"In All Honesty, You Don't Learn Much": White College Men's Perceptions of Diversity Courses and Instructors

Jörg Vianden
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

The positive effects of diversity coursework on college students are uncontested and the majority of institutions now require some form of diversity content. However, not all students engage in this content in the same way, and heterosexual White male students may show ardent resistance to diversity courses and the faculty teaching them. Faculty of color disproportionately teach diversity courses, and some White faculty may avoid teaching about topics of human difference altogether. This article shares the results of a phenomenological study with 92 undergraduate White heterosexual male participants at 10 institutions throughout the United States. Data analysis reveals participant perceptions of the lack of depth in required diversity courses, of the need to weave diversity throughout the major course of study, and of the skills and behaviors of faculty teaching diversity content. Recommendations to incorporate the teaching of diversity and pedagogical strategies for faculty are offered.

The vast body of research on the effects of college student engagement with diversity makes an unequivocal assertion: diversity courses, programs, and discussions positively influence student outcomes (Chang, 2002; Nelson, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005; Parker, Barnhart, Pascarella, & McCowin, 2016). Faculty are among the main socialization agents of college students, and, generally speaking, college students respect professors and work diligently to meet faculty expectations (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Nelson Laird, & Umbach, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Umbach & Wawrzynksi, 2005). Faculty who teach diversity courses do most important work. They challenge college students with privileged identities to interrogate unearned privileges while providing an environment that validates the experiences of students from traditionally underserved groups (Branche, Mullenix, & Cohn, 2007; Charbeneau, 2015).

A growing subset of research suggests that White and male students also benefit from their engagement in diversity initiatives (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado, 2005; Spanierman, Neville, Liao, Hammer, & Wang, 2008), perhaps often at greater rates than women or students of color (Engberg, 2004; Sax, 2009). However, White students (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014), and especially White college men, are also least engaged in diversity initiatives on campus among any racial, ethnic, or gender group (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). White men also resist diversity education in college classrooms more vehemently than any other student group (Heinze, 2008; Schueths, Gladney, Crawford, Bass, & Moore, 2013; Vaccaro, 2010). White male collegians often feel excluded from, or frustrated by, diversity efforts, indicate diversity is not about them, and perceive they have nothing to contribute to diversity conversations (Banks, 2009; Roper, 2004). Required diversity courses are often the only form of diversity education for heterosexual White men because of their low level of engagement in any other campus diversity initiatives. Yet, little research exists about their perceptions of such coursework and about the faculty teaching such content (Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011).

White men are also the most privileged of any social group in United States society (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003). On college campuses, White men are more often the originators of unacceptable behavior, including social, racial, gender, and sexual discrimination and violence (Harper & Harris, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). This presents a major dilemma: despite substantiated benefits stemming from engaging in diversity initiatives and interacting with faculty in such contexts, heterosexual White college men may not participate in diversity initiatives beyond low-level or general education diversity requirements. If they do not, college educators will continue to struggle to challenge White male students' understanding of privilege and oppression, to activate their responsibility for social change, or to dissuade them from engaging in inappropriate behavior. In higher education today it is plausible that too many heterosexual White men experience 4 to 6 years of college without gaining enough critical knowledge and skills relative to diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice. Should this trend continue, consequences will not only be dire for the campus climate of their institution, but also for society when these men hold or share positions of significant social influence throughout their careers (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003).

The purpose of the present phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 92 heterosexual White college men at 10 U.S. institutions about diversity initiatives, courses and co-curricular programs, and faculty teaching diversity courses on their campus. White college men have the ability to either create positive or negative campus climates for faculty, staff, and peers with marginalized identities. Studying the perceptions of those college students with the most social privileges is

essential in improving campus climates, redesigning academic and out-of-class curricula and programs, and redevising services for oppressed and privileged students.

Literature Review

Effects of Required Diversity Courses

Enrollment or engagement in curricular or co-curricular activities brings about positive change in college students (Chang, 2002; Harper & Yeung, 2013; Hurtado, 2005). Specifically, diversity courses positively affect students' moral development and reasoning (Hurtado, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012; Parker et al., 2016), and they raise student racial awareness (Cole, Case, Rios, & Curtin, 2011; Soble, Spanieman, & Liao, 2011), civic-mindedness (Cole & Zhou, 2014; Denson & Bowman, 2013), engagement in social action (Nelson Laird et al., 2005), and development of White empathy (Spanierman et al., 2008).

Most institutions are now requiring such coursework or programs of their students, at least in general education arenas. A number of studies have examined the effects of required college diversity courses on student outcomes; however, few report the perceptions of, or attitudes of, students about having to take the required course (Littleford, Ong, Tseng, Milliken, & Humy, 2010; Plaut et al., 2011). Generally, students who completed required diversity courses displayed more favorable attitudes toward human difference than those students who had not completed the coursework (Chang, 2002). Of the nearly two-thirds of institutions who have established diversity coursework, nearly 70% require their students to take at least one course in this area (Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). Fuentes and Shannon (2016) studied more than 200 individual psychology courses across the U.S. for diversity content. While most of their research sites required some kind of diversity course in general education, most psychology programs did not require diversity content in the major.

Research focusing on the effects of diversity efforts on White college students also suggests positive outcomes. White students' engagement in diversity initiatives results in more openness and appreciation of human differences, as well as increased awareness of racial privilege (Harper & Yeung, 2013; Hurtado, 2005; Spanierman et al., 2008). White students who engaged in deeper diversity initiatives, such as intergroup dialogue sessions, increased their development as social justice advocates (Alimo, 2012; Reason, Roosa Millar, & Scales, 2005). White students who took more diversity courses or who participated in more diversity activities reported a significant reduction of colorblind ideology over time than their less-engaged counterparts (Neville, Poteat, Lewis, & Spanierman, 2014).

