



# Good education for all? Student race and identity development in the multicultural classroom



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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of ethnic identity in students' responses to a multicultural curriculum. Specifically, it tested group differences in the key premise of multicultural education, which is that learning about other groups affects students' identity formation and that this learning translates into skills critical to academic success, intergroup harmony, and promotion of democratic values. The results provided partial support of the hypothesis. Participating in a curriculum focusing on race and ethnicity yielded more benefits to White than non-White students, suggesting that Whites may be uniquely positioned to benefit from multiculturalism. Possible mechanisms underlying the different outcomes of multicultural education for various groups of students are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

In the past decade, the question of educating students from diverse cultural backgrounds has been highlighted in two contexts: the increasing rate at which our society is becoming racially and ethnically diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) and the troubling persistence of the “achievement gap” that separates educational outcomes and career opportunities of White<sup>1</sup> and non-White students (Harris & Herington, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2007; Zirkel, 2008). These developments coincide with 50 years of educational reform following the historical Brown vs. Board of Education decision. During this time, the end of educational segregation was followed by the establishment of diversity as a “compelling interest” in higher education (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003), legitimizing multicultural education as a means of educational and social change. Yet some authors now warn of new forms of discrimination in integrated schools (Feagin & Barnett, 2005) and others document that multiculturalism benefits primarily White students (Bowman, 2009; Denson, 2009; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin 2002; Kuklinski, 2006). These competing interpretations of the legacy of Brown vs. Board of Education suggest the following questions: What does it mean to educate culturally diverse students in integrated classrooms? Do these different students receive the same, and equally valuable, education? And whose “compelling interest” does multicultural education serve?

To meaningfully address students' academic and social-developmental needs, it is important to clarify the connections between intra-personal, interpersonal, and institutional processes that are uniquely implicated in multicultural education (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). Fundamentally, these connections center on the role of student ethnic and racial

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<sup>1</sup> The accepted racial designator typically uses a suffix “American” to describe Whites, for example, as White or European Americans. However, to accurately represent the diversity of the student sample in this study (and in many US institutions of higher learning), comprised in large part of immigrants and foreign nationals, only a racial designator White/non-White was used.

identity in learning. This paper seeks to understand how student identity develops as a function of both curricular changes that incorporate diverse perspectives into a curriculum (“classroom diversity”) and through social interactions among diverse students on campuses (“interactional diversity”) (Gurin et al., 2002). In addition, because identity functions differently for students identified as members of different groups, it explores whether and how these developmental processes differ among White and non-White students.

### 1.1. Conceptualizing race in multicultural education

Research on racial identity shows that Whites and non-Whites experience their group memberships differently: for Whites, their racial (and often, any other cultural identity) is typically much less salient and therefore, less developed as part of one’s self concept, compared to non-Whites (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009). In fact, among the many privileges of being White is having the choice to ignore the important ways in which one’s race structures the life opportunities and success of people (Rankin & Reason, 2005). For example, many White students believe that only minorities “have race” (Banks & Banks, 2010), while non-White students wonder at how little White students know about the effects of race in our culture (Henry, 2005). In addition, White identity development follows different models compared to the development of minority identities (Tatum, 1997; Zirkel, 2010).

Because of their differing points of view and the ways in which schools institutionalize race, White and non-White students may have very different educational experiences (Hurtado et al., 2008). Non-Whites experience their campuses as more racist (Rankin & Reason, 2005), tend to be more in favor of equal opportunity initiatives (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Syed, 2010), and those who perceive the school climate as hostile show poorer social and academic outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2008; Steele, 1997). In view of these differences, multicultural educators have called for the development of educational frameworks that meaningfully incorporate issues of diversity for students who occupy different social positions, identity statuses, and who may seek different goals.

### 1.2. The role of student identity in multicultural schools

The importance of examining schools as spaces in which students develop is underscored by current debates about accountability and reform aimed at reducing disparities in educational outcomes. The focus on identity as a process that shapes student academic achievement and school engagement, together with cognitive development and democratic attitudes, allows us to displace early conceptualizations of multiculturalism as a form of remedial education for minority students. By shifting how we view the process of learning, it establishes multicultural education not as an individual intervention but a social project designed to deliver “good education for all” (Zirkel, 2008).

#### 1.2.1. Identity effects among non-White students

One of the original rationales for teaching multiculturalism is its hypothesized positive effect on academic outcomes of minority students. To help reduce the White–Black achievement gap, schools seek to engage minority students’ ethnic and racial identities and reshape students’ perceptions of school climate. The identity-engagement hypothesis is largely supported by research; when the school environment is viewed as supportive rather than contrary to minority students’ experiences outside of the classroom, academic engagement increases (Tatum, 2004; Zirkel, 2008), as does the students’ academic confidence (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003).

What emerged in the first decade of multicultural research, however, was the finding that White students frequently benefit from multiculturalism in schools *as much or more* than their non-White counterparts (Bowman, 2009; Denson, 2009; Gurin et al., 2002; Kuklinski, 2006). This raises the following question: How does identity development promote educational benefits among White students who already feel connected to their school environments? And, what other mechanisms may be responsible for White students’ gains?

