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Contributing Factors to Attitudes and Beliefs about Diversity

Rachael M. Duda

University of New Hampshire

University Honors Thesis

Abstract

Diversity is a major issue in the world today. This project studied the attitudes and beliefs about diversity in order to understand where they originate. It focused on family beliefs and educational experiences and whether they each play a role in one's perspective of other races/ethnicities. The sample consisted of 100 University of New Hampshire undergraduate students recruited through Facebook as well as in-class presentations on campus. Students were asked to complete a survey online. Quantitative results revealed that neither family nor education, as measured with forced-choice questions, were predictive of acceptance of other races. Overall, students reported themselves and their families as being very accepting of other races. However, they noted there was a lack of formal education about the topic of diversity in schools and that they largely came from homogenous schools. Qualitative results reveal that students themselves highlight the importance of exposure to diverse others, family upbringing, the media, and several other key factors as important considerations in how they treat other people; this suggests a multitude of ways that people create their beliefs. Implications for college student curriculum and campus life are highlighted.

Contributing Factors to Attitudes and Beliefs about Diversity

America is a melting pot of numerous cultures, races, and ethnicities. Diversity continues to grow every year but that does not mean everyone is accepting of it. For example, the Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing segments in America, with growth only projected to continue, with an estimated 114.8% increase between 2014 and 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Yet, racial tensions are still high which is partially due to lack of knowledge or incorrect knowledge about others (Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001). People still feel threatened, anxious, and prejudice against immigrants (Murray & Marx, 2013) and minority groups in the United States. It is vital to address the sources of knowledge about outgroup members in order to prevent prejudices due to race before they even take root. Importantly, prejudices can lead to discrimination and acts of racial violence. Education centered on research-based knowledge of the commonalities and diversity *between* different racial groups and *within* these groups can help to promote greater acceptance of others and move the U.S. towards social harmony.

One potent source of knowledge is the family. The family can have a major impact on the beliefs one has especially if they are never exposed to another perspective (Dalege & Degner, 2013). Children are likely to be molded by their parents' values because that is what they have been taught since birth. Before children begin school or make friends, their first agent of socialization is their family. Social learning theory suggests parents serve as important models for children's behaviors and beliefs and that children begin to develop certain ideals based off what they are exposed to in the home (Bandura, 1977); children are directly and repeatedly exposed to what their parents are doing and saying. Even when children enter school, their values and beliefs continue to be more influenced by their parents than their peers (Castelli, Tomelleri, & Zogmaister, 2009). While the influential role of parents is not surprising given this

direct exposure, interestingly, research shows children hold the same values as parents about topics that are not even spoken of explicitly in the family, such as immigration and prejudice (Dalege & Degner, 2013). This suggests that parents serve as a powerful force, even unintentionally, in molding the attitudes and acceptance of their children.

However, parents, alone, are not responsible for the socialization of children in the United States. Education is meant to help develop children's minds through both instruction and exposure, and this includes issues related to social justice (Laird, 2005). Bowman and Denson (2012) noted that when college students had more interracial interactions, they had higher feelings of satisfaction. Yet, acceptance of others does not always need to come from first hand exposure. Education about diversity-related topics in the classroom may also be a useful tool to help us understand individuals' attitudes towards others, especially among those who may not come from a diverse community. But little is known about individuals' exposure to such education in schools.

While both exposure to diverse student populations in schools and parental contributions have been looked at in isolation, no known research has examined the effect that each contributes to the attitudes and beliefs of young adults and what added role that having curriculum devoted to diversity plays in acceptance. Limited research on the inclusion of curriculum about diversity exists. Given that exposure to those from diverse backgrounds increases acceptance of individuals from outgroups (Chang, 2002; Hogan & Mallot, 2005), in lieu of, or in addition to, such exposure, course content and information about diversity topics may also help increase student awareness and acceptance of similarities and differences among individuals.

College is an especially interesting time to question where beliefs come from because it may be the first time students are away from home and may be exposed to greater diversity. Specifically, adolescence and young adulthood may be an especially salient time in which attitude formation can be modified by others and through experience. While research suggests that parents continue to be an important influence on beliefs in adulthood (Jasper, Lubbers, & de Vries, 2008), the college experience itself may open up a much wider social network and provide more opportunities to be exposed to diverse opinions and activities to learn more about diverse races and cultures.

Family Influences

One of the key microsystems impacting individual development is the family (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Children are exposed to their parents from birth. Demonstrating the role of parenting on individual development, Achtergarde, Postert, Wessing, Romer, and Müller (2015) looked at how parenting styles affect child temperament. Their meta-analysis stresses the influence parents have on the mental health of their children. They found that aggressive parenting led to more problematic child behaviors, including aggression and rebellion, exemplifying the amount of influence a parent has on children's social-emotional development.

