A Model and Method of Teaching Racial and Ethnic Prejudice in an Introductory Psychology Course

Vernon E. Smith  
Department of Social Sciences, Human Services, and Criminal Justice  
Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York, USA  
E-mail: vsmith@bmcc.cuny.edu

Abstract  
Research and scholarship on the teaching of racial prejudice and discrimination in undergraduate college psychology courses typically centers on college instructors' efforts to modify negative views presumed to be held by white students against racial and ethnic minorities. While there is some evidence of backlash by white students who deny or resist statements about white racism and white privilege, scholarship on teaching racial and ethnic prejudice also point to other barriers that may negatively affect classroom instruction. The present work describes how college instructors may develop an introductory psychology curriculum informed by a value system encouraging self-reflection and a methodology that integrates issues of racial and ethnic prejudice into pre-existing psychology curricula. Racial and ethnic minority students may also benefit from efforts to integrate themes of racial and ethnic prejudice in psychology curricula. Although these specific pedagogical methods were tailored for a large urban community college composed mainly of African American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students, they may be useful in racially and ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous classrooms. Reflections of the work put into practice, recommendations for future revisions, and limitations and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: college teaching, introductory psychology, racial prejudice, ethnic prejudice, curriculum
Incorporating issues of racial and ethnic prejudice into introductory psychology curricula has the potential to broaden and deepen college students’ understanding of what the study of psychology affords, while helping shape them as more culturally competent global citizens. Formal coursework in psychology is rare in primary and secondary schools. It is a staple, however, in the standard curricula of United States undergraduate colleges and universities. A course in introductory psychology usually is recommended for first year college students and may be the first (and only) time students come into contact with core concepts of scientific psychology. This early opportunity may be used to help students understand psychological principles to enhance both academic and personal development. Adolescent college students, in particular, may benefit from an examination of racial and ethnic prejudice to contextualize psychological principles within a personally relevant and contemporary framework.

In my role as a psychology professor teaching racial and ethnic minorities, and as an African American male Psychologist, I have become increasingly aware of deficiencies in addressing race and racism in standard introductory psychology curricula, especially in its textbooks. A series of campus events concerning race, racism, and global citizenship, as well as increasingly frequent news reports of racially-motivated anti-black bias, led me to question how I might lead my students into a deeper examination of race and ethnicity in the classroom without losing focus on classic and contemporary psychology scholarship and research. A more critical reflection on my course textbooks and my own curriculum confirmed how much opportunity there was in revisiting how I taught introductory psychology. Further reflection and research led me to conclude that my course could be redesigned to highlight how the study of psychology and psychological-mindedness might allow students to better grasp psychological processes involved in racial prejudice that may yield benefits to them as global thinkers and workers. It was not my intention to turn our Introduction to Psychology course into a course on the psychology of race and racism, or on oppression generally, yet I recognize those may be valuable goals for other instructors.

My primary goal was to make psychology less abstract, more relevant, and more approachable to my students. Only a very small percentage of the predominately ethnic and racial minority students in my Introduction to Psychology classes ever expressed a sense of psychology being relevant to them personally or as a potential career. Making use of a more contemporary and experience-near perspective might lead not only to a greater understanding of careers in psychology, but also how thinking psychologically can help them better understand their thoughts, feelings, behaviors and motivations. The present work,
therefore, reflects my initial efforts to incorporate issues of racial and ethnic prejudice into my course in a way that would be respectful of my students and the science of psychology. I was interested first in defining the system of values that would inform this new approach. Additional goals consisted of defining course objectives and learning outcomes; integrating topics relevant to racial and ethnic prejudice with commonly taught research and theories of psychology; succinctly sharing my reflections on and recommendations for this pedagogical approach.

Maintaining a value of being an engaged psychology instructor and having experience as a clinical psychologist, I believe that the study of psychology can help students understand complex interpersonal and intrapersonal processes. I use the term ‘model’ deliberately because it describes multiple implications for learning: 1) these suggestions represent a framework for instruction rather than a prescriptive approach; 2) as a general framework, it may be used as a template for instruction on diversity in other topic areas (e.g., sexism, heterosexism, and ableism); 3) the instructor consciously offers himself or herself as a model to students to convey personal, professional, and scientific values required of a psychologist. This model comprises a set of values necessary for the development and support of an experiential learning environment where the personhood of students and instructors are respected and where (as much as possible) power differentials are acknowledged and kept at a minimum.

Taking into account personal, cultural, curricular and institutional factors, and in contrast with key aspects of Banks’ (2006, 2008) comprehensive model of multicultural education reform, I decided not to implement an explicit anti-prejudice pedagogical strategy in my Introduction to Psychology curriculum. Personally, I concluded that it was not “my job” to reduce any prejudicial attitudes potentially held by my students. Culturally, I did not primarily identify my students as perpetrators of prejudice. Accurately or not, I identified these mainly working class and poor students of color primarily as targets of racial and ethnic prejudice. From a curricular standpoint, I respected that my students did not register for a course on racial and ethnic prejudice; taking an anti-prejudice stance would, in my eyes, radically change the nature of this introductory level course. Lastly, I see immense benefits at the institutional level to develop new programs to address racial and ethnic inequality in academia. For example, a new upper-level course, Cultural Psychology, is being developed and a class on the psychology of prejudice and racism is in early development. Additionally, the college’s Center for Ethnic Studies has implemented a series of *Balancing the Curriculum* workshops to support innovative approaches to using race, gender, class, and sexuality.
Multicultural education should prepare all students for an increasing ethnically and racially diverse society (Banks, 2008). A critical set of questions concern exactly how to achieve that goal. Ultimately, instructors choose (consciously or not) whether they will take a social activist stance. In higher education settings, that choice often is both personal and political, perhaps reflecting the institution as much as the individual educator. My choice to limit the objectives of the course to what occurs inside the classroom tracks most closely with Adams’ (2006) Frameworks for Teaching Social Justice. Guiding principles of this approach include attending to: 1) individual and group dynamics; 2) the maintenance of emotional and intellectual balance; and 3) the experiential and reflective processes of the learning environment.