#### 1.2.2. Identity effects among White students

There are three possible mechanisms to explain White students’ learning from multicultural education and why Whites may benefit to a greater degree than their non-White peers. First, multicultural curricula create important opportunities for intergroup education. The extensively tested contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011) specifies the beneficial effects of interacting with persons from different backgrounds as a road to cooperation and social tolerance. Because White students typically have less interethnic contact pre-college, they frequently reap the most benefits from the multicultural “acquaintance potential” made available by diverse schools (Sidanius, Levin, van Laar, & Sears, 2008). Research on asymmetrical contact describing contact between majority and minority groups further supports this notion. High status group members typically improve their intergroup attitudes as a result of contact with minorities, yet the resulting attitudes of the lower status group members may remain unchanged (Bikmen, 2011; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005).

Multicultural curricula may facilitate the development of those aspects of White identity that are aligned with the valuing of diversity and rejection of oppression, conceptualized as a “positive” or “power-cognizant” White identity (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010; Plaut, Buffardi, Garnett, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Without diversity interventions, increased identification results typically in a “negative” or “prideful” White identity leading to hierarchy-enhancing attitudes, a color-blind ideology, individualistic rather than systemic conceptions of racism, and negative intergroup attitudes (Adams,

Edkins, Lacka, Pickett, & Cheryan, 2008; Deaux, Reid, Martin, & Bikman, 2006; Goren & Plaut, 2012; Morrison et al., 2010; Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2006). These specific effects of White identification are explained by social dominance theory and its formulation of an “ideological asymmetry hypothesis” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For groups higher in the power structure, it is advantageous to support hierarchical group relationships while for groups lower in status, group identity, along with the group’s interest, is more typically aligned with the promotion of hierarchy-attenuating ideology (Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, & Federico, 1998). The capacity of multicultural curricula to reverse such tendencies among White students is a yet untested, but potentially important step toward promoting intergroup harmony.

Finally, multicultural education can promote all students’ learning by promoting their capacity to engage in complex thinking that contributes to both academic and interpersonal success (Antonio et al., 2004; Bowman, 2009). Schools hold unique opportunities as sites for development during a period when students are particularly sensitive to issues of group membership (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). It is through their multiple memberships in social groups that young people are able to negotiate their developing sense of the self (Syed, 2010), utilizing both available symbolic representations of group memberships and the peer contexts in which these memberships are embedded and performed (Deaux & Martin, 2004). By virtue of relating student voices to multiple perspectives provided by their diverse peers, new forms of learning emerge. Therefore, the benefits that White students experience in multicultural classrooms may be tied to cognitive gains made possible by the unique format of the diverse classroom and curricula targeting alternate conceptions of the self and other.

This study tested the effects of a multicultural curriculum on college student outcomes, including identity, intergroup, and academic outcomes. Employing a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design (Cook & Campbell, 1979), changes in outcomes of students attending a course with multicultural content were compared to those of students who attended non-multicultural courses in the same discipline, while controlling for prior levels of achievement. In addition, this study examined how multicultural education was received by students from different racial backgrounds and whether student identity served as a mechanism of academic, democratic, and intergroup development.

### 1.3. Study hypotheses

A major assumption of multicultural education is that addressing the cultural histories and conditions of different groups has a beneficial impact on students’ learning, identity, intergroup, and democratic understandings. The first hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) tested in this study examined student changes experienced as a function of attending a course focusing specifically on race, ethnicity, and intergroup issues (Multicultural Curriculum, or MC). The changes were operationalized as *increases* in four areas of student development: Identity development, Intergroup interactions, Democratic understanding, and Learning, when compared to students attending other social science curricula (non-Multicultural Curriculum, or non-MC).

**H1.** Participation in the MC curriculum will increase students’ scores on measures of identity, intergroup interactions, democratic understanding, and learning compared to the scores of students attending non-MC courses. In addition, rates of learning will differ between White and non-White students.

Two additional hypotheses were tested to examine whether identity development had a specific impact on White and non-White students in the MC condition.

**H2a.** Among White students attending the MC course, increases in identity will be linked to increases in democratic and intergroup outcomes.

**H2b.** Among non-White students attending the MC course, increases in identity will be linked to increases in learning outcomes.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Site of the study

The study was conducted at a public university in New York City, recognized as the largest and most diverse educational system in the nation. The college from which study participants were recruited is attended by approximately 20,000 students who come from more than 140 nations and speak more than 100 languages. 72% of the student population are women and 4% are foreign students, although about ½ of the student body is born in countries outside of the U.S. 38.6% are White, non-Hispanic; 17.7% are Black, non-Hispanic; 21.7% are Hispanic; 16%, Asian/Pacific Islander. More than 50% of students are the first in their families to attend college (About “college”, 2010).

#### 2.1.1. Sociology 217: Race and Ethnicity

This elective course has been instituted as part of the undergraduate curriculum in Sociology while also fulfilling the college’s Pluralism and Diversity requirement. The course examines the nature of race and ethnicity and the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities in modern societies. Specifically, it compares the various types of groups usually defined as “minorities” and the positions they hold in various societies. The comparison group attended one of two elective psychology courses at a comparable level of difficulty.