Parents also play a role in the development of children's attitudes (Vollebergh et al., 2001). Although education is an influential agent in peoples' lives, parents and the environment a child grows up in are more likely to shape their beliefs about topics such as diversity until they reach adolescence. This is because parents are the primary agent of socialization for children prior to this time. Once children reach adolescence, cognitive advances may prompt children's beliefs and opinions of others to be more flexible and amenable to revision. According to

Piaget's cognitive development theory, during adolescence, children become capable of abstract thought and hypothetical reasoning (Berk & Myers, 2016). Being able to think outside the "here and now" may allow adolescents to be better able to put themselves in the shoes of others, including those of different racial groups, and take their perspectives, even when it may vary greatly from their own experiences. The significance of this developmental shift is that it may allow for greater openness to influences outside of the family. Yet still, while their influence may change, parents continue to serve an important role in influencing the lives of children across development and into adulthood (Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). If parents make negative comments about people, children may internalize these. In a study by Dalege & Degner (2013), they researched 131 previous studies about the interactions between 45,000 different parents and children, ranging in age from three to 21 years old. They looked at how the child holds the same values or not, as his or her parent, regarding intergroup attitudes. The study found that children held similar beliefs to their parents about prejudices, but they could not confirm that it was because of parental influence due to concerns about developmental status, age, and/or other sources of socialization. Interestingly, however, the biggest overlap between the parent and child was when the issues of immigration or prejudice were brought up. Such issues may indirectly communicate to children the value placed on outgroup members such that even if race is never discussed, parental attitudes towards it are understood by the actions of family members. Nonverbal cues can often say more to a child about how a parent is feeling on an issue than what they actually say about it. Even a facial expression can reveal how someone feels without them outright saying it (Castelli et al., 2009).

Other research has indeed supported the influence of parents on children's attitudes about social issues. For example, in a study conducted in the Netherlands by Jaspers, Lubbers, and de

Vries (2008), they looked at the attitudes children and parents had about the subjects of euthanasia, homosexuality, and ethnic minorities when the child was 15. The study was conducted by sending out questionnaires to participants aged 18-70 and asking them to think back on their attitudes when they were 15. They then asked for parents' addresses and sent out questionnaires asking their parents to think about their own beliefs when their child was 15. This study found that parents' beliefs about these social issues influenced their adult children's beliefs on these issues as well. However, the influence was found to have faded as the child aged. Importantly, however, this study is retrospective, so further research needs to be done to assess whether the role of parents in shaping attitudes really lessens in adulthood or if the findings of Jasper and colleagues is a product of the longer time period between adolescence and study participation for the older participants. In order to truly know the effect of parental socialization, a longitudinal analysis would need to be done.

Another study demonstrating the link between parent and child attitudes was done by Sinclair, Dunn, and Lowery (2005). They surveyed 89 parent-child (fourth and fifth graders) pairs about their racial attitudes and found that the more the child identified with the parent, the stronger their views aligned about racial prejudices. Parent-child identification was measured by asking the children how much they cared about making their parents proud, how often they did what their parents told them, how much they enjoyed spending time with their parents, and how much they wanted to be like their parent. Additionally and perhaps more relevant due to the developmental age examined, in a study of adolescents, Edmonds and Killen (2009) studied teenagers' perceptions of their parents' views on outgroup members and the teenagers' relationships with outgroup members. A survey that asked about parents' acceptance of outgroup members was completed by 347 ninth and twelfth grade students of all different ethnicities. The

survey focused on three main categories: experiences, intimacy, and messages. They found that

parents had a large influence on the students' relationships and intimacy with outgroup members.

Participants, for the most part, said the reason they did not bring a cross-race date home was

because of parents' lack of comfortability.

Educational Influences

While home life plays a large role, so too, does education. There is still room to educate

students, mainly in high school and college when they are old enough to know the difference

between what they are told by parents and what they choose to believe. This can occur two ways:

explicitly and implicitly. Explicit education includes incorporating diversity classes and content

in schools. Implicitly, education can also come from exposure to diverse peers in a diverse

school environment. The knowledge people can gain from school can change their ideals.

Although some people grow up sheltered to the diversity of the world, society cannot blame

them for this, but provisions must be made to account for it. Importantly, Vollebergh et al.

(2001) noted that those with less education are more likely to discriminate and have negative

feelings toward people who are culturally different than them.

Clearly, education in and of itself is important, but it is particularly useful when

curriculum centers on diversity-related issues. It is vital that quality education be provided to all

that encompasses not only core subjects such as math and history, but also culture and diversity.

Courses on diversity lead to greater acceptance of others because people are able to understand

outgroups better (Chang, 2001; Hogan & Mallot, 2005). A study by Hogan and Mallot (2005)

looked at 250 college students to see if diversity courses helped reduce racial prejudices. They

found that courses on race and gender did reduce denial that racism exists, but did not reduce

resentment or antagonism toward outgroup members.

