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Incidents of Bias in College Classrooms: Instructor and Student Perceptions

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Little is known about incidents of bias specific to college classrooms or how they are handled by instructors. To learn more about this subject, professors, graduate instructors, and undergraduates (N = 2,523) completed surveys assessing perceptions of classroom bias. Results indicated that about a quarter of instructors and half of students perceived an incident of bias in a classroom in the last year. Instructors' responses to bias commonly included forms of direct confrontation, discussion, and ignoring. Undergraduates perceived significantly more bias than did instructors and rated responses to bias as significantly less effective than did instructors. Undergraduates also reported that instructors were occasionally the perpetrators of bias. These results indicate that preparation of instructors should include increased awareness of bias and methods of handling classroom bias.

Keywords: education, college students, prejudice, teaching

Asked to give an example of an incident of bias that occurred in their classrooms, one college instructor offered that "On several occasions, students referred to things they didn't like as gay, which is perhaps a little more than subtly derogative." Asked to describe how the bias was handled, the same instructor offered "Regrettably, I did nothing because it seems to be an unfortunately common slang term, offensive though it is." Another instructor encountering the same pejorative use of the word gay confronted the student "about how this may create an uncomfortable environment for the other students." Which instructor handled the incident most effectively?

The question of how to handle incidents of bias in the classroom is important to college instructors for numerous reasons. One reason is the increase of diversity on campuses. In 2007, 36% of college students were racial and ethnic minorities, and this represented an increase of 8% since the 1980s (American Council on Education, 2005). In addition, women now make up the majority of students in college (National Science Foundation, 2009), and college has become a primary place for the development of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students' sexual identities (e.g., Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Handling classroom bias is also important because professional standards for instructors dictate that the increasingly diverse student population be treated equitably. The American Association of University Professors (1987) statement on professional ethics mandates that instructors maintain fairness for students and avoid harassment and discrimination. Various discipline-specific professional organizations also have explicit standards for respecting diversity in the classroom (e.g., American Anthropological Association, 2009; American Psychological Association [APA], 2002, 2003; American Sociological Association, 2009). Overall, college instructors are responsible for maintaining and promoting an atmosphere of

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respect for diversity in increasingly diverse classrooms, and that responsibility includes effective management of incidents of bias such as pejorative use of the word *gay*. Thus, the purpose of this article is to expand knowledge about classroom incidents of bias and how instructors can effectively handle those incidents.

Bias on Campus

Despite several decades of increasing diversity at universities, campus climates are not equally accepting of all students. Many studies have documented that racial and ethnic minority students perceive the climate of colleges to be less hospitable than do White students (Ancis, Selacek, & Mohr, 2000; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Hurtado, 1992; Morrow, Burris-Kitchen, & Der-Karabetian, 2000; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008). Campus climates can also be inhospitable for LGB students (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004), female students in male-dominated academic areas (Steele, James, & Barnett, 2002), and students of various religious denominations (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Hyers & Hyers, 2008; Speck, 1997). One factor in perceptions of campus climate is how frequently students encounter prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes on campus. Although the methods used to collect data vary greatly, survey research suggests that about half of all students face one of these forms of bias while at college. Researchers have documented bias toward African Americans, (D'Augelle & Hershberger, 1993; B. J. Fisher & Hartman, 1995), homosexuality (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997; Rankin, 2003), and women (Steele et al., 2002; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Importantly, rates of bias differ on the basis of the population in question. African American students report encountering more bias than do White students (D'Augelle & Hershberger, 1993; B. J. Fisher & Hartman, 1995), LGB students report being the target of harassment more frequently than does the student population in general (Rankin, 2003), and women encounter more sexism than do men (A. R. Fisher & Good, 1994; Swim et al., 2001).

The types of bias faced by students include both overt and subtle forms. *Overt bias* tends to be intentional and obvious (e.g., a racial slur), but *subtle bias* is frequently unintentional and ambiguous (e.g., presuming an ethnic minority is foreign). Experiences of subtle bias are common among racial and ethnic minority students (Panter, Daye, Allen, Wightman, & Deo, 2008; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003), LGB students (Silverchanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008), and female students (Swim et al., 2001). Subtle forms of bias may lack the intensity of blatant prejudice, but they still have detrimental effects. Researchers have begun focusing on the damaging effects of subtle forms of bias called microaggressions. Microaggressions are the subtle slights and insults that targets of bias face, most of which occur without the perpetrator's awareness (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Forms of microaggression common on college campuses might include social exclusion, making assumptions about intelligence on the basis of race, and denying the continued existence of prejudice. Although everyday, interpersonal interactions may contain some subtle insults and offenses, microaggressions are different because of their frequency and their tendency to define reality due to the historical power differential between racial and ethnic groups (Sue, Capodilupa, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). Microaggressions directed at college students can lead to academic and social conflict (Constantine, 2007; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000), and students indicate that dealing frequently with microaggressions is a draining experience (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Overall, the evidence from campus climate and microaggression research is clear; many students still face both overt and subtle forms of bias on campus, and this can be detrimental to their educational experience.