How do diversity initiatives affect men specifically? Sax's (2008) research on the gender gap in college suggests that men, compared with women, display more problematic academic behaviors, such as coming late to class, not completing work, or reporting boredom. However, Sax (2009) also suggested that men reap greater benefits than women from time spent studying, working on assignments, and preparing for class. Men who expended more energy towards their studies became more interested in larger political and cultural contexts, which is not true in the same way for women (Sax, 2009).

Once involved, men perceived engagement with formal and informal diversity experiences more liberalizing, motivating, and awakening than women (Sax, 2009). Diversity workshops and ethnic studies courses contributed more strongly to men's commitment to improving race relations and to adopting more progressive attitudes toward gender roles. Diversity coursework also increased political interest and liberal social and political views among men as compared to women (Sax, 2009). More personal experiences or interactions across difference—such as dating, dining, or studying—with someone from a different racial or ethnic identity furthered men's commitment to social activism and desire to improve race relations.

Despite the positive outcomes men can realize from engaging in diversity courses or programs, scholars have found that White college men often either feel left out of or frustrated by diversity initiatives (Plaut et al., 2011; Roper, 2004). White college men do not regularly engage in diversity initiatives willingly (Vaccaro, 2010), actively resist explorations of diversity and social justice inside or outside of the classroom (Bondi, 2012; Heinze, 2008; Johnson, Rich, & Cargile, 2008), or suggest they do not contribute much to diversity on campus (Banks, 2009). Vaccaro (2010) found an alarming level of White male resistance to diversity efforts in her campus climate study at a large Eastern U.S. university. Respondents refused to have deep dialogue about diversity, found diversity efforts unnecessary or discussed too frequently on campus, or threatened to withdraw financial support as alums if the institution continued to foster diversity (Vaccaro, 2010).

Not in all cases will Whites ardently resist diversity initiatives and education; however, they may purport not to need additional training or development in issues of power, privilege, and oppression because they perceive themselves as progressive and anti-racist. White fragility, or the lack of stamina for racial issues, is an attitude or behavior educators should consider as a form of White resistance to topics of power, privilege, and oppression (DiAngelo, 2011). When engaging in diversity coursework, many Whites may expect the same kind of racial comfort they are afforded in society: comfort that prevents the challenge of engaging in critical content on issues of privilege and oppression.

Table 1
Research Sites

Institution (Pseudonym)	Region	Type	Affiliation	Undergraduate Enrollment	Percent White Undergraduates
Callahan College	Midwest	B	Private	2,000	66%
Lakeside State University	Midwest	M	Public	10,000	85%
Lucas College	Midwest	B	Private	2,500	85%
Mason College	Midwest	B	Private	2,000	66%
Midwest University	Midwest	D	Public	36,000	74%
Mountain State University	West	D	Public	30,000	75%
Riverside State University	Midwest	M	Public	10,000	89%
St. Margaret University	West	D	Private	6,000	49%
University of Danbury	Midwest	B	Private	1,700	67%
University of Southern State	South	D	Public	15,000	70%

Such security should not be a given in courses interrogating centuries of American oppression at the hands of Whites and their cultural ancestors.

Perceptions of Faculty Teaching Diversity Courses

Scholars have posited for decades that faculty are of key importance in the socialization of college students (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Faculty who teach diversity courses are often instrumental in challenging privileged students to consider different perspectives while creating an environment in which students with underserved identities may feel validated (Brayboy, 2003; Charbeneau, 2015; Heinze, 2008; Larke & Larke, 2009). However, compared to White instructors, faculty members of color are also disproportionately assigned to teach required general education multicultural or diversity courses (Schueths et al., 2013). Because of the heightened emotional response diversity content brings about in students and faculty, this growing trend typecasts and burdens faculty members with already marginalized identities and threatens their institutional and career livelihoods.

Moreover, students often evaluate professors who teach diversity courses more harshly than their White or male professors, specifically faculty who identify as women or people of color (Littleford et al., 2010; Schueths et al., 2013). Students with privileged identities have challenged, often vehemently, the authority and competence of faculty who have discussed race, privilege, and oppression in diversity courses (McGee & Kazembe, 2015). White students specifically tend to not value content that interrogates their self-professed nonracist identity or their beliefs in a meritocratic society (Boatright-Howowitz & Soeung, 2009; Littleford et al., 2010; Perry et al., 2009). Students may also perceive that faculty operate with bias or self-interest (Czopp & Monteith, 2003) or that they

have inadequate training or knowledge in diversity content matter (Lim, Johnson, & Eliason, 2015). For instance, students presume African American instructors who discuss racism do so primarily because they are motivated by self-interest (Littleford et al., 2010). In general, male faculty include diversity topics in their courses less frequently than women or faculty of color (Nelson Laird, 2011), and faculty with predominantly privileged identities may actively resist multicultural education altogether (Ukpokodu, 2007). Such instructors may engage in a process Schueths and colleagues (2013) have coined "ducking diversity"; that is, White male and female faculty purposefully avoid diversity discussions in their courses; yet, the majority of their students do not evaluate this conscious exclusion of critical content poorly. That is, White male and female faculty often get away with not engaging topics of diversity in their courses.

Method

A constructivist epistemology grounded the present phenomenological study assuming that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live through subjective and lived experiences. According to Charmaz (2006), qualitative studies explore participants' experiences in their natural settings, in this case college students from a variety of privileged and minoritized identities on their individual campuses where they experienced encounters with the phenomenon of diversity.

