Intercultural Competence and Anti-Racism among College Students

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This study answers an academic call to action by intersectional scholars to engage in anti-racism work (Galán et al., 2021) by utilizing intercultural competence curriculum to educate college students to oppose racism and promote equality. One effective tool that could support, sustain, and strengthen anti-racism behaviors is intercultural competence curriculum (Hammer, 2008), building off of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) framework, which is a developmental model that supports an individual's capacity to address structural racism and other forms of oppression and marginalization (Wiersma-Mosley, 2021). The IDI framework can foster intercultural competence among students to recognize their own cultural identity and to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures (Hammer, 2008). The IDI posits that an individual's developmental orientation—how one constructs worldview ideas and responds to cultural differences and commonalities—can influence and structure the ability to engage and address anti-racism (Harewood & Zemsky, 2020). For the current study, the IDI was chosen as the framework because of its evidence-based, stage-like progression for implementing anti-racist education and high-impact experiences into higher education

(Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). Currently, there are few studies that have examined intercultural development and anti-racism (Bradford et al., 2021; Kusi, 2020); however, they do not utilize the IDI framework. The current study contributes to the ongoing understanding of the relationship between frameworks like the IDI in understanding anti-racism behaviors, using the anti-racism self-assessment tool introduced by Wells, which focuses on awareness and accountability.

Anti-Racism

Anti-racism is the action of opposing racism and advocating for change (Bradford et al., 2021). Anti-racist practices include creating awareness about one's social positioning within a historical and social context of power and oppression, assessing norms and values pertaining to race and related social constructs (e.g., gender, class), and challenging practices that maintain the oppression of people of color (POC; Bhatti-Sinclair, 2011). Current research has examined existing curriculum through an anti-racism lens (Schmier & Grant, 2022); however, this is not the same as anti-racism curriculum. Anti-Blackness (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, actions, practices, and behaviors of individuals and institutions that devalue, minimize, and marginalize the full participation of Black people; Comrie et al. 2022) and systemic racism are longstanding, pressing social issues that have received increased attention (Pieterse et al., 2023).

Anti-racism curriculum has received pushback, notably through pieces of legislation and executive orders that prohibit the use of critical race theory (CRT), which is one of the bases of understandings of both racism and anti-racism. While proponents of anti-racism curriculum acknowledge challenges associated with implementation, they also argue that it is essential to a comprehensive education (Crenshaw, 2021). Further, Safarpour et al. (2021) argued that public attitudes toward CRT have no consistent relationship with state policy on CRT. While CRT is not the entirety of anti-racism curriculum, it is

important to contextualize the ways in which anti-racism curriculum may be impacted, including through laws that render it illegal to teach.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is mostly and simply defined as an awareness of one's own cultural identity and the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures (Deardorff, 2011). The IDI (Hammer, 2008) assesses intercultural competence, which is the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities. The IDI is an appropriate instrument for assessing students in higher education because it supports that intercultural competence is a developmental process that can be taught. Intercultural competency is assessed through the IDI's five stages: *denial*, *polarization*, *minimization*, *acceptance*, *and adaptation*. Starting at one end, *Denial* (approximately 3% of people) reflects limited experience with and capability to understand and respond appropriately to cultural differences in values, beliefs, perceptions, emotional responses, and behaviors (Hammer, 2008). Racial and other forms of cultural differences may appear chaotic and bewildering for these individuals, where they would rather avoid topics of race and racism and interact exclusively with members of their own in-group (Harewood & Zemsky, 2020). Individuals in *polarization* (approximately 16% of people) hold an "us vs. them" mindset either through *defense* (seeing cultural differences frequently as divisive and threatening to one's own way of doing things) or *reversal* (valuing other cultural practices while denigrating one's own culture group) (Hammer, 2008). For many self-identifying white individuals who are in defense, considered to be in the dominant group of the United States, they may become fearful and angry regarding diversity initiatives, leading to backlash and retreat from policies or practices that address equity and inclusion. There may be an overemphasis and judgement of racial differences, which stems from the fear of loss of their own power, privilege

(i.e., advantages), control, or group identity (Harewood & Zemsky, 2020). And for individuals in reversal, they may feel remorse or shame, often referred to as *white guilt* for white individuals. The best strategy for individuals in *polarization* is to start focusing on commonalities.