Bias in the Classroom

One place that students face overt and subtle forms of bias is the college classroom. Bias in the classroom is especially likely to impact students' success in college. However, few studies have examined bias specific to the classroom. A study by Marcus and colleagues (2003) found that students reported higher levels of bias in the classrooms than in other areas of campus; specifically, 10% of students encountered racially motivated bias in public spaces on campus in

comparison with 32% who had encountered bias in class. Another study found that 30% of reported harassment of LGB students occurred in class and that in-class was the third most common place to face bias (Rankin, 2003). Students also perceive microaggressions in the classroom. Interviews with 14 racial and ethnic minority students about microaggression in the classroom revealed that they had faced assumptions about intelligence and criminality, been treated as foreigners, and experienced denials of the importance of race (Sue et al., 2009). Such events were stressful for the students in many ways; they led to strong emotional reactions, caused conflict about whether to respond, and were exhausting because of their frequency. Unfortunately, it appears that attending class for many students means dealing simultaneously with intellectual and discriminatory stressors.

Despite evidence of bias, little guidance exists for instructors concerned with how to handle incidents of bias in the classroom. Some have suggested that direct confrontation is the best method (Wolfe & Spencer, 1996), and others maintain that biased students (i.e., students expressing prejudice, discrimination, or stereotypes) should be presented with facts that counteract their beliefs (Garcia, 1984). Research on microaggressions in the classroom offers some of the most detailed suggestions about responding to bias. Students reported that instructors who were comfortable discussing diversity issues and who provided support and validation of students' experiences were most effective (Sue et al., 2009). These instructors tended to directly address the issue, accept race as a legitimate topic, and validate all students' experiences. Ineffective responses included ignoring or avoiding the issue, allowing students to dominate the discussion, and becoming angry. Although all of the reviewed suggestions have face validity, they are based on anecdotal evidence and represent just a fraction of the possible ways to handle bias in the classroom.

A first step in finding effective ways of handling bias in the classroom is to explore how instructors respond to bias and the effectiveness of those responses. Boysen and Vogel (2009) examined college instructors' perceptions of the frequency of bias in the classroom and their methods of handling that bias. A sample of 333 professors reported on the overt and subtle forms of bias that they noticed in their classrooms, their responses to the bias, and how effective the responses were. Thirty-eight percent of the sample perceived some form of bias in their classroom in the last year, and overt and subtle forms of bias were noticed with similar frequency. Discussion, direct confrontation, and providing a rebuttal were the most frequently reported methods of managing incidents of both overt and subtle bias. On average, participants believed these responses were effective; however, 40% of professors were unable to assess the success of their response.

Although professors may perceive incidents of bias and believe they have found effective classroom management techniques for the incidents, there are several limitations associated with relying solely on professors to understand bias in the classroom. Relying only on professors ignores the perspective of graduate students who are also frequently responsible for the facilitation of classroom learning. Graduate students have the unique point of view of individuals just learning to teach. Novice instructors may have less attention to devote to detecting bias in the classroom than would experienced professors, which would lead to lower rates of noticing bias. In addition, when graduate instructors do perceive bias, their lower power in relation to professors may lead to fewer responses because of fear of repercussions. Although these outcomes are logical, limited evidence suggests the possibility that graduate instructors might perceive more bias than would professors. Boysen and Vogel (2009) found that younger professors reported more incidents of bias than do older professors, which suggests the potential importance of age and experience in perceiving bias in the classroom. In addition to their perspectives on rates of bias, graduate instructors could help expand knowledge on effective responses to bias. For example, it is unknown how instructors develop effective responses. Professors tend to believe that their responses are effective, but it is not known whether all instructors possess this belief or whether it emerges only with experience. In general, the experience of graduate instructors is different from that of professors, and this suggests that their perspective is valuable in furthering understanding bias in the classroom.