Research Sites

Ten four-year institutions of higher education served as the research sites. Table 1 shows their pseudonyms, region, type, affiliation, undergraduate enrollment, and percentage of White and male students. All institutions were predominantly White and mostly female-identified. Most U.S. regions are represented in the study, but because of cost restrictions, the majority of the research

Table 2
Sample Demographic Information

	Heterosexual White Men (n = 92)
Age (Mean)	21.3
Contact (Hours/ Week)	5.52
Intramurals (Percent)	62%
Arts (Percent)	12%
Student Organizations (Mean)	1.2
Campus Job (Hours/ Week)	5.4
Office Hours (Hours/ Year)	7.2
Diversity Programs (Mean of all Participants/Year)	1.7
Diversity Electives (Mean of all Participants/ Career)	0.6

sites were located in the Midwestern U.S. Midwest University (32,000) had the largest undergraduate enrollment and University of Danbury the smallest (1,700).

Sampling and Data Collection

The study used purposeful criterion sampling strategies (Patton, 2002). The author chose all research sites because colleagues worked for the institution and had access to undergraduate students. Participants needed to identify as White, heterosexual, and male students who were full-time undergraduates. By the end of data collection in July 2015, 92 heterosexual White men had participated in the study.

Focus groups were appropriate for the constructivist approach to the study. Due to time and resource constraints, the author did not employ any other forms of data collection. Focus groups are designed as a participatory model, allowing students to be active participants and to co-construct meaning rather than being subjected to a more hierarchical or power relationship with the researchers (Yakaboski, 2010). Incentives for focus group participation included $10 in cash for participants.

A team of four shared focus group moderation duties at the research sites. Each member moderated a focus group alone, which is appropriate for applied research (Fern, 2001). Team members included two heterosexual White male associate professors (Higher Education and Psychology), one biracial female-identified assistant professor (Higher Education), and one male African-American graduate student. All faculty had conducted and two had published qualitative research at the time of data collection, including employing focus group methods. All faculty involved had also taught research design, methods, or assessment courses in which qualitative methods were included. The graduate student had taken a research methods course from one of the faculty and received further training on focus group moderation and qualitative data analysis.

In qualitative research, scholars address, and are transparent with, their potential biases. Removing researcher bias entirely is impossible, but the research team took the following steps to address this bias. First, as Smithson (2000) suggested, the moderator and participants should come from similar identity backgrounds to avoid bias and engender the comfort and disclosure of student participants. The author identifies as a cis-gender, heterosexual, White man and conducted the vast majority of focus groups with heterosexual White male participants.

Second, before the focus groups started, the moderators instructed the participants about the nature and aim of the study, about wanting to hear different viewpoints, and about the participants' freedom to answer any question or to skip questions with which they felt uncomfortable. This likely helped to address potential groupthink or conformity to singular ideas, and the participants confirmed they understood the intentions of the researchers to study participants' lived experiences with the topic (Hollander, 2004).

Third, during the focus groups the moderators did not confront or correct participants' potentially racist, sexist, or homophobic language or behaviors. As Fern (2001) asserted, the moderator of a focus group must accept all responses and comments from all participants during data collection and analysis. Because each group was digitally recorded, the author considered each participant's comment for analysis.

Finally, the moderators did not keep any notes during the focus group interviews to concentrate entirely on the participants and their contributions. Note taking, while suggested as good practice by Krueger and Casey (2000), has the potential to alarm or unnerve participants; if the moderators take notes after a specific statement, participants may perceive the moderator disagreed, causing participants to withdraw from further participation (Yakaboski, 2010). Before each focus group began, participants completed an informed consent form and a brief survey assessing demographic and campus engagement data.

Table 2 displays the aggregated demographic characteristics of the sample. The author collected these

data to assess the diversity among the participants, as well as show their overall type of engagement in campus life. "Contact" describes how many hours per week participants estimated they spent in close personal interaction (longer than 30 minutes) with someone different than them (e.g., race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion). "Intramurals" and "Arts" capture the percentage of participants who engaged in athletic or artistic student activities at the time of data collection. "Student Organization" reports the average amount of registered student organizations in which the participants took part at the time of data collection. "Campus Job" refers to the average hours per week the participants worked on campus. "Office Hours" captures the average number of faculty office hours the students had visited over the past year. "Diversity Programs" reports the average number of diversity-related out-of-class activities the participants visited during the past academic year. "Diversity Electives" captures the average number of elective diversity courses in which the students enrolled beyond required diversity courses over their careers at their respective institution.

Focus groups ranged from 3 to 8 participants each, each group was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, and each lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Responses to the following questions in the focus group protocol provided the data for this article: 1) How specifically does this institution teach you about diversity or social justice? 2) What do you learn from diversity courses, programs, or related experiences?

To ensure trustworthiness, the author performed member checks with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This involved inviting participants to review, authenticate, and critique a one-page document that included initial interpretations of the specific focus group data. All participants were invited to participate in the member checks and either agreed with the researchers' interpretations or did not reply. Additional trustworthiness strategies included maintaining an audit trail of all focus groups transcripts, focus group protocols, field notes, and memos written about interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audit trails "attest to the use of dependable procedures and the generation of confirmable findings" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 9).

Data Analysis and Reporting

Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested that data analysis of focus groups should follow a systematic and sequential process. While optimal focus group analysis develops among a team of moderators and debriefers, data emerging from focus groups analyzed by a single researcher are not inappropriate or invalid (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The graduate student team member and the author conducted the majority of the data analysis.