What then *can* lead to a deeper appreciation for diverse others? Keehn (2015) found that learning from personal experiences allowed students to understand how diversity affects people in a more understandable way. She asked students about their experiences listening to panels in a diversity course and overall they agreed that it helped them understand a new perspective better. People from all different backgrounds found different ways to appreciate the speakers such as a white woman empathizing with a black woman or a black woman finding similarities between her and the white speaker. A personal experience had a stronger effect on them than reading a book about diversity. Keehn also noted that if participants had a relationship with the people giving the personal stories, they were more likely to empathize and pay attention. Hence, exposure to diverse others, seems to be key.

Experience with individuals from diverse races can also lead to more satisfying college experiences (Bowman & Denson, 2011). Specifically, Bowman and Denson (2011) found that increased interracial interactions in college were related to greater fulfillment/happiness with their school experience. However, college satisfaction also depended on their precollege experiences. Students who came from highly diverse high schools and had less interracial interactions in college were less satisfied with the school as a whole. Similarly, Saenz (2010) studied precollege environments and interactions people had with diverse groups in college. He looked at students' interactions, anxieties, expectations, and amount of time spent with diverse people. He found that increased interactions with diversity in college led to more benefits from these experiences such as higher academic performance and an overall positive environment on campus. Saenz also noted that people who interact with diverse groups are able to expand their knowledge and way of thinking.

Collectively, the body of research on educational influences on diversity shows the benefits of learning about diversity as well as experiencing it. Exposure can be a pivotal way for students to learn about others; however, such direct contact with diversity varies greatly across high school and undergraduate institutions. On less racially diverse campuses, explicit instruction about diversity may be especially useful in helping to broaden the minds of students.

Familiarity is a vast step in helping students who are leaving home for the first time. It can be uncomfortable for new students when they are faced with differences they have never experienced. It also may be hard for them to accept that what they grew up thinking is no longer true to them. If people come from homogenous environments, college is the first time they may experience what is different. College is critical for students to learn what they want to do in the world and how they fit in it. For many, college campuses offer many more opportunities to be exposed to diverse others that they may not have been afforded in their hometowns (Saenz, 2010). The more students become involved with diverse clubs, friend groups, and courses, the better their interactions with diverse people become. The importance of interracial interactions is that it leads to more fulfilling college experiences and better perceptions of other races (Bowman & Denson, 2011; Saenz, 2010). If students are not exposed to this in high school, their post-secondary education is their second chance. People need to be exposed to what the real world is like—diverse. This will promote cultural competence and compassion in working with others.

In support of this, Laird (2005) conducted a study of 289 college students and assessed their backgrounds, education of and experience with diversity, and well-being. He found that people's experience with diversity led to higher academic confidence and better critical thinking because of their exposure to different thinking methods. Interestingly, a vast percentage (97.8%) of students took a diversity course in college. These students also consider themselves to be

intelligent and caring towards social justice. These qualities seem to intertwine with each other to build a more educated, respectful person. Diversity can be taught to students in a classroom but experiences can also be an important teaching tool. Opportunities to be exposed to diversity on campus can also lead to diverse opinions in classrooms which is an important source impacting the acceptance of others.

The Current Study

One thing is clear; the negative treatment and beliefs about others are rooted somewhere and need to be rectified. The first step in doing this is to identify the sources of these beliefs. Importantly, given the role of the family and school in the socialization process, they may both be influential over individuals' attitudes towards others. Yet no known study has examined their unique contribution to one's beliefs. This study aims to address this gap by exploring three research questions: (1) is there insufficient education and opportunities in school to help support the advancement of diversity (i.e., do schools offer courses and curriculum including diversity); (2) does acceptance of others stem more from familial influences or educational influences (quantitative); and (3) what do students themselves report are the greatest forces impacting their beliefs and attitudes towards other races/ethnicities (qualitative)? Specifically, a multi-method format was used to address the questions of interest with a college-aged population, a developmental period where cognitive gains, greater distance from the family, and the potential for more diverse interactions may make individuals less susceptible to the opinions of their family and more open to experiences with others.

Method

Participants

Research participants were 100 college students at the University of New Hampshire over the age of 18. Out of the 100 respondents, 93 responded about their age with the mean being 20.31 years old (SD = 1.16, range = 18-22 years). The majority of respondents were from either Massachusetts (37.9%) or New Hampshire (36.8%) and came from largely suburban neighborhoods (57.9%). The majority of students also identified as non-Hispanic Caucasian (87%), 3% were African-American or Black, 4% were Asian, 6% were Hispanic or Latino/a, and 1% was Native American; the remainder (6%) reported other races not listed or multiple races. The majority (57.9%) of individuals had an average family income greater than $90,000; 34.7% reported income between $30,000 and $89,000 and 7.4% reported income between $10,000 and $29,000. For their mothers' highest level of education, 67.5% had a bachelors, masters, or doctorate degree. For their fathers' highest level of education, 63.1% had a bachelors, masters, or doctorate. For those identifying as having some kind of religious affiliation (38.1%), 81.4% identified with Christianity. For full demographic information, see Table 1.