**Table 1**  
Participants' characteristics.

	MC group	Non-MC group
Mean age	24 years	23 years
Range	19–38	18–45
SD	3.9	5.3
Gender	14 (21%) male	7 (14%)
	54 (79%) female	42 (86%)
Immigration status	33 (48%) native-born	16 (39%)
	24 (42%) immigrants	25 (61%)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	16 (23.5%)	7 (14.5%)
Colombian	4 (6%)	0 (0%)
Dominican/Ecuadorian	7 (10%)	0 (0%)
Mexican	1 (1.5%)	1 (2%)
African-American	5 (7%)	7 (14.5%)
West Indian	5 (7%)	4 (8.3%)
White	7 (10%)	7 (14.5%)
East European	5 (7%)	5 (10.4%)
White-other	4 (6%)	7 (14.5%)
Asian	6 (9%)	7 (14.5%)
East Indian	0	1 (2%)
Mixed race	3 (4.5%)	2 (4.1%)

## 2.2. Participants

The participants were 117 students, 68 (58%) of whom attended SOC 217: Race and Ethnicity (Multicultural or MC group) and 49 (42%) attended PSY 170: Psychology of Human Sexuality or PSY 220: Theories of Personality (Comparison group, or non-MC group). In the MC group, the initial response rate was very high,  $N = 76$  out of 77 (98.7%) students. The resulting participant rate of 68 students reflected student attrition over the semester. In the comparison group, the final participation rate was about 50%, due to attrition. The two groups were not significantly different in terms of age, gender, and ethnic/racial background, as assessed by a one-way ANOVA. Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

## 2.3. Procedure

Surveys were administered to students attending two parallel sections of Sociology 217: Race and Ethnicity (MC group) and to students attending two other social science courses: Psychology 170: Psychology of Human Sexuality and Psychology 220: Personality (non-MC group). The surveys were administered in these courses twice, at the beginning and end of the semester.

## 2.4. Measures

### 2.4.1. The survey

The pre- and post-surveys employed an instrument described by Gurin et al. (2002) in their seminal study of the effects of diversity in education and cited in the University of Michigan's defense of its undergraduate and law school admissions policies (Gurin, 1999). The majority of the survey measures were developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). The CIRP is the nation's longest and largest on-going empirical study of American higher education, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, under the auspices of the American Council on Education (Gurin, 1999). The validity and reliability of the measures has been extensively documented (Astin, 1991; Gurin, 2001; Pryor & Hurtado, 2012). Although consisting entirely of self-report measures, ratings on the CIRP Survey demonstrated significant relationships with direct measures examining similar cognitive concepts, and when direct and self-report measures were used interchangeably as outcome variables, the pattern of influence of independent measures was very similar (Anaya, 1999; Pryor & Hurtado, 2012; Rhee & Hurtado, 2009).

The survey assessed four general classes of self-reported outcomes: (a) *learning outcomes*, including perceptions of intellectual engagement and active thinking, (b) *democratic outcomes*, including perceptions of citizenship engagement, racial and cultural understanding, perspective-taking, the compatibility of difference and democracy, and views on conflict, (c) *intergroup outcomes*, including perceptions of the amount and quality of students' contact with diverse peers, and (d) *identity outcomes*, assessing perceptions of the importance of group membership to one's sense of self. The survey consisted of 48 items, all of which used a Likert scale format.

### 2.4.2. Learning outcomes

*Intellectual engagement* was measured by self-assessments of academic ability, drive to achieve, intellectual confidence, and listening ability. This 4-item index, based on Astin (1993) had an alpha of .71 and .80 pre- and post-test. *Active thinking*

was measured by 7 items from Fletcher, Danilovics, Fernandez, Peterson, and Reeder (1986) who defined their scale as a measure of motivation to understand human behavior, the tendency to think about underlying processes, and to prefer complex to simple explanations. An example is “I enjoy analyzing reasons for behavior”. The modified version of the scale, developed by Gurin et al. (2002), had an alpha of .76 and .74, pre- and post-test.

#### 2.4.3. Democratic outcomes

*Citizenship engagement* was measured by 5 items, assessing students' motivation to participate in activities that affect society and the political structure. These activities included “influencing the political structure”, “influencing social values”, “helping others in difficulty”, “being involved in programs to clean up the environment”, and “participating in a community action program”. This index, based on Astin (1993) had an alpha of .71 and .74, pre- and post-test.

*Racial and cultural understanding* was measured by students' self-ratings of how much they changed in “their knowledge of people from different races/cultures” and “ability to get along with people from different races/cultures”. This index, based on Astin (1993) had an alpha of .74 and .77, pre- and post-test.

*Perspective-taking* was measured by 4 items from Davis' (1983) longer scale of empathy, assessing the tendency to consider other people's points of view. An example is “I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other person's point of view” (reversed). The 4-item measure had an alpha of .69 and .73, pre- and post-test.

*Compatibility of difference and democracy* identifies student views about the compatibility of an emphasis on difference and democracy. This construct was measured by 4 items, assessing the belief that diversity is non-divisive (for example: “The University's commitment to diversity fosters more intergroup division than understanding”, reverse-scored), and by asking students how much difference in values they perceived between their own racial/ethnic group and other groups. This index, developed by Gurin et al. (2002) had an alpha of .77 and .72, pre- and post-test.

*Views on conflict* were assessed by 8 items, combining two 4-item scales, developed by Gurin et al. (2002): Positive Beliefs about Conflict and Negative Beliefs about Conflict. These items reflect the views that conflict can have positive consequences, is a normal part of life, is healthy in a democracy, and can enrich the learning process (Positive Beliefs) and that conflict is a win-lose situation, should be avoided, rarely has positive consequences, and hinders discussions of social issues (Negative Beliefs). These scales were combined into a single scale and had alphas of .68 and .72, pre- and post-test.