The perceptions of instructors also need to be directly compared with the perceptions of students. Instructors and students have different

classroom roles and demographic characteristics that might lead to differences in the amount of bias each group perceives. The perceptions of students could also help clarify how effectively instructors handle bias. Although previous research indicates that instructors believe that their responses to bias are successful in general (Boysen & Vogel, 2009), it is important to determine whether students find certain responses particularly effective or ineffective. Research indicates that people who confront prejudice are perceived negatively and that confrontation leads to negative emotions among those who are confronted (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). Considering these negative outcomes, it is possible that students may generally perceive instructor responses to bias as ineffective. Overall, Boysen and Vogel's (2009) survey of professors provides a starting point, but additional research that includes graduate instructors and undergraduates is needed to better understand bias in the classroom and how it can be handled effectively.

The Current Study

The current study examined perceptions of bias in the classroom among graduate students who are instructors and undergraduates; in addition, we compared new data on graduate instructor and undergraduate perceptions to previously published data on the perceptions of professors (Boysen & Vogel, 2009). Reanalysis of the professor data is particularly valuable because it will allow for statistical testing of differences between the groups. Specifically, we compare the rates of overt and subtle bias, the responses to bias, and ratings of effectiveness reported by professors, graduate instructors, and undergraduates. Four research questions guided the research. How much bias is perceived in the classroom? How do instructors respond to bias the classroom? Are responses to bias in the classroom perceived as effective? Do instructors and students have similar perceptions of bias in the classroom and the responses to it? Answering these questions will further understanding of bias in the classroom and begin to inform instructors on the effectiveness of methods for handling bias.

Method

Sample

Participants ($N = 2{,}523$) included graduate students ($n = 443$) at a large Midwestern university in the United States. The majority of graduate students were female (52%) and White (77%, Asian American = 12%, multiethnic = 3%, Latino or Latina = 3%, African American = 1%, Middle Eastern = 1%, and other 2.5%). The average age was 28 years ($SD = 7$), and they had completed an average of 3 years ($SD = 2$) of graduate education. Areas of major concentration among the graduates included the natural sciences (30%), social sciences (30%), engineering (17%), arts and humanities (7%), business (5%), design (3%), and other (10%). Graduates had been responsible for teaching 3 labs or courses ($SD = 5$) on average. Participants also included undergraduate students ($n = 1747$) from the same university. The majority of undergraduates were also female (52%) and White (89%, Asian American = 4%, multiethnic = 4%, Latino or Latina = 2%, African American = 1%, and all others $< 1\%$). The average undergraduate was 21 years old ($SD = 5$) with junior class standing, and their areas of study included the social sciences (25%), engineering (22%), natural sciences (15%), business (12%), arts and humanities (7%), design (7%), agriculture and animal science (5%), and undecided or other (7%). In comparison with university enrollment data, women were overrepresented in both samples because they actually represent only about 40% of graduate students and 44% of undergraduates. Ethnicity in both samples was generally representative of the student populations with the percentage of Asian American, African American, and Latino or Latina participants not varying more than 2% from university enrollment data. All participants received a recruitment message sent to their university email account requesting participation in a study about prejudice in the classroom; they received no inducements for participation and self-selected into the study.

In addition to the undergraduate and graduate student samples, this study includes a reanalysis of a previously published data set (Boysen & Vogel, 2009). Reanalysis was conducted so that perceptions of professors could be statistically

compared with graduate instructor and undergraduate perceptions. The sample ($n = 333$) included professors at the same large, public university in the Midwest mentioned above ($n = 267$) and a small, public university in the northeastern United States ($n = 66$). The majority of the sample was male (58%), White (White = 86%, Asian = 6%, Latino or Latina = 3%, multiethnic = 3%, all others less than 1%), and tenured (57%); the mean age was 48 years ($SD = 10$), and mean number of years teaching was 16 ($SD = 11$). Participants self-selected into the study after receiving a message through campus mail or email requesting participation in a study about prejudice in the classroom and received no inducements for participation.