The majority of students are likely within *minimization* (approximately 65% of people), in which individuals overemphasize commonalities, which inadvertently prevents a deeper understanding of cultural differences (i.e., color-blindness, "I don't see color") (Hammer, 2008). Individuals value equality and want people from all racial/ethnic groups to be treated equally, but they may mask or minimize racial differences by focusing on similarities or commonalities while tending to ignore differences (Harewood & Zemsky, 2020). Next, individuals in *acceptance* (approximately 15% of people) recognize and appreciate patterns of cultural differences and commonality but lack the ability to adapt to cultural differences (Hammer, 1998). They may be supporters of social justice issues verbally but without engaging in anti-racist actions and behaviors (Harewood & Zemsky, 2020). Lastly, *adaptation* (approximately 2% of people) is when one is able to successfully bridge cultural differences and behave appropriately in contexts beyond one's own native culture (Hammer, 2008). Here, individuals have developed deep awareness of their own privileges, can relate to others, have a critical understanding of social issues, and have hands-on experience working for social change (Clark-Taylor, 2017). Individuals are likely to challenge systemic, institutionalized, and structural racism (Harewood & Zemsky, 2020).

For intercultural competence to develop, three major domains must be addressed: (1) identity development (i.e., deep self-awareness, cultural humility), (2) learning about cultural differences, and (3) bridging or adapting behavior with different groups through experiences (e.g., service learning [SL]). The cognitive aspect of intercultural understanding comprises knowledge about one's own identity and culture as well as learning about others who are different (Hill, 2006). Although knowledge is indeed important, and required in the IDI's first two steps, it is not enough for intercultural understanding; experiences are crucial and the final step according to the IDI (Hammer, 1998). One of

the best ways to increase intercultural competence in higher education is through high-impact educational experiences (step 3), such as SL (Wiersma-Mosley & Garrison, 2022). SL is an inclusive and comprehensive way to educate students by creating experiences locally, where students can develop intercultural competence within their own community by engaging and working with children and families who come from different backgrounds.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Data for this study come from 70 undergraduate students (primarily white, high-socioeconomic-status women) enrolled in diversity courses at a mid-South, public university from fall 2021 through fall 2022. Students self-identified primarily as female (97%) and non-Hispanic white (86%) with a mean age of 22.07 (SD = 5.58); an analysis of variance (ANOVA) resulted in no significant group differences (fall 2021 vs. 2022) in gender, age, or race/ethnicity for the two courses. All students were required to enroll in the family diversity course as part of the requirements for a human development and family science degree; the course was taught by the same instructor each fall semester. The internal review board (IRB) was approved by the primary institution of data collection.

   In general, the curriculum of the course is organized into three main domains for intercultural competence growth: (1) in-class identity activities, (2) diversity education, and (3) diversity interaction and experiences. First, students focused on identity development through classroom activities such as icebreakers and small group discussions; personal interactions and in-class journaling; reflection essays wherein students wrote about their perceived stereotypes, privileges, and implicit biases (e.g., Harvard Bias Test); participating in the *Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts* 30-minute online training to reduce microaggressions (Boggs Riley et al., 2022); class discussions regarding

oppression, racism, and anti-Blackness that are deeply embedded in every US institution; and highlighting one's unique culmination of privilege and disadvantage in comparison with those of peers. Next, the class focused on diversity education through textbook learning and lectures, viewing mixed media (film, movies, videos, documentaries, and podcasts about Southlake, Texas, and open educational resources [OER]; Wiersma-Mosley & Butcher, 2021), interacting with guest speakers representative of a wide array of identities and communities, and utilizing multicultural content from books and stories throughout lectures and assignments. For many assignments, students are allowed to choose their preferred method of learning about a specific topic (visiting a museum, attending an event on campus, or listening to a podcast).

And finally, the third step was derived from service-learning, which provided students with experiences engaging with similarities and differences in their community outside of the classroom, where they could apply their learning to real life. Students were required to complete a minimum of 15 hours of volunteer service with the community agency of their choice. Community agencies were chosen by the course instructor and were specifically selected to increase students' intercultural competence. The goal of the SL assignment was for students to become better acquainted with others by stepping out of their comfort zones to volunteer or engage with a community agency. Placements included a national-affiliated Boys & Girls Club that provides after-school care and classes with a diverse group of children in terms of race/ethnicity and social class, a nonprofit community center that provides after-school care of children from diverse race/ethnicity and social-class backgrounds, and community centers that work primarily with either young adults or adults with disabilities, which provided experiences working with neurodiverse individuals.