#### 2.4.4. Intergroup outcomes

*Amount and quality of contact with diverse others* was assessed by 3 items. Two questions probed the positive quality of such interactions, asking students how much these interactions involved “meaningful and honest discussions about race and ethnic relations” and “sharing of personal feelings and problems”. The scale had an alpha of .77 and .73, pre- and post-test. Another question assessed the quantity of interracial contact across different groups other than one's own. These scales were developed by Gurin et al. (2002).

#### 2.4.5. Identity outcomes

First, students completed an open-ended question asking “How would you identify yourself in terms of your race and ethnicity?” The strength of *Ethnic identity* was then measured by 4 items, assessing the importance of one's ethnic group to oneself, how often one thinks about being a member of one's group, the extent to which one's ethnic identity affects one's life, and how proud one feels about one's group. This measure, developed by Gurin et al. (2002) had an alpha of .79 and .72, pre- and post-test. Most students defined themselves using hyphenated terms such as “Greek-American”, or White non-American”, at times referring to their ethnicity in terms of their immigration status as well as cultural membership. Only a small portion of participants (23, 15%) used the term “American” in their self-descriptions.

A revised Ethnic Identity scale (Ethnic Identity-R) was added to the post-survey because the MC group obtained relatively high scores on Ethnic Identity at pre-test, making it difficult to detect differences over time (regression to the mean; Cook & Campbell, 1979). In this revised scale, the four Ethnic Identity items were reworded to reflect perceived changes over the course of the semester. For example, Ethnic Identity item #1 stated: “How often do you think about being a member of your group and what you have in common with others in your group?” In the revised version, this item read: “Over the course of the semester, have you been thinking about being a member of your ethnic group and what you have in common with others in your group?” The possible answers were (1) less than usually; (2) about the same as always; (3) more than usually.

### 2.5. Data analysis

#### 2.5.1. Testing Hypothesis 1

To test the main effects of curricular condition, and whether these effects differed by student race, a series of repeated measures mixed factorial ANOVAs was conducted for all dependent variables, with curricular group and race serving as between-subjects factors, and Time as the within subject factor (Table 3). Table 2 depicts the mean difference scores and standard deviations for all measures used in the study for the two curricular groups by student race. Main effects of curriculum on Ethnic Identity-R, a measure of self-reported changes in identity over the course of the semester, were assessed by an independent samples *t*-test.

**Table 2**  
Means and standard deviations by curricular condition and race.

	Multicultural (N = 64)				Comparison (N = 49)			
	White students (N = 15)		Non-White students (N = 49)		White students (N = 19)		Non-White students (N = 30)	
	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)
Intellectual engagement	3.68 (.42)	3.80 (.57)	3.61 (.57)	3.70 (.68)	3.55 (.43)	3.59 (.52)	3.58 (.59)	3.60 (.60)
Active thinking	4.19 (.74)	3.77 (.77)	3.78 (.68)	3.72 (.70)	3.85 (.54)	3.84 (.55)	3.82 (.78)	3.68 (.81)
Citizenship engagement	2.40 (.48)	2.74 (.63)	2.51 (.63)	2.69 (.64)	2.44 (.45)	2.42 (.47)	2.59 (.42)	2.54 (.58)
Racial/cult. understanding	2.96 (.63)	3.00 (.77)	3.12 (.78)	3.19 (.62)	3.07 (.62)	2.92 (.69)	3.13 (.59)	2.96 (.58)
"Had discussions w/diverse others"	3.80 (1.20)	4.20 (.94)	3.40 (1.39)	3.65 (1.21)	4.31 (.67)	4.22 (.78)	3.73 (1.04)	3.46 (1.13)
"Shared feelings and problems w/diverse others"	3.93 (1.22)	4.00 (1.25)	3.91 (1.26)	3.87 (1.16)	4.38 (.77)	4.10 (.73)	3.93 (1.14)	4.03 (.85)
	Multicultural (N = 68)				Comparison (N = 49)			
	White students (N = 15)		Non-White students (N = 49)		White students		Non-White students	
	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)	Time 1 score M (SD)	Time 2 score M (SD)
Interaction frequency w/diverse others	2.92 (.46)	3.05 (.52)	2.88 (.65)	3.06 (.53)	3.05 (.48)	3.03 (.48)	3.15 (.56)	3.00 (.67)
Views on conflict	3.88 (.48)	3.75 (.61)	3.72 (.63)	3.78 (.64)	3.71 (.64)	3.90 (.56)	3.59 (.64)	3.71 (.57)
Perspective-taking	3.73 (1.25)	4.05 (.99)	4.15 (.76)	4.03 (.81)	4.19 (.56)	4.17 (.83)	3.92 (.82)	4.03 (.77)
Compatibility of democracy and difference	2.75 (1.05)	3.03 (1.03)	3.44 (.87)	3.22 (.90)	3.38 (.85)	3.02 (.74)	3.41 (.92)	3.35 (.67)
Identity scale	2.53 (.97)	2.53 (.93)	3.05 (.60)	3.04 (.61)	2.63 (.76)	2.89 (.65)	3.01 (.58)	3.02 (.58)
Identity scale revised		2.00 (.46)		2.27 (.38)		2.02 (.40)		2.05 (.37)