Of Banks’ Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education (2006), the model currently being put forth directly involves: 1) content integration; 2) knowledge construction processes; and 3) pedagogical techniques valuing student equity. It only indirectly involves 4) specific objectives to reduce prejudice and 5) reshaping school cultures to increase the empowerment of diverse groups. Similarly, the pedagogical values presented here do not reflect all of Banks’ (2008) Five Categories of Multicultural Learning. The present study focuses on 1) teacher learning; 2) student learning; and 3) intergroup relations. However, 4) school governance, organization, and equity; and 5) assessment were considered aspects of broader college-wide multiculturalism efforts. The present pedagogical approach, therefore, centers on highlighting and challenging biases by providing information about prejudice, contributing to a larger process involving multiple stakeholders in a community (Pedersen, Walker, Paradies, & Guerin, 2011).

Literature Review

Race or Ethnicity? Discrimination, Prejudice, or Racism?

Racial and ethnic prejudice are parts of a broad, complex field of overlapping concepts spanning multiple disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. It was necessary, therefore, to define the scope of the curriculum to accentuate psychological processes. In my initial development of the curriculum, I attempted to cover bias, discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice, and racism. However, it became clear that addressing such distinctions would add complexity at the expense of comprehension in an introductory-level course. In fact, Zarate (2009) suggested that distinguishing between race (a biological construct) and ethnicity (a cultural construct) may be unnecessary in brief works of social science research. Specifically, insufficient empirical support was found for conclusions
that discrimination directly results from racial or ethnic attributions or judgments (Zarate, 2009).

Prejudice has been defined as comprising “(a) a cognitive component-irrationally based beliefs about a target group; (b) an affective (emotional) component-feelings of dislike; and (c) a behavioral disposition-a tendency to avoid or harm the target group (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2013, p. 36).” “Prejudice leads to discrimination because it is the motivation for creating systems that maintain social hierarchy that favors some groups over others (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2013, p. 32).” That prejudice may be causal of discrimination influenced my decision to focus on the former rather than the latter term. Moreover, whereas the term *racism* is complicated by its historical, sociological, political, and economic expressions, *prejudice* refers to intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Use of the term *racial and ethnic prejudice*, in the context of my college’s multi-racial and multi-ethnic student body, sufficiently captured the deleterious effects of making attributions about an individual on the basis of observable physical and cultural characteristics.

### Institutional Barriers and Pedagogical Innovations

Typically, pedagogical strategies for addressing racial and ethnic prejudice at colleges tend to center on ameliorating racial bias among racial majority (i.e., white) students or at least raising awareness among those students about historical and contemporary expressions of such oppression. College instructors engaged in scholarship in this area have gone further by examining oppressive institutional practices and policies. As translated into curricula, these approaches include *anti-racism, anti-prejudice, multiculturalism, social activism/social justice*, and *cultural diversity* pedagogies. Recent research and scholarship in the United Kingdom and the United States university settings suggests that there exist inequalities in institutional and instructor commitment to incorporating anti-racist curricular practices. Drawing on his experiences in the United Kingdom, Law (2003) concluded that racial and ethnic segregation in higher education has long-standing and relatively unexplored roots with implications for “student access, employment patterns, and networks of power” (p. 518). White graduate students of education, often destined to instruct ethnic minorities in public schools, may think of anti-racism simply as helping the ‘other’, i.e., examining how racism adversely impacts ethnic minority students. Instead, anti-racism approaches should also involve critically examining *white privilege*, advantages passively or actively benefitting members of the majority racial group based on nothing more than their skin color (Lea, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009).
The difficulties in reworking institutional dynamics are central to Ahmed’s (2008) discussion of the challenges of teaching psychology from an anti-racism standpoint. A form of institutional barrier, Ahmed observed, was that white instructors in the United Kingdom often failed to appreciate the relevance of teaching race issues, typically arguing that race was not germane to their specific psychology program module or that as white professors they were ill-equipped to do so. Department colleagues were suspicious of topics introduced by the author to broaden the racial discourse. Such ‘distancing practices’ exclude whiteness from racial discourse, eliminating possibilities for whiteness and white privilege to be considered as dynamically related to race and racism (Ahmed, 2008).

Buchanan, Wilson, and Gopal (2008) developed an innovative online course module on racism and its amelioration. The pedagogical strategy was to present the material as a four-week international virtual conference utilizing an online course management system. The instructors remotely facilitated discussion of academic papers and multimedia content among students in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and United States. The authors observed benefits to students interacting internationally in efforts to critically evaluate race and racial discrimination. Analysis of the course, including student feedback, also suggested that the sensitive and personal nature of the topics (along with the anonymity and lack of personal contact that would allow for reading body language and interpreting tone) might have limited the effectiveness of their online-only method.

