

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Infusing Diversity into an Entry Level Psychology Course

**Authors**

Carolyn R. Fallahi, Laine C. Blankenburg, Carissa D. Daigle, and Matthew Heinly

**Affiliation**

Central Connecticut State University

**Author Note**

Carolyn R. Fallahi,  
Department of Psychological Science, Central Connecticut State University.

**Correspondence**

Carolyn R. Fallahi, Central Connecticut State University, Department of Psychological Science,  
1615 Stanley Street, New Britain, CT. 06050, E-mail: [fallahic@ccsu.edu](mailto:fallahic@ccsu.edu)

**Abstract**

Lifespan Development is a required course for majors in psychology and a general education elective for students at large at our university. This article follows the journey of a redesign project that focused on infusing diversity into both small and large lecture classes, with emphasis on both course content and pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Infusing diversity; lifespan development

### **Infusing Diversity into an Entry Level Psychology Course**

Many universities now have diversity as part of their mission statement and goals. In fact, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2000) reports that 62% of participating colleges in a national survey require the study of diversity in order to obtain an undergraduate degree. Most colleges and universities explicitly state that they want to “embrace” and/or “promote diversity” in their mission statements (Rozado & Arkins, 2018). “Diverse learning environments help students sharpen their critical thinking and analytical skills; prepare students to succeed in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world; break down stereotypes and reduce bias; and enable schools to fulfill their role in opening doors for students of all backgrounds” (U. S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 5). Creating an environment where students are exposed to a wide range of diversity in different contexts prepares students for future success in their careers, because the American workforce is becoming increasingly diverse (Hyman & Jacobs, 2009). According to Burns et al. (2012), as of June 2012, people of color made up 36% of the workforce in the United States. By 2050, within the United States, there will no longer be any racial or ethnic majority group, which also highlights the importance of understanding diversity as a part of normal interactions in our society. To ensure that businesses and companies are able to find the most talented labor force available, they must recruit potential employees from diverse backgrounds and experiences (Burns et al., 2012; Hyman & Jacobs, 2009).

Given that students will be required to interact with diversity in the form of coworkers, employers, and employees in an effective way, infusing diversity into the curriculum is one way to expose students to the necessary skills needed for success once

they graduate. Diversifying the curriculum becomes even more important when there are not many faculty or students of color (Sciame-Giesecke et al., 2009). Many faculty are committed to providing exposure to diversity within the curriculum but face obstacles with a lack of development and training on just how to accomplish this, especially when many faculty have not been previously exposed to diversity within their chosen field of study (McHatton et al., 2009). In addition, some faculty find dealing with diversity in the classroom difficult, especially when the discussion may highlight student bias and create difficulties for the professor in dealing with those incidents (Boysen et al., 2009; Curtis-Boles et al., 2020). Curtis-Boles et al. (2020) found that often faculty are not prepared to deal with difficult conversations about diversity, e.g., race, power, and intersectionality, often responding poorly or not at all within the classroom with themes of racial tension and resistance to diversity. This failure to handle these kinds of discussions and address racism in the classroom are often seen as microaggressions (Sue, 2015). Further, not all students are open to discussions about diversity and bring their own biases into the classroom (Gordon et al., 2019). Despite these concerns, integrating diversity into course curricula is important. We need to ensure that students not only have an understanding of diversity, but that they are able to demonstrate that understanding in their collegiate work (Gordon et al., 2019). This document highlights one professor’s journey to infuse diversity into an existing course in psychology, Lifespan Development.

College provides many experiences with diversity that influence a student’s openness to diversity during their first year in college, especially for White students (Pascarella et al., 1996). Attending college provides unique opportunities for students to have friendships and interactions with

students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds (Bowman, 2013). Within the field of psychology, the Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles calls for establishing cultural competence and diversity into training, practice, and research (Tracey, 2005). In support of these principles, the content taught in psychology courses lends itself nicely to the discussion of diversity. Similar to a liberal arts curriculum, psychology provides opportunities for students to explore and discuss important societal issues (Waterman et al., 2001). Boysen (2011) found that 87% of the programs in psychology surveyed incorporated diversity in their curriculum. However, this percentage has increased; in contrast, Buskist et al. (2002) (as cited in Boysen, 2011) previously found that 73% of programs in psychology included diversity, showing an increase in the inclusion of diversity within the past decade. Psychology provides an excellent opportunity to weave diverse content, objectives, and pedagogy into the curriculum (Tracey, 2005).