**Table 3**  
Summaries of repeated measures ANOVA effects.

Dependent variable: intellectual engagement						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.617	1	.617	1.02	.31	.009
Race	.054	1	.054	.09	.76	.001
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.133	1	.133	.22	.64	.002
Between groups error	65.122	108	.603			
Within subjects						
Time	.167	1	.167	2.12	.14	.019
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.047	1	.047	.60	.44	.006
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.002	1	.002	.02	.87	.001
Within groups error	8.48	108	.079			
Dependent variable: active thinking						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.111	1	.111	.13	.71	.001
Race	1.383	1	1.383	1.66	.20	.015
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.116	1	.116	.14	.70	.001
Between groups error	89.700	108	.831			
Within subjects						
Time*	.448	1	.948	5.18	.02	.046
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.426	1	.426	2.32	.13	.021
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race*	.847	1	.847	4.624	.03	.041
Within groups error	19.790	108	.183			
Dependent variable: citizenship engagement						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.333	1	.33	.59	.44	.005
Race	.308	1	.308	.55	.46	.005
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.85	1	.085	.15	.70	.001
Between groups error	60.339	107	.564			
Within subjects						
Time**	.595	1	.595	6.74	.01	.059
Time $\times$ Curriculum***	.863	1	.863	9.77	.00	.840
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.057	1	.057	.64	.42	.006
Within groups error	9.44	107	.088			
Dependent variable: race and cultural understanding						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.084	1	.084	.12	.72	.001
Race	.566	1	.566	.83	.36	.008
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.162	1	.162	.239	.62	.002
Between groups error	72.100	106	.680			
Within subjects						
Time	.170	1	.170	.742	.39	.007
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.496	1	.496	2.17	.14	.001
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.003	1	.003	.015	.90	.001
Within groups error	24.257	106	.229			
Dependent variable: perspective-taking						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.324	1	.324	.28	.59	.003
Race	.003	1	.003	.00	.96	.000
Curriculum $\times$ Race	1.756	1	1.756	1.55	.22	.014
Between groups error						
Within subjects						
Time	.251	1	.251	.97	.32	.009
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.051	1	.051	.19	.65	.002
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race*	1.000	1	1.000	3.86	.05	.035
Within groups error	27.957	108	.259			

**Table 3** (Continued)

Dependent variable: compatibility of difference and democracy						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	1.502	1	1.502	1.30	.25	.012
Race*	4.604	1	4.604	4.00	.05	.035
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.806	1	.806	.702	.40	.006
Between group error	125.214	109	1.149			
Within subjects						
Time	.353	1	.353	.91	.34	.008
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.659	1	.659	1.69	.19	.015
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race*	1.848	1	1.848	4.76	.03	.042
Within groups error	42.281	109	.388			
Dependent variable: views on conflict						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.136	1	.136	.22	.63	.002
Race	.553	1	.553	.91	.34	.008
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.077	1	.077	.12	.72	.001
Between groups error	65.955	109	.605			
Within subjects						
Time	.165	1	.165	1.07	.30	.010
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.407	1	.407	2.648	.10	.024
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.182	109	.182	1.183	.27	.011
Dependent variable: "had discussions with diverse others"						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	1.278	1	1.278	.64	.42	.006
Race**	14.825	1	14.825	7.41	.00	.064
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.434	1	.434	.22	.64	.002
Between groups error	218	109	2.002			
Within subjects						
Time	.215	1	.215	.34	.56	.003
Time $\times$ Curriculum*	2.988	1	2.988	4.77	.03	.042
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.000	1	.000	.00	.99	.000
Dependent variable: "shared feelings and problems with diverse others"						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	2.182	1	2.182	1.30	.26	.012
Race	1.863	1	1.863	1.114	.29	.010
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.644	1	.644	.385	.53	.004
Between groups error	177.302	106	1.673			
Within subjects						
Time	.001	1	.001	.002	.97	.000
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.036	1	.036	.049	.83	.000
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.356	1	.356	.48	.48	.005
Within groups error	77.556	106	.732			
Dependent variable: interaction frequency with diverse others						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.303	1	.303	.52	.47	.005
Race	.000042	1	.000042	.000	.99	.000
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.005	1	.005	.009	.92	.000
Between group error	61.636	106	.581			
Within subjects						
Time	.091	1	.091	1.06	.30	.010
Time $\times$ Curriculum**	.566	1	.566	6.62	.01	.059
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.113	1	.113	1.32	.25	.012
Within groups error	9.062	106	.085			



Table 3 (Continued)

Dependent variable: ethnic identity						
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	$\eta^2$
Between subjects						
Curriculum	.525	1	.525	.69	.40	.006
Race <sup>***</sup>	7.020	1	7.020	9.23	.00	.079
Curriculum $\times$ Race	.848	1	.848	1.11	.29	.010
Between groups error	82.142	108	.761			
Within subjects						
Time	.133	1	.133	.90	.34	.008
Time $\times$ Curriculum	.299	1	.299	2.04	.15	.019
Time $\times$ Curriculum $\times$ Race	.208	1	.208	1.42	.23	.013
Within groups error	15.754	108	.146			

\*  $p < .05$ .\*\*  $p < .01$ .\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### 2.5.2. Testing Hypothesis 2

It was hypothesized that for White students, the relationship between identity and intergroup and democratic attitudes was going to be less positive than for students of minority backgrounds, unless moderated by participation in the multicultural course (Hypothesis 2a). In turn, among non-White students, increases in identity were hypothesized to promote intellectual engagement and academic growth (Hypothesis 2b). A series of three-way mixed factorial ANCOVA's were conducted to evaluate this hypothesis, with curricular group and race serving as between-group factors, and identity change as a within-group factor, regressed on repeated terms for all intergroup, democratic and learning changes. Both identity scales were used in these analyses, employing either a difference score on Ethnic identity, or a score on Ethnic Identity-R.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Effects of a multicultural curriculum

#### 3.1.1. Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes were assessed by an Intellectual Engagement scale and Active Thinking scale. There were no significant differences in the changes experienced over the semester in the MC and control groups.