In an institution-level analysis, Nuri-Robbins, Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell (2012) described six levels of cultural proficiency, ranging from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency proper. An example of cultural destructiveness may be found in teaching history where links between historical and modern-day racism are omitted. In designing a course that includes considerations of racial and ethnic prejudice attention should not be limited to challenging the unexamined racial and ethnic biases held by students. Instructors should attend to the standardized curriculum as well as the inner and hidden curricula (Nuri-Robbins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2012). The term inner curriculum refers to the cultural values and expectations of each individual learner, not simply their interpersonal biases. Hidden curriculum refers to the values, policies, and procedures of institutions and institutional leaders that directly or indirectly impact the learning process. The present curricular framework supports challenging both the inner and hidden curricula, encouraging students’ self-exploration, and correcting for deficiencies in psychology instruction, especially its textbooks.
Personal Challenges for Instructors

In addition to institutional barriers to fully addressing matters of race and ethnicity, individual educators may find it difficult to directly address inequality. Boatright-Horowitz and Soeung (2009), in a brief report in *The American Psychologist*, noted that white students evaluated black and white professors more negatively when they taught white privilege compared to when they taught social learning theory, potentially discouraging such objectives. On the other hand, white educators may minimize the discourses of race in teaching a diverse student population (Liggett, 2008). In one instance, Liggett described an instructor leading students through an exercise describing a family day at the beach. The instructor asked students to offer detailed descriptions of shells and sea animals but failed to ask them similarly detailed questions about the physical characteristics of the individuals in the pictures. For Liggett (2008), this example of a pedagogical blind spot demonstrated how matters of skin tone and race often are ignored.

Writing primarily from the position of Australian scholars addressing prejudice against indigenous Australians, Pedersen, Walker, Paradies, and Guerin (2011) discussed fourteen mechanisms by which anti-prejudice may be taught. They acknowledged that most, but not all, interventions would be applicable to every intervener. The most successful mechanisms for intervention, they noted, included providing accurate information about marginalized groups, being respectful of one’s audience, and appreciating the role of context. Although their approach touches on multiple methods of prejudice reduction, these methods appear to have been designed for formal training programs involving employees, community workers, and policy makers, emphasize how to bridge divides between those who are prejudiced and those oppressed by prejudice, and strongly encourage empathy.

Choosing to teach topics related to racial awareness to white students may be met with overt resistance or negative instructor evaluations from those students. Despite such challenges, Boatright-Horowitz (2005) revised a large introductory psychology course in a predominantly white university. The stated goals of the week-long course module on racism included examining racism in psychology and society-at-large; clarifying how open racism is categorically unacceptable at the university; validating the experiences of racism experienced by ethnic minority students while also challenging white students to question their privilege; and facilitating increases in social activism at the campus. As part of a week-long anti-prejudice curriculum, a brief self-report questionnaire about perceptions of personal and social racism was administered as a pretest, didactic instruction about
racial division, white privilege, racism and efforts to confront it was given, and immediate and delayed posttests measuring the effects of didactic interventions were administered. The author reported mixed results. White students agreed less with a statement about racism being a major problem in the United States; however, there were significant increases over time in agreement that they benefit from white privilege.

Williams (1994) highlighted the dilemma that social science professors are expected to take sides in addressing racism in the college classroom. He advocated for a pedagogical strategy that placed a premium on neutrality. Drawing on his experiences as a white male teaching the history of South Africa, his course spoke to a condemnation of racism. However, the complexity of South Africa’s racial system motivated him to challenge students to “understand racism rather than condemn it” (p. 85). Adopting this stance was controversial, yet it did not preclude Williams from offering some flexible (and inflexible) rules for discussing racism. He stressed an intolerance for racial and ethnic epithets and ad hominem attacks while allowing students to comment on matters that may be seen as the exclusive right of in-group members.

Although my approach also emphasizes understanding rather than condemnation, I disagree with not challenging students who present one-sided arguments. Williams’ position that ultimately each side of an argument will be presented assumes the classroom stage is balanced. In my experience, more articulate or assertive students tend to present their positions more clearly, more often, and more forcefully. There also appear to be gender and culture differences in engaging in conflict. The perspectives of silent students still matter. Also, in my experience, all sides usually are not presented well. When a student presents information from an ill-informed or biased position, instructors should respectfully and non-judgmentally intervene to challenge the entire class to take a closer look. Arguably, giving voice to the unspoken and actively correcting misinformation and bias is an essential role of instructors in higher education.

Managing Classroom Conflicts

Managing classroom conflict is a significant personal challenge for any educator broaching the topic of ethnic and racial prejudice, yet specific guidance on these efforts is worth a distinct treatment. Instructors consistently are forced to decide when to intervene and how to do so. Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell (2012) suggest six strategies for managing conflict within and between individuals and within the organization. With regard to person conflicts, it is
suggested that culturally-proficient instructors must: 1) get the facts about the nature of the conflict; 2) check his or her own “core” values from less important ones, all while respecting the difficulty others face in modifying their values; 3) distinguish one’s perceptions from facts by eliciting clarifying questions of speakers; 4) gauge whether an instructor's motives for intervening in a conflict are more personal than facilitative of the goals of the instruction objectives; 5) be prepared for and bear in mind that the instructor must adjust to varying social styles impacting on the conflict and; 6) involve the other party in a discourse about how varying objectives may be met. These strategies contrast with Williams’ approach and reflect my pedagogical style. I endeavored to consistently challenge students who minimized other students’ ideas (and maximize their own) to use psychological facts and well-reasoned conclusions to convey first-hand personal experiences.