### **Infusing Diversity into a Lifespan Development Course**

Several years ago, a number of professors serving on a faculty diversity committee at a regional, comprehensive liberal arts college collaborated in the attempt to add a diversity designation to the curriculum. A diversity designation, or d-designation, at that university signifies that the professor has infused diversity curriculum into their course that includes content, pedagogy, and issues of diversity and social justice. Workshops were provided to help faculty begin this process.

### **Typical coverage of diversity within a psychology course**

The first step in the d-designation process was to review pertinent literature and learn what topics of diversity are typically

introduced and taught in a psychology course. Boysen (2011) surveyed 325 psychology programs listed in the American Psychological Association's (APA) Graduate Study in Psychology. He found that "87% of the instructors addressed diversity; race was the most common form of diversity covered (92%), followed by disability (83%), gender (80%), sexual orientation (71%), socioeconomic status (59%), age (55%), nationality (50%), religion (49%), and other (2%)" (Boysen, 2011, p. 90). Other topics frequently addressed included racial bias (Denson, 2009; Case, 2007), empathy (Gurin et al., 2004), structural oppression in the United States (Case, 2007), privilege awareness (Case, 2007), fostering comfort in social interactions with members of a different racial/ethnic group (Cole et al., 2011), intergroup anxiety (Cole et al., 2011), and willingness to act against racism (Cole et al., 2011).

### **The Redesign Approach – Content**

The focus of the redesign in lifespan development involved two important areas within the course – content and pedagogy. To adapt the content, the instruction methodologies of each lecture were reviewed and cross-referenced with those methods outlined in the literature with the objective of explicitly including issues of diversity. The following description provides a topical as opposed to a chronological approach to infusing diversity into the content of the Lifespan Development psychology course.

**Introduction Lecture.** In the first lecture, an Introduction to Lifespan Development, we chose to expand on the famous contributors to the field of developmental psychology. Previously, we would only cover the biographies of contributors to the "major" theories in developmental psychology, e.g. Jean Piaget (cognitive development), Sigmund Freud

(personality development), Erik Erikson (psychosocial theory of development), B. F. Skinner (operant conditioning), Ivan Pavlov (classical conditioning), Konrad Lorenz (ethological theory), Uri Bronfenbrenner (ecological theory), and Lawrence Kohlberg (moral development). After the literature review, we decided to include contributors who were not exclusively white or male but rather who were women or contributors of color. We were also sure to emphasize why their stories were not more well known. This allowed for a discussion about race, religion, and privilege. Female contributors included Mary Whiton Calkins, the first woman to earn a Ph.D. at Harvard under the direction of William James but who was refused the degree. She was also the first woman president of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2011). Also included were Karen Horney, founder of feminist psychology; Anna Freud, considered a pioneer in the treatment of children; Melanie Klein, creator of play therapy; Mamie Phipps Clark, research in children's attitudes towards race; Eleanor E. Maccoby, research in the divorcing families; Margaret Floy Washburn, first woman to receive a doctorate in psychology and past president of the American Psychological Association; and Mary D. Ainsworth, renowned for her work on emotional attachment in children. For male minority contributors, we sought to include Francis Sumner, the first African American to receive a doctorate degree at an American university; Kenneth Eliza Clark, an expert witness in *Briggs v. Elliot*, which led to the monumental *Brown v. Board of Education* court ruling that deemed the token phrase "separate but equal" illegal in the education sphere; John Garcia, a Latino psychologist known for research on taste aversion; Carlos Albizu Miranda, a Puerto Rican Psychologist and activist, promoting the need for increased sensitivity in treatment of Hispanic clients; and Thomas A. Parham,

research in the psychology of Black and African American's struggle for identity.