After each focus group was transcribed open coding commenced (Creswell, 2014) using Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative data analysis software. The round of open coding aimed to discover expected and unexpected participant conceptualizations of diversity courses, requirements, and perceptions of faculty. After the open coding process was complete, axial coding (Creswell, 2014) involved categorizing the data into larger themes. Three distinct themes emerged from the coding process: 1) lack of depth in diversity requirements; 2) weaving diversity into the major curriculum; and 3) perceived White male shaming.

Limitations

Although this study is among a few to advance new knowledge on the perceptions of heterosexual White male college students' perceptions of required diversity courses and the faculty teaching such courses, it has some limitations. First, the perceptions reflected in the results are those of 92 undergraduate heterosexual White male students at 10 specific institutions. Hence, the transferability of results to other institutional or regional contexts should be approached with caution. Second, the participants represented less than 1% of all undergraduates at the 10 institutions. This means other students' conceptualizations of diversity coursework and faculty exist at the research sites, yet their voices do not emerge from this study. Third, focus group data are self-reported by the students who participate. The researchers do not have the ability to check each statement for accuracy, and it is possible the institution would present a different story. However, the stories told here are critical to the student participants and thus vital to be voiced in this paper.

Results

Lack of Depth in Diversity Requirements

The first theme describes participant perceptions of their institution's current diversity course requirements. Recall from Table 2 the demographic data of our participants which suggest that over their entire college career (71% juniors and seniors), on average the men enrolled in less than one diversity elective course beyond what they were required. At least for the participants this means that required courses are the only formal instruction on issues of diversity the students received. Additionally, not all institutions required diversity coursework from their students, and, as we will see from the participant comments, the content that fit under the general definition of diversity course was vague at some institutions.

When a research site instituted a diversity requirement, the offering was usually broad enough that "you could get all of your general education

requirements without having to take something that would deal strictly with social justice and diversity" (Dan, senior, Lucas College). The following conversation between the researcher and White heterosexual male participants at Callahan College, a very selective national liberal arts college, underscores the perceived lack of diversity requirements:

> Researcher: "So you don't actually have a diversity requirement in terms of the curriculum on this campus?"
> Mitch (Sophomore): "Nope."
> Trent (Senior): "Not at all."
> Researcher: "Not in general requirements?"
> Trent: "Nope."
> Abe (Junior): "We have an inter…"
> Mitch: "Well, we have lots of things like interdisciplinary psych, humanistic inquiry, all kinds of little subsets in classes [where] you will address diversity, but no class completely devoted to it. I actually think that's a good thing."
> Trent: "For me, the classes I used to fulfill those requirements, I took a lot of Russian. We don't talk about diversity in those classes, we talk about another culture."

This interaction hints at a problem in the way universities teach "diversity." Foreign language courses should not substitute for diversity or social justice content. A heterosexual White male student who learns how to speak Russian fluently may never learn basic awareness of power, privilege, and oppression in a U.S. context unless he is engaging directly in such content.

Beyond the apparent lack of focus on diversity content in required diversity courses, heterosexual White men shared thoughts about lack of challenge and depth in diversity coursework. Andrew, a junior at Midwest University, stated, "We [have] to take world culture classes…so I guess in that way you are exposed to other ideas. But I also feel like that's pretty minimal, how much you really interact with [diverse] people." Zane, a sophomore at Lakeside State University, indicated that diversity requirements vary in quality and challenge: "In all honesty you don't learn much, it's not really worth your money, you're not really challenged…I know someone who skipped like half the days, and they still passed." Colleges and universities can ill afford treating diversity in a way that signals to students, specifically students with primarily privileged identities, that power, privilege, and oppression are issues that deserve minimal time and effort, minimal course credit, and minimal engagement. In a way, this kind of peripheral treatment of diversity silences the voices of students, staff, and faculty who are historically marginalized on a specific campus and normalizes privileged and hegemonic White culture.

Lack of American diversity content in diversity courses was a topic of conversation during this focus group at Lucas College:

> Brian: "I would say in management, you're not sitting there and discussing like, 'This is how diversity affects your life.' It's more like, 'Here is a cultural norm in the managerial process in China, and here is why the roles of a high person in the corporation is different from a high person of a corporation in the U.S.' So, you get kind of some differences in that way. But it's not like you're sitting there and discussing what diversity means to you."
> Moderator: "But the overall consensus is that they don't do a great job within courses?"
> Dennis: "Yeah, I feel like even with the gen ed requirements there's not. You could get all of your general ed requirements without having to take something that would deal strictly with social justice and diversity."

To go along with the lack of focus on, or depth in, diversity courses at some of the research sites, participants shared their recommendations for anchoring diversity content inside the major program of study rather than in the general education curriculum.

Weaving Diversity into the Major Curriculum

The second theme, in a way, provides a solution to the dilemma unearthed in the first theme. The majority of all participants desired diversity courses as part of the curriculum in each major course of study, the only place on campus that enjoys the most captive audience. Students, once they have declared a major, will likely spend between 10 and 15 courses in that program, frequently interacting with the program faculty and smaller groups of peer students. In this setting, diversity coursework should be incorporated or required, thus supplementing the required courses in the general education arena. However, this in-depth treatment of diversity topics may not be occurring in the major program of study at some of the research sites: "I don't think there's any course I've had where we've talked about why understanding [diversity] is important for your major, or what you're going to get into later in life" (Brad, senior, Lakeside State University).