Vespia and Filz (2013) wrote about how to diffuse out-of-control classroom discussions of controversial topics. Instructors are advised to implement prevention, intervention and post-intervention strategies, including developing a working alliance similar to that which often is employed in psychotherapy. Specific techniques include giving praise when appropriate, being flexible with grading, inviting feedback about the course, using appropriate humor, and being personable and approachable. Some issues, however, are more controversial than others. When this is the case, instructors should prepare the student for controversial discussions. Instructors should use data to ground discussions; model respectful communication styles; and actively train students in “mindful listening”. Vespia and Filz (2013) also recommended that students should be made aware they can leave class should they become overly-distressed and should be informed of the college’s student resources (e.g., a college counseling center). In contrast to an implicit bias against using emotion in teaching psychology (presumably to increase objectivity) my present strategy is to explicitly prepare students for and remind them about how intricately interwoven emotion is to human thought, motivation, and behavior. Emotions are not to be feared, they are to be understood and used to gain insight and achieve the aims of personal and interpersonal adaptation and success.

The deeply emotional nature of racial and ethnic prejudice inevitably creates opportunities for classroom disruptions and conflicts. The instructor engaging students in an examination of racial and ethnic prejudice should assess their ability to balance dispassionate objectivity with emotional warmth. Instructors are challenged to create empathetic responses that lessen defenses, acknowledging perspectives with which students or instructors may stridently disagree or find
deeply painful. Conveying trust that one may form and modify their own opinions will go a long way to smoothing a path to greater racial and ethnic self-awareness on the part of both instructor and student.

**Self-Reflection in Teaching Racial and Ethnic Prejudice**

Because implicit attitudes tend to be quite difficult to modify (Joy-Gaba & Nosick, 2010), students and instructors should engage in on-going self-examination about race and ethnicity. Literature on teaching white students about racism and white privilege almost uniformly report that white college students resist acknowledging white privilege and anti-black biases (Ahmed, 2008; Boatright-Horowitz, 2005; Boatright-Horowitz & Lund, 2009; Carr & Lund, 2009; Kahn, 1999), or they may engage in outright denial (Whatley-Smith, 2002; Yemisi Jimoh & Johnson, 2002). Furthermore, white students’ implicit (unconscious) biases may only be weakly associated with their explicit (unconscious) biases toward Blacks, i.e., they may be *dissociated* (Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997). This dissociation may produce contemporary expressions of subtle, ‘modern racism’, rather than overt ‘old world racism’ (Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997). Taking this literature into account, I considered that instilling the value of self-reflection in student will be personally challenging to instructors implementing curricula about racial and ethnic prejudice. To be successful, instructors will be required to consistently reflect on their own biases, the effects of student biases on their attitudes toward individual students, the effectiveness of their performance as instructors, and their motivation to continue the work of highlighting racial and ethnic prejudice in their classrooms.

Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell (2012) advocate that educators’ personal journeys toward fulfilling social justice ideals are reflected in the ways in which they commit to those ideals and actively transmit them to their students. Self-reflection about racial and ethnic prejudices may have the potential to reduce the conflict between implicit and explicit biases. Incorporating experiential learning exercises has the potential to bring to light both implicit and explicit biases. As a psychologist accustomed to working with clients, an essential objective is to create an environment of safety where potentially shame- and guilt-inducing topics can be revealed to another person. Open communication of personally-relevant ideas and concerns form the basis for the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal intimacy essential for confronting and challenging biases.
Implicit and explicitly prejudicial attitudes are held not only by white students and instructors, however. They also are held by and influence members of racial and ethnic minority groups. Racial and ethnic minorities may hold racially and ethnically prejudiced views of whites, but also of non-white ethnic groups, including their own. Such biases may be associated with their stage of racial and ethnic identity development (Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990; Nghe and Mahalik, 2001; Phinney, 1992) and may come to light with classroom exercises, assignments, and discussions related to the measurement of racial identity attitudes. Instructors consider their own racial and ethnic prejudice, as doing so could allow them to anticipate and contextualize students’ internalized racial and ethnic biases and their reactions to those biases. Use of a scientifically valid instrument scale such as the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRAIS; Helms, 1990) or the Multiethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992), can demonstrate that identity and prejudice are understandable and measurable, serving as a starting point for further personal self-exploration. Where appropriate, instruments such as these may be self-administered by students and used for class discussion or as the basis of a graded assignment.

Ethnic minority students’ experiences as targets of racial and ethnic prejudice also are relevant (Stuckey, Gottfredson, Panter, Daye, Allen, & Wrightman, 2011; Utsey, 1996). Skerrett advocated that instructors and students should share personal experiences of racial discrimination and suggested that “all teachers engage in self-study as a means of assessing how their biographies continue to affect their pedagogical practices, their beliefs and attitudes about students, and their relationships with students (2006, p. 197).” Self-reflection, therefore, is an essential component of teaching controversial topics that elicit both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict (Ahmed, 2008; Carr and Lund, 2009; Lea, 2009; Ligett, 2008; Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell, 2013; Vespia and Filz, 2013; Wiliams, 1994). Milner (2003) noted,

Race reflection can be seen as a way to uncover inconspicuous beliefs, perspectives, and experiences, specifically where race is concerned. It can be a process to understand hidden values, dispositions, biases, and beliefs that were not in the fore of a teacher’s thinking prior to conscious attempts to come to term with them. (p. 175)

Implicit and explicit attitudes about race, white privilege, racial and ethnic identity, and perceived racial and ethnic prejudice (including white students' and
white instructors' perceptions of being targets of prejudice) are pervasive, infusing individual, cultural, and institutional dimensions of society. The college classroom is not immune to its influence. Integrating racial and ethnic prejudice into a psychology curriculum, therefore, requires the integration of self-reflection throughout the curriculum, not merely presenting theoretically and empirically valid concepts about race and ethnicity. Doing so may go far in understanding what the study of psychology affords and allowing for an examination of inner and hidden curricula that minimizes or disregards the psychological significance of race and ethnicity.