**Nature-Nurture Lecture.** In the nature-nurture lecture, we introduce the diathesis-stress model (Walker & Diforio, 1997), the liability threshold model (Carey, n.d.), and epigenetics (Lester et al., 2014). For all three models, the professor facilitates a discussion on how a person's genetics or biological vulnerabilities – in addition to environment and lifestyle – can potentially lead to the development of an emotional or psychiatric disorder. With the emphasis on diversity, we now include a discussion on those environmental stressors that are more prevalent with racial and ethnic minorities (National Research Council [US] Panel on Race, Ethnicity, and Health in Later Life, 2004). These include the chronic effects of stress on the body and immune system (Garza, 2015), which may be related to economic disadvantages (Jang et al., 2010). Poverty and socioeconomic indicators, including housing, exposure to education, access to excellent and preventative healthcare (Timmermans & Haas, 2008; Reyes et al., 2013; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2012), and a lack of trust towards the medical community (Smedley et al., 2003). Finally, as part of this section, we review teratogens and take the opportunity to highlight the relationship of socioeconomic status (SES) and exposure to teratogens and other potentially hazardous conditions (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). In fact, this additional discussion with respect to diversity also serves to demonstrate that these life experiences – including poverty, lack of access to health care, etc. – not only impacts the individual, but also has the potential to negatively impact developing fetuses as well.

**Aging and Longevity.** As the United States' population is living longer, women continue to outlive men (Austad, 2006), in

large part due to the increased frequency of heart-related issues associated with being male (Beltrán-Sánchez et al., 2015). Beginning in the womb, women seem to have an advantage with respect to health thanks to higher levels of estrogen. Estrogen appears to play a role in a stronger immune system for women (Khan & Ahmed, 2016) and protection from cardiac health problems (Barrett-Connor & Bush, 1991). In fact, women outlive men an average of 5 to 6 years (Kirkwood, 2010). Thus, in service of our focus on diversity, in this lecture, we also included literature on women's longevity throughout the lifespan, beginning in utero when female fetuses are less likely to miscarry as compared to male fetuses (Rojas-Burke, 2010). In general, these gender differences in mortality are more pronounced at certain points in the lifespan (Perls & Fretts, 1998). With the onset of puberty, there is an increase in deaths due to motor vehicle accidents, homicide, cancer, and drowning. Men are much more likely, as compared to women, to die from a car accident or a completed suicide. In addition, men are more likely to suffer from substance use disorders and heart attacks. As a result, in the lecture, we chose to explore the reasons for this difference with a focus on how those rates are impacted by a history of smoking (Beltrán-Sánchez et al., 2015). Women's heart problems do not typically begin until menopause. For men of color, there is an increased likelihood for racial discrimination and oppression, which is occasionally linked to an increase in unhealthy behaviors, e.g. alcohol use (Kwong et al., 2015). By 2030, the rates of cancer will increase significantly, with a 99% increase for minorities as compared to a 31% increase for White older adults (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, women are able to receive social support from friends and colleagues as well as provide support as they are more likely to emphasize nurturance and emotional expressiveness (Barbee et al.,

1993), whereas males emphasize achievement, autonomy, and emotional control, making it more difficult to give and receive social support. Social ties and relationships and the quantity of those relationships are associated with longevity (Blue, 2010). These sex, gender, and racial differences highlight differences in the aging process in diverse populations.

**Cognitive Development and Educational Opportunities.** After the cognitive development lectures on the works of Piaget (Wadsworth, 1996) and Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978), we dedicate time to examine how diversity issues impact the education that children receive in the public American school system. The United States' national and state governments invest millions of dollars to be able to offer public and free education for our nation's students, but this money has not translated into better or equitable educational outcomes across the United States (Cook, 2015). As the number of students of color continues to increase, the United States local governments are unable to keep up with a rapidly changing population or provide an adequate education that serves the majority of its students. Furthermore, due to the fact that public schools are primarily funded by local taxes, the SES and the wealth of the residents of cities and towns largely dictate the resources and facilities afforded to neighborhood public schools (Cook, 2015). Blacks do not have the same educational opportunities that are afforded to whites due to a host of circumstances including income levels, health, education levels of the parents, and more frequent involvement with the justice system. Therefore, SES and local funding play a major factor in the inequitable funding and resulting resources, curricular opportunities, and education for minorities. As a result, if it were not for inequitable educational opportunities, then theoretical factors like gender, racial, social, linguistic,



or cultural differences would not interfere with the education that each and every American child would receive, giving children an equal opportunity to learn (Banks & Banks, 2016).