In a focus group of heterosexual White men at Callahan College, Mitch stated, "I think your challenge as a faculty member is to integrate diversity and not have the special 'Diversity Day.' You have to integrate it into the curriculum." How to incorporate such content in a specific major was a topic of discussion in a focus group at Lucas College:

If you had a class called Diversity or Diversity Awareness, not a lot of people are going to jump at that. But, for instance, if you were a Management major and it was Diversity Management: Working with a Diverse Workforce – tying it to something that's applicable or like [Tony] said, something that you're interested in, then I think a lot more people would be like, 'OK, I see how this relates to me now.' Being a White male, like we said before, we can choose to ignore this but if you frame the issue [as] something that's for me – you know, Managing a Diverse Workforce is something you're going to have to deal with – then I think people would be much more willing, and the key factor, interested [*emphatic*], in learning about that.

Because diversity coursework may, at face value, not appeal to most heterosexual White male college students, incorporating topics of human difference in major programs of study may be the best way to get them to engage in the topic in more depth and throughout their college careers, specifically if the outcome of the course is tied to career-related ends.

In most focus groups with heterosexual White male participants, incorporating courses into the major was a topic of vivid discussion:

> Researcher: "If [your] program said 'each year there is going to be a required diversity component,' you wouldn't worry about it?"
> Bill (senior): "I wouldn't pay for it."
> Researcher: "It's required for your major."
> Bill: "I'm going to a different school if I have to pay for that."
> Ron (senior): [to Bill] "No, it's part of your 120-hour plan basically."
> Researcher: "If it's part of your curriculum just like the courses . . ."
> Ron: "Instead of financial accounting you have to take a diversity class. It wouldn't be a big deal at all."
> Kyle (junior): "Yes, everyone would just take it."
> Researcher: "It's part of your major."
> Ron: "If…it's part of my major, it's a fact of life. [If] it's going to get you a job, you're going to take it

Like Bill, not all heterosexual White men may be excited to take diversity courses in the major, but very few would consider leaving their program of study to avoid or resist engaging in diversity content in the classroom.

This kind of utilitarian approach to diversity education may be a suitable way to engage more heterosexual White men in diversity content than they are used to; however, it also points to a problem. If diversity education in the major continues to be viewed only as a means to an end, college men will not necessarily engage in it more deeply than before the requirement. To realize the altruistic nature of learning about power, privilege, and oppression, college administrators and faculty have to communicate carefully the human and ethical obligations of engaging in diversity in the major and beyond the associated career-related promises.

Perceived Instructor Skills

The third theme describes participants' perceptions of the behaviors and pedagogical skills of faculty members and notes perceptions of apparent White male shaming. Some students perceived faculty of diversity courses as having low skills or not being committed to the course or the topic. Ron, a senior at Southern State University, enrolled in required diversity course focusing on "Native American Indians because I heard the professor was really easy." In a conversation with Jake, a senior at Lakeside State University, the researcher asked whether the perceived quality of the faculty member teaching the required course makes a difference to students. Jake responded, "Exactly, and that's why if we do make that course a 3-credit course you can't have the head football, [or] the head softball coach [teaching it], who are just here to coach those sports."

Several participants took issue with faculty whom they perceived as biased or opinionated. These perceptions likely came easier to men who disagreed with the faculty member or their apparent political or ideological disposition. Derek at St. Margaret was offended by one of his political science professors:

> I think I'm offended. When my Presidency [course] teacher says like, "Bush only won because Bible thumpers showed up and they don't know how to vote or they don't know that voting for the Democrats would actually help them more." I just get turned off. I'm like, "You realize there's bible thumpers in [my home state], we don't all just worship the word of God all day long, we actually have rational thoughts occasionally.

Faculty who didn't seem to be neutral in their approach or their pedagogy, our participants evaluated critically. Mel at St. Margaret University shared a story about a faculty member he perceived to be biased:

> With the classes I've taken so far, I've taken my history, my American Cultures, and theology. My history is just a history class, but my teacher was pretty biased. A White woman who was very adamant about African American rights. And then my American Cultures class, I had an Asian teacher and he was a great teacher, but he couldn't take his biases out of the curriculum.

What the participants considered instructor-generated "White male shaming" in diversity courses was a topic during several focus groups with heterosexual White male participants. Jon, a senior at Lakeside State University, shared such an experience in a required social stratification course: "[On] the first day, she basically just pointed out how if you are White, male, and middle class, you're a horrible person, because of all these different reasons." Jon felt "kneecapped right from the beginning." In the same focus group, Nate, a junior added, "Teachers need to be better, they are not properly trained, they're all opinionated. They're supposed to be teaching us how to be more diverse with our thoughts, with our actions. [But we] have a college professor yelling at [us]." Ben, a senior at Riverside State University, addressed an in-classroom encounter with a women's studies professor: "When you have a teacher who's bashing White people it becomes offensive…[My] teacher legitimately just hated men, or at least that was the impression I got. It made it unpleasant to go to class, and [I] didn't want to learn." In a different group at Riverside State, Max added, "I was leaving that class every day just annoyed, because the teacher basically bashed White males the entire hour. About how we're the cause of everything racist and wrong. She'd completely leave females out of it and just bashed us." A similar discussion on shaming took place at Southern State University when Mark, a junior, added this comment to a conversation with his peers: "[Shaming] doesn't encourage progress because you're always going to feel like you're doing something wrong. Instead of giving constructive criticism on what could be done, to just tell people what we did wrong in the past is counter-productive." The idea that today's heterosexual White male college students do not feel responsible for historic tragedies and a resulting sense of discomfort surfaced in most focus groups.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings from this study point to three conclusions about the participants. First, not all institutions required diversity coursework in their general education courses, confirming extant research (Fuentes & Shannon, 2016; Perry et al., 2009). The majority of participants perceived diversity course requirements in general education courses to be of low quality where little deep learning takes place. If institutions require diversity coursework from students in general education realms, these courses must be challenging. Students who get the sense that the institution or the faculty do not emphasize the importance of diversity courses will likely not engage in-depth in the topic beyond the requirement.