When analyzed by race, a significant interaction effect of MC condition  $\times$  Race emerged on the Active Thinking scale:  $F(1, 108) = 4.62, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ . Contrary to hypothesis, White students attending the multicultural course decreased their active thinking scores, whereas in the comparison group, the White students' scores stayed the same. The scores of non-White students showed no changes in either of the groups.

#### 3.1.2. Democratic outcomes

Democratic outcomes were measured by five scales, assessing citizenship engagement, racial and cultural understanding, perspective-taking, compatibility of difference and democracy beliefs, and views on conflict. There was a significant main effect of MC condition on changes in citizenship engagement:  $F(1, 109) = 9.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .84$ . At the beginning of the semester, the MC group scored slightly lower on citizenship engagement than the non-MC group; however, the MC group's scores increased and surpassed the comparison group's scores by the end of the semester. There were no effects of MC condition on race and cultural understanding, perspective-taking, compatibility of democracy and difference, and views on conflict.

When analyzed by race, two significant MC Condition  $\times$  Race interactions emerged, for changes in Perspective-Taking and The Compatibility of Difference and Democracy. In the MC group, White students manifested an increase in perspective taking at the end of the semester whereas the non-MC group showed a slight decrease; the pattern was reversed for minority students although the changes were very small in that group:  $F(1, 108) = 3.86, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$ . Similarly, White students in the MC group increased their scores on the belief in the compatibility of democracy and difference, while Whites in the non-MC group experienced decreases. For minority students, small decreases were experienced in both conditions;  $F(1, 109) = 4.76, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ .

#### 3.1.3. Intergroup outcomes

Significant main effects of MC condition were found on two out the three measures of intergroup contact: Discussions with diverse others, and Interaction frequency with diverse others. At the beginning of the semester, the MC group reported having fewer discussions with members of other races/ethnicities than the non-MC group. At the end of the semester, however, the MC group reported having more discussions with other group members than the non-MC group,  $F(1, 111) = 4.77, p < .05; \eta^2 = .04$ . Similarly, rates of cross-group contact significantly increased in the MC group compared to the non-MC group whose interactions had decreased,  $F(1, 106) = 6.62, p < .01; \eta^2 = .05$ . In addition, the changes in interaction frequency were

not specific to any single target group: whereas the control group *decreased* the amount of interactions with members of each group (with an exception of African Americans with whom interactions remained unchanged); the multicultural group *increased* their interactions with each racial/ethnic group. There were no significant differences between the groups in reported amounts of sharing personal feelings and problems with diverse others. There were no interaction effects for MC Condition  $\times$  Race.

### 3.1.4. Identity outcomes

A significant main effect of the MC curriculum emerged on identity outcomes. By comparing scores on *Ethnic Identity-R*, students attending the MC course reported significantly greater gains in ethnic identity compared to the non-MC group:  $F(1, 111) = 5.16, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ . Most students in the MC group indicated awareness and interest in their own identity “more often than usually”, while the comparison group participants’ average answer was “about the same.”

Although the MC Condition  $\times$  Race test did not reach significance ( $F[1, 109] = 2.28, p = .13$ ), pairwise *t*-tests by race showed different rates of identity change within the MC group: at pre-test, non-White students had higher identity scores compared to White students ( $M_{\text{non-White}} = 3.05, M_{\text{White}} = 2.53; t(61) = -2.41, p < .05$ ). In addition, overall, non-White students reported significantly greater increases in identity after attending the MC course,  $M_{\text{non-White}} = 2.27, M_{\text{White}} = 2.00; t(62) = -2.30, p < .05$ , while no identity increases were observed in the comparison group.

In sum, comparing changes in the four areas of outcomes between the MC and non-MC groups yielded a moderate support for Hypothesis 1. As predicted, students who attended the MC curriculum increased their scores on some measures of ethnic identity, intergroup, and democratic outcomes, compared to students attending non-MC curricula. In addition, on two measures of democratic understanding, the gains in the MC condition were unique to the White group, attesting to the notion that White students benefit more from MC curricula than non-Whites. No learning benefits were observed as a function of the MC curriculum. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, White students in the MC course experienced mild decreases in their Active thinking scores during the semester.

## 3.2. The effects of identity in MC classes by student race

The next set of analyses focused on the relationship between identity development and democratic and learning outcomes. For White students, the relationship between identity and intergroup and democratic attitudes was hypothesized to be less positive than for students of minority backgrounds, unless moderated by participation in the multicultural course (Hypothesis 2a). In turn, among non-White students, increases in identity were hypothesized to promote intellectual engagement and academic growth (Hypothesis 2b).

### 3.2.1. The effects of identity gains on democratic and intergroup outcomes

As hypothesized, among White students, participation in the MC curriculum had an effect on the strength of the relationship between identity change and two democratic outcomes. A three-way repeated measures ANCOVA yielded significant effects for Perspective-taking:  $F(3, 105) = 5.16, p = .01; \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .129$ , and Views on conflict:  $F(3, 106) = 3.26, p < .05; \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .085$ . In the MC condition, White students who experienced increases in identity also experienced increases in perspective-taking,  $r(13) = .73, p < .05$ , although no such relationship was detected in the control group ( $r = .29, n.s.$ ). For non-White students, the relationship between identity change and perspective-taking was not significant in either group. Similarly, increased identification among Whites was related to increased scores on Views on conflict, a scale that measured the belief that conflict is a normal part of democracy. This effect occurred for White students attending a multicultural curriculum ( $r = .70, p < .01$ ), but not for Whites in the control condition ( $r = .25, n.s.$ ).