In addition, research indicates that black parents do not expect their children to attain as much from their education as their white counterparts, possibly leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy and less positive attitudes towards school and education (Cook, 2015). Differences between black and white children can be seen starting at the age of 2 in a number of skills, including “receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, matching, early counting, math, color knowledge, numbers and shapes” (Cook, 2015). Furthermore, white children are read to by family members at a rate of 3 or more times per week, as compared to black children. The author theorizes that black parents may not have access to books with the same frequency, are too busy with their job obligations, are less comfortable reading, or that children’s books may not be as interesting to black children as the children featured are overwhelmingly white. Furthermore, both black and white children are likely to be enrolled in day care, but black children are more likely to be enrolled in poorer quality day care. Nonetheless, what has been demonstrated is that black students show disparities in reading, mathematics, science, cognitive flexibility, and approaches to learning, and do not score as high on the SAT for both math and verbal as compared to white students (Cook, 2015).

Once formal schooling begins, black children are more likely to be held back despite the fact that research has not proven that it is helpful to do so (Cook, 2015). Disparities in discipline were also noted by Cook (2015), showing that black students receive more in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, as compared to their white peers. Further, black students are

three times more likely to drop out of school before attaining their high school diploma as compared to white students. A large percentage of minority students come from low-income households. Black children are less likely, as compared to both Hispanic and White children, to have at least one parent with employment and are more likely to live in unsafe and low income neighborhoods, thereby attending lower income schools. “With a mix of race, poverty and family structures, lower math and reading achievement, behavioral problems, grade retention, obesity, risky sexual behavior, greater risk of illness, greater risk of interpersonal or self-directed violence, creates a difficult cycle to achieve and excel” (Cook, 2015). These trends continue and follow black students showing disparities at every level. Black students are twice as likely to drop out of high school. If attending a 4-year college, 40% of black students graduate within 6 years, as compared to 60% of whites.

Some interesting research on gender is also presented. Historically, studies have shown that males have tended to outperform females in the areas of math (Halpern *et al.*, 2007), but those differences have declined in recent years (You, 2010). Male students report that they are more confident in the areas of math, computers, and sports (Harter, 2006; Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Female students have shown more competence in reading, english, music, art, and social studies. The authors conclude that the differences reported are more than “real differences” in abilities, suggesting that other factors, like gender stereotyping, might help explain them. In a meta-analysis examining differences between males and females on a variety of variables, Hyde (2005) concludes that men and women are similar on most variables, with the exception of skills like motor behaviors. Male students are better at spatial tasks and math word problems (Perry & Pauletti, 2011), but there is a trend where

female students receive higher marks in school in every subject, including science and math (Dwyer & Johnson, 1997). Female students outperform male students in verbal skills, reading, and especially in writing (Bae et al., 2000; Mullins et al., 2003; Perry & Pauletti, 2011). At the same time, girls are more likely to avoid competition, choose problems that are easier, have lower expectations as compared to boys, and experience more anxiety related to math performance (Division of Science Resources Statistics, 2008). More American women receive college degrees as compared to men (Bae et al., 2000), yet do not score as well as men on more “high stakes” achievement tests, such as the SATs and GREs (Willingham & Cole, 1997). It may be partially explained by competitive pressure, which may exaggerate those differences. In other words, there is evidence to suggest that males and females respond to competition differently (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2010) and that test scores that are obtained in situations where females experience a competitive environment with males, their scores may be impacted. In the classroom, girls are outperforming and receiving better grades than boys (Kenney-Benson et al., 2006). Girls tend to approach coursework with more effortful learning strategies, mastery over performance, and are less likely to show disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Similarly, in the area of science, Ginther and Kahn (2006) report gender differences in the sciences; specifically, women are less likely to be hired for tenure-track positions, receive tenure, become a full professor, and earn comparable salaries. Explanations given for this trend include research productivity, a hostile work environment, and problems with work-life balance.