Measures

Undergraduate participants completed a brief questionnaire. The first section was a demographic survey. Next, participants responded *yes* or *no* to the overt bias question, "In the last year has a student said or done something obviously prejudiced during class?" Participants then indicated the targets of the bias (i.e., *race*, *ethnicity*, *religion*, *sexual orientation*, *sex*, *class*, *disability*, or *other*) and types of bias that occurred (i.e., *slur*, *stereotype*, *insult*, *offensive joke/humor*, *avoidance/isolation*, or *other*). Then, a question asked, "Did the instructor notice the obvious prejudice?" and participants responded *yes* or *no.* An open-ended question followed that asked participants to report how the instructor responded to the overt bias. Participants also rated the instructor's response to the bias on a scale from 1 (*extremely unsuccessful*) to 4 (*extremely successful*); they could also select *unable to assess success.*

Next, participants answered *yes* or *no* to the subtle bias question, "Sometimes people do not act in an obviously prejudiced way but are still subtlely insulting, hostile, derogatory, or negative. In the last year has a student said or done something subtlely prejudiced in class?" They then indicated whether their instructor noticed the bias. Because subtle bias is more subjective and difficult to define than is overt bias, we did not provide a list of types and targets of subtle bias. Rather, open-ended questions asked them to describe the incident of subtle bias and how their instructor responded to the subtle bias. They rated the success of the response to subtle bias by using the same scale as with overt bias.

Finally, undergraduate participants responded to questions about bias directed at them. The overt bias question asked, "Has a student directed obvious bias toward you in class based on any of the following characteristics?" and it was followed by the list of targets outlined above with the additional option of *no bias has been directed toward me*. An analogous question about subtle bias immediately followed the overt bias question. The surveys for professors and graduate instructors were the same as the undergraduate survey. The only differences were that the overt and subtle bias questions were phrased to represent classes that the participant had taught, and the response to bias questions asked them to "please provide a specific example of how you responded to the prejudiced event in class."

Procedure

The researchers contacted participants' via their university email accounts with an informational letter requesting participation from graduate students who had taught or were teaching and any undergraduates who had taken a college class. All graduate and undergraduate students at the university received an email solicitation. The letter stressed the voluntary nature of the study and that all responses would be kept confidential. Participants who wished to participate followed a link to a website where the survey was administered.

Participants described responses to bias in open-ended questions. In order to code these data, we followed Hruschka and colleagues' (2004) procedure for codebook development and implementation. An initial coding system was developed on the basis of a review of responses. Hruschka and colleagues then independently coded a selection of responses and compared agreement. Revisions to the codebook occurred on the basis of disagreement, and a sample of responses was recoded. we repeated this procedure until agreement reached acceptable levels and then recoded all responses again independently. The independent coding resulted in a kappa value of .83; however, 100% agreement was reached through discussion.

A total of 13 distinct response types emerged from the coding: direct confrontation, providing information, group discussion, public discussion, private discussion, changing the subject, changing student behavior, humor, removal of the student, referral to authority, nonverbal response, ignoring, and instructor bias. *Direct confrontation* occurred when the instructor immediately conveyed that the bias was offensive or would not be allowed. *Providing information* occurred when instructors immediately responded to the bias with information that did not directly establish that it was offensive or unacceptable; most frequently instructors offered counterevidence or a different perspective. *Group discussion* occurred when the instructor allowed students to discuss the bias. *Public discussion* with the biased student (i.e., a student expressing overt or subtle prejudice, discrimination, or stereotypes) consisted of instructors speaking back and forth only with the biased student; frequently, the instructor asked the student to explain what had been said or engaged in a Socratic dialogue with the student. *Private discussion* occurred whenever the instructor spoke to biased students in a way that other students could not witness, such as holding them after class. *Changing the subject* occurred when instructors put an end to the bias by moving the class in a different direction. *Changing student behavior* consisted of instructors encouraging different behavior without labeling the original behavior as biased; common examples would be forcing students to work together or having a student repeat a comment with appropriate language. *Humor* occurred whenever the instructor attempted to make a joke out of the bias. *Removal of the student* was any case in which the biased student was forced to leave class. *Referral to authority* consisted of any appeal to higher authorities, such as the judicial office of the college. *Nonverbal responses* occurred when the instructor sent a message without speaking such as by giving a look or through body language. *Ignoring* occurred when instructors did not respond at all to the bias, even though they noticed it. *Instructor bias* consisted of any time the instructor joined in with the biased student or was the source of the classroom bias. Finally, responses such as "battled it down," "addressed it," and "acknowledged it" were not clear enough to be coded, which led to a nonspecific 14th category of *Other*.

Results

How Much Bias Is Perceived in the Classroom?