Tests of relationships between identity change and intergroup outcomes by race and curricular group yielded no support of the hypothesis predicting improved intergroup outcomes among increasingly identified Whites in the MC condition. However, within-group correlations showed a pattern of non-significant positive relationships in the hypothesized direction. The correlations in the MC group ranged from .24 to .38; in contrast, there were none or negative relationships between identity change and intergroup outcomes in the comparison group, with correlations ranging from  $-.32$  to .08.

### 3.2.2. The effects of identity gains on learning outcomes

No significant effects emerged when testing the hypothesis using the revised Ethnic Identity Scale. However, employing a Time1-Time2 difference score on Ethnic Identity yielded significant effects in the hypothesized direction. Across groups, there was a marginal relationship between increases in identity and increases in self-perceived intellectual engagement (consisting of academic ability, drive to achieve, intellectual self-confidence, and a listening ability),  $r = .18, p = .06$ , suggesting that identification with one’s ethnic group helps students view themselves as more capable and more successful in academic work. However, this effect was moderated by MC condition and student race,  $F(6, 111) = 3.44, p < .05; \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = .09$ . The relationship between intellectual engagement and identity increase was the strongest for White students in the MC condition:  $r_{\text{Whites-MC}} = .75, p < .01$ . Identity increases also had some effect on academic ability of non-White students in the control condition:  $r_{\text{non-White-nonMC}} = .33, p = .07$ , but not on their counterparts in the MC course. Similarly, White students in the non-MC group experienced no academic ability changes as a function of identity change.

These results suggest that contrary to the hypothesis predicting that identity gains contribute to non-Whites' academic development, attendance of the MC curriculum was coupled with academic gains only among *White students*. In fact, for White students in the MC curriculum, identification increase was correlated with both democratic and learning outcomes. The hypothesized unique benefit of identity increases among non-White students was not observed. Instead, non-Whites' increases in academic ability were related to increases in racial and cultural understanding ( $r = .33, p < .05$ ) and to citizenship engagement ( $r = .33, p < .05$ ). These relationships were similar to those found in the non-MC group and in the overall sample, because curricular condition did not affect minority students' scores on these constructs.

#### 4. Discussion

Multicultural education proposes that cultural identity is an important bridge between learning and student development. The development of ethnic or racial identity, enhanced by participation in multicultural schooling, allows students to internalize multicultural values and to prepare to use them in action (Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004). This study tested whether participation in a single multicultural course yielded benefits to students in four areas of interest previously specified by Gurin et al. (2002), including identity, intergroup understanding and contact, democratic participation, and academic outcomes. In addition, the study examined whether these effects differ by student race, and how they are shaped by students' identity development.

The study results confirm the hypothesis that participation in a multicultural curriculum positively affects students' development of cultural identity, intergroup, and democratic understanding, three of the four outcomes under examination. Specifically, compared to the comparison group, students in the MC group reported more frequent and more positive cross-racial interactions (quantity and quality of cross-cultural contact). Similarly, gains in citizenship engagement show that these understandings are coupled with increased preparedness for democratic action, represented, for example, by the students' desire to "take action to improve the political structure". Expanding on studies that examined the accumulated effects of classroom and structural diversity over the span of an entire undergraduate education (Gottfredson et al., 2008; Gurin et al., 2002), this study showed significant effects gained after attending a *single multicultural course* lasting one semester, pointing to the relative expediency with which developmental changes can be observed (also see Bowman, 2009).

Although the study's sample size was relatively small, the observed effects ranged from small to large (.02–.09) using eta-squared as an index of effect size (Cohen, 1992). The largest effects were observed on gains in cross-racial interactions ( $\eta^2 = .09$ ) and students' frequency of having "meaningful and honest discussions about race and ethnic relations" ( $\eta^2 = .05$ ) suggesting that the most immediate effect of participating in a MC course is the students' willingness to engage in peer contact across racial and ethnic boundaries. This result adds to the growing evidence demonstrating the effects of structural diversity on students' informal diversity experiences, and in particular, on the positive quality of these experiences (Gurin, 1999; Laird, 2005; Porter, 2012).

##### 4.1. Differences in identity effects among White and non-White students

The study provided several important insights into the role of student identity in MC courses while also raising additional questions. First, White students' increased identification with their ethnic group in the MC course yielded increases in two democratic outcomes, perspective-taking and views on conflict. These results support the prediction that multicultural curricula may be uniquely effective in promoting identified White students' democratic attitudes, exemplified by the perceived normalization of conflict in social life and a greater appreciation of diverse viewpoints. The importance of these findings lies in that they suggest a mechanism of reducing some negative reactions to multiculturalism found among highly identified Whites who sometimes view social diversity as a threat to their fundamental values (Morrison et al., 2010). Thus, a multicultural course, by creating a space for dialog, may have the potential of reframing multiculturalism as a project of inclusion rather than of competition (Morrison et al., 2010).