**Intelligence.** When discussing intelligence theory and testing with students,

we would be remiss if we did not discuss IQ disparities between Asians, Whites, and Blacks or Hispanic/Latinos. This discussion is especially important when we examine the history of how intelligence tests have been used in the United States. While intelligence tests are helpful for the placement of students in special education and as a method for providing a summary of their strengths and weaknesses, it has been horribly misused as a justification for the forced and coerced sterilization of people of color, the poor, or those with developmental disabilities (Martschenko, 2017). During this discussion, we emphasize that intelligence tests should not be used as a high stakes test, determining the student’s academic future based on only that one assessment as was the case of Daniel Hoffman versus the Board of Education (Rosenberg, 1981), where an IQ test in kindergarten placed him in special education despite later learning that he really had normal intelligence. After reviewing some of the reasons why people of color might show an IQ disparity, we introduce bandwidth theory. Verschelden (2017) highlighted the negative effects of racism and poverty on academic achievement stating that there is a defined space available for mental processing (Basu et al., 2019). Whether it is stereotype threat that reduces bandwidth and therefore academic achievement (Steele, 1997) or poverty and financial debt (Ong et al., 2019), bandwidth theory helps students conceptualize how racism, microaggressions, and low SES reduce the bandwidth available for academic success and performance on intelligence tests.

**Media Violence.** In a survey done by Time Magazine in 2013, they found that children spend approximately 35 hours per week watching television, and this does not include the time spent on the computer or playing computer games despite the American Academy of Pediatric’s

recommendation that children only view 1-2 hours of television per day (Rothman, 2013). In addition, the type of programming watched is often violent programming, especially between the ages of 7 and 9 years old (Cantor & Nathanson, 1997). Huesmann et al. (2003) found that media violence contributed to both childhood aggression and adult aggression, with sex differences seen in the expression of that aggression. Specifically, men were more likely to show physical aggression and tendencies towards criminality, where women were more likely to show indirect forms of aggression. Finally, children with diagnosed DSM-5 disorders, especially Disruptive Behavior Disorders, experienced more physiological responses to violent programming, including psychophysiological reactions to media violence.

**Parenting.** One of the topics discussed during the section on parenting involves methods of discipline. Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and other researchers discourage discipline techniques that involve corporal punishment, specifically because of the link between spanking and children's problems with externalizing behaviors (Coley et al., 2014; American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995; Gershoff et al., 2012). Nonetheless, compared with White and Hispanic parents, Black parents are more likely to choose spanking as a method of discipline (Flynn, 1998; Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2007). Gershoff (2002) found that parental corporal punishment was associated with a number of "undesirable" constructs, including physical maltreatment, externalizing behaviors in children, a decrease in the internalization of moral behavior and long-term compliance. Gershoff et al. (2012) found that spanking and children's externalizing behaviors were moderated by race. Early childhood spanking was related to an increase in externalizing

behaviors. Early externalizing behaviors were associated with an increase in spanking across all race and ethnic groups.

A discussion of parenting can also highlight differences based on SES and race. Specifically, differences were found in a study by Lareau (2002), who examined middle class, working class, and poor families based on SES and race. Middle-class parents, both Black and White, emphasized cognitive and social skills in their children. They made a concerted effort to expose their children to a stimulating environment, an effort that the author referred to as "concerted cultivation". Working class and poor parents were more likely to view their child's development as something that is more spontaneous – as long as the children were properly cared for in the areas of shelter, food, and comfort, what they chose to do in their leisure time was up to them. Middle-class children dedicated more time to carefully chosen leisure activities to boost their skills. By the age of 9, middle class children had a clear sense of themselves as learners, maintained stronger metacognitive skills, and could describe their attributes and skills as being different from their siblings and peers. The author concluded that race had less of an impact than did SES.

The parenting section within Lifespan Development also affords the opportunity to discuss gay and lesbian parenting. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2005) in cooperation with the Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns, the Committee on the Women in Psychology, and the Committee on Children, Youth, and Families provided a research-based document on *Lesbian and Gay Parenting*. In this document, they review the research on Lesbian and Gay parenting, offering the conclusion that there is no evidence that gay and lesbian parenting negatively affects the psychosocial development of children, addressing numerous concerns from



bullying, competent parenting, and gender identity issues in children. In addition, children showed secure attachments and the vast majority grew up heterosexual (Tasker & Golombok, 1998; Patterson, 2000).

**Language Development.** Females show superior performance on many measures of language and show linguistic milestones earlier than do males (Ozcaliskan & Goldin-Meadow, 2011). Infant girls use more types of communicative gestures than do males (Eriksson *et al.*, 2012). Toddler girls speak more words and are ahead of boys in the ability to put together their first word combinations. These differences were found not only in U. S. samples, but in samples from other language communities as well.