**A Pedagogical Model for Teaching Racial and Ethnic Prejudice in Introductory Psychology**

The limitations of current introductory psychology textbooks and curricula that marginalize race and ethnicity may be somewhat overcome with readings, discussions, exercises, and writing assignments that enhance an appreciation for psychology as well as racial and ethnic diversity. It is important that psychology instructors applying this approach serve as a model for how to apply classic and contemporary psychological concepts that remain valid and relevant. The guiding principles of these pedagogical values, distilled from the preceding research on anti-racism, anti-prejudice, and multiculturalism, are listed in Table 1. Although these values are presented categorically, there are overlaps in conceptualization and implementation.

The Psychology is a Science value espouses that instructors and students value valid peer-reviewed research and theory. Instructors are challenged to maintain as a primary objective that students learn introductory psychological principles. Students are taught to evaluate theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence from qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. The instructor consistently identifies the scientific value of psychological concepts by discussing examples of both acceptable and flawed research. Invalid conclusions about race and ethnicity variables are not hard to find in contemporary psychology literature. Instructors also have an opportunity to highlight the psychological approach to understanding racial and ethnic prejudice by requiring that students explain personal experiences using the language of psychology and the tools of measurement in psychological science. A way of thinking of this strategy is that the scientific nature of psychology grounds all other discussions of anecdotal evidence, media biases, and received wisdom.
Teaching and assessing critical thinking is a fundamental aspect of instruction in higher education. The Critical Thinking, Discourse and Writing value is demonstrated when instructors create activities and assessments that allow students to improve their ability to challenge their own beliefs. Such opportunities are deepened when controversial topics reveal prejudicial thinking. Multiple assessment methods are used to assess a range of student competencies. Oral presentations, including psychology-related debates and discussion of newsworthy events, may prove engaging. College freshman may be uncomfortable experiencing ambiguity and ambivalence and may actively avoid conflict. Often this reflects a desire not to offend or represents unacknowledged uncertainty. The use of group activities and online exercises moderated by the instructor can create a comfortable level of personal distance to reflect on their thoughts and feelings.

At the outset of teaching this revised version of Introduction to Psychology, I anticipated that students may fear that ‘saying the wrong thing’ would invite my retaliation. Instructors should not dismiss that possibility and respect the power of perceptions of unfairness and favoritism. Ethical and Transparent Decision-Making is included to highlight the value of explicitly informing students that the instructor, indeed any scientist, holds biases and are subject to feeling slighted or offended. To address such fears, students must be provided with specific detailed rubrics for how they will be graded. The course objectives are clearly outlined and students understand that their personal beliefs are not a basis of evaluation of their performance. Instructors would be wise to check and-recheck assignments they grade before returning the material to students. Attention must be payed not only to subtle negative feelings toward some students, but also to subtle positive feelings toward others. Instructors may elect to anonymously grade written assignments by requiring students to provide their name on an attached cover sheet that the instructor will only see after the body of the work has been graded. Instructors may also elicit the help of a colleague to grade a sample of student work and compare conclusions. Discretion should be used, of course, in determining precisely how much transparency is helpful to the student and the management of the class.

The Technology and Data Analysis value may facilitate the development of students’ self-knowledge, better understand their classmates, and provide feedback to instructors. Although not implemented in the present iteration of the course, I learned quickly that future implementations could use voluntary collection of personality data from students about race and ethnicity. The data could be analyzed not only to understand introductory descriptive and inferential statistics, but also to gain a more objective look at their classmates’ beliefs and attitudes. Internet technologies, in particular, are valued insofar as they can facilitate classroom
engagement resulting from the use of online discussion forums, anonymous online surveys, and student feedback to instructors about reactions to the course. Real-time feedback about a class discussion could be monitored with wireless “clickers” connected to survey software that provides anonymized feedback.

Introspection and self-reflection are highly valued and strongly encouraged to organize, contextualize and challenge personal perspectives. A key aspect of the present enterprise is for instructors to actively engage in self-reflection regarding the teaching process. Instructors may play a valuable role in sharing with students their own difficult experiences that arise in exploring the often taboo topics of racial and ethnic prejudice. Interpersonally, that requires maintaining a non-judgmental attitude toward students’ responses to one’s disclosures, being responsive to classroom dynamics, and providing appropriate feedback. These efforts, if successful, will promote critical yet respectful discourse in a manner that reduces the resistant defensiveness that impedes learning. The instructor models introspection and self-reflection on a range of topics, not only those related to racial and ethnic prejudice.

The present model is not one-size-fits-all. Although most instructors would agree that self-reflection is a valuable tool in college teaching, many will differ on the degree to which one should disclose personal information. The Openness to Self-Disclosure value assumes that each instructor will find her or his own way. Generally-speaking, however, sharing appropriate and relevant personal experiences by instructors and students is encouraged and supported. The maintenance of silence can support the deleterious practice of considering taboo open discussion of race, ethnicity, and prejudice. The instructor encourages self-disclosure and provides a means of safe discourse, including anonymous and confidential disclosures. Difficulty with talking about understandable levels of bias may point to avoiding the appearance of being either victim or perpetrator a student’s or instructor’s maintenance of unhelpful power-imbalanced beliefs about the student-teacher relationship or a need to appear objective.