Overt bias. The first set of analyses examined the frequency with which overt bias is perceived in college classrooms. we compared frequencies among professors, graduate instructors, and undergraduates for (a) perception of overt bias, (b) type of overt bias perceived, and (c) reported target of the overt bias. Frequencies can be seen in Table 1. Chi-squared analyses indicated that undergraduates perceived overt bias more frequently than did graduate instructors, $\chi^2(1, N = 2148) = 52.49$, $p < .001$, and professors, $\chi^2(1, N = 2070) = 33.18$, $p < .001$. Graduate instructors and professors did not differ in their frequency of perceiving of overt bias, $\chi^2(1, N = 742) = .611$, $p = .434$. Interestingly, 30% of undergraduates who reported perceiving bias also indicated that their instructor had noticed the bias; this is similar to the percentage of professors (27%) and graduate instructors (25%) who reported perceiving overt bias. Next, we compared the frequency that participants reported specific types of overt biases and targets of these overt biases (see Table 1). A significant difference emerged in terms of the type of overt bias perceived, $\chi^2(10, N = 1866) = 33.27, p < .001$. This difference was driven by professors' tendency to perceive more stereotypes than did undergraduates and graduate instructors. Finally, the proportion of specific targets of overt bias did not differ between the groups, $\chi^2(14, N = 2208) = 11.75$, $p = .626$.

We performed additional frequency analyses on undergraduate responses in order to better understand their perceptions of overt bias in the classroom. Undergraduates reported whether they had been the target of overt bias in the classroom and what personal characteristic led to the bias. Twenty-two percent of undergraduates perceived themselves as a target of overt bias in the classroom in the last year. The most frequent characteristics targeted for overt bias were race or ethnicity (33%) and sex (33%), followed by religion (14%), class (8%), sexual orientation (8%), disability (3%), and other (12%).

Subtle bias. The next analyses examined how frequently subtle bias was perceived in the classroom. We examined how frequently professors, graduate instructors, and undergradu-

Table 1
Frequencies of Overt and Subtle Bias, Targets of Bias, and Types of Bias

Percieved Bias	Professor % (n = 333)	Graduate % (n = 443)	Undergraduate % (n = 1,747)
Perceived overt bias	27	25	44
Perceived subtle bias	30	40	63
Target of bias			
Sexual orientation	20	19	19
Race	19	18	21
Sex	16	19	15
Ethnicity	15	13	14
Religion	12	12	15
Class	10	7	6
Disability	3	8	7
Other	4	5	3
Type of bias			
Stereotype	47	36	34
Offensive humor	20	25	28
Isolation	12	10	5
Slurs	9	13	15
Insults	9	13	16
Other	3	2	3

ates perceived subtle bias (see Table 1). Chi-squared analyses indicated that undergraduates perceived subtle bias more frequently than did graduate instructors, $\chi^2(1, N = 2023) = 68.10$, $p < .001$, and professors, $\chi^2(1, N = 1967) = 120.17$, $p < .001$. In addition, graduate instructors perceived subtle bias more frequently than did professors, $\chi^2(1, N = 708) = 7.38$, $p = .007$. Among those undergraduates who perceived subtle bias, 19% reported that their instructor noticed the bias.

Once again, we performed additional frequency analyses on the undergraduate data to determine how frequently they perceived themselves as being the target of subtle bias. Thirty-four percent of undergraduates reported perceiving themselves as a target of subtle bias in the classroom in the last year. The most frequent characteristic targeted for subtle bias was sex (36%), followed by race or ethnicity (19%), religion (16%), class (10%), sexual orientation (5%), disability (3%), and other (11%).

What Do Instructors Do About Bias in the Classroom?

All participants answered open-ended questions asking them to describe the response to overt or subtle classroom bias. The responses broke down into 14 categories. We performed frequency analyses in order to determine the most common responses to overt and subtle bias. The distribution of responses reported by professors (76 overt responses and 79 subtle responses), graduate instructors (74 overt responses and 91 subtle responses), and undergraduates (173 overt responses and 145 subtle responses) can be seen in Table 2. Several trends are evident in the frequencies. First, providing information, direct confrontation, group discussion, and ignoring the bias were consistently the most common responses to bias. Second, overt and subtle bias did not elicit dramatically different responses from instructors. Third, a substantial number of undergraduates indicated that the instructor's response to bias was to join in with it or otherwise indicated that the instructor was the source of bias.

Are Responses Bias Perceived as Effective?