Recent research confirms differences in the brain between males and females, which may help to explain some of these differences (Burman *et al.*, 2008). In their study, early sex differences were found in children ages 9 to 15 across two linguistic tasks for words presented in two modalities. “Bilateral activation in the inferior frontal and superior temporal gyri and activation in the left fusiform gyrus of girls was greater than in boys. Activation in the left inferior frontal and fusiform regions of girls was also correlated with linguistic accuracy regardless of stimulus modality, whereas correlation with performance accuracy in boys depended on the modality of word presentation (either in visual or auditory association cortex)” (Burman *et al.*, 2008, p. 1349). This pattern suggests that girls rely on a supramodal language network, whereas boys process visual and auditory words differently. Activation in the left fusiform region, often associated with performance on language tests, was seen and interpreted as yet another explanation for females outperforming males in language. Other interesting research has suggested that a higher amount of the gene FOXP2 in females

may help explain why females have the ability to acquire and produce language earlier as compared to males (Balter, 2013).

**Moral Development.** The study of moral development begins with a discussion of Kohlberg’s theory (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977), which developed out of the analysis of the responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas in a longitudinal study of boys. Kohlberg describes his theory as a universal theory within 6 stages, which represents an “organized system of thought” (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 54), and shows a qualitative transformation in thought over time. It also shows that girls have a tendency to score lower than boys in this approach to measuring moral development (Woods, 1996). Gilligan (1986) felt that girls and boys differed in their moral reasoning, emphasizing a sense of self instead of cognitive capacities. Specifically, girls emphasize the justice and care perspective or more traditionally feminine characteristics like empathy in contrast to more masculine tendencies, including assertiveness and independence. When women are judged against male morality, they are going to fall short (Woods, 1996). Further, Gilligan questioned the universality of Kohlberg’s stages and argued that women define themselves by their relationships and their ability to care for others – something that is not often seen in men until middle adulthood.

**Gender.** The child’s understanding of his or her own gender lends itself to socialization differences. Zosuls *et al.* (2011) note that the research in gender has focused on specifying the trends in research and many have delineated differences seen between males and females. The emergence of gender identity and gender stereotypical behavior are reinforced and modeled by adults, parents, and peers. A child’s concept of gender is reinforced both outwardly and subtly by the

parents (Witt, 1997). Gender identity is reportedly stronger in males than females as they report being more content with their stated gender, and put less pressure on themselves for gender conformity (Egan & Perry, 2001).

A number of sex differences in gender are reported in the literature. These include differences in intimacy and self disclosure, with females showing more concern about relationships in caring behavior, co-rumination or the sharing of complaints, and jealousy (Egan & Perry, 2001). Men are more likely to show an inhibition of intimacy (Benenson & Christakos, 2003). Girls engage in more prosocial interactions, characterized by time spent with same-sex peers, self-disclosure, and supportive behaviors (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Females report more stressors and worry in their friendships, showing a sensitivity to friends that is not seen in male relationships. Males have larger friend groups, that are less intimate, possibly putting them more at risk for externalizing behaviors like aggression and recklessness (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). The opposite typical style for women, a tendency toward intimacy, may make them more at risk for depressive tendencies. In terms of differences in aggression, males show more direct physical and verbal aggression as compared to females (Hyde, 2005), and females show more of a tendency towards indirect aggression (Card et al., 2008).

In Latino/a families, males and females are socialized differently (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Mother's are more likely to socialize daughters, and fathers socialize sons. More limits and restrictions are placed on daughters, as compared to sons.

**Identity.** In a traditional Lifespan Development class, coverage of identity development often involves coverage of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, where

he theorizes that adolescence is a time of occupational commitment, and Marcia's (1966) identity theory (as cited in Kroger et al., 2010), that specifies that there are specific identity statuses, along 4 concentration points that are on a dimensional scale of ego-identity statuses. In addition to these traditional theories, an examination of gender and racial identity is important to understanding oppression. Many woman have examples from their own lives and/or the lives of female family members about oppression because they are a woman, but if White, they may have enjoyed White privilege (Hughes, 2013).