Second, perhaps surprisingly to the reader and a bit paradoxical, the majority of the participants advocated for the inclusion of diversity into major programs of study. This would serve to make diversity initiatives specific to a course of study and a particular world of work and thus perhaps make it more relevant to students from traditionally privileged social groups. Especially heterosexual White men may want college educators to make the decision that diversity is important for them rather than having to choose between a diversity elective or another low-level requirement. They sense diversity is important but have not learned that it is indeed essential. Faculty, chairs, and deans should find ways to infuse diversity content in major-specific curricula, even in disciplines outside of the humanities, social sciences, or the arts. According to the participants, diversity must become part of discussions and experiences designed to benefit all students who graduate with a degree in a particular field.

Incorporating diversity content in all degree programs signals to important stakeholders that diversity is an essential value of the institution and of each discipline. Next, it forces and challenges students with mostly privileged identities to engage in diversity content related to their chosen major program of study. No longer will they be able to opt out of diversity or only complete basic requirements while exhibiting diversity competencies far below optimal levels. As the focus groups showed, some heterosexual White college men may initially balk at new requirements, but then engage in the content their program of study prescribes. Also, that White students typically learn a great deal from such courses is well known (Harper & Yeung, 2013; Hurtado, 2005; Neville et al., 2014; Sax, 2008, 2009; Spanierman et al., 2008). Finally, adding requirements beyond the general education realm normalizes diversity and may alleviate already overtaxed faculty of color who disproportionately teach these courses and whom students evaluate more harshly (Boatright-Horowitz & Soeung, 2009; Littleford et al., 2010; Martin, 2010; McGee & Kazembe, 2015; Schueths et al., 2013). Faculty of color have been the vanguards of dismantling racism and teaching diversity courses at predominantly White institutions, often because White institutional leaders have abdicated their own responsibility in disrupting oppression. It is high time White male faculty and administrators join their colleagues of color in addressing institutional inequities and challenge themselves to incorporate content on power, privilege, and oppression in their own teaching (Schueths et al., 2013).

Third, participants of the present study implicitly resisted learning about topics or power, privilege, and oppression. This was evident in their lamentations about the quality of most of their faculty teaching diversity courses. Specifically, the participants desired faculty who can present information in an unbiased, professional manner without getting the sense the

professor is shaming them for the sins of their cultural ancestors. This confirms research on student resistance in classrooms where privilege and oppression are topics because students do not want their own nonracist identities questioned (Brown, 2004; Ehrke, Berthold, & Steffens, 2014; Martin, 2010; Walters & Sylaska, 2012). It also confirms the exaggerated need for comfort and lack of stamina Whites may exhibit around issues of racial oppression (DiAngelo, 2014). To be certain, professional faculty behavior is necessary in college classrooms, and arbitrary targeting or downgrading White male students must be avoided. However, faculty with traditionally marginalized identities often feel targeted or triggered by White male resistance in classrooms (Boatright-Horowitz & Soeung, 2009; Johnson et al., 2008; McGee & Kazembe, 2015), and no faculty member, regardless of salient identity, should guarantee student comfort in diversity courses. The importance of discomfort, cognitive dissonance, or disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991) in learning new content needs to be clearly stated by faculty at the onset of every course that interrogates power, privilege, and oppression. However, faculty may also need to learn or further develop skills to communicate this necessity clearly. Appropriate faculty development could take place in workshops on pedagogy, didactics, or classroom management; conference attendance; or one-on-one mentoring by faculty or administrator colleagues.

White male resistance to diversity content and fragility were further evident in the complaints by the participants about apparent shaming or bashing of White men by instructors. College educators, especially White male instructors, have to make sure we challenge White college men on issues of privilege and oppression, and we have to do it in a way that does not let them retreat or withdraw from the classroom or the learning. What students described in the data as hiding from faculty who seemed to shame them, I have termed the "hiding in the corner with a blanket over my head" way of White male engagement in diversity courses. Social privileges allow White men not to engage in topics relative to diversity that make us uncomfortable, so we hide or are afraid to engage. In such an environment, no learning occurs. When no learning occurs, White college men exit the classroom without having raised their critical consciousness or activated their responsibility to assist with social change. They leave college with exactly the same low skill set around interactions across difference with which they arrived on their campus.

College educators need to draw White college men out from under the blanket, challenge and support their thinking, and help them engage more critically in all types of diversity discussions and initiatives. We also have to help them grow much thicker skins than what

they are used to. Colleges and universities may have become too careful in educating students about privilege and oppression, diversity and inclusion, and equity and social justice. Discomfort is a necessary factor in learning, and we as educators need to stop avoiding discomfort in students from traditionally privileged identities. That is not to say we should not support them, but guaranteeing comfortable learning environments for heterosexual White men will not generate much learning on their part.

Heinze (2008) identified several techniques specifically White instructors can use to handle White male resistance, including instructor awareness of student discomfort, awareness of potential student conflict with previously held ideas, the turning of student objection into questions for group discussion, and the avoidance of arguing one-on-one with a student. Structurally, though, colleges and universities need to challenge more White and more male faculty to incorporate diversity content in their courses, and to become skilled at teaching this content (Schueths et al., 2013).