Overt bias. The next analyses examined perceptions of the effectiveness of responses to bias. Ratings of how successful the response was served as the measure of effectiveness. We defined success as responses of either *successful* (i.e., 3) or *extremely successful* (i.e., 4). In terms

Table 2
Frequencies of Instructors' Responses to Bias in the Classroom

Response	Professor %		Graduate %		Undergraduate %	
	Overt	Subtle	Overt	Subtle	Overt	Subtle
Provide information	32	25	19	20	10	19
Direct confrontation	18	14	28	20	30	15
Group discussion	17	17	14	7	8	9
Ignore	9	13	20	21	13	21
Public student discussion	7	3	4	8	6	3
Private student discussion	5	5	1	4	3	3
Refer to authority	1	—	1	—	—	1
Remove student	1	1	1	—	3	1
Nonverbal	1	—	1	6	4	6
Humor	1	—	1	—	1	1
Change students behavior	1	8	1	7	—	5
Change subject	—	—	—	2	8	5
Instructor is source of bias	—	—	1	—	12	3
Other/unclear	5	15	5	7	5	7

of overall effectiveness, 48% of professors rated their responses as successful, but 40% reported that they were unable to assess the success. Likewise, 38% of graduate instructors rated their response as successful, and 34% were unable to assess success. Undergraduates rated 28% of instructors' responses as successful and were unable to assess success 42% of the time. In order to compare the ratings, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with group (professors, graduate instructors and undergraduates) serving as the independent variable and ratings of success serving as the dependent variable. The Welch statistic corrected for unequal sample sizes. The analyses did not include participants who provided more than one example of a response to bias or who reported being unable to assess the success of the response. A significant overall effect emerged, $F(2, 415) = 10.56$, $p < .001$. Post hoc Tukey's tests revealed that undergraduates' ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .96$) ratings of success were significantly lower than were professors' ratings ($M = 2.89$, $SD = .71$; $p < .001$). However, the ratings of graduate instructors ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .76$) were not significantly different from the ratings of undergraduates or professors (all ps $> .157$). Importantly, if the means are rounded, professors and graduate instructors had an average response of *successful*, and undergraduates had an average response of *unsuccessful*.

The large sample of undergraduates allowed for direct comparison of the effectiveness of several types of responses to bias. There were five response types that occurred more than 10 times in the undergraduate sample: direct response ($n = 41$), providing information ($n = 16$), ignoring ($n = 16$), instructor bias ($n = 16$), and group discussion ($n = 11$). We conducted a one-way ANOVA with response type as the independent variable and ratings of success as the dependent variable. A significant difference emerged between the responses, $F(4, 93) = 12.37$, $p < .001$. Means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 3. The means indicate that ignoring and instructor bias were perceived as *unsuccessful* on average, but undergraduates perceived the other three responses as *successful* on average. Post hoc Tukey's tests showed that undergraduates rated ignoring the bias and instructor bias as significantly less successful than direct responses, providing information, and group discussion (all ps $< .004$). However, no significant differences emerged between direct responses, providing information, and group discussion; also, no significant difference emerged between ignoring bias and instructor bias (all ps $> .413$).

Subtle bias. Analysis of the effectiveness of subtle bias responses was analogous to that used for overt bias. Professors rated their response to subtle bias as successful 45% of the time, and 42% were unable to assess the success. Graduate instructors rated their responses to subtle bias as successful 45% of the time, and 36% were unable to assess success. Undergraduates

Table 3
Mean and Standard Deviations of Undergraduates' Ratings of the Successfulness of Responses to Bias in the Classroom

Response	Overt		Subtle	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Direct response	2.88_a	0.81	2.95_a	0.69
Group discussion	3.36_a	0.67	3.27_a	0.79
Provide information	3.19_a	0.75	3.07_a	0.47
Ignore	1.64_b	0.74	2.00_b	0.95
Instructor is the source of bias	2.00_b	0.74	—	—

Note. Responses ranged from 1 (*extremely unsuccessful*) to 4 (*extremely successful*). Means within a column that do not share a subscript are significant ($p < .004$).

rated 20% of instructors' responses as effective and reported being unable to assess success 53% of the time. A one-way ANOVA examined the professor, graduate instructor, and undergraduate groups for differences in ratings of success. Once again, a significant overall effect emerged, $F(2, 426) = 15.69$, $p < .001$. Post hoc Tukey's tests revealed that undergraduates' ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .89$) ratings of success was significantly lower than were professors' ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .83$) and graduate instructors' ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .68$) ratings of success (all ps $< .001$). However, the ratings of professors and graduate instructors did not differ ($p = .159$). Just as with overt bias, professors' and graduate instructors' responses rounded up to a rating of *successful*, but undergraduates' ratings rounded down to a rating of *unsuccessful*.