Measures

The online survey consisted of 26 multiple choice questions and two open responses (only one of which was analyzed in this study) specifically created by the researcher in consultation with her advisor. The questions were created from looking at previous research on similar topics (e.g., Bowman & Denson 2011; Degner & Dalege, 2013; Jasper et al., 2008). Questions asked about demographic information, family and personal attitudes towards those from other races, and school exposure to diverse course content and student body. You can find the complete survey in the Appendix.

Personal attitudes about those from other races were assessed with three questions: "are you accepting of other races," "would you feel comfortable in an interracial relationship," and "how do you perceive races differently than your own?" Participants responding "yes" to either of the first two questions were given a score of 1 for that question, accordingly, while respondents indicating that they perceived races as similar to themselves (vs. different) on question 3 were also given a score of 1 for that question. Responses across the three questions were summed to create an overall sum score of personal attitudes towards other races, with higher values indicating greater acceptance. *Family influences* were assessed by asking students to answer 'Yes' or 'No' to four questions about their family members' attitudes about other races: "Are your parents accepting of others," "would your parents feel comfortable if you were in an interracial relationship," "are your grandparents accepting of others," and "would your grandparents feel comfortable if you were in an interracial relationship?" Yes (1) responses were again summed to create an overall measure of family-level influences, with higher scores indicating more acceptance of other races. *Educational influences* were assessed by having participants respond to three questions. Participants endorsed 'Yes' or 'No' for two questions: "did your high school consist mostly of people the same race as you" [reverse coded], and "did your high school offer a diversity class?" 'Yes' responses (reverse coded for the first question, so that higher scores indicate a more diverse student body) were again given a score of 1 and were added to responses to a third question: "Did any of your teachers in high school incorporate the topic of diversity in classes such as math, science, history, English, etc.?" Responses to this question were on a four point score ranging from 0 = none of my teachers did to 4 = all of my teachers did. Thus, *Educational influences* could range on a scale of 0 (indicating a homogenous high school with no diversity courses or diversity curriculum included) to 6 (heterogeneous with

much diversity covered). Lastly, students responded to the open-ended question: "What factors do you think have the greatest impact on your attitudes and beliefs towards individuals who may differ from you in terms of race/ethnicity? Please explain."

Procedure

Prior to data collection, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Hampshire. Participants were recruited to complete an online survey through an advertisement posted on Facebook and brief class presentations. Interested parties followed a provided link to complete the online survey via Qualtrics. After consenting to the study protocol, participants were presented with the survey questions. Participation was completely voluntary; participants were not compensated in any way for completion of the study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

On average, the mean for *personal attitudes* was 2.56 (*SD*= 0.75, Range = 0-3), indicating an overall tendency to be accepting towards other races. Results were similar for *family influences,* with a mean of 3.01 (*SD* = 1.06, Range = 0-4), indicating overall familial acceptance of other races/ethnicities. Lastly, the mean of *educational influences* was 1.20 (*SD*= 1.04, Range = 0-4); overall, there was not much exposure to diversity in schools. Refer to Table 2 for specific frequency of responses by question. *Family influences, educational influences,* and *personal attitudes* were not correlated.

Main Analyses

To address the first research question, the frequency with which students are offered courses specifically devoted to diversity and the extent to which diversity was incorporated in their core coursework was examined. As Table 2 highlights, 70.5% of participants had the topic

of diversity incorporated into their high school classes somehow. However, only 5.3% said their

high school offered a diversity class and 25.3% have ever taken a course specifically devoted to

the topic of diversity (either in high school or college).

To explore whether *family influences* or *educational influences* play a greater role in

predicting *personal attitudes* about diversity, a multiple hierarchical regression was used. First,

the correlations between potential demographic covariates (e.g., ethnicity, religiosity, gender,

income) and *personal attitudes* were examined as control variables. No significant covariates

emerged and thus, none were included in the regression model. In the final model, neither *family*

influences, ($\beta = .15$, *ns*) nor *educational influences* ($\beta = .14$, *ns*) were significant predictors of

personal attitudes about diversity, $R^2 = .05$. Follow up correlational analyses between the seven

variables (see Table 2) used to create the two sum scores (*family* and *educational influences)* and

personal attitudes were examined to explore further. Only two significant correlations emerged;

there was a trend for participants who reported their parents as more accepting of them being in

an interracial relationship to be more likely themselves to accept other races, $r = .19$, $p = .06$.

Further, participants who went to a high school with a student body including races different than

their own were also more accepting, $r = .23$, $p = .03$. Lastly, the total number of influences on

personal attitudes was examined by creating a sum score of all possible sources of acceptance

and exposure to diversity from the family and education ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.58$, Range = 1-8), to

determine if greater exposure more globally from all sources was important beyond individual

relations to *personal attitudes.* Results show that individuals reporting greater sources of overall

acceptance globally (from family and education) were more likely to be accepting of other races,

$r = .21$, $p = .04$.