Measures

All students participated in the study by providing responses to pre- and posttest assessments of the IDI, which assesses intercultural

competence. The IDI is a 50-item questionnaire available online that can be completed in 15 to 20 minutes and includes questions regarding intercultural experiences based on cross-cultural goals, the challenges that one confronts while navigating cultural differences, intercultural incidents that one may face when encountering cultural differences, and the ways one may address those cultural differences. The IDI instrument has been tested with diverse populations; has shown high reliability; has shown high construct, content, and predictive validity; and has been found to not be influenced by social desirability or cultural bias (Hammer et al., 2003). For this study, the developmental orientation (DO) subscale was designated as the outcome variable. The DO is the perspective that the student is most likely to use in situations where cultural differences and commonalities need to be bridged. Scores of 55 to 69 indicate *denial*, 70 to 84 indicate *polarization*, 85 to 114 indicate *minimization*, 115 to 129 indicate *acceptance*, and 130 to 145 indicate *adaptation*. After students completed the IDI, a trained IDI qualified administrator (in this case, the primary author and instructor of both courses) reviewed the students' individual profile report (which includes their developmental orientation) and customized intercultural development plan (IDP), with the intended outcome of this process being that the student will increase in intercultural competence over the course of the semester. Students completed the IDI preassessment during week one and the post-assessment during week 16.

The anti-racism self-assessment tool, introduced by Wells, consisted of questions about accountability, such as: "How often do you say or do something (e.g., make a comment, ask a question, or behave/react in a way that is rooted in a racist attitude, assumption, or stereotype)? (This includes things you think, say, or do in the presence of people of color and things you think, say, or do that other people might not know about)." Then measures of guilt, shame, embarrassment, frustration (with self), defensiveness, anxiety, and concern were also assessed. Additional questions included "taking up space" such as dominating conversation, and behaviors regarding others, such as remaining silent when others say or do something in a racist attitude, assumption, or stereotype (including friends, family, neighbors, peers,

faculty, and other students). Finally, questions about personal and professional development were assessed, such as: "How committed are you to be actively engaged in personal and professional development of anti-racist practices such as ongoing, lifelong process? How comfortable are you with accepting and acknowledging that you will continue to make mistakes and cause harm due to comments, questions, or behaviors rooted in racist attitudes, assumptions, or stereotypes that you still need to unlearn? How often do you participate in formal/structured professional development opportunities?" Additional behaviors included reading books and podcasts and listening and reflecting on anti-racism. All questions were assessed on a 0 (never) to 10 (regularly) scale.

Results

First, starting with the DO at baseline (week one), students' IDI scores ranged from 67.00 to 122.21, with one student in *denial*, 25 students in *polarization*, 38 students in *minimization*, and 5 students in *acceptance*; none scored in *adaptation*. For the post-assessment DO in week 16, IDI scores ranged from 80.29 to 138.91, with four students in *polarization*, 42 students in *minimization*, 20 students in *acceptance*, and 3 scored in *adaptation*.

Students' pre-IDI (n = 69) average DO was 92.34 (SD = 14.08; range 67 to 122.21) with a post-assessment average in week 16 of 106.38 (SD = 14.56, range 80.29 to 138.91), with both of these averages falling within the *minimization* development orientation. Group differences between the two semesters using ANOVA were tested and there were no significant differences in the pre-IDI scores ($F(1,68) = 0.03$, $p = 0.86$) or post- IDI scores over the two semesters ($F(1,69) = 1.15$, $p = 0.29$). When examining the *significant growth* in IDI scores, there was a significant increase in the IDI scores over the semester ($F = 33.39$, $p < 0.001$), moving from low minimization at 92.34 to 106.38. Thus the course reflected significant intercultural development on average for students enrolled in this course.

