For hypothesis 2, we anticipated that more novice instructors will have a greater difficulty imparting these concepts to their students over the course of the semester. Again, analyzing the *PI* Papers from

the 2019 section of social psychology taught concurrently by a veteran (full professor) and more novice instructor (a graduate student), an independent samples T-Test was conducted, with instructor experience as the grouping variable, and how often students applied constructs from chapter 13 (the most relevant to the foundations of diversity the course strove for) as the outcome variable. Results of the independent samples T-test were not significant, ($p = .910$, $t(213)= -.113$) suggesting that the average amount of times the students applied diversity and identity-related concepts in their papers was not meaningfully different between the more veteran ($n = 100$, $M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.8$) and more novice instructor ($n = 115$, $M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.65$). As a result, Hypothesis 2 is unsupported.

4. Discussion

Our findings indicate that overall, students consistently applied social psychological constructs and chapter materials that focused on diverse and socially just-based content emphasized in lecture. Additionally, students overwhelmingly chose to tie in psychological constructs and chapter materials from the chapter on prejudice, which aligned with a diverse and socially justpedagogy over constructs that relayed general social psychology content. This significant trend was found when students were assigned a project that did not directly relate to diversity/social justice and when assigned to relate constructs to a reflection paper based on a book rooted in the diverse, discriminatory experiences of women in higher education. This finding suggests that utilization of a socially just pedagogy allowed students to retain important concepts linking social justice and social psychology while also encouraging students to explore and reflect on how socially just/diversity rooted materials relate to their own interests and lives beyond what the core curriculum mandates. Findings indicate that students applied diverse/ social justice-focused chapter materials to their class assignments at equivalent rates in both social psychology course sections, despite immense differences in instructor experience and expertise. Finally, our hypothesis that more seasoned instructors would have an easier time imparting a diversity-centered pedagogy was not supported. However, this result spells a positive outcome for social psychology pedagogy, suggesting that one does not need years of experience to successfully impart on undergraduate students the foundations of why identity is important to our individual, social experience.

One limitation of this study is the exclusion of any self-report measures that directly asked students about learning outcomes, level of engagement, or interest in applying knowledge rooted in a social justice pedagogical approach to the real world and their local communities. Another limitation is the lack of demographic information collected from each participant to better understand if there are underlying group differences in receptiveness to a socially just pedagogy. In addition, this study lacked a control group to ascertain whether these patterns would have naturally occurred without a focus on diversity within the classroom.

Future research should compare success outcomes between courses that employ social psychology pedagogy with an integrative SJP approach and courses that do not address topics of diversity and

social justice in-depth. Future studies should also evaluate student's willingness to challenge systemic injustice and educate others on subject matter related to race, gender, identity, diversity, and social justice.

Students' application rate of socially just/ diversity-focused content in both course sections suggests that a socially just pedagogical approach to a social psychology course may be effectively implemented by instructors to enhance student's learning and exposure to diverse materials. Secondly, the current results suggest that a diversity-driven, socially just-based curriculum can be successfully implemented in the classroom, regardless of prior teaching experience or exposure. This finding might have major implications for faculty who fear appearing incompetent or uncomfortable, but wish to effectively address issues like diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice in their psychology curriculum.

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