Qualitative analyses. Beyond examining participants' responses to quantitative

questions, the researcher also asked students to respond to the following open-ended question:

"What factors do you think have the greatest impact on your attitudes and beliefs towards

individuals who may differ from you in terms of race/ethnicity?" This question was designed to

allow students to provide their own perspective on what they believe to be the greatest sources of

influence on their personal attitudes towards others. Using a constant comparative method

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990), themes among participant responses ($n = 71$) were identified in a

three-step process. First, both the researcher and her advisor independently analyzed the data to

identify commonalities emerging from the data. In this first step, the researcher identified 5

themes and her advisor identified 11. There was substantial overlap in the themes, but minor

disagreements about whether some themes should be more broad or narrow. After discussion,

they agreed on 8 themes that best captured participant responses. In the second step, the

researcher and her advisor again independently coded participant responses and forced them into

these identified themes (note that responses could fall into one or more of these themes). In the

last step, comparisons between response placements were made; inter-rater reliability was

84.5%. In two cases, the two coders placed responses in completely different categories. The

remainder of the disagreements ($n = 9$) involved cases in which both coders agreed on placement

in one category, but one of them also placed that response in a second category. Discrepancies

were discussed to come to consensus on where each response would be placed, resulting in the

final distribution of responses among the themes.

The eight themes that were identified include: Prior Exposure, Family/Upbringing,

Media, Other Person's Behavior/Personality, Friends, Religion/Morality, Education, and

Other/NA. *Prior Exposure* (27.08%) includes responses that stress the importance of personal

interactions with those from other races, the diversity of the environment one grew up in, or the

demographics of where they lived and went to school. As one participant explained, "Exposure is

definitely a key factor; up where I live in the boondocks people are prejudiced because they

don't learn any different meeting people of other races." Another noted: "Growing up in a

racially diverse community greatly impacted my attitude and beliefs towards individuals that are

different than me."

The second most prevalent theme was *Family/Upbringing* (19.79%). Responses that

acknowledged the influence that family and how one is raised/socialized impacts their ideals, fit

in this category. For example, as one participant powerfully stated, "My mother taught me about

what challenges other peoples have gone through and it made me feel that just because someone

looks different or speaks in different tongues doesn't mean that they don't bleed when you cut

them." The *Media* (17.70%) also appears to play a role in personal attitudes about other races.

Books, movies, the internet, and social media all contribute. For example, one individual wrote,

"Social media has educated me more about diversity than school ever did."

A fourth theme identified was related to the O*ther Person's Personality* (10.42%);

specifically, respondents noted that the other person's personality or how they treat them (the

respondent) is what dictates how they are treated, not their race. One participant said, "The

greatest factor that impacts my attitude and beliefs towards anyone who is different is how they

treat me and what their attitude is. Example: If you are nice to me, I'm nice to you. If you are

rude, mean, etc. then I will ignore you."

Friends (7.29%), both their diversity as well as the information and attitudes they share

about other races, also play a role. For example, as one student noted: "I am friends with a lot of

people in the social justice realm of UNH and they have all opened my eyes to injustices that

happen on a daily basis because of race." Some participants also suggested that their

Religion/Morality (4.17%) were important to them. Specifically, individuals explicitly noted the

role that their religion held in shaping their values, as is evidenced in this response: "Growing up

in a church who's core philosophy is to "believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all living

things. Our religious education program (Sunday School) was called [removed for

confidentiality] and taught about other religions and we visited other places of worship." Some

also suggested that treating others differently solely because of their race was the wrong thing to

do: "I think the biggest factor is that I know it is morally wrong to dislike someone because of

their ethnicity. People should be judged by their character, not their ethnicity."

    Education (3.13%), such as courses taken or information about diversity that was learned

in school, really highlighted the importance of learning about diversity in the classroom or

environment. As one participant suggested: "My experiences in college have taught me about

privilege and what it means to be oppressed. These factors helped me better understand my

attitudes of different races and what I believe." The remaining responses (10.42%) included

answers that did not address the question posed (*Other*).

Discussion

    Recently, an increased number of universities have required students to take a diversity

course, but media coverage suggests this is still controversial (e.g., Jaschik, 2015). In this study,

a large 63.2% of students at UNH said they would take a diversity class if they could. Then why

have so few (25.3%) students taken a diversity course? People may not have the ability to

experience diversity firsthand which is where education about diversity can truly make a

difference. The more people are exposed to diversity, the more accepting they are likely to

become (Chang, 2001; Hogan & Mallot, 2005).

According to the U.S. Census there has been an increase in the Hispanic population since 1950 because of increased immigration (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). From 2000 to 2010, there was a 43% increase in Hispanics/Latinos whereas there was only a 4.9% increase in those who were not. Older generations are more likely to have conservative values that include prejudices against immigrants whereas the youth of society has become more accepting of them (Marx & Murray, 2012). The findings of this study support this greater tolerance, with the majority of students reporting that they perceive other races positively. Once people become informed, they are more likely to gain respect for people different than themselves (Keehn, 2015). This could be a result of higher education or growing up in a more liberal generation that is generally more accepting. In addition, people who grew up around other races or immigrants (i.e., heterogeneous environments) may feel more comfortable and accepting of these differences, which is also supported by the results of this study.