Undergraduates reported enough incidences of four subtle bias response types to analyze their relative effectiveness using a one-way ANOVA: direct response ($n = 20$), providing information ($n = 27$), ignoring ($n = 21$), and group discussion ($n = 11$). Means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 3. A significant difference in success emerged between the responses, $F(3, 93) = 11.77$, $p < .001$. Post hoc Tukey's tests showed that undergraduates rated ignoring the bias as significantly less successful than direct responses, providing information, and group discussion (all ps $< .001$). No other significant differences emerged (all ps $> .633$). As with overt bias, ignoring was seen as *unsuccessful* on average, but direct responses, providing information, and group discussion were all seen as *successful* on average.

Discussion

This study of bias in college classrooms provides initial answers to four related research questions. First, how much bias is perceived in the classroom? About a quarter of instructors and half of students perceived bias in their classrooms in the last year. In addition, about a quarter of undergraduates perceived themselves as being the target of overt or subtle bias in the last year. Second, how do instructors respond to bias the classroom? Several different responses emerged as most common from the perspective of both instructors and students. Instructors who perceived bias were likely to directly confront it, provide information to counter it, discuss it, or ignore it. Third, are responses to bias in the classroom perceived as effective? Instructors most commonly perceived their responses to bias as successful. However, it was almost as common for them not to be able to assess the success of the responses. In comparison, perceptions of instructor success were significantly less common among undergraduates; however, undergraduates did see attempting to address bias as more effective than ignoring bias. Fourth, do instructors and students have similar perceptions of bias in the classroom and the responses to it? Unsurprisingly, they do not. Undergraduates perceived more overt and subtle forms of bias in the classroom than did instructors. They also perceived instructors as occasional sources of bias in the classroom, which was a virtually nonexistent perspective among instructors. Finally, undergraduates perceived instructors' responses to bias as significantly less effective than the instructors did themselves.

Relation to Previous Research

Previous studies have documented that college students perceive classrooms as sites of bias on campus (Marcus et al., 2003; Rankin, 2003), and the current study conforms to those results. The current research is also consistent with the emerging field of microaggressions, which explores the everyday, subtle slights and indignities faced by racial and ethnic minorities (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are thought to persist despite the tendency for people to avoid committing overt acts of prejudice, and this study supports that contention. Among instructors, subtle forms of bias were perceived more frequently than were overt forms of bias. Among undergraduates, subtle bias was also more common than was overt bias. In fact, the majority of undergraduates perceived subtle bias in the classroom during the last year. Considering the ubiquity of subtle forms of bias in our culture (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002), its presence in college classrooms is not surprising. Overall, past and present research on overt and subtle bias indicates that college classrooms do not provide a bias-free learning environment for students.

Implications

Given the novelty of the current research, there are a number of immediate implications for diversity in higher education. Perhaps the most important implication is that more bias may be occurring in college classrooms than instructors perceive. Students report more bias than do instructors. Such a trend is not surprising; both the physical separation between instructors and students and the many aspects of classroom management that compete for instructors' attention might prevent them from noticing as much bias as do students. Thus, bias in the classroom should be addressed before it even occurs. Colleges should make nondiscrimination policies clear to students, and instructors should make similar expectations explicit through syllabi and outlines of course policy. Such nondiscrimination policies are associated with positive effects on diversity (Cook & Glass, 2008) and fit with the organizational change that is central to the multicultural movement (APA, 2003; Hill, 2003). It is important to note an alternative interpretation of the difference between instructor and student perceptions, however. Instructors and students have many demographic differences that were not assessed in this study, and it may be these differences that account for students perceiving more bias than do instructors. Differences in perception may not be due to the ability of instructors to notice bias but rather students' tendency to interpret events as bias more frequently than do instructors.