Challenging more White faculty to avoid ducking diversity (Schueths et al., 2013) needs critical attention and training. Lim et al. (2015) suggested faculty needed more development programs and training to teach important diversity content with which they are unfamiliar. Departments must begin critical conversations about integrating diversity courses in majors and prepare faculty with privileged identities to incorporate diversity in their research and teaching. Beyond frequent discussions of topics centering on power, privilege, and oppression at the meeting or lunch table, this can be done by providing grant funds for research focusing on such topics, incentivizing attendance at workshops facilitated by local teaching and learning centers, or sending faculty to regional or national conferences.

Conclusion

Participating in diversity initiatives, including coursework, leads to positive student outcomes, specifically in heterosexual White male college students. However, they do not typically engage in diversity initiatives as frequently as their counterparts with traditionally marginalized identities. Most institutions of higher education require diversity courses from their undergraduate students, but not always in major programs of study. In the present study, participants regarded the quality of such required coursework and the instructors teaching it as low. Moving such requirements into major programs of study relieves faculty who are disproportionately burdened with teaching general education courses and who are further marginalized by student evaluations. Requiring diversity in the major is supported by the

vast majority of the participants in the present study and makes content surrounding diversity more relevant for students with privileged identities. Finally, colleges and universities must require more White male faculty to become skilled in teaching diversity content in their courses. Supplementing diversity coursework in general education with additional requirements in major programs of study not only benefits students and faculty, but it also signals the institution knows diversity is not a box to check, but a value to sustain.

References

Alimo, C. J. (2012). From dialogue to action: The impact of cross-race intergroup dialogue on the development of White college students as racial allies. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *45*(1), 36–59.

Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college?: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Banks, K. H. (2009). A qualitative investigation of white students' perceptions of diversity. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *2*(3), 149–155. Doi:10.1037/a0016292

Boatright-Horowitz, S. L., & Soeung, S. (2009). Teaching white privilege to white students can mean saying good-bye to positive student evaluations. *American Psychologist, 64*, 574–575. Retrieved from http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/64/6/574/

Bondi, S. (2012). Students and institutions protecting Whiteness as property: A critical race theory analysis of student affairs preparation. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *49*(4), 397–414. doi:10.1515/jsarp-2012-6381

Branche, J., Mullenix, J., & Cohn, E. R. (2007). (Eds.). *Diversity across the curriculum: A guide for faculty in higher education*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Brayboy, B. M. J. (2003). The implementation of diversity in predominantly white colleges and universities. *Journal of Black Studies*, *34*(1), 72–86.

Brown, E. L. (2004). What precipitates change in cultural diversity awareness during a multicultural course: The message or the method? *Journal of Teacher Education*, *55*(4), 325–340. http://doi.org/10.1177/0022487104266746

Chang, M. J. (2002). The impact of an undergraduate diversity course requirement on students' racial views and attitudes. *The Journal of General Education*, *51*(1), 21–42.

Charbeneau, J. (2015). White faculty transforming whiteness in the classroom through pedagogical practice. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *18*(5), 655–674.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Cole, E. R., Case, K. A., Rios, D., & Curtin, N. (2011). Understanding what students bring to the classroom: Moderators of the effects of diversity courses on student attitudes. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 17*(4), 397–405.

Cole, D., & Zhou, J. (2014). Do diversity experiences help college students become more civically minded? Applying Banks' multicultural education framework. *Innovative Higher Education*, *39*(2), 109–121. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-013-9268-x

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Czopp, A. M., & Monteith, M. J. (2003). Confronting prejudice (literally): Reactions to confrontations of racial and gender bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *29*(4), 532–544.

Denson, N., & Bowman, N. (2013). University diversity and preparation for a global society: The role of diversity in shaping intergroup attitudes and civic outcomes. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(4), 555–570. doi:10.1080/03075079.2011.584971

DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 3*(3), 54–70.

Ehrke, F., Berthold, A., & Steffens, M. C. (2014). How diversity training can change attitudes: Increasing perceived complexity of superordinate groups to improve intergroup relations. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *53*, 193–206. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2014.03.013

Engberg, M. E. (2004). Improving intergroup relations in higher education: A critical examination of the influence of educational interventions on racial bias. *Review of Educational Research*, *74*(4), 473–524.

Feagin, J. R., & O'Brien, E. (2003). White men on race: Power, privilege, and the shaping ofcultural consciousness. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Fern, E. F. (2001). *Advanced focus group research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Fuentes, M. A., & Shannon, C. R. (2016). The state of multiculturalism and diversity in undergraduate psychology training. *Teaching of Psychology*, *43*(3), 197–203. doi:10.1177/0098628316649315

Harper, C. E., & Yeung, F. (2013). Perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity as a predictor of college students' openness to diverse perspectives. *The Review of Higher Education*, *37*(1), 25–44.

Harper, S. R., & Harris, F. (Eds.) (2010). *College men and masculinities: Theory, research, and implications for practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2007*(120), 7–24.

Heinze, P. (2008). Let's talk about race, baby: How a White professor teaches White students about

White privilege & racism. *Multicultural Education*, *16*(1), 2–11.

Hollander, J. A. (2004). The social contexts of focus groups. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *33*(5), 602–637.

Hu, S., & Kuh, G. D. (2003). Diversity experiences and college student learning and personal development. *Journal of College Student Development*, *44*(3), 320-334.

Hurtado, S. (2005). The next generation of diversity and intergroup relations research. *Journal of Social Issues*, *61*(3), 595–610.