Next, anti-racism behaviors indicated some significant change, as shown in Table 1. Behaviors did increase in the positive direction, but only certain types of behaviors demonstrated significant growth, including becoming less *defensive* when saying or doing something rooted in a racist behavior (from 4.26 to 3.31) and significantly more comfortable with accepting and acknowledging that they will continue to make mistakes and cause harm due to comments, questions, or behaviors rooted in racist attitudes, assumptions, or stereotypes that they need to still unlearn (from 7.39 to 8.22). In specific behaviors, students reported increasing in watching movies related to anti-racism (from 4.39 to 5.85) and discussing anti-racism with friends and family (from 5.61 to 6.19).

Table 1. Aggregate scores of anti-racism behaviors among students over the semester (N = 70).

	PRE	POST
How Often are you racist?	2.52	2.13
Emotions		
Guilt	7.43	7.14
Shame	7.10	6.76
Embarrassment	6.64	7.04
Frustration	7.03	7.25
Defense	4.26	3.31*
Anxiety	6.30	6.37
Concern	8.14	7.86
Taking up Space from BIPOC	4.87	4.99
Monitoring BIPOC	5.68	5.79
Judging BIPOC	5.34	6.01
Silence about Others		
Friends	3.02	3.28
Family	3.19	3.96[t]
Neighbors	4.39	4.25
Peers	4.00	4.25
Faculty	4.90	5.15*
Students	4.08	4.30
Commitment to Anti-Racism	7.37	7.88
Comfortable about Anti-Racism	7.39	8.22**
Activities about Anti-Racism	3.90	4.71
Workshops/Webinars		
Read Books	3.52	4.10
Watch Movies	4.39	5.85*
Listen to Podcasts	2.47	2.88
Reflect on Anti-Racism	5.25	5.84
Discuss Anti-Racism with Others	5.61	6.19*

Note: Scales are 0 (none) to 10 (regularly); [t] $p = 0.08$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Students' intercultural competence and some anti-racist behaviors (e.g., becoming less defensive, comfortability with anti-racism, participating in opportunities to learn about anti-racism) increased significantly over the semester. The IDI framework supports growth in intercultural competence as well as helping students learn to become more anti-racist in behaviors and awareness over time. One reason the IDI may be effective is because it allows students to learn through identity awareness, interactions with different people, and experiences within a community, especially when SL is a component (Harnek Hall & Morris-Compton, 2018). Wiersma-Mosley and Garrison (2022) indicated that SL is one of the most important ways to develop intercultural competence among students. SL with a local (or global) community can help students view new perspectives while working with families of diverse backgrounds. Based on the IDI model, students participate in all three steps for developing intercultural competence, with SL providing the opportunity to practice adapting behavior within different cultural groups. All three steps are necessary for developing intercultural competence.

It is critical to note that most students in both groups scored in the minimization orientation in both their pre- and post-assessments of the IDI, which is the most common orientation among adults and comprises 65% of the population (Intercultural Development Inventory). When students are in minimization, they may focus too much on commonalities while ignoring cultural differences, with the mindset of "I do not see color" or "We are so similar." In order to advance, students need *additional* educational opportunities, which aid them in understanding concepts regarding power and privilege, as well as other crucial differences between cultures. More than anything, this course curriculum might have acted as a catalyst for students to further develop a new lens and perspective for their own as well as other cultures. The IDI created a progressive movement of increasing

awareness of the self and the classroom community, and the course-work provided learning and lived experiences and offered concrete connections where they could reflect and apply that new intercultural awareness.

The present study's participants were from a small sample of primarily white undergraduate women living in a white community in the mid-South. However, some research (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Loes et al., 2012) indicates that white students benefit more in critical thinking development when they are exposed to people from diverse backgrounds compared to students of color. In addition, data were based on self-report pre- and posttest assessments; thus there may be testing effects, and because the anti-racism survey was anonymous, we were not able to specifically connect the IDI scores with anti-racism behaviors.

Increasing intercultural competence and anti-racism is essential to higher education because students are expected to work productively with individuals and families who have been shaped by different values, beliefs, and experiences. Not only does creating greater intercultural competence awareness and inclusion help students with different backgrounds and needs succeed, but it encourages acceptance and helps prepare students to thrive in a diverse world. It is important to note that no course or discipline can cover all aspects of cultural diversity. Therefore, it is important that institutions of higher education systematically review their curriculum, assessment, policies, and environments to engage students to become self-aware, recognize inequities, talk intentionally about them, and act to transform curriculum, instruction, and policy.

Bios

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