At this point, we introduce Helm's (1990, 2008) stages of racial identity development, including the contact or the colorblindness stage (I am not racist, and I do not see race, but they do not have an understanding of White privilege); disintegration (I am not a racist, and I think that racism is highly over-rated); reintegration (Maybe there is some racism against people of color, but sometimes they are to blame for their lot in life); pseudo-independent stage (I am not superior to others, but I am not responsible for racism); immersion-emersion stage (I am ready to understand what has happened to people of color at the hands of White people); and autonomy (I am ready to work against racism, accept responsibility for past racist acts, and deal with my feelings of oppression). Presenting this racial identity theory allows for a beginning discussion of oppression, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes.

**Personality.** In addition to a historical presentation of Freud's theory of psychosexual development (Kline, 2014), and the trait personality theory, the Five Factor Model (FFM, Digman, 1990), we particularly highlight some of the gender differences seen in the FFM. Costa et al.

(2001) found gender differences on the FFM. Specifically, women score higher than men on agreeableness, warmth, and openness to feelings. Men rate themselves as more assertive and open to ideas. Women report that they are more emotionally expressive but less instrumental as compared to men (Sneed *et al.*, 2006). Women also rated themselves as having poor self-esteem (Cross & Madson, 1997), and a poorer body image (Harter, 2006).

### **Pedagogical Strategies**

As schools in higher education are becoming more diverse in their student population, it is of great interest to have a diverse learning environment that celebrates different perspectives for all students. Methods for infusing diversity into the curriculum have included classroom discussions, allowing students to explore various topics related to diversity, including issues of equity and access (McHatton *et al.*, 2009; Boysen *et al.*, 2009); textbook readings augmented by journal articles, case studies, and video responses (McHatton *et al.*, 2009; Boysen, 2011); experiential activities, such as tutoring at a local community center located in a diverse setting followed by structured reflection and debriefing opportunities (McHatton *et al.*, 2009); multicultural genograms or ethnographic stories that trace an individual's personal roots (McHatton *et al.*, 2009); and guest speakers (Boysen, 2011). Other strategies might include small group assignments, case studies, films, demonstrations, personal stories, field trips to museums, interaction with foreign exchange students, and travel abroad (Sciame-Giesecke *et al.*, 2009). We utilized many of these strategies in our course. More importantly, many of the assignments given had diversity-based themes. Whittlesey (2001) suggested requiring students to go into the research literature to answer questions related to the

curriculum. As such, at the beginning of the semester, students were assigned a research paper on a diversity topic within lifespan development. Examples of the topics included things like: gay and lesbian parenting, the development of gender identity, etc. Students studied peer-reviewed journal articles, authored a research-based literature review, and presented their findings to the class. This learning experience affords students a chance to research and discuss important topics within lifespan development with a “diversity-twist,” but also work on their research and writing skills, important to their success in college and beyond.

It has also been suggested that a way to increase exposure to diverse perspectives is to assign study groups (Haslerig *et al.*, 2013). Strategically assigning the group membership can increase exposure to diversity because students will not have the opportunity to form groups with friends from class. Creating the structure of the group will give students the opportunity to make new friends and be exposed to different backgrounds. In return, each student will bring a different perspective to the study group. Within the class, we assigned study groups for review sessions prior to each examination. Students worked in teams and competed in jeopardy-like review sessions, helping to both master the content for the exam, as well as earn additional points on their exam for good performance.

Lee *et al.* (2012) found that students felt it was beneficial to have class journals as part of a course emphasizing diversity. There were three main themes found in the project that were important in their development of diversity: (1) the classroom climate, (2) reflection, and (3) facilitated and frequent interactions across diversity. Throughout the semester, students reflected in their journals that they were more likely to engage in group activities with students who had different opinions from their own, and gained from the

diverse interactions with peers. Exposure to diversity helps to create positive interactions and real life applications (Bowman, 2013; Lee et al., 2012). We have utilized both journals for reflection, as well as, on-line discussion boards where students can post their opinions and experiences for other students to read and reflect. Previous results showed that the writing assignments and discussion improved exam performance (Drabick et al., 2007).