The results of this study also suggest that methods of handling bias in the classroom should be a topic in college-teaching courses, Preparing Future Faculty seminars, learning center workshops, and any other training that graduate students receive to prepare them for teaching. Students perceive instructors' responses to bias as unsuccessful on average. One way to improve this trend would be to actually train instructors to deal with bias in the classroom. Graduate instructors often see their responses to bias as less effective than those of professors, which is an indication that their efforts at handling bias, like other teaching skills, could be improved through training (Prieto & Meyers, 1999). Previous analysis of the professor sample used in this study indicated that younger faculty are more likely to perceive bias in the classroom than are older faculty (Boysen & Vogel, 2009). Similarly, graduate students in the current study were more likely to report incidences of subtle bias than were professors. Such trends suggest that younger instructors have an increased likelihood of dealing with bias in the classroom, and this further indicates that they need to be trained to effectively respond.

Although the training of graduate instructors may be particularly valuable, several findings from this study are pertinent to all instructors. At a general level, instructors should strive to avoid prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes. Students perceive instructors as a source of bias in the classroom. As such, efforts to improve teaching, such as college-teaching courses for graduate students and learning center workshops for professors, could benefit from an infusion of basic multicultural ideals. Specifically, multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skill could be introduced as basic teaching concepts relevant to all instructors (Sue & Sue, 2003). Instructors should be aware of their own biases and cultural preconceptions, have knowl-

edge of other cultures and the experiences of people with diverse backgrounds, and possess the skill to work effectively with students of diverse backgrounds.

In terms of specific skills for dealing with bias, some generalizations can be made from the results of this study. Surprisingly, it appears that simply responding in some way is a key to effectively handling bias in the classroom. No significant differences emerged in the general effectiveness of the most common responses to bias, and they were all perceived as effective. In contrast, ignoring bias was perceived as ineffective. In fact, no significant difference emerged between undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of ignoring bias and contributing to bias. Simply acknowledging that bias has occurred appears to be the essential task. After responding in some way, the next step should be assessing how effective the response was. Instructors need to do more to determine how well they are handling bias in the classroom. Almost as many instructors reported not being able to tell how effective their response to bias was as reported being successful in their response to bias. One simple way to assess success is to solicit feedback from students after an incident of bias and make adjustments on the basis of that feedback. Using good classroom assessment practices would not only allow for improved responses over time, it would further communicate concern about ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment for all students.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study provides a novel examination of bias in the classroom from multiple perspectives, several limitations should be noted. The major limitation of this study was the sample; although representative of the university it was taken from, it lacked racial and ethnic diversity. Different trends may have emerged if this study had been conducted on a campus with a more diverse student and faculty body. Previous research suggests that a more diverse sample would have reported even higher rates of overt and subtle biases (D'Augelle & Hershberger, 1993; Fisher & Hartman, 1995). Another limitation of the sample was that participants self-selected into the study. Although a large number of students completed the survey, students who choose to complete a survey about bias in the classroom may be different than students who choose not to complete such a survey, and selection effects may have impacted the results. The survey also had some limitations. All responses were subjective and retrospective. There is no way to assure than participants' perceptions matched objective operational definitions of bias. Furthermore, participants based their perceptions on different classroom experiences. The validity of the results would have benefited if all participants had been in the same classroom experiencing the same events. Considering the lack of objective measures, differences between groups must be interpreted tentatively because they may represent differences in the subjective interpretation of incidents as examples of bias rather than in the objective identification of bias.

Future research might begin by addressing the limitations of the current study. A random sample with a higher proportion of diverse instructors and students would be a good first step to ensuring the generalizability of this study's results. Such a sample would also foster exploration of differences in the perception of bias based on ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation. In addition, experimental methods might be effective in removing some of the study's subjectivity. For example, instructors could be provided with various classroom situations and be asked to report how they would handle them. Similarly, students could react to vignettes describing instructors' methods of handling bias. Such vignettes would allow for a more detailed analysis of response effectiveness, which is difficult to study because of the relative rarity of incidents of bias in the classroom in comparison with all other classroom events.

Summary and Conclusion

Perceiving bias in college classrooms is a common experience for instructors and students. Incidents of bias include overt forms of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping and subtler forms of bias. Although instructors apparently have several standard methods for dealing with bias, it is common for them to have little idea of the responses' effectiveness. Furthermore, instructors perceive less bias in their classrooms than do students, and their handling of bias is seen by students as generally unsuccessful. Incidents of bias are certainly less com-

mon than positive learning experiences in college classrooms; nonetheless, just one such incident can affect a students' college experience (e.g., Samuel, 2004). Considering this, both educators and researchers have a responsibility to better ensure that students can focus on academic challenges in the classroom.

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