Despite the fact that *family influences* were not related overall to personal attitudes, qualitative results from the study indicate that students *do* find family an important influence (19.8% of responses fell within this theme). It may be that the summed nature of this composite variable did not capture the nature of this relationship clearly enough. In fact, when examining individual questions, parents' acceptance of inter-racial relationships supports their children's greater acceptance of other races.

Similar to findings regarding *family influences*, *educational influences* as a whole also did not predict *personal attitudes*. However, follow-up analyses did reveal that coming from a school with a diverse student body was related to being more accepting towards others. This finding was confirmed in the qualitative analyses, with participants noting that the biggest factor impacting their attitudes and beliefs towards other racial/ethnic groups is prior exposure to

diversity. If someone grows up in a heterogeneous, diverse neighborhood/school, they may stem certain beliefs from that very environment. Children need to be exposed to people and environments different than their own to understand the world more fully (Saenz, 2010). The lack of a diverse student body can affect peoples' perspectives of the world and leave them more "sheltered" to the many cultures that exist in our society.

This finding aligns well with previous research by Milem and Umbach (2003). They conducted a survey that helped them understand the likelihood of students participating in diverse activities depending on their previous experiences. Over three quarters of the White participants said they grew up in a neighborhood consisting mostly of their race. Only half of the African American students said they grew up in a neighborhood mostly of their race. Interestingly, their data showed that African American students were increasingly likely to get involved with diverse activities when compared to White students. Importantly, this finding may suggest that the homogeneity of neighborhoods from which many White students originate may serve as an obstacle that may lead to less involvement in diversity activities in college. It may be especially helpful to consider ways to increase White student engagement in such activities, especially given their overall low levels of exposure to diverse student body (89% of White participants in this study came from homogenous schools) prior to college.

In this study, while most students, regardless of race, had *some* exposure to diversity in one form or another, they had little direct instruction/information on the topic. This creates a problem because people, especially those coming from homogenous backgrounds, may not be opened up to the realities of the world. The lack of students who acknowledge formal instruction on diversity may explain why it did not have an influence on personal attitudes in this study (i.e., restricted range). While a diversity course is not required at UNH, the majority of students are

interested in taking such a course. Coupled with greater exposure to more diversity in college, it would be interesting to design a longitudinal study to assess how students' exposure/knowledge of diversity changes across the college years and whether this leads to even greater acceptance of others.

Contrary to the hypothesis, neither education nor family contributes more or less than the other to attitudes about diversity. Although both family and education play a role in attitudes about diversity, specifically in terms of parental acceptance of interracial relationships for their children and coming from a diverse student body, there were more factors that were identified as themes in participant responses that also play a role; notably, media, the other person's personality, and religion/morality. Further, it was also found that regardless of the source of influence, the greater the number of positive influences the more accepting participants were. Together, these findings suggest that there is not one sole influence on college students' attitudes towards others. It is important to look collectively and comprehensively at what people are exposed to as well as what they hear and learn about others. The individual is embedded in a multitude of systems that impacts their behavior and beliefs, such as microsystems, exosystems, and chronosystems (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Microsystems are the school and family influences, exosystems are the neighborhoods and communities and chronosystems are generational shifts, which are all prevalent in one's life. Findings from this study suggest influences at each level must be taking into consideration. There is no single influence on people's ideals which shows why education is vital for everyone, no matter their family or previous educational background.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the current study due to the sensitive nature of the topic. For example, social desirability may be an issue; some students may not have answered truthfully because they could have been embarrassed to disclose their own, or their family members', true beliefs about diversity. Another limitation is related to the study design. For questions asking about parents' acceptance, the questionnaire grouped them together rather than asking about each parent separately. Future studies should ask about each parent separately, as they may have diverging beliefs about diversity and may have more or less influence on children's attitudes, depending on a number of factors, including how the child identifies with the parent (Sinclair et al., 2005). To this end, future students should also include a measure of how close the child is to his or her parents. The survey also did not ask about gender, which is clearly a major flaw; there is no way to assess differences based on this characteristic in the current study. Other research has looked at gender to see differences among responses and found that women are more likely to partake in diverse activities (Milem & Umbach, 2003) and have more positive cross-racial interactions than men (Saenz, 2010).

In terms of how the data was collected, participants were majorly recruited from Facebook, so people without this form of social media account may not have known about the study. Other students were recruited from diversity-relevant courses, where they were currently being exposed to diversity-related content, potentially making them more homogenous in acceptance of racial diversity than students who were not enrolled in such courses. Lastly, when we consider sample demographics participants were mostly a homogenous group of Caucasian students from homogenous neighborhoods and from higher income, well-educated families, who are enrolled at a public, 4-year university. Results may differ if this study is replicated with a

more heterogeneous sample, include those from different races, socioeconomic status, and enrollment status in institutes of higher education (e.g., not attending a university, those enrolled at a community college, private college, etc.). Thus, the generalizability of findings may be limited.