### **Large Lecture Strategies**

At our university, the Lifespan Development class is offered in either a smaller classroom (n=37) or a larger lecture hall classroom (n=200). Incorporating diversity activities into large lecture halls is not an easy task. It is not always feasible to ask student to get into small groups, as there usually is not enough time nor space. Similarly to Smilowitz and Gabbard-Alley (2002), we specifically examined this dilemma and chose an alternative to work virtually. Online discussion boards were found to be helpful, especially when completed in small groups with about six students in each group. As a part of the small discussion groups, students were assigned to write a reaction paper based on what the group discussed and how it related to their own life, or what emotions it provoked. By including an online option, students reported that they felt more comfortable about sharing personal experiences since there was a form of anonymity behind the screen. The purpose of these assignments was to encourage students to think critically about diverse concepts and how they relate to their own personal experiences. It is also to promote student openness as well as encourage them to be more understanding of other people's situations (Smilowitz & Gabbard-Alley, 2002).

There are other options besides online discussions. For example, we provided

screencasts and videos to their online forum. Snowball (2014) found that 43% of students agreed or strongly agreed that online education technology aided in their understanding of a course. By incorporating diversity into these strategies, we were able to expose students to more diversity examples.

### **Discussion**

Past research has shown that both White students and students of color benefit from interactional diversity experiences (Hu & Kuh, 2003); there is a connection between a diverse student body composition and better scores of student preparedness post-college employment in a diverse workforce. With an emphasis on course content and pedagogy, we redesigned a psychology course in lifespan development. Denson and Chang (2009) examined some of the necessary factors that maximize educational benefits noting that students who have multiple chances to interact with students of a different race or ethnicity are more likely to improve their social and cognitive development. Bowman (2011) found that as students are more exposed to college diversity experiences, increases are also seen in civic engagement. Bowman notes that interactions with racially diverse individuals lead to more civic gains than coursework and intergroup discussions about diversity topics alone. Bowman (2010a) conducted a meta-analysis looking at the relationship between college diversity experiences and cognitive improvements and concluded that the more cross-racial experiences combined with diversity-related experiences led to improvements in critical thinking and problem solving. However, the types of diversity experiences did make a difference. There are other types of diversity experiences that occur in higher education other than structural diversity, or the number of diverse students on campus. Informal interactional

diversity describes more informal interactions with diverse peers, and includes the frequency of those interactions and the quality of those interactions (Bowman, 2010a). Finally, classroom diversity refers to “any programmatic efforts to help students engage in diversity in the form of both ideas and people” (Denson, 2009, p. 806). Classroom diversity addresses both what students learn within the class and about interacting with diverse peers within the classroom (Bowman, 2010a). Classroom diversity can include courses that explore diversity issues or one-time diversity workshops outside of a scheduled college course. Bowman found that studying about diversity in the classroom did lead to significant cognitive growth, including problem solving and critical thinking, but the effect sizes are larger when there is a chance for increased student interactions with racial diversity. The benefits of infusing diversity into the curriculum are many. A pedagogy that engages students and exposes them to diverse perspectives and diverse student backgrounds has been associated with active thinking, intellectual engagement, democratic participation, and leadership (Gurin et al., 2002).

Other universities have shown a commitment to diversity with good results. A plan known as the “Olivet Plan” was developed to incorporate diversity into a Michigan university after there was a racial driven altercation among students in the early 1990s. This university decided to make it mandatory to infuse diversity across the entire curriculum in all four years. Their pedagogical strategies included oral presentations, small-group projects, campus-

wide Service Day projects, a First Year Experience (FYE) course, portfolio assessments, general education, and service learning. These service projects are on and off campus to serve the surrounding community in some way (Walters, 2000).

There is no right or wrong answer to how academia incorporates diversity into the curriculum. Whether it is through textbook assignments, journal articles, study groups, personal journals or guest speakers - what is important is that the conversation is started. One way to put an end to the stigma that is associated with diversity is through education, and that starts in the classroom and is carried out into real world experiences. Bowman (2010b) found that in order to show some of the positive benefits of exposure to diversity within a diversity college course, the student needs to be exposed to 2 or more diversity courses. This results in increased comfort with differences, complex intergroup perceptions, and psychological well-being. Bowman notes that these positive changes are not seen when the student has taken only one course. It is important that this commitment to diversity occurs in multiple courses. Jayakumar (2008) examined the impact of diversity ten years post college and found that ethnic and racial diversity in higher education prepared White student’s cross-cultural workforce competencies, which included pluralistic orientation and leadership skills. Interestingly enough, exposure to and engaging in cross-racial interactions in higher education led to lasting pluralistic orientation, even when the student did not continue to socialize with people of color after the college years.



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