For example, in a different course, a discussion about race and racism led me to remark that I rarely heard white people talk about racism, even in the midst of near non-stop media coverage of blatantly racist events. An older white male student remarked that white people talk about racism, they just talk to each other about it. In that case, my willingness to appropriately self-disclose might clear a path for students’ appropriate self-disclosures. The instructor, therefore, should take into consideration cultural values (e.g., concerning modesty and discretion) that may preclude some students from doing so. In my introductory psychology
class a young woman of Dominican descent shared with me during office hours shame-inducing aspects of her family’s anti-black prejudice. In the end, self-disclosing should not be a requirement for successfully completing a psychology course, instead it should be thought of as an ideal to be held up as a brave possibility.

The Interpersonal Experiences value was created to formalize the responsibility of the college instructor to design and implement interpersonal experiences appropriate for their own classrooms. Learning is valued as a social process insofar as it is *multi-directional* and interpersonal. In homogeneous settings instructors may tailor experiential interpersonal exercises requiring students to interact with members of diverse groups. The instructor is challenged to develop activities that promote inter-group understanding rather than derailed by inter-group conflict. In addition to face-to-face group projects, students may be assigned to fully-online or hybrid learning communities to discuss topics or collaborate on coursework. Buchanan, Wilson, and Gopal’s (2008) approach to international students’ online learning about race can be modified for use in single local class sections. It may be wise for instructors to plan to introduce potentially conflictual group exercises and topics after having developed a sense of the personalities in the class. Instructors may consider forming groups based on differing racial and ethnic identities, not presumed racial and ethnic identifiers. Groups also should be formed to create diversity on other personal variables, including gender, age, and life experience.

Continuous Feedback is valued and encouraged, as doing so rewards student engagement and informs instructors about their own performance. Technology resources may be used to gather immediate, delayed, identified and de-identified responses from students. Instructors must maintain a non-judgmental and non-punitive attitude to students’ disclosures especially when such disclosures are personally distressing. It is imperative that instructors inform students of what data may be used and how that data will be protected. The instructor should include both impromptu and regularly-scheduled feedback sessions throughout the semester, however students always should be able to opt out. Relying on the college’s faculty observations and student observations alone will not suffice. Instructors teaching psychology from the perspective of the role of racial and ethnic prejudice should avail themselves of continuous data (to make immediate corrections) and specific data (to determine which aspects of the course should be revised and retained). Student data should be collected according to ethical and policy guidelines of the college. Moreover, psychologists should be thoroughly familiar with American Psychological Association ethical guidelines as well as
policies and procedures put forth by government education departments and state licensing boards.

A Pedagogical Method for Teaching Racial and Ethnic Prejudice in Introductory Psychology

The vast array of topics in standard psychology textbooks imposed a practical limit on the range of additional or alternate topics that could be incorporated. My choice of this set of topics was influenced by perceived deficits in widely-used introductory psychology textbooks, my personal affinity for and facility with particular topic areas, and how well they reflect a set of common Introduction to Psychology course learning outcomes adopted by a committee of psychology instructors at my college. The topics also were chosen on the basis of how well they might increase students’ understanding of psychological knowledge and how well they reflect a broad range of psychology’s major sub-disciplines, concepts, theories, empirical research, and methodologies. These include foundational concepts (e.g., on the defense mechanisms of the ego and observational learning) as well as contemporary research and theoretical advancements (e.g., cultural neuroscience and racial and ethnic identity theory).

I developed eight distinct topic areas, or modules, linked to textbook chapters that I typically taught or considered relevant to understanding racial and ethnic prejudice from a psychological perspective. Common introductory psychology subject areas are presented alongside topics relevant to racial and ethnic prejudice, supplementary readings for instructors, course content and assessment suggestions, and related pedagogical values (Appendix A). Instructors implementing this modular method may choose to incorporate some and eliminate others, or to replace some topics with other relevant topics. For example, instructors with courses heavily emphasizing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) learning outcomes may choose from those curricular topics that are more quantitative than qualitative. Other instructors, for example those with courses typically including liberal arts majors or students with undeclared majors, may choose curricular topics that are more theoretical or applied. Including such a vast amount of supplemental material proved difficult. Over the course of the semester, I re-visited each topic area and the progress of the class. Ultimately, I was able only to fully include four modules: 1) Racial and Ethnic Identity Development, 2) The Unconscious and Defense Mechanisms, 3) Operant Conditioning and Observational Learning, and 4) Social Categorization and Implicit Processes. In the next section, I reflect on those first efforts to
implement the above stated models and methods in my Introduction to Psychology course.