Conclusion

Contrary to the hypothesis, neither education nor family contributes more or less than the other to attitudes about diversity. There are a multitude of influences, which can make it difficult to address if the problem of racial intolerance is related to lack of family acceptance, or education about diversity alone. What seems to matter most, is prior exposure to those from diverse racial groups. Because of the ever-growing diversity in this country, people should be learning about cultures other than their own. Most people in this study had some exposure to diversity but not substantial information. This creates an issue because about 80% of these students came from homogeneous environments. If they are not experiencing diversity firsthand, it is important for them to learn about it in another way, such as in the classroom. There are a lot of students interested in diversity courses yet it leaves the question of whether schools should be requiring students to partake in them. If it is such a large issue relating to basic human rights, shouldn't people understand the importance of treating others with respect and dignity?

The first step is to incorporate more diversity courses here in college. People need curriculum on the topic and knowledge of the challenges and strengths of all racial/ethnic groups, with specific awareness drawn to similarities between different races rather than focusing solely on differences. While incorporating courses here is the first step, we should also focus on the bigger picture of how this can be done throughout the country. Mandating diversity courses can open minds about others and develop a sense of openness to anyone and everyone.

However, in addition to courses, there should be more student organizations that allow

interactions among diverse races. Public universities that have offered more chances for diverse

interaction with co-curricular activities have allowed for high interactions among peers which

also creates higher acceptance through friendships and stronger bonds (Saenz, 2010). If there are

numerous activities for students to partake in with people who are different than themselves, this

can make the bridge easier to cross for people to meet someone they might not have the chance

of knowing otherwise and learning about the uniqueness of their cultural experience as well as

the ties that bind all humans together as one. It is everyone's basic human right to have a fair

chance in this world, no matter their race, and this all starts with how people treat one another.

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Table 1

Sample Demographics (Frequencies)

	Percent
Age[a]	20.31 (1.61)
Ethnicity	
African-American/Black	3
Asian	4
Hispanic	6
Multiple Ethnicity/Other	6
Native American	1
Non-Hispanic Caucasian	87
Hometown	
Massachusetts	37.9
New Hampshire	36.8
Other	
Household Income	
Below $29,000	7.4
$30,000-$59,000	15.8
$60,000-$89,000	18.9
Above $90,000	57.9
Mothers' Education Level	
Below GED	0
High School/GED	23.2
Some College/Associates	9.5
Bachelors/Masters/Doctorate	67.5
Fathers' Education Level	
Below GED	2.1
High School/GED	30.5
Some College/Associates	4.2
Bachelors/Masters/Doctorate	63.1

Note. [a]Age represents mean and standard deviation.

Table 2

Frequency of Responses to Questions assessing Personal Attitudes, Family Influences, and

Educational Influences

	Yes	No
Personal Attitudes		
Do you view other races the same or differently than your own?[a]	91.6	8.4
Would you feel comfortable in an interracial relationship?	83.2	16.8
Do you think it is important to have friends who are of a different race than you?	81.1	18.9
Family Influences		
Are your parents accepting of other races?	96.8	3.2
Would your parents feel comfortable if you were in an interracial relationship?	85.3	14.7
Are your grandparents accepting of other races?	70.2	29.8
Would your grandparents feel comfortable if you were in an interracial relationship?	50.0	50.0
Educational Influences		
Did your high school consist mostly of the same race as you?[a]	80.0	20.0
Did your high school offer a diversity class?	5.3	94.7
Did any of your teachers in high school incorporate the topic of diversity in classes such as math?		
No	—	28.4
Some of my teachers did	54.7	—
Most of my teachers did	11.6	—
All of my teachers did	4.2	—

Note. [a]Responses were reverse scored in creating the sum scores

Appendix

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

You have been invited to participate in a research project that will study experiences and

attitudes about diversity. This project is being conducted by Rachael Duda, an undergraduate

student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of New

Hampshire (UNH). This study is her honor's thesis project. The use of human subjects in this

project has been approved by the UNH Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of

Human Subjects in Research. Please read the information below. If you understand and agree to

participate, please click "I agree/consent to participate" at the bottom of the page to continue to

the survey.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research is to understand the influence of home life and educational

experiences on people's beliefs about diversity. Approximately 100 college students, over the

age of 18, are expected to participate. Results will be presented in a poster presentation at the

UNH Undergraduate Research conference in Spring 2016.

What does participation in this study involve?

Participants will complete a brief survey consisting of 30 multiple choice questions and two short

answer questions. The expected length of time it will take to complete the survey is 15-20

minutes.

What are the possible risks of participating in this study?

Participation in this study is expected to present minimal risk. There is a possible risk of

discomfort with some of the questions. If this is the case, you do not need to answer those

questions; if you need additional support, you can contact UNH's Counseling Center at (603)-

862-2090. Further, there is a minimal risk of breach of confidentiality; however, safeguards have been put in place to reduce this risk (see information about confidentiality).

