Title
Review: The Diversity Challenge: Social Identity and Intergroup Relations on the College Campus

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The Diversity Challenge: Social Identity and Intergroup Relations on the College Campus by Jim Sidanius, Shana Levin, Colette van Laar, and David O. Sears. New York: Russell Sage Press, 2008. 445 pp. ISBN 978-0-87154-793-4.

From segregation to affirmative action, and all the legal challenges that have accompanied this historical range, the topic of diversity in higher education is a persistent discussion for researchers and practitioners. The book *The Diversity Challenge: Social Identity and Intergroup Relations on the College Campus* is a recent attempt at taking a neutral stance toward the topic of ethnic identity, diversity, and multiculturalism. The book is very specific to the University of California, Los Angeles, in that the researchers conducted longitudinal research on this one campus. It is a dubious single-site study, in terms of application, because UCLA has no racial group that represents more than 50 percent of the student population. The authors alternate between referring directly to UCLA and generalizing their findings to all students and all colleges. As a result, the hypotheses tested and the recommendations made have more limited potential application to large public schools that have a student body with no racial majority by number.

The authors go to great lengths to show that college is a liberalizing medium, meaning that students from all ethnic groups enter college more conservative than when they leave. Each race group is consistent in this trend. As a result, public colleges like UCLA are considered to be multiethnic and liberalizing institutions. The authors utilize an interpretive framework that promotes superordinate identification. They found that when White Americans identify as "White" they are more patriotic. When Black and Latino Americans identify as "Black" or "Latino," they identify as less patriotic. Given the discrimination that these two ethnic groups experience as an aggregate group (e.g., unequal treatment with regard to criminal justice, education, health care, labor market), the United States is a hierarchy enhancing environment in which groups experiencing discrimination are less likely to identify as patriotic. Here is the crux of the argument: Given that UCLA (and perhaps many public universities) is made up of students who become more liberal and egalitarian, then the ability to identify as a superordinate group *should* exist. In other words, because there is no majority ethnic group among students and they all show increased concern for racial prejudice during college, the ability to identify as a UCLA student as opposed to a Black or Latino student in an ethnic-specific organization should exist. UCLA is an environment in which subgroup members should find it easier to feel equal ownership of a superordinate identity, which is quite different from the larger American context.

Based on the central premise, readers may be able to guess where the authors go next. On campuses such as UCLA's, ethnic-specific organizations continue to promote subgroup identification and membership. This may detract or weaken the ability to coalesce into a more harmonious superordinate identity that alleviates racial tensions. This position relies on the theoretical assumption that one method to reduce intergroup tension is for groups to come together in this higher order, superordinate identity to emphasize what groups have in common. This would mean encouraging members of different ethnic groups on the UCLA campus to embrace a common identity as a UCLA student and reduce inter-ethnic conflict by extending the ingroup favoritism of fellow ethnic ingroup members to all UCLA students. This is called recategorization. However, without a more thorough study of hierarchy and power on a campus like UCLA, it comes across as repackaged, uncritical assimilation.

In the first chapter of the book the authors set up a premise that I believe to be flawed. Consider this statement:

> However, if the welcoming and multicultural environment of UCLA is operating as expected, there should be none of the asymmetry found in the relationship between university and ethnic identification across different racial groups that we find in the relationship between national and ethnic identification. That is, members of all ethnic groups should feel equal attachment to the university. (p. 7)

I find this premise to be flawed because a "functioning multicultural" environment is not fully unpacked and do not believe it equates to no asymmetry or racial tension. The premise relies upon a reduced view of the purpose of multiculturalism and diversity. Another premise of the book is:

> A related – and up to this point poorly studied – issue within the broader multiculturalism debate is whether the ethnically oriented and largely segregated student organizations help to alleviate ethnic and racial tension on campus or only aggravate it. (p. 7)

This premise connects student organizations with alleviating racial tension. I am not convinced that the sole purpose of ethnic organizations is to alleviate racial tension, but rather to support students in having a safe haven where they identify with a group of students. The authors concede this point but argue that the safe harbor effect is only useful when it acts as a bridge to the larger institutional community. In chapter 10, the authors go on to point out that while membership in ethnic organizations increases a sense of ethnic identification, it does not increase a member's sense of university identification, but instead has a conflict-inducing effect.

The authors come to two conclusions which many readers will likely try to obtain more directly than from fishing through the 445 pages of the book. The first question was whether race and ethnic diversity led to racial balkanization in the United States, which yielded their conclusion that, "College does not seem to produce increased ethnic balkanization in terms of ethnic identity, despite the seemingly favorable conditions for it at UCLA" (p. 305). The second conclusion speaks to the debate about ethnicity-centered social organizations. In response to the debate, the authors found that, "For minorities, involvement with ethnic organizations failed to enhance a sense of common ingroup identity…rather, it actually served to sharpen perceptions of ethnic conflict and to heighten perception of ethnic discrimination" (p. 310). As an aside they mention that predominantly White Greek organizations have the same impact, but the only warning they offer is in regard to ethnic-specific organizations, not predominantly White organizations. One major limitation of the book's premise is that it does not deal with perceived dominant groups based on the number of faculty and administrators who are one ethnic group.

During the final chapter it seems the authors waiver in their attempt at achieving a neutral front. Their findings include that students are not significantly changed in their ethnic and racial orientations by the college experience and that, "Cultural diversity and multicultural education simply are not earth-shattering experiences for university students" (p. 323). Notice how the language has moved away from UCLA to focus on all university students. In addition to a faulty premise, avoiding issues of power and perceived dominance, their generalized conclusions are likely to fall in the hands of university administrators who are unsure about the need for ethnic-specific organizations on their campus. Following the suggestion of the authors could potentially recycle concerns about serving underrepresented students on predominantly White campuses (while ignoring the aside about predominantly White Greek organizations) based on a study of a unique, ethnically pluralistic, single-campus study of diversity. This is not a strong challenge to the research on benefits of diverse learning environments (Hurtado, 2006 Allen, 2006; Hurtado, 2007; Bok, 2006; Chang, 1999; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998), but it is a potentially harmful approach. Approaches to multiculturalism should not be accepted uncritically and should be adequately assessed for specific learning outcomes and campus climate issues. However, claims to neutrality about the issue may be a thin veil. Whether unintended or intended, the recommendations in this book seem guided by research that has an ideological bent against some benefits of diversity in the context of higher education.

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Reviewer

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