I used the present curricular model and method in the two Introduction to Psychology sections I taught during the spring 2015 semester. Student course grades comprised scores on two multiple-choice type exams and two 4-page response papers. The exams covered factual and conceptual basics derived from text and lectures, whereas the response papers required students to apply knowledge to demonstrate their ability to think and write clearly, critically, and persuasively. Each of the assessments were equally-weighted. One response paper required students to evaluate Latino and Latina characters in the film, *Raising Victor Vargas*, by describing the interaction of gender and culture schemas. Specifically, students were asked to apply their knowledge of operant conditioning and observational learning to describe how gender and culture schemas are learned. The other assignment, detailed below, proved more personally challenging, yet more engaging. It required students to take an online Implicit Association Test to measure their implicit biases about Blacks and Whites (Race, IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz, 1988; https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp]. The Race IAT assignment is especially illustrative of the manner in which the course was conducted insofar as multiple values were transmitted in a single assessment, presented below. The related pedagogical values appear in brackets:

When designing this project, I imagined that some students might be uncomfortable taking such a test [Introspection and Self-Reflection]. As a result, I expressly acknowledged the potential for discomfort and allowed any student to opt out of that assignment and complete an alternate written assignment [Ethical and Transparent Decision-Making]. They needn’t express their concern in class, they were able to email me or leave a note in my mailbox, requesting the alternative. I also asked students how they generally felt about such a probing assignment [Continuous Feedback]. No student in either class section opted out of the assignment. Students were instructed on how to navigate to the website, take the test, and interpret their results [Technology and Data Analysis]. The assignment required students to describe what implicit attitudes are and how they are measured by the Race IAT [Psychology as a Science]. They were also required to describe their reactions to taking the test, and their results [Openness to Self-Disclosure]. They were required to note whether they agreed or disagreed with the results, yet also were required to make a clear,
concise, and cogent case for why they agreed or disagreed. Lastly, students were required to discuss in writing how they might have developed those attitudes and what they might do to change them— if they felt their attitudes were undesirable [Critical Thinking, Writing and Discourse].

I noticed that students were both confused by the complexity of administration of the online Race IAT and somewhat taken aback by having their personal results (of which they may only have been dimly aware) exposed to me [Introspection and Self-Reflection]. I took the opportunity to define confidentiality and anonymity, and assured them of the former but not the latter [Ethical and Transparent Decision-Making]. I shared my feeling that many of them were confused and concerned by the test administration. To allay their concerns and resolve their confusion, I demonstrated how to use the Race IAT during class and shared my results with the class in real time [Openness to Self-Disclosure; Interpersonal Experiences]. I also shared that I agreed with the results, why I agreed with the results, and what I might do to change my implicit attitudes. I also discussed research on how implicit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) attitudes might be dissociated, potentially leading some to devalue personally or socially undesirable results [Psychology as a Science]. After grading and returning the assignments, I led the class in a discussion about the assignment by asking if anyone wanted to share their results and impressions [Openness to Self-Disclosure; Critical Thinking, Discourse and Writing] or offer feedback about the assignment [Continuous Feedback]. Several students voluntarily shared their results and their experience of taking the Race IAT [Openness to Self-Disclosure; Interpersonal Experiences].

**Reflections and Recommendations**

Experiential learning needn’t describe only activities outside the classroom. In the present implementation, the value of experiential learning was expressed in the consistent use of emotion and self-reflective experiences of the topics in the classroom. I began the first day of each of these classes by telling students about my idea to use the topic of racial and ethnic prejudice to highlight psychological principles, shared that the process would require self-reflection, and reassured them that I would take the journey with them. I clearly recall the excitement, fear, and hope about this undertaking. I also recall the wonder in the eyes of my students
and the enthusiastic and affirmative reaction to my question, “How does that sound?”, “Are you ready?”, and “Who’s excited by this?”

The primary experiential exercise I used was to assign students to take the online version of Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz, 1998) of personal attitudes about race and to write a short paper describing their experiences taking the test. The first time I personally took the Race IAT was to prepare the class for the assignment and educate myself about the methodology. My results were somewhat surprising and embarrassing. Nonetheless, I retook the test live in each section of my class while describing the test-taking method. To model my being vulnerable in revealing deeply personal facts myself and “level the student-teacher playing field”, I revealed my results in class and briefly discussed my feelings about the results. In this and other instances of teaching racial and ethnic prejudice, I engaged in appropriately boundaried expressions of emotion that framed and accentuated my personal reactions to the topics at hand. Those experiences reaffirm my belief that students taking introductory psychology tend to enjoy assignments that allow for self-exploration.

Kite (2013), writing about the instructor’s role as facilitator of class discussions on race and ethnicity suggests that instructors must acknowledge their subjectivity (especially with regard to gender and race) when leading discussions about race and ethnicity. My classes were consisted mainly of young racial and ethnic minority students. A single-digit percentage were over 25 years old and white. Rather than the resistance noted by many instructors who report resistance by white students, my students often responded with relative silence. In an effort to model a willingness to discuss taboo or controversial topics, I sometimes lead or joined the discussion by offering my own experiences of being African American and male. In doing so, I acknowledged how my personal experiences have resulted in biased attitudes, that biases are ubiquitous, and require on-going examination. They needn't induce shame or embarrassment, and in isolation do not invalidate one’s point of view or indicate character deficits.

Many instances in which I was faced with a decision to self-disclose were unanticipated and required considerable self-reflection throughout the semester. Unexpectedly, I found myself surprised and saddened by the extent to which many students implicitly and explicitly revealed negatively prejudicial views about their own racial or ethnic group, unquestioningly espoused beliefs about the intellectual, moral, and cultural superiority of whites, and described internalized negative views about themselves. For example, in a discussion regarding beauty standards (e.g., skin tone and hair texture), I encouraged students to say more about their beliefs
regarding seemingly unquestioned cultural ideals. Several students in class and during office hours described deep and painful personal and family conflicts regarding such beliefs. I briefly noted how ideals and values related to race and ethnicity may become unconsciously internalized, yet may be amenable to change with sufficient cognitive, affective, and behavioral effort and support.