What are the possible benefits of participating in this study?

There are no direct benefits of taking this survey. However, the information gained is expected to inform others about the factors that influence our opinions and beliefs and will add to the limited research on this topic.

Will you receive any compensation for participating in this study?

You will not receive any compensation for participating in the survey.

Do you have to take part in this study?

Your consent to participate in this research is entirely voluntary. If you refuse to participate, you will not experience any penalty or negative consequences. If you consent to participate in this study, you may refuse to answer any question and/or withdraw your participation in the study at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.

How will the confidentiality of records be protected?

I seek to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. There are, however, rare instances when I am required to share personally-identifiable information (e.g., according to policy, contract, regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. I am also required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases), or to appropriate UNH authorities (e.g., disclosures involving Sexual Violence - which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, sexual misconduct,

domestic violence, relationship abuse, stalking [including cyber-stalking] and dating violence -

must be reported to the UNH Title IX Coordinator or UNH Police).

 Further, any communication via the Internet poses minimal risk of a breach of confidentiality.

The following steps have been taken to reduce this risk: (1) no information about your name will

be collected; (2) information from Qualtrics will be downloaded and will be stored in a

password-protected environment and that password will be known only to the UNH faculty

advisor to the student, Dr. Jill Trumbell; (3) once data is downloaded from Qualtrics, the survey

and survey results will be removed from online.

Most of the data from this study will be reported in aggregate (i.e., group) form; however, some

individual responses to open-ended questions may be presented. When this is done, such

responses will not be linked in any way to identifiable information; if names are provided in

responses, they will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

 Whom to contact if you have questions about this study?

 If you have any questions pertaining to the research you can contact Rachael Duda,

(rmu76@wildcats.unh.edu) or her advisor, Dr. Jill Trumbell (jill.trumbell@unh.edu; 603-862-

5499) to discuss them.

 If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact Dr. Julie Simpson

in UNH Research Integrity Services, 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu.

What Plays a Bigger Role in Students' Beliefs: School or Home Environment?

Please answer the following questions with the best answer.

1. What is your age?
   _____

2. To which gender do you identify?
   Female
   Male

3. Where did you grow up for most of your childhood?
   Connecticut
   New Hampshire
   Maine
   Massachusetts
   Rhode Island
   Vermont
   Other: _____

4. How would you describe the environment where you grew up?
   City
   Rural
   Suburb

5. What is your race/ethnicity? Please choose as many that apply:
   African American
   Asian
   Caucasian
   Hispanic or Latino/a
   Native American
   Other:_____

6. How would you describe your family's financial situation growing up?
   Lower class
   Working class
   Middle class
   Upper class

7. Do you consider yourself religious/spiritual?
   Yes
   No

8. If yes, which religion/spiritual beliefs do you affiliate with?
    Buddhist
    Christianity
    Judaism
    Muslim
    Other: _____

9. What is your mother's highest level of education?
    Below High School
    High School/GED
    Bachelors
    Masters
    Doctorate
    Other:_____

10. What is your father's highest level of education?
    Below High School
    High School/GED
    Bachelors
    Masters
    Doctorate
    Other:_____

The following questions will ask you about your family and personal beliefs. Please choose the best answer.

11. Are your parents accepting of other races?
    Yes
    No

12. Would you feel comfortable in an interracial relationship?
    Yes
    No

13. Would your parents feel comfortable if you were in an interracial relationship?
    Yes
    No

14. Would your grandparents feel comfortable if you were in an interracial relationship?
    Yes
    No

15. How do you perceive races differently than your own?
    I perceive them the same as me
    I perceive them more negatively than me
    I perceive them more positive than me

The following questions will ask you about your friendships and school experiences. Please choose the best answer.

16. Did your high school consist mostly of people the same race as you?
    Yes
    No

17. If no, what was the majority?

    _____

18. In high school, did you have friends of races other than your own?
    Yes
    No

19. Reflecting on your current friendships, are most of your friends the same race as you?
    Yes
    No

20. Do you think it is important to have friends who are of a different race than you?
    Yes
    No

21. Do you feel that your high school focused on diversity as a core subject?
    Yes
    No

22. Did any of your teachers in high school incorporate the topic of diversity in classes such as math, science, history, English, etc?

    Yes, all of my teachers did
    Yes, most of my teachers did
    Yes, some of my teachers did
    No, none of my teachers did

23. Have you ever taken a course specifically devoted to the topic of diversity?
    Yes
    No

24. Did your high school offer a diversity class?
    Yes
    No

25. Would you take a diversity class if you could?
    Yes
    No

The following open-ended questions ask you about your attitudes and experiences. Please provide as much information as possible.

Have you ever witnessed or experienced mistreatment or prejudice based on race/ethnicity? If so, how did this experience make you feel?

What factors do you think have the greatest impact on your attitudes and beliefs towards individuals who may differ from you in terms of race/ethnicity? Please explain.