Next, among White students, the results confirmed the developmental impact of diversity education as a way of enhancing students' cognitive complexity, an important correlate of problem-solving ability, critical thought, and creativity (Antonio et al., 2004; Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). White students whose identification increased during the semester in the MC course reported gains in their self-perceived intellectual engagement, measured as increases in academic ability, drive to achieve, intellectual confidence, and listening ability. These findings confirm that developmentally speaking, White students may be uniquely positioned to reap benefits from exposure to multiculturalism. More research is needed to explore the effects of White students' growth through the statuses of White racial identity (Helms, 1985) or changes in identity form, moving from "prideful" to more "power-cognizant" identities (Goren & Plaut, 2012). Such research may suggest crucial steps toward more effective implementations of multiculturalism, with particular attention paid to the role of multicultural pedagogy (e.g., critical multiculturalism vs. colorblindness) in accelerating White students' growth (Bloom & Peters, 2012).

In sum, the pattern of gains observed in this study confirmed the identification-benefit hypothesis among White students attending the MC course. However, although non-White students experienced significant gains in identity scores after attending the MC course, increases in identity in this group did not correlate with any other outcomes under study. Why

did minority students failed to benefit – apart from gains in ethnic identity – from a multicultural curriculum theorized to improve their educational opportunities?

The first explanation focuses on how the multicultural curriculum contributes to students' existing knowledge. It has been suggested that minority students have little to learn from a curriculum focusing on race and ethnicity because they are already well-versed in issues of intergroup life (Bowman, 2012). This "ceiling effect" explanation echoes findings from another study (Bowman, 2009) showing that minority students did not benefit from introductory multicultural courses that target primarily White students' lack of knowledge and possible resistance to the subject. But why do minority students, who may be positioned as experts on the subject and who clearly engage personally as evidenced by the development of their identities in these courses, fail to increase their academic engagement?

To answer this question, we need to examine actual classroom interactions around diversity that shape the meanings the multicultural curriculum acquires for each student. Negative experiences with diversity have been shown to have a detrimental effect on students' learning (e.g., Hurtado, 2005). Therefore, it is critical to recognize the role of the school and the teacher in creating optimal learning environments. In a follow-up to this study, classroom observations were collected in one of the MC courses from which our surveys were collected. The results showed that the teacher tended to silence the sharing of students' personal perspectives during class discussions, in contrast to minority students' preference for class discussions as a way to process the material (Martin & Yannuzzi, 2012). Research suggests that some teaching methods, particularly those related to experiential education and critical pedagogical approaches, may be particularly effective in engaging minority students in MC courses (Banks & Banks, 2010; Nagda, Kim, & Truelove, 2004; Reason, Cox, Lutovsky Quaye, & Terenzini, 2010).

In contrast, White students may be processing their group identities in abstract as opposed to experiential terms and may be more likely to construct their learning as a valid academic project. This explanation has some support in Helms' description of a middle stage of White racial identity development that relies on seeing race in theoretical rather than personal terms (pseudo-independence; Helms, 1985). More research is needed to examine the various forms and interpretations of "academic learning" to clarify how these constructions interact with the perceived and actual outcomes of multicultural instruction.

#### 4.2. *Study limitations and future directions*

One limitation of this study lies in its relatively small sample size, particularly in regard to group analyses contrasting Whites' and non-Whites' experiences in the two curricular conditions. It is possible that other differences may have been detected with more statistical power. For example, the unexpected finding that Whites in the MC course decreased their Active Thinking scores parallels another study's finding showing that an intergroup dialog course decreased students' need for cognition (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996); however, follow-up subgroup analyses revealed that experiences with diversity within the course shaped whether students' need for cognition increased or decreased. Additionally, more insight into the results of this study might have been gained with a follow-up assessment. For example, non-White students' reported gains in identity might have triggered engagement in other courses or areas of academic life, such as minority student clubs, that could have yielded additional benefits in subsequent semesters.

Future studies employing larger samples should address other important forms of student diversity, such as gender and immigration status, which may interact with race in shaping how students perceive or benefit from the multicultural content. Another factor to examine is institutional climate. This study focused on an institution where White students are a numerical minority, providing increased opportunities for interracial contact. Research shows that all students, and Whites in particular, manifest greatest diversity-related gains in institutions where meaningful interactions with minorities take place (interactional diversity) and diversity-related content is incorporated into the curricula (classroom diversity) (Hu & Kuh, 2003).

When measuring student outcomes, objective as well as subjective measures of academic skills and competence should be assessed because their results are often unrelated. Due to a limited ability to assess their own learning, student surveys often lack validity when self-reporting learning gains compared to affective or attitudinal gains (Porter, 2012). Similarly, social desirability effects may threaten the validity of a study in which pre- and post-tests occur close in time and the research purpose is clearly understood by participants (Bowman, 2010). For these reasons, the results of this study may be most reliable in addressing patterns of identity, intergroup, and democratic change, the three areas in which the most consistent evidence of multicultural benefits was demonstrated, and these findings could be further strengthened by objective measurements of outcomes.

Requirements aimed at incorporating diversity across the undergraduate curriculum are now a common staple of university education; yet at the same time, the processes and effects of classroom diversity are not adequately examined. This study's findings contribute to a growing body of literature showing that a multicultural curriculum positively affects not only students' intellectual engagement (factual knowledge), but also their view of themselves vis-à-vis others (relational knowledge or self-identity). More importantly, the results reveal that classroom diversity interacts with student diversity in ways that may sometimes reproduce those gaps it set out to alleviate. Future research needs to clarify the conditions under which multicultural classes provide "good education for all" (Zirkel, 2008), without erasing the differences that shape the fit between the curriculum and each student's unique developmental and academic needs.

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