College instructors continually are challenged to determine how much to self-disclose. As a clinical psychologist, I was able to draw upon my experience with issues of self-disclosure in psychotherapy. Clear that the college classroom is not a psychotherapy consulting room, I nonetheless was prepared to ask myself several questions, “How might this self-disclosure enhance the learning experience?” , "How might it negatively affect teacher-student role boundaries?", and "How might my disclosures allow students to experience less shame with the topic?”. The challenge of self-disclosure was brought into stark relief throughout the semester. A series of unfortunate instances of police brutality in U. S. African American communities were widely reported by the national media. After one particular fatal shooting, I openly shared with my students that I had been internally debating how much I should disclose to them about my reactions to those events. Subsequently, when I did offer my perspective on these matters, I did so only after students had provided their own opinions or conclusions and I framed my perspective in the context of relevant psychological theory and research. Ultimately, I recognized the potential benefits of modeling the internal debates about what we communicate (and why) and shared introspective processes that should be central to the teaching of psychology.

To create a more emotionally safe environment and increase engagement, I began to routinely ask students to anonymously address prejudice-related questions on a blank sheet of paper in the form of ungraded free writes. I collected and read those notes to spark discussion; that practice appeared to work better than I had expected. The written responses were more articulate, candid and thoughtful than I had imagined and rarely failed to enrich the conversation. Integrating online learning platforms may further enhance or facilitate student learning. In a future iteration of the course use of internet technologies can draw on modern students' social media competencies to increase comfort and openness with controversial and taboo topics. The typical course introduction that occurs in the beginning of the semester might involve an ungraded online discussion board topic requiring students to reply with questions and concerns about how the study of psychology can inform them about racial and ethnic prejudice. Subsequently, their replies may be integrated into face-to-face discussions, lectures, and activities relevant to related course modules.
Other informal discussion topics may be formalized as graded asynchronous online discussion forums. To limit harmful or inappropriate conduct, posts and replies will always be identifiable to and moderated by the instructor, however students may be allowed to post and reply such that their identity is known only to the instructor. The instructor’s role may be to clarify terms, circumscribe boundaries, help resolve conflicts, and post rebuttals addressing students’ blind spots and factual inaccuracies. In this way, online moderation may allow instructors to challenge students’ perspectives in ways that can be less embarrassing and shame-inducing than in a face-to-face setting. An additional benefit of using an online learning platform is that students may take online surveys about the course itself. Use of online surveys offer students anonymity and offer instructors real-time feedback about the course. The interactions in the virtual online classroom should then be taken back into the physical space where issues may be subjected to further reflection and elaboration.

**Conclusion**

The present effort to incorporate topics of racial and ethnic prejudice into my introductory psychology course results from my perception of deficits in standard introductory psychology curricula. Despite its undeniable relevance in the United States and applicability to college students’ personal and professional development, teaching race and racism in introductory psychology courses is rare. Racial and ethnic prejudice often is reserved for upper-level study, however, many college students may only be exposed to psychology at the introductory level. Moreover, although there is considerable research on multicultural education, anti-racism, and diversity in undergraduate curricula, there is little practical guidance available to introductory psychology instructors on how specifically to integrate these topics into their courses. Such integration should be informed by a value system including self-reflection and general course objectives may be achieved without compromising or impeding learning in core curricular topic areas.

In addition to offering practical curricular strategies, the present work incorporates a method with the potential to challenge students’ and institutions’ inner and hidden curricula. Ideally, the present endeavor, including use of supplemental background resources for instructors, will fill in deficits in standardized psychology textbooks and curricula. The results of these present efforts reveal two major challenges that instructors may face: 1) managing the logistics of integrating race and ethnic prejudice topics with an already demanding introductory curriculum and 2) challenging oneself and one’s students to become more introspective, self-reflective, and self-disclosing (and less defensively
resistant) about racial and ethnic prejudice. If successful, introductory psychology students may more fully internalize psychological knowledge and ideals.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Previous efforts in teaching prejudice and racism have been aimed at addressing perceived deficits in white students’ and white instructors’ understanding and acknowledgment of race, racism, and white privilege. However, the present curricular design was deployed at a two-year community college where students overwhelmingly identify as Hispanic/Latino(a), African-American, African, and Caribbean and where the instructor identifies as African American. In this light, my experiences may be atypical. White and black educators at four-year colleges serving a predominately white student body may be faced with significantly greater intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges than are presently noted. Although designed to be relevant for both mainstream white students as well as members of minority, marginalized, and oppressed groups, no effectiveness and efficacy data was collected. The present curricular approach therefore, may not be effective in predominately white colleges and universities. Future research should focus on testing this pedagogical strategy with multiple large samples of college students from diverse college and university settings. Researchers should implement mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to establish its practicality, utility, effectiveness, and efficacy.

The present implementation of this model and method revealed significant negative attitudes among students about their own racial and ethnic groups as well as about other racial and ethnic minority groups. It is recommended, therefore, that future researchers should attend not only to how racial and ethnic minorities are targets of prejudice. It also is important for researchers to better understand ethnic minority students’ prejudices about other racial and ethnic minority groups as well as their own group. These prejudices may be significant, especially insofar as they may reflect internalized racism and maladaptive racial and ethnic identity development. However, it may be challenging for college instructors to become cognizant of their own implicit and explicit attitudes regarding race and ethnicity and their stage of racial and ethnic identity development. It also may be challenging for instructors to determine the appropriate amount of self-disclosure of their own attitudes, identities, and self-reflective processes.
References


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