Hurtado, S., Mayhew, M. J., & Engberg, M. E. (2012). Diversity courses and students' moral reasoning: A model of predispositions and change. *Journal of Moral Education*, *41*(2), 201–224. doi:10.1080/03057240.2012.670931

Johnson, J. R., Rich, M., & Castelan Cargile, A. (2008). "Why are you shoving this stuff down our throats?": Preparing intercultural educators to challenge performances of White racism. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *1*(2), 113–135. http://doi.org/10.1080/17513050801891952

Kuh, G. D., Nelson Laird, T. F., & Umbach, P. D. (2004). Aligning faculty activities & student behavior: Realizing the promise of greater expectations. *Liberal Education*, *90*(4), 24–31.

Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Larke, P., & Larke, A. (2009). Teaching diversity/multicultural education courses in the academy: Sharing the voices of six professors. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, *3*, 1–8.

Lim, F., Johnson, M., & Eliason, M. (2015). A national survey of faculty knowledge, experience, and readiness for teaching lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health in baccalaureate nursing programs. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, *36*(3), 144–152.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Littleford, L. N., Ong, K. S., Tseng, A., Milliken, J. C., & Humy, S. L. (2010). Perceptions of European American and African American instructors teaching race-focused courses. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *3*(4), 230–244. doi:10.1037/a0020950

Martin, K. J. (2010). Student attitudes and the teaching and learning of race, culture and politics. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(3), 530–539. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.06.018

McGee, E. O., & Kazembe, L. (2015). Entertainers or education researchers? The challenges associated with presenting while black. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *19*(1), 96–120.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

National Survey of Student Engagement. (2014). *Bringing the institution into focus – Annual results 2014*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Nelson Laird, T. (2011). Measuring the diversity inclusivity of college courses. *Research in Higher Education*, *52*(6), 572–588. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9210-3

Nelson Laird, T. F. N., Engberg, M. E., & Hurtado, S. (2005). Modeling accentuation effects: Enrolling in a diversity course and the importance of social action engagement. *Journal of Higher Education*, *76*(4), 448–476.

Neville, H., Poteat, V., Lewis, J., & Spanierman, L. (2014). Changes in White college students' color-blind racial ideology over 4 years: Do diversity experiences make a difference? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *61*(2), 179–190.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students* (Vol. 2). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Parker III, E. T., Barnhardt, C. L., Pascarella, E. T., & McCowin, J. A. (2016). The impact of diversity courses on college students' moral development. *Journal of College Student Development*, *57*(4), 395–410.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, *3*, 344–347.

Perry, G., Moore, H. A., Edwards, C., Acosta, K., & Frey, C. (2009). Maintaining credibility and authority as an instructor of color in diversity-education classrooms: A qualitative inquiry. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *80*(1), 80–105.

Plaut, V. C., Garnett, F. G., Buffardi, L. E., & Sanchez-Burks, J. (2011). "What about me?" Perceptions of exclusion and Whites' reactions to multiculturalism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*(2), 337–353. doi:10.1037/a0022832

Reason, R. D., Roosa Millar, E. A., & Scales, T. C. (2005). Toward a model of racial justice ally development. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(5), 530–546. doi:10.1353/csd.2005.0054

Roper, L. D. (2004). Do students support diversity programs? *Change*, *36*(6), 48–51.

Sax, L. J. (2008). *The gender gap in college: Maximizing the developmental potential of women and men*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sax, L. J. (2009). Gender matters: The variable effect of gender on the student experience. *About Campus, 14*(2), 2–10.

Schueths, A. M., Gladney, T., Crawford, D. M., Bass, K. L., & Moore, H. A. (2013). Passionate pedagogy and emotional labor: Students' responses to learning diversity from diverse instructors.

International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 26(10), 1259–1276.

Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Smithson, J. (2000). Using and analysing focus groups: limitations and possibilities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *3*(2), 103–119.

Soble, J. R., Spanierman, L. B., & Liao, H.-Y. (2011). Effects of a brief video intervention on White university students' racial attitudes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *58*(1), 151–157. doi:10.1037/a0021158

Spanierman, L. B., Neville, H. A., Liao, H.-Y., Hammer, J. H., & Wang, Y.-F. (2008). Participation in formal and informal campus diversity experiences: Effects on students' racial democratic beliefs. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *1*(2), 108–125. doi:10.1037/1938-8926.1.2.108

Strayhorn, T. L, & Johnson, R. M. (2014). Why are all the White students sitting together in college? Impact of Brown v. Board of Education on cross-racial interactions among Blacks and Whites. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *83*(3), 385–399. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.83.3.0385

Ukpokodu, O. N. (2007). Preparing socially conscious teachers: A social justice-oriented teacher education. *Multicultural Education*, *15*(1), 8–15.

Umbach, P. D., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2005). Faculty do matter: The role of college faculty in student learning and engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, *46*(2), 153–184.

Vaccaro, A. (2010). What lies beneath seemingly positive campus climate results: Institutional Sexism, racism, and male hostility toward equity initiatives and liberal bias. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *43*(2), 202–215. doi:10.1080/10665680903520231

Walters, A., & Sylaska, K. (2012). Gender in motion: Developmental changes in students' conceptualizations of gender through participation in a first-year seminar course. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *7*(2), 89–109. doi:10.1080/15546128.2012.680856

Yakaboski, T. (2010). Going at it alone: Single-mother undergraduate's experiences. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *47*(4), 456–474.

_____

JÖRG VIANDEN is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. His scholarship focuses on the intersections of men and masculinities and social